

Co-operative Vocational Business Education: A Programme for Production of Skilled Office Personnel

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Abstract

Co-operative vocational education is an instructional plan that combines learning experiences gained through regularly scheduled supervised employment in the community and vocationally oriented in school instruction. The study examined the quality of co-operative vocational education programme needed for the production of office personnel for office work. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. A Survey research design was adopted and data collected from 342 respondents were analysed using mean. The finding of the study revealed that co-operative vocational business education components were required for production of personnel for office work. It was also found that the application of co-operative vocational business education will lead to the attainment of the goals of vocational education as stated in the National Policy on Education, (2004). Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that co-operative education should be integrated in the vocational education curriculum of tertiary institutions to enable students benefit from the programme, for effective participation in the world of work.

Introduction

Co-operative education is a structured education programme that integrates classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career occupation. Co-operative education provides progressive experiences by integrating theory and practices. Co-operative education as a strategy includes the following responsibilities:

- work experiences related to career goals
- pre-employment preparation for students as well as on going advising
- provision for employer and school evaluation of quality and relevance of the work experience and curriculum
- structure for multiple work experiences in formalized sequence with study leading to degree completion
- agreement on job description and new learning opportunities,
- work monitored by the school's qualified co-operative coordinator (NCCE, 2012).

The co-operative method may be used to achieve variety of career-related goals in vocational co-operative education.

Co-operative vocational education is developed through the co-operative efforts of labour, management and educational institutions, to stimulate students interest on the job experience. The co-operative vocational education also enables students to become efficient on-the-job. Osuala (2009) defined co-operative vocational education as an instructional plan which combines learning experiences gained through regular scheduled, supervised employment in the community and vocationally-oriented in-school instruction. Co-operative vocational education encompasses various types of co-operative plan programmes designed specifically to prepare youths for occupation in proportion to the distribution of employment. An important point is that co-operative education plans at all levels, similar policies and procedures. Essential components of a successful work-based learning programme include: related classroom instruction; planned programme of job training and experiences; paid work experience, workplace mentoring, instruction in general workplace competencies and broad instruction in all aspects of the industry. Business, marketing, computer education and co-operative vocational education can successfully prepare students for employment in any business-related occupation. Co-operative education assists students to develop effective business skills and attitudes through practical, advanced instruction at school and on the job (National Commission for Co-operative Education; 2012). Co-operative business education training in the related work-based learning areas at school will enable students to focus upon the student's career choice in accounting, information processing, office practice, and other business related programmes. The career programme will include marketing management, accounting/bookkeeping, administrative support learning, enterprise management and operations, banking and financial services support and business systems networking. With the support of technology many business students will be engaged with webpage development and design. Co-operative business programme according to the Guidelines for Education Amendments in Osuala (2009) stated that the learning experiences and instructional outcome are contained in the school curriculum.

Curriculum is a prescribed course of study which learners must fulfil to enable them pass a certain level of education. Esu (2007) stated that curriculum encompasses those learning experiences both formal and informal, planned and guided by the school for the benefit of the learner. Fafunwa in Etonyeaku (2010) defined curriculum as the total environment in which education takes place, that is, the child, the teacher, the subject, the content, the method, the physical and psychological environment. White (1985) stated that curriculum is the total learning, planned or unplanned, overt or covert, explicit or implicit, interceded or unintended that a learner gains from exposure to instruction. In the same vein, vocational education curriculum prepares people for employment in any occupation for which specialized education is required.

Marketing education has been a part of the curriculum for schools and it is grounded in academics. It integrates learning as students apply the principles of psychology, human relations, oral and written communication and mathematics as they learn how businesses plan, produce, price, distribute and sell many products and services needed by consumers. Curriculum is essentially a set of documents for implementation and the teacher is the person who will interpret and implement the curriculum.

The importance of teacher and his roles in education process are central to basic education hence the teacher is the foundation upon which growth and development in any society hinges. In co-operative vocational education, the teacher designs and interprets the necessary learning experiences that will help the learners to progress in their career life.

A teacher coordinator is a person that had acquired knowledge, attitude and skills through training and he is capable of imparting such skills to students in order to change the learners' behaviour. The teacher-coordinators are versatile to function in a variety of situations. The teacher coordinator must be physically fit, committed to his job, exercising self-control and be a master of the subject. This is in line with Offoma in Etonyeaku (2010) that curriculum is deliberately and systematically planned attempt to change the behaviour of the young and inexperienced learners to enable them acquire competency, that will enable them build-up a better society.

The student-learner objective is to prepare the student for occupation or an array of occupations in the schools, while in the training station, a supervised office work. The school plan should be jointly developed by the teacher-coordinator and the training stations, based on the student's career needs, tasks or duties involved in the occupation. The teaching techniques adopted by the teachers should vary from teacher to teacher. The selection of the technique should depend in parts, on materials and teaching aids potentially available for each instructional lesson. According to Osuala (2009) the selection of techniques for teaching should anchor on the characteristics of the learners, nature of the information to be presented and principles of learning processes.

