DETERMINATION OF THE ACCEPTANCE OF CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF PRIVATE BUSINESS (COMMERCIAL) SCHOOLS

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Abstract

It has become doubtful whether private business (commercial) schools are still relevant in the present-day Nigeria. This study which was of a descriptive survey design sought to determine the acceptance of the contemporary relevance of this type of institutions. Three hypotheses were accordingly tested at 0.05 level of significance. Purposive sample of 170 secondary school business educators in Enugu State was drawn to source data from a structured questionnaire validated by three experts and with a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Data were analyzed with t-test and one-way ANOVA. It was found that secondary school business educators accepted the contemporary relevance of private business schools. While this acceptance was not based on the gender and experience of the business educators, it was based on their areas of specialization. It was recommended that government and private business school proprietors should provide requisite resources and standardized curriculum and modes of operation for this type of institutions.

Introduction

From the onset, it is essential to clarify the concept of "private business schools" especially at the secondary school subsystem. Private business schools are the equivalent of public secondary schools (Obayi, 1996). They are not, however, the same with conventional private secondary schools. In private business schools, emphasis is laid on business or commercial subjects such as Commerce, Bookkeeping and Accounting, Economics, Business Methods, Typewriting, and Shorthand. Education in private business schools in an individual or private want. Under the premise of education as an individual want, "education will be financed privately in its entirety individuals paying the market price of their education" (Eze, 1983). The cost of education is totally paid for by the recipients or their sponsors. Government may not be a recognized financial contributor to the running of private businessschools.

It has to be noted that the history of educational development of many countries remains incomplete if mention is not made of the private sector. With an especial reference to Nigeria, private entrepreneurs (especially Christian missionaries) spearheaded the introduction of Western education. As of contemporary significance, Eze (1983) stated that in spite of the more active involvement of the public sector in education today, the private sector made of individuals, voluntary agencies, cultural unions, educational and community entrepreneurs still plays a very important role in education.

Private entrepreneurs blazed the trail in the field of business education in Nigeria through the setting up of private business schools. Osuala (1985) traced the historical development of business education in Nigeria to as far as the 1930s. He noted that the first private business school in Eastern Nigeria was established at Onitsha in 1936 by one Mr. Joseph Etukokwu. Thereafter many private business schools sprang up in various parts of Nigeria.

In the past few years, it appears emphasis had shifted to mere private secondary schools in lieu of private business schools. Many famous private business schools have transformed to mere private secondary schools, increasing and diversifying their subjects offerings to embrace arts and sciences. Many people have even proposed the abolition of private business schools, adducing various reasons for their position.

The first is that the ownership of private business schools is a form of business. Owners are thus interested in profit making and profit maximization. Hammond (1991) stated that an accountant would define profit as the difference between revenue and expenditure; that is the difference between the money received as a result of the activities of the business (the revenue), and the costs associated with those activities (the expenditure). Profit motive defeats the essence of education. In the less developed countries of the world including Nigeria education is taken basically as a social want. When education is viewed as a social want, it should be financed in its entirety by government. But the operation of private business schools is against the concept of education as a social want. The price tag on private business school education will be a discourager to many people. In addition, the proprietors will tend to provide educational services very cheaply in order to make reasonable profit. Provision of cheap education may entail inferior education which is not in the interest of the students, the society and the nation as a whole.

Another reason against private business schools is that they have poor entry requirements for admission into these schools. The common entrance examinations are required for entry into post-primary schools, to test the aptitude of the students. But most of the commercial secondary school operators do not take their students through any recognized entrance examinations. That means that they do not mind the academic standard of their students. It is alleged that once these students buy their forms and pay the necessary fees, the students are deemed qualified to be admitted.

Moreso, education in private business schools is not conducted in proper school setting. This state of affairs is not in the best interest of the students as it does not augur well for teaching-learning and extracurricular activities. Many of the private business schools in the country are found in incomplete buildings, small apartments, one-storey building, or can be found occupying upstairs while other business activities take place downwards. Such accommodation makes it impossible to have enough space for teaching-learning let alone sporting activities.

As aforementioned, the establishment and management of private business schools lie with individual owners. On many occasions, the employment of teachers is based on relationships of familiarity. Many proprietors of private business schools go for unqualified

teachers. Consequently, students are misled as a result of poor instructional task management. Teachers who are not qualified and sound cannot impart sound knowledge to the students. Think of instances where SSCE holders are employed to teach in private business schools. What kind of knowledge can they transmit?

Furthermore, in private business schools, there is no substantial control on school activities. In public secondary schools, supervisors and inspectors are sent to evaluate instructional and allied activities from time to time. This is not so with private business schools because many of them are not even recognized. That private business school lack

recognized standards is an indictment. According to Igboke (2000), a standard can be defined as something by authority as a rule by which to measure. Without recognized standards, the performances of private business schools can be properly determined. This is not the case with public secondary schools.

It became necessary to determine whether private business schools can be dispensed with in Nigeria. There was the need to find out from business educators who are the major stakeholders, on the continued relevance of private business schools in spite of the criticisms advanced against such institutions, and the contention that they be abolished. Gender differences in perception have been implicated in some studies (Mount, 1997) in favour of females in literacy (Fontana, 1998) and in favour of boys (Bruton, 1997). Experience is an essential variable in education (Obayi, 2006). Moreso, one's academic area of specialization might influence one's opinion/perception. Against this background, the following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{o1}: Significant difference does not exist in the opinions of male and female secondary school business educators on their acceptance of contemporary relevance of private business schools?

H_{O2} : There is no significance difference in the opinions of experienced and less experienced secondary school business educators on their acceptance of contemporary relevance of private business schools.

