

**UNIFIED TERTIARY MATRICULATION EXAMINATION:
A CHALLENGE TO NCE BUSINESS EDUCATION**

BY

C.D. OCHUBA

AND

D.I. OKOLI

School of Business Education

Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze

Anambra State

Abstract

The study highlighted the causes of poor quality input in NCE Business Education. This is a research study conducted in Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuze. The researcher made use of all the academic staff, and non academic staff of school of Business Education and hundred level students of the school that were randomly selected as the sample of the study. The work is guided by three research questions. The major instrument for data collection is the questionnaire which the responses is based on 4 - point Likert scale. Mean was used as the method of data analysis. Some of the major findings of the study are that the tendency that Universities and Polytechnics will absorb the best brains for tertiary education through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) admission process is true and educated and enlightened parents do not allow their children to attend College of Education. The study equally proffers some useful recommendations.

Introduction

Business Education is a pragmatic and eclectic discipline which inculcates in its recipients basic knowledge, values, skills, competencies and attitudes aimed at enhancing their effectiveness and functionality in world of work (Victor-Igwe 2007). As part of education industry (which functions like an open system), Business Education accepts inputs (students) from the society, process them (by applying various teaching methods and curriculum with the help of various equipment, texts, facilities etc; using human resources such as academic and supporting staff), and then send the students back to the society as output (graduates) after a stipulated period of time. These graduates are expected to be able to face the challenges and demands of a dynamic society. For Business Education to fulfill its promises to the society, attain its objectives and meet the expectations of various stakeholders such as individuals, government, establishments, conglomerates and parastatals, it should join the race for continuous strive for excellence and quality in all ramifications (Ochuba, 2010). This will amplify its advantage over general education, justify the capital intensive nature of this field of study and enhance its sustainability especially in view of the various technological challenges of the 21 st century and diverse implication it has on the world of work.

It is not an over statement to say that the quality of NCE inputs is a source of worry to the stakeholders in Business Education. What is not taken into account is the fact that the quality of each sub-part of a complex system is likely to influence the final result/product considerably. At this juncture the need for quality input can never be over - emphasized. Ochuba (2010) opined that the word quality assurance is more than just checking to see that products or services meet customers' expectations but also involve the process of creating the product or service to ensure that quality product or service is produced each and every time. Part of this process is verifying that inputs are correct before they go into whatever production or service one provides.

The current process of verifying Business Education inputs in Nigerian Colleges of Education leaves a lot to be desired. Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) is the new admission policy for students intending to gain admission to higher institutions in Nigeria. Intending candidates have options to all of the three higher institutions (University, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education) with the purchase of a form. When filling the form, the candidates are expected to choose six institutions, two schools in the university category, two from the polytechnic and two from the Colleges of Education. One examination is taken, the scores in the examination determines the higher institution offered to the student. Requirements for gaining admission include: a minimum of five (5) credits in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination/National Examination Council (SSCE/NECO) in a maximum of two sittings and ability to get the cut-off mark which will be the same nationally for all tertiary institutions (JAMB, 2011).

Before now, under the existing system, candidates were required to make two (2) choices of Institutions; sit for four (4) subjects in the Universities Matriculation Examination (UME); sit for three (3) subjects in the Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCE); pass a minimum of five (5) O'level subjects at credit level for the Universities Matriculation Examination; pass a minimum of three (3) O'level subjects at credit level for the Monotechnics, Polytechnics and College of Education Matriculation Examination. Institutions are expected to select candidates based on the approved guidelines by the proprietors as well as the carrying capacities as approved by the accrediting bodies. Joint Admission and Matriculation Board's (JAMB) comprehensive print out is sent to the institutions with the names and result of candidates who make such institutions their first choice.

Likewise, same is done for candidates' second choice institutions. Selection deals with the Board's examinations, while eligibility has a national undertone because there are other criteria for admission based on the Federal Government guidelines for admission to institutions. The break - down consists:

| S/N | Criteria | Federal Institutions | State Owned Institutions |
|-----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Merit | 45% | 40% |
| 2 | Catchment/locality | 35% | 35% |

| | | | |
|---|---|-----|-----|
| 3 | Educationally less developed State/local government areas | 20% | 20% |
| 4 | Other states of the federation | Nil | 5% |

Source: www.jamb.org.ng/unifiedtme

Pre - NCE Programme which was an alternative to MPCE, where the college prepares its candidates for NCE programmes has invariably been abolished since JAMB made it compulsory for all intending candidates of NCE programmes to take MPCE. This situation has also been worsened by the introduction of UTME since these Pre -NCE candidates are likely to obtain higher scores in UTME and at the same time may not go back to the institution that prepared them for the examination. No wonder the Pre-NCE syllabus is undergoing some restructuring to suit UTME syllabus.

The management of JAMB had argued that the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) will improve access to tertiary institutions and reduce cost for both parents and candidates as there will not be multiple applications. To achieve this, the syllabuses and brochures of previous examinations (University Matriculation Examination (UME) and Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCE) have been harmonized. It will also remove discrimination among graduates from University, Polytechnics and also restore the dignity of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) and higher National Diploma (HND) holders.