The school has the mandate to provide basic related instructions for knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes needed as basis for occupational preparation at the training stations, and for advancement toward career objectives. The classroom is the place where the group instruction and those the students must develop before applying such on the jobs are learned. The theory and principles are learned in the classroom while the training station implies the laboratory where the students test the theory and practice the learned principles in the classroom. The teacher-coordinator must ensure that the efforts to develop the students' knowledge, attitude, skills and habits needed for successful transit from school to career occupation are adequately made. Apart from mentioned factors, lack of suitable training stations constitute constraints to effective implementation of cooperative education programmes, as well as necessary facilities needed for the training of the students. Many teacher-coordinators and students are not motivated by not receiving financial assistance in the form of good salary, transport allowances and accommodation at the training stations. Despite the significant role cooperative vocational/office education can play in human capital development, in Nigeria in particular and world over, little or no attention, has been accorded to co-operative vocational office education.

The study, therefore, was designed to determine the use of cooperative vocational education as a tool for the production of skilled personnel.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the components quality of co-operative education programme.
2. determine the areas co-operative education would train skilled personnel

3. determine competent work-based learning activities
4. determine the benefits of co-operative education

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study

1. What are the components of quality co-operative education programme needed for personnel production in effects work?
2. What are the areas in co-operative vocational education necessary for training skilled personnel?
3. What are the competent work-based learning activities for skilled personnel production?
4. What are the benefits of cooperative education to student, employers and community?

Method

The study was carried out in Enugu State of Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The survey design was chosen because it focuses on people, their opinion, attitudes, motivation and behaviour (I Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003).

The design was appropriate for the study since questionnaire was used to seek the opinion of the respondents on co-operative vocational education as a tool for production of skilled personnel.

The population for the study consisted of 342 respondents, made up of 300 final year students 2011/2012 session and 42 lecturers teaching Business Education courses in the institutions under study. Final year students were chosen to constitute the population because they have passed through various education processes, which engender awareness. The lecturers were also chosen because they form part of the teacher-coordinators who impart the needed skills, knowledge, and understand the rationale for integrating work-based learning activities into the curriculum. The sample of the study was 342. The entire population formed the sample because the number was manageable.

A structured questionnaire that consisted 38 items was used to collect data in accordance with the purpose of the study. The instrument was in four Sections. Section A was used to collect data on components of quality co-operative education programme, Section B for areas of co-operative education for training skilled personnel, Section C for competent work-based learning activities while Section D was for the benefits of co-operative vocational business education to students and community. Each questionnaire item was assigned a five point response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree, with corresponding values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Vocational Teacher Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation of Department of Educational Foundations, all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha method was used to test the internal consistency with a coefficient of 0.72. The data

collected from the study were analysed using mean to answer the research questions. Any item with a mean rating of 3.50 and above was regarded as required while items with mean rating below 3.50 was regarded as not required.

Results

Research Question One

What are the components of quality cooperative vocational education programme needed for personnel production in office work?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of respondents Responses on Component for Vocational Business Education Programme

N = 342				
S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Qualified and dedicated teacher-coordinator should be involved in planning the programme	3.78	0.47	Agree
2.	Students should be selected based upon their attitudes, needs desires and suitable training stations	3.64	0.53	Agree
3.	Learning experiences should be appropriate at the training stations	3.58	0.59	Agree
4.	Related instructions should be planned and correlated directly with student on the job experiences	3.63	0.65	Agree
5.	An advisory council from the school and cooperative agencies should be established to advise and assort in planning and implementation	3.56	0.82	Agree
6.	All the defined policies should be developed to guide the operation of cooperative education	3.64	0.54	Agree
7.	Administrative support for cooperative vocational education should allow for the flexible scheduling needed to effectively and efficiently operate the plan	3.50	0.64	Agree
8.	Adequate facilities in related classrooms and offices should be provided for teacher-coordinators	3.66	0.54	Agree
Cluster Mean		3.63	0.60	

Table 1 shows that all the eight components are needed for personnel production in office work, based on the mean of 3.50- 3.78.

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Respondents Responses on Areas for Training Skilled Personnel

N = 342				
S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks

9.	Processing and distribution (purchasing)	3.70	0.68	Agree	
10.	Marketing and salesmanship	3.52	0.65	Agree	
11.	Accounting and bookkeeping	3.57	0.92	Agree	
12.	Administration supporting and information processing	3.66	0.68	Agree	
13.	Computer operation/programming	3.74	0.66	Agree	
14.	Word processing	3.86	0.91	Agree	
15.	Data processing and bus systems networking	3.72	0.64	Agree	
16.	Human resource management	3.60	0.92	Agree	
17.	Oral and written communication	3.50	0.67	Agree	
18.	Small business management	3.70	0.68	Agree	
19.	Advertising/webpage development and design	3.52	0.85	Agree	
20.	Enterprise management and operations	3.0	3.50	0.62	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.63	0.74	Agree	

The data presented in Table 2 revealed that the 12 items have mean that range from 3.50 to 3.86 and a cluster mean of 3.63 and standard deviation from 0.62 to 0.92. This indicated that all the training areas are required for skilled personnel.