H_{O3} There is no significant difference in the opinions of secondary school business educators on their acceptance of contemporary relevance of private business schools relative to their areas of specialization.

Methods

A survey design was adopted for this study. A purposive sample of 170 secondary school business subjects teachers was drawn from Enugu State. A structured questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. This instrument was validated by a group of three experts one in educational measurement and evaluation, and two in business education and with a reliability coefficient of 0.78, it was confirmed both valid and reliable. 88 copies of the instrument were distributed to the respondents with 100% returns.

The t-test was used to test null hypotheses 1 and 2, while One-way Analysis of Variance

(ANOVA) was used to test null hypothesis 3. A null hypothesis was accepted at 0.05 level of significance when the calculated value of t or F ratio was equal to or less than the critical t or table value of F; otherwise the null hypothesis was rejected.

Results

Table 1: t-Test Result of the Comparison between the Opinions of Male and Female Secondary School Business Educators on their Acceptance of Contemporary Relevance of Private Business Schools.

Groups	No of Cases	x	SD	df	t-cal	t-cri	Decision
Male Business Educator	90	245.13	20.11	165	*0.11	1.960	Accept H_{o1}
Female Business Educators	80	247.15	21.23				

Table II: t-Test Result of the Comparison between the Opinions of Experienced and Less Experienced Secondary School Business Educators on their Acceptance of Contemporary Relevance of Private Business Schools

Groups	No of Cases	x	SD	df	t-cal	t-cri	Decision
Experienced Business Educators	101	236.02	20.11	165	*0.23	1.960	Accept H_{o1}
Less Experienced Business Educators	69	238.11	23.09				

* Not Significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Table III: ANOVA Result of the Difference in the Opinions of Secondary School Business Educators on their Acceptance of Contemporary Relevance of Private Business Schools Vis-à-vis their Areas of Specialization (Accounting, Secretarial and Distributive Education)

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-cal	F-cri	Decision
Between Groups	2	5211.5561	2652.6334	*6.088	3.000	Reject H_{03}
Within Groups	167	6814.4564	447.3002			

* Not Significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

Results in Table 1 reveal that there is no significant difference in the opinions male and female secondary school business educators on their acceptance of contemporary relevance of private business schools. Similarly, results in Table II show that there is no significant difference in the opinions of experienced and less experienced secondary school business educators on their acceptance of contemporary relevance of private business schools. However, results in Table II indicate significant difference in the opinions of the business educators vis-à-vis their areas of specialization (that is accounting education, secretarial/office education, and distributive education). When the results in Table III was subjected to Scheffe Multiple Group Comparison test, it was found that the mean response scores of secretarial educators were significantly higher then those of accounting educators and distributive educators; however those of the two latter groups were not significantly higher than each other. Business educators, with specialization in secretarial education, appear to more disposed than business educators in the other two option areas because of the age-long advantage graduands of these institutions had enjoyed in secretarial courses during their tertiary education in business education.

Osu (1988) stated that private business schools which were the first institutions devoted exclusively to business education have been training office workers for the business and industry since 1936. The major aim of private business schools was to provide sound practical training in commercial education and to arouse the interest of youths in the world of commerce. Today, there are many private business schools in Nigeria serving an estimated half a million students each year (Osu, 1988). Some of these institutions emphasized accounting and allied studies while majority emphasized shorthand and typewriting.

Private business schools provide a challenging alternative to secondary grammar schools. It is a pity that the former are generally looked down upon with many unsubstantiable misconceptions. However, it has to be rightly pointed out that many of these misconceptions are majorly held by people who do not see anything good in, or appreciate the achievement of others.

A recent survey carried out in Onitsha (Anambra State) and Enugu (Enugu State, by this author indicates that many negative conceptions about the private business school are wrong. Many of the schools are found to be equipped with modern instructional materials and equipment and, also staffed adequately with highly qualified teachers including university, polytechnic, college of education graduates. Again, many of the students are graduates of the conventional secondary schools who want to acquire marketable skills especially in typewriting and shorthand for the world of work. Private business schools adapt their curricular offerings to meet the needs of their students and the business community. Most importantly, they provide education to the people who could not have had the opportunities. They contribute a lot to Nigeria's development.

The impact of private business schools is still very relevant and a supplement to government's efforts towards education for all. They “provide general education and vocational training for all students who desire and need them” (Osuala, 1987). These schools provide the learning experiences which imbue the graduands with such knowledge and skills as to be able to carry out various tasks in government establishments, industry, and commerce. They are trained to work as secretaries, typists, bookkeepers, receptionists, communication systems clerks and operators, mail and postal clerks, mail preparing and handling machine operators, copying and duplicating machine operators, file clerks, and in other various office activities. The products of private business schools are highly needed in every facet of our economy.

Conclusions

No doubt the place of business schools in the development of business education in Nigeria in the past and present has been prominent. Secondary school business educators are still of the opinion that private business schools are still relevant in present-day Nigeria. It has been concluded that while the gender and experiences of the business educators are not correlates to their acceptance of the relevance of this type of institutions, their area of specialization is a correlate to such acceptance.

Recommendations

From the foregoing findings, discussions, and conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Government should, through relevant agencies, enhance the quality of training in existing private business schools by setting up minimum standards in terms of facilities and equipment, staff quality and strength, and other conditions to be met by proprietors of these schools.
2. Government should standardize the curriculum for all private business schools.
3. Private business school operators should be prepared the more to emphasize the distinctiveness of private business schools from ordinary private secondary schools. They should provide requisite human and material resources for better instructional task management in such business subjects as commerce, economics, shorthand, typewriting, word processing (computer studies) and office studies in general.

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