School-Industry Collaboration as an Innovative Tool for Quality Preparation of Business Education Graduates in Tertiary Institutions in Imo State

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Abstract
The focus of the study focused on institution and industry collaboration as an innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Specifically, the study was designed to determine the areas of collaboration between institution and industry for quality preparation of business education graduates, the constraints faced in institution and industry collaboration for quality preparation of business education graduates and the probable solutions to constraints faced in school and industry collaboration for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Three research questions guided the study, and one hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population of the study consists of the 56 business educators in tertiary institutions in Imo State where business education and office technology and management programme are offered. The entire population was used for the study because manageable size of the population, hence there was no sampling. A three sectioned research questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was developed by researchers and validated by experts in the field of business education. The questionnaire was administered on the respondents and data obtained was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analyses revealed the areas of collaboration between institution and industry, the constraints faced in institution and industry collaboration as well as the solutions to constraints faced in school and industry collaboration for quality preparation of business education graduates. Based on the findings, it was recommended that business education students should be given adequate awareness and exposure to industrial activities and experience while in training to acquire practical knowledge needed to cope with the demand of digital economy
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Keywords: Collaboration, innovation, business education

Introduction

The future of any nation lies greatly on the workforce prepared through a well designed and implemented school programmes. This reveals why education is considered the wheel for socio-economic growth. The quality of education provided by educational institution influences the level of performance of the workforce which eventually determines the future of the nation.

The high rate of unemployment in Nigeria for both graduates and non-graduates has become an issue for national debate. This resulted to a call for curriculum planners and management of tertiary education to investigate the issue and seek effective methods that will train graduates for the world of work and self-reliance. Nedum-Ogbede (2017) stated that the type of education that is needed for self-employment and national development has changed to include reasoning, creative problem solving and behavioral skills as well as positive cognitive styles as against the narrow cognitive and occupational skills sought in more direct work environment.

Traditionally, educational institutions have the role and capacity of shaping and determining the future technological direction of a nation by providing platforms for innovation and education of future generations but not totally in isolation. It therefore becomes imperative to note that for school to deliver the right set of skills and knowledge needed for graduates to fit properly into the emerging economies, some form of school-industry collaboration is required.

Collaboration can be defined as the action of working jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour. According to Rubin (2009) collaboration is the process of two or more people or organizations working together to complete a task or achieve a goal. It is considered as a means of bridging the gap between those who are more experienced with those that are less experienced. It enables the two teams to do their best work is essential component of problem solving and decision making as it leverages on a team's unique perspective, build trust and creates new avenues for communications in real time. According to Odugbasan in Madu, Okananzu and Eneogwe (2019), the job market now requires a high level of analytical reading, critical thinking, writing and mathematical skills than the same jobs in some ten or twenty years ago. This is obviously the result of technological changes and advancement. To cover this gap, training institutions are seeking innovative means and ways in which it can collaborate with players in industries to close the gap between what is taught in school and what the graduates needs to excel in their roles in industries.

School and industry collaboration is the partnership between educational institutions and industrial sector to create enabling environment for students to acquire hands-on experience and knowledge, skills and appropriate attitude to work. In the view of Wegner and Ramsey (2019), collaboration seeks to combine the technical know-how, skills and managerial expertise of industry with institutional regulatory actions and its protection of public interest. School and industry collaboration is a win-win situation for both partners. While industry provide school with funds, facilities and managerial expertise for training students, the school in turn provide knowledge and skills for paid employment.

Therefore, it has become imperative that industries should be actively involve in the skills training of business and office education students to complement classroom experience to acquaint them with skills needed for employment in the industries after graduation. An effective partnership between the school and the industries would compel the industries to make their expertise, equipment and expendable material available for the effective learning of the students. Okorie (2011) noted that as industries participate in the training of the students, certain

deficiencies that existed in the training of the students will be reduced if not completely eradicated thus, producing quality business and office education graduates.