Table 3: Mean Scores and Deviation of Respondents' Responses on Teacher Coordinated Competent work-based-learning activities

N = 342				
S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
21	"The teacher-coordinator should" understand the rationale for integrating work-based activities into the curriculum	3.75	0.56	Agree
22	Understand the roles, responsibilities of students, school and work-site in the work-based learning experience	3.75	0.56	Agree
23	Develop collaborative partnerships with students, colleagues, business/industry to minimize resources	3.91	0.58	Agree
24	Secure and develop work-based learning sites	3.67	0.72	Agree
25	Articulate work-based learning opportunities, internship work experience as they relate to local resources and needs	3.74	0.52	Agree
26	Develop training plans, agreements, and evaluation instruments to integrate work-place skills instruction into all work-based	3.91	0.58	Agree

27	learning curriculum Integrate workplace skills instruction into all work-based learning	3.72	0.64	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.78	0.59	Agree

The data presented in Table 3 revealed that all the items on teacher-coordinated competent work based learning activities are required for personnel production for office work-based on the mean of 3.67 to 3.91 and cluster mean of 3.78 and standard deviation from 0.52 to 0.72. This indicated that all the teacher co-ordinated competent work-based learning activities are required for the production of skilled personnel for offices work.

Table 4: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of respondents' responses on Benefits of Cooperative Education

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
	Co-operative education:			
28	Provides closer integration of theory and practice	3.59	0.74	Agree
29	Increases students' motivation	3.50	0.61	Agree
30	Provides students with opportunity to explore their career choices	3.91	0.57	Agree
31	Enables economically disadvantaged students to stay in school because of their earning power	3.70	0.68	Agree
32	Provides an opportunity for training sponsors to discover potential employees.	3.74	0.66	Agree
33	Provides employers with an opportunity for direct input into the training programmes	3.57	0.92	Agree
34	Reduces cost of training to training sponsors	3.66	0.68	Agree
35	Improves the image and prestige of the industry, student learners and the community	3.75	0.66	Agree
36	Provides a closer relationship between the community and school	3.59	0.74	Agree
37	Provides opportunities for graduates to remain in the community after graduate	3.50	0.55	Agree
38	Reduces rate of drop-outs among students by making learning more interesting	3.75	0.56	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.66	0.70	Agree

Data presented in Table 4 shows that the 11 benefits of cooperative vocational business education programme are required for personnel production. The Table revealed that the items have mean score from 3.50 to 3.91 and standard deviation of 0.55 to 0.92. This indicated that the items, beneficial for cooperative education.

Discussion

The findings in Table I revealed that the respondents agreed that the eight components for vocational business education programme are required for personnel production for office work. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Igboke (1998) and Osuala (2009) that component of office education as a vocational education programme provides students with aptitudes skills, knowledge and understanding. To this effect, there is need for efficient and effective training of office working and this need is not appropriately served by cooperative office education. The findings on research questions 2 as presented in Table 2 showed that all the 12 training areas are required by students of cooperative vocational business education for personnel production. These findings agreed with the findings of Blair in Anaele (2010) human resources management skills required of vocational technical college administrators.

Table 3 shows the findings on teacher coordinated competent work-based activities are required for personnel production for office work. The current information and communication technology is about the use of computer and competent people are needed to process data and words in the most efficient manner. This is in consonance with the findings of Osuala (2009) that human resource planning is the process of forecasting human resource needs and developing procedures for filling them.

The findings on research question 4 on benefits accruing from cooperative education as presented in table 4 revealed that all the 11 benefits are required by students, employers and society at large. This findings are also in consonance with the findings of (National Commission for co-operative Education (2012) <http://www.co-op.edu/aboutcoop.htm>) that teacher-coordinators need to be able to sell co-operative education to the various publics, and cooperation education must have support from students, employers of labour, local education authority personnel and the community.

The respondents agreed that co-operative vocational education provides students with the opportunity to explore their career choices prior to making long-term and costly investments in further training.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the application of co-operative vocational business education will lead to the attainment of the goals vocational education as stated in the National Policy on Education, (2004). This will result in the production of graduates with skills, attitude aptitude and knowledge for self and paid employment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Co-operative vocational and office education should be introduced in the vocational education curriculum of tertiary institutions to enable students benefit more from co-operative education co-operative vocational education should be adopted by Nigerian schools.

The federal government should ensuring cooperative education as a discipline in the National Policy in Education

Co-operative education should be made a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.

Industries should be involved in co-operative education so as to be a transitional place for graduates from the training station.

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