The objective of the UTME may be good but the question is how practicable? How many people particularly the proponents of the new policy want their children to attend a Polytechnic or College of Education? Ideally, most candidates will prefer University Education. The truth also is, you cannot force a candidate to attend a school he/she does not intend to, even if you allocate them to such schools on a silver platter.

It is believed that in keeping faith with the general perception of tertiary education, it is expected that the higher UTME scores will attract University admission. The second best will go to the Polytechnics while the residues of the admission process will have no choice than to go to the Colleges of Education. A closer look at the candidates' performance at West African Examination Council (WAEC) last five years showed a sliding drift. According to statistics released by WAEC (2010) the rate of failure every year had been between 65 - 70 percent. It must be noted that only 31 percent of the candidates who wrote the November/December 2009 WASSCE obtained credits in English language and Mathematics and at least three other subjects. From the current arrangement of admission, it is most likely that Colleges of Education will not have a share of the 31 percent mentioned above.

Statement of the Problem

It will be gladdening to every Nigerian if all graduates are of the same quality but, will there be equal job opportunity for Polytechnics, Colleges of Education graduates as well as those from Universities? Nigeria is not a first class economy, there is need to produce middle - level manpower for the country, especially

teachers that will teach our children in the nursery and primary schools. This middle - level manpower must not be UTME admission process residues. It is therefore the problem of this study to bring to limelight causes of poor quality inputs (students) in NCE Business Education with a view of proffering solutions to the problems.

1. To what extent has candidates' perception of NCE Business Education Programmes affected the quality of its inputs?
2. To what extent has government policies affected the quality of NCE Business Education inputs.
3. How has family background affected the quality of NCE Business Education inputs?

Area of the Study

The research was carried out in Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of all the academic, non academic staff and year one students in School of Business Education federal College of Education (Tech.) Umunze. There are 30 academic staff, 14 non-academic staff and 272 year one students in the School of Business Education F.C.E (T) Umunze. Therefore a total of 316 people were used as the population of the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

All the staff was used for the study hence there was no sampling or sampling technique adopted for the staff of the School of Business Education. But 100 students out of 272 students were randomly selected to give each student an equal opportunity to be selected. Therefore, 144 respondents were used as sample for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point Likert scale. Questions set in Likert format were used in eliciting information from the academic and non-academic staff Quality Input as a Challenge in Business Educations. The instrument was validated by two experts in Business Education

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were arranged in a frequency table and were analyzed using mean. The mean of each item was calculated by multiplying the frequency of the response under each category and dividing the sum of the value obtained by the number of respondents who gave response to it. The Likert format used for the data collection were

VHE 4
HE 3
LE 2
VLE 1
Mean (X) = $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10 = 2.5$

An interval of 0.5 was added to the mean to get the cut of point of 3.0

Decision Rule

Any response with a mean of 3.0 and above was accepted while any response with a mean below 3.0 was rejected.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent has candidates' perception of NCE Business Education Programmes affected the quality of its inputs?

Table 1: Mean responses on how the candidates' perception of NCE Business Education Programmes affected the quality of its inputs.

| S/N | ITEMS | VHE | HE | LE | VLE | N | X | Remarks |
|-----|---|-----|----|----|-----|-----|------|----------|
| 1 | NCE Business Education courses are not among the frontline courses like law and medicine; therefore do not attract very brilliant students. | 4 | 20 | 50 | 70 | 144 | 1.01 | Rejected |
| 2 | NCE Business Education courses have no prospect for higher degrees in them. | - | 4 | 60 | 80 | 144 | 1.47 | Rejected |
| 3 | NCE Business Education courses are courses that one only studies for lack of alternative. | 26 | 38 | 45 | 35 | 144 | 2.38 | Rejected |
| 4 | Job opportunities available for the graduates of NCE Business Education are not of dignity | - | 1 | 78 | 65 | 144 | 1.56 | Rejected |
| 5 | NCE Business Education courses are meant for candidates with poor academic background. | 25 | 40 | 36 | 43 | 144 | 2.32 | Rejected |
| 6 | Students have negative perception on colleges of education programmes because of the stigmatization attached to it. | 54 | 68 | 16 | 6 | 144 | 3.18 | Accepted |

Research Question 2: To what extent has government policies affected the quality of NCE Business Education inputs?

Table 2: Mean responses on how government policies affected the quality of NCE Business Education inputs.