Graduates are considered to be adequately prepared for the world of work and entrepreneurship when studentsacquire appropriate knowledge, attitudes, abilities and skills that would make them secure well-paid jobs and at the same time create jobs. This is because business and office education in addition to providing knowledge and skills for paid employment. It is an education that provides wonderful opportunities for youth empowerment and sustainable economic development.

A quality business education programme requires effective collaboration with relevant industries which the graduates will serve upon graduation and be able to set up and run successfully any small-scale business of choice. Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji (2017) observed that institutional collaboration with industries is gaining prominence globally so that resources can be shared and utilized profitably. The authors further remarked that business and office education programme require huge facilities and infrastructure to implement which government alone is unable to sufficiently provide due to dwindling economy.

Although, business education students are exposed to Student Industrial Workn Experience Scheme (SIWES) during their programme, Okoro and Agholor (2014) lamented that the experiences students acquire from this scheme are not adequate to their training needs. Institutions need to collaborate with industries for research assistance and collaboration, curriculum planning, infrastructural provision, scholarships, seminars and field trips among others. Furthermore, Gbenedio (2012) noted that many academic programmes tend to exist in isolation, with few connections between learning institutions and industry, even between those in the same geographical area.

Effective collaboration between schools and industries provide occasion for representative of labour, business and industry to develop a common language and bring technicians-in-training and front-line workers into communication process. This relationship would make the graduating students better able to make connection between school and work. The relationship could equally enable graduates of such system to be able to set up business that can serve all the sectors. In line with this, Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013) in the National Policy on Education stated that cooperation between industries and training institutions shall be encouraged.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of school-industry collaboration, its implementation in many tertiary institutions in Imo State remains limited, fragmented, or informal. Many students graduate with limited practical experience and minimal interaction with industry stakeholders, making it difficult for them to transition smoothly into the labor market. Moreover, challenges such as poor communication, lack of commitment from both sectors, inadequate infrastructure, and policy constraints continue to impede effective collaboration efforts.

Given these concerns, it becomes imperative to investigate the extent and nature of existing or potential areas for collaboration between schools and industries as a tool for enhancing the quality of business education graduates. Furthermore, understanding the constraints faced and proposing practical solutions will be vital for establishing a sustainable framework for effective school-industry partnerships.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore school-industry collaboration as an innovative tool for the quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State, with specific focus on identifying areas for collaboration, assessing the challenges faced, and

examining feasible solutions that can strengthen these partnerships and improve graduate outcomes.

Statement of Problem

today's rapidly evolving global economy, the demand for business education graduates who possess not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical, industry-relevant skills has become increasingly critical. However, despite the growing importance of aligning academic programs with industry needs, a significant gap persists between what is taught in tertiary institutions and the actual requirements of the workplace. In Imo State, Nigeria, this disconnect is particularly evident in the training of business education graduates, many of whom complete their programs without adequate exposure to real-world business practices, technologies, and professional environments.

School-industry collaboration has been widely acknowledged as an innovative approach to bridging this gap by fostering a symbiotic relationship where academic institutions benefit from industry insights and resources, while industries gain access to a pipeline of well-prepared graduates. However, in Imo State, such collaborative efforts between tertiary institutions and the business sector remain limited, poorly structured, or underutilized. This has raised concerns about the quality of business education graduates, their employability, and their capacity to contribute meaningfully to economic development.

The areas through which schools and industries can collaborate—such as curriculum development, industrial training, guest lectures, internships, joint research, and professional mentoring—have not been fully explored or implemented in many institutions. Additionally, various constraints, including bureaucratic bottlenecks, lack of policy frameworks, inadequate funding, and mutual distrust between academic and industry stakeholders, hinder the successful execution of such partnerships.

Without identifying and addressing these challenges, the potential of school-industry collaboration as a transformative tool for improving the quality of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State will remain unrealized. Hence, there is a pressing need to investigate the specific areas of possible collaboration, determine the constraints impeding effective partnerships, and propose practical solutions that can enhance the synergy between schools and industries for the benefit of business education graduates.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine school - industry collaboration as an innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The areas for collaboration between school and industry as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.
2. The constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.
3. The probable solutions to constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Research Questions

1. What are the areas for collaboration between school and industry as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?
2. What are the constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?
3. What are the probable solutions to constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Hypothesis

There is no significance difference between the mean rating of male and female business educators on school and industry collaboration as an innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State

Methodology

The research design used for this study was survey design to determine school and industry collaboration as a strategy for quality preparation of business and office education students in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The population of the study comprised 56 business educators in tertiary institutions in Imo State Nigeria where business education and office technology and management programmes are offered. The entire population was used for the study since the number is small and relatively manageable, hence there was no sampling.

A research questionnaire consisting of 26 items was used as instrument for the study. The research instrument has two parts – Part A and Part B. Part A contains information on the respondent's biographic profile. Part B was divided into three sections in line with research questions raised for the study. The instrument was structured to elicit information from the assessment of respondents on a 4-point rating scale using the real limits of numbers as follows:

Response		
Strongly Agreed	(SA)	4
Agreed	(A)	3
Disagreed	(D)	2
Strongly Disagreed	(SD)	1

The instrument was validated by three experts in business education while the reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha (α) reliability test and overall reliability coefficient of 0.91 was obtained. The questionnaire constructed was administered by the researcher to the respondents with the aid of research helpers. In analyzing the data collected from the instrument administered, mean was used to analyze the responses for research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. Analysis of responses to the research questions was based on the cluster mean relative to real limits of numbers as shown below.

Response		Rating Scale	Real Limits of Number
Strongly Agreed	(SA)	4	3.50 – 4.49
Agreed	(A)	3	2.50 – 3.49
Disagreed	(D)	2	1.50 – 2.49
Strongly Disagreed	(SD)	1	0.50 – 1.49

The null hypothesis was tested using t-test statistics at $p<0.05$. A null hypothesis was rejected where the t-value is equal to or greater than the critical value, otherwise the null hypothesis is upheld

Analysis of Result

In analyzing the data for the study, the items were grouped according to the research questions.

Research Question 1

What are the areas for collaboration between school and industry as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Table 1: Respondents' Mean Rating on Areas for School and Industry Collaboration

S/N	Areas of School and Industry Collaboration	Mean	Remark
1	Provision of technological devices and equipment	3.20	Agreed
2	Sponsoring and supporting students for conferences, seminars and workshops.	3.80	Agreed
3	Donating instructional materials like current and relevant books, office tools and machines etc.	3.42	Agreed
4	Accepting students for industrial training and adequately exposing them to relevant industrial experiences.	3.60	Agreed
5	Providing awards, prices and scholarship to poor and deserving students.	3.50	Agreed
6	Engaging industrial professionals and experts from industries on part-time teaching.	3.20	Agreed
7	Engaging employers in curriculum designing and training as well as offering employees as faculty.	3.19	Agreed
8	Accepting students on excursion and according to them all necessary assistance.	3.20	Agreed
9	Collaborating with business educators in area of knowledge sharing and skill update through seminars, conferences and workshop training.	3.60	Agreed
10	Providing support and sponsorship of well researched and outstanding students' projects.	1.32	Disagreed
	Grand Mean	**3.23**	Disagreed

The data in Table revealed areas in which school and collaborate with industry for quality preparation of business and office education students in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Apart from providing support and sponsorship of well researched and outstanding students' projects which received mean score of 1.36, the respondents believed that all other areas as itemized in the table are areas for collaboration between school and industry for quality preparation of business and office education students. This was indicated by high mean scores above 2.5. A grand mean of 3.23 shows that the respondents agreed that collaboration between school and industry in the areas itemized with ensure quality preparation of business education graduates.