| S/N | ITEMS | VHE | HE | LE | VLE | N | X | Remarks |
|-----|--|-----|----|----|-----|-----|------|----------|
| 7 | The replacement of PRE -NCE Programme as one of the admission strategies with Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination encourages quality input in NCE programme | 7 | 29 | 61 | 47 | 144 | 1.97 | Rejected |
| 8 | The introduction of UTME is a cost saving mechanism and therefore should be supported in NCE Programmes | 10 | 35 | 64 | 35 | 144 | 2.31 | Rejected |
| 9 | UTME is likely to bridge the gap between NCE and first degree certificates since all the candidates take the same examination. | 14 | 25 | 48 | 57 | 144 | 1.97 | Rejected |
| 10 | The tendency that Universities and Polytechnics will absorb the best brains for tertiary education through UTME admission process is not true | 1 | 4 | 51 | 88 | 144 | 1.43 | Rejected |
| 11 | Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCE) will be preferred to UTME for the case of NCE Programmes | 69 | 42 | 18 | 15 | 144 | 3.15 | Accepted |
| 12 | UTME cut-off mark and O'level minimum requirements for NCE should differ from that of Universities and Polytechnics | 74 | 46 | 22 | 2 | 144 | 3.33 | Accepted |
| 13 | The scrapping of NCE graduates from attending NYSC Programme do not encourage quality input in the programme | 70 | 39 | 8 | 27 | 144 | 3.01 | Accepted |
| 14 | Considering the status of NCE Programmes in the higher education, NCE should have its own selection examination | 83 | 51 | 9 | 1 | 144 | 3.50 | Accepted |

Table 3: Mean responses on how family background affected the quality of NCE Business Education inputs.

| S/N | ITEMS | SA | A | DA | SDA | N | X | Remarks |
|-----|---|----|----|----|-----|-----|------|----------|
| 15 | Candidates from poor families prefer NCE programmes because it is cheap. | 45 | 73 | 20 | 6 | 144 | 3.09 | Accepted |
| 16 | Educated and enlightened parents do not allow their children to attend colleges of education because of stigmatization. | 62 | 41 | 28 | 13 | 144 | 3.05 | Accepted |
| 17 | Most of the students in the College of Education are from rural areas. This is because of their level of awareness. | 30 | 32 | 46 | 36 | 144 | 2.39 | Rejected |
| 18 | NCE programmes are meant for the poor in the society since their parents may not be able to pay for special examination centres to improve their O'level. | 28 | 40 | 54 | 22 | 144 | 2.51 | Rejected |
| 19 | The position of NCE graduate in his/her family is synonymous to the position of college of education amongst Nigerian tertiary institutions. | 71 | 52 | 14 | 7 | 144 | 3.30 | Accepted |

Discussion of Findings

From table 1, results showed that NCE Business Education courses are among the front line courses, attract brilliant candidates and are not meant for candidates with poor academic background. Furthermore, the study revealed that job opportunities available for NCE Business Education graduates are worthy of respect.

The Business Education courses have prospect for higher degrees and are not courses that one studies for lack of alternative. However the stigmatization attached to Colleges of Education has been identified as a contributory factor to poor quality input to Colleges of Education programmes as shown in item 6.

From table 2, findings showed that the introduction of UTME, though cost effective, should not replace PRE-NCE programmes and also should not be supported for NCE Programmes because it encourages poor quality input in Colleges of Education. The study also revealed that UTME cannot bridge the gap

between NCE and first degree certificates. Therefore NCE Programme should have its own selection examination; at worst have its own UTME cut-off mark and O'level requirements different from that of universities and polytechnics.

Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCE) is preferred to TUME for the case of NCE Programmes since universities and polytechnics are likely to absorb the best brains for tertiary education through UTME process. The scrapping of NCE graduates from attending NYC Programmes has been identified to have contributed to the poor quality of input to NCE Business Education Programmes.

From table 3, it is obvious that candidates from poor families prefer NCE Programmes because it is cheap and not that it is meant for the poor or for those in the rural areas. Again educated and enlightened parents do not want their children to attend Colleges of Education because of stigmatization attached to it. All these tend to lower the quality of inputs.

Finally, the study accepted that the position of NCE graduate in his/her family is synonymous to the position of College of Education amongst Nigerian tertiary institutions. This situation dealt a serious blow to the quality of inputs in Business Education.

Recommendations

1. The stakeholders in NCE Programmes, especially the management and the academic unions in NCE institutions should join forces fight for separate selection examination for NCE candidates.
2. NCE should look into the possibility of having a different cut-off mark and O'level requirements for NCE Programmes.
3. Efforts should be geared towards restoring the original functions of PRE-NCE Programmes to sustain quality input in NCE Programmes.
4. Re-instatement of NCE graduates into NYSC Programme will go a long way in fighting stigmatization attached to NCE Programmes.

Conclusions

Following the contention that high quality input is likely to influence the final result/product of a complex system, the time has come to overhaul selection criteria for NCE programmes, if quality is to be maintained in Business Education. The fact that UTME is a cost saving mechanism is not enough to sacrifice quality at the altar of cost.

A simple logic principle has it that "garbage in, garbage out" is the same as "quality in, quality out". The tendency that universities and polytechnics absorb the best brains for tertiary education through UTME admission process leaves no option for Colleges of Education to have its own selection examination.

Then after the quality of applicants seeking admission into NCE programmes will serve as a gauge to the success of the new selection process.

References

JAMB (2011). *Discussion Forum*. www.jamb.org.ng/unifiedtme

Ochuba C. D (2010). *Improving Quality Assurance in Vocational Business Education doe Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger*. *Journal of Business and General Education*: 4(1) p108-117.

Victor-Igwe J. N (2007). *Adapting Total Quality Management into Business Education Programmes in Nigeria*. *Journal of Business and General Education*: 1(1) p191-198

WAEC (2010) *Discussion Forum*: www.waec.us/