Research Question 2

What are the constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Table 2: Respondents' Mean Rating on Constraints to School & Industry Collaboration

S/N	Constraints to School and Industry Collaboration	Mean	Remark
11	Exclusion of industries in development of curriculum for training business and office education students.	3.30	Agreed
12	Confidentiality of official business information and patent right protection make industries unwilling to expose students to certain details about their businesses.	3.45	Agreed
13	Paucity of fund makes business and industrial organizations to shy away from some school industrial collaboration endeavours.	3.40	Agreed
14	Fear of damage to machines and expensive industrial equipment prohibits school and industry collaboration.	3.67	Agreed
15	Poor preparation of students for industrial training makes industry turn down business and office education students for industrial training.	2.97	Agreed
16	Poor relationship between institutional administrators and business/industrial managers hinders school and industry collaboration.	3.50	Agreed
17	Overcrowded school curriculum does not create enough room for professionals and experts in industries to be involved in teaching and learning activities in schools.	3.70	Agreed
18	Economic challenges and other business crisis make business to shy away from most of their social responsibility to schools.	2.85	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.32**	**Agreed**

Table 2 reveals the constraints to school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. All the items in this section received mean rating greater than 2.5. The grand mean of 3.32 is a further indication of respondent agreement to the items as the constraints to school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Research Question 3

What are the probable solutions to constraints faced in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Table 3: Respondents' Mean Rating on Solutions to School and Industry Collaboration

S/N	Probable Solutions to School – Industry Collaboration	Mean	Remark
19	Industries should be involved in school curriculum development and planning.	3.70	Agreed
20	Creation of business/industry liaison office in schools to ensure smooth school and industry relation.	3.20	Agreed
21	Industries should see schools as part of its social responsibilities to the society and environment where they do business.	3.34	Agreed

22	Organization of joint cooperative programme of research between school and industries.	3.63	Agreed
23	Availability of adequate and competent hands and manpower to guide business and office education students on industrial training to minimize damage to industrial machines and equipment.	2.80	Agreed
24	Industrial partnership in training and retraining of business and office technology educators in the use of digital technologies to ensure better quality of students are turned out for industrial attachment.	3.25	Agreed
25	Creating business friendly environment for industries to strive and make good profit to meet up their social responsibilities.	3.65	Agreed
26	Provisions of tax waiver and incentives to industries considered to be active in school and industry collaboration so as to motivate others along that direction.	3.85	Agreed
	Grand Mean	**3.53**	Agreed

Table 3 reveals the probable solutions to constraints facing school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. All the items in this section received mean rating above 2.5. The grand mean of 3.53 further shows that the respondent was in agreement that all the items in this section are solutions to the challenges facing school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. In other words, incorporating these strategies will guarantee quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Testing of Hypothesis

Table 4

The Summary of the t-test Analysis of Business Educators' Mean Ratings on School and Industry Collaboration as Innovative tool for Quality Preparation of Business and Office Education Graduates

N = 59

Gender	N	X	S	t-cal	α	df	t-crit	Remark
Male	33	3.64	1.07					Not
Female	38	3.52	0.93	0.76	0.05	57	1.96	significant

The data in Table 4 revealed the t-test analysis of responses of male and female business educators on school and industry collaboration as a tool for quality preparation of business office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State with mean scores of 3.64 and 3.52 respectively. The t-calculated value of 0.76 is less than the t-tabulated value of 1.96 at 57 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected which implies that, there is no significance difference between the mean rating of male and female business educators on school and industry collaboration as an innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Discussion of Results

The study identified the areas in which school and industry can collaborate as innovative tool for quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in

Imo State. The areas include provision of technological devices and equipment, sponsoring and supporting students for conferences, seminars and workshops and donating instructional materials like current and relevant books, office tools and machines etc. Other areas include, accepting students for industrial training and adequately exposing them to relevant industrial experiences; providing awards, prices and scholarship to poor and deserving students; engaging industrial professionals and experts from industries on part-time teaching and engaging employers in curriculum designing and training as well as offering employees as faculty. Accepting students on excursion and according them all necessary assistance; collaborating with business educators in area of knowledge sharing and skill update through seminars, conferences and workshop training as well as providing support and sponsorship of well researched and outstanding students' projects were also identified as areas schools and industries can collaborate for quality training and preparation of business and office education graduates for the world of work and employment.

These results are in line with the position of Mourshed, Farrelled and Barton (2023) who observed that collaboration with industries is key to aligning instruction with in-demands skills and that the more creative and innovative one gets, the more results one gets to closely align with the skills needed to succeed on the job. Hence, there is need for all stakeholders to perform their part to close the skill gaps. Madu, Okanazu and Eneogwe (2019) also emphasized that close collaboration with industries in curriculum development, laboratory training and professional standard is important to ensuring schools are producing work ready graduates who can quickly begin to deliver value without the need for additional on the job training.

Again, the findings of the study also revealed the constraints to school and industry collaboration for quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The constraints include exclusion of industries in development of curriculum for training business and office education students, need for confidentiality of official business information and patent right protection and paucity of fund. Other constraints include fear of damage to machines and expensive industrial equipments; poor preparation of students for industrial training and poor relationship between institutional administrators and business/industrial managers. Overcrowded school curriculum which does not create enough room for professionals and experts in industries to be involved in teaching and learning activities in schools as well as economic challenges and other business crisis were identified as part of the limitations that make businesses and industries to shy away from most of their social responsibility to schools.

This finding agrees with Ikelegbe (2019) who discovered that successful transition of students from school to workplace is a huge challenge because of poor collaboration between school and industry. According to Ikelegbe, the challenges limiting effective school-industry collaboration are lack of funds in industry to initiate collaboration work in schools, near absence of collaboration, poor preparation of students for industrial attachment, fear of damaging their tools among others. Similarly, Madu, Okanazu and Eneogwe (2019) discovered that sustainable collaboration is only possible and assured when concrete steps are taken to make business education graduates acquire skills that will enable them to be self-reliant which becomes a tool for achieving development and its sustainability despite the challenges.

The results of the study as shown in Table 3 revealed the probable solutions to constraints in school and industry collaboration as innovative tool for quality preparation of business and office education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The solutions which the study discovered include: involvement of industries in school curriculum development and planning;

creation of business/industry liaison office in schools to ensure smooth school and industry relationship, organization of joint cooperative programme of research between school and industries, and availability of adequate and competent hands and manpower to guide business and office education students on industrial training to minimize damage to industrial machines and equipment. The study also revealed that industrial partnership in training and retraining of business and office technology educators in the use of digital technologies and creating of business-friendly environment for industries to strive will enhance school and industrial ties for quality preparation of business and office technology graduates. The study maintained that introduction of tax waiver and other tax incentives to industries considered to be active in school and industry collaboration will enhance school and industrial ties for quality preparation of business and office technology graduates.

These finding agrees wiith Mourshed, Farrell and Barton (2013) who held that for school to prepare work ready graduates, both education providers and employers of labour must actively step into one another's world. This according to the authors implies that employers of labour and captains of industries can for example, help in designing school curriculum and offer their employees as faculty while education providers and administrators can have students spend time on a job site and assist with job placement. Okeke (2010) stressed on the need for increased collaboration between tertiary institutions and industries in Nigeria. The author emphasized that, in the face of the present economic recession, reduced funding of education and high cost of technological equipment, tertiary institutions cannot be left alone to provide the technological needs of the school in training students. The present linkage between school and industrial organizations needs to be seriously strengthened to encourage the industries to provide technological tools needed by the schools.

Finally, the null hypothesis formulated for the study was retained which implies that there is no significance difference between the mean rating of male and female business educators on school and industry collaboration as an innovative tool for quality preparation of business education graduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Conclusion

The result of this study revealed that school and industry collaboration is an innovative tool that can be harnessed for quality preparation of graduates in business and office education in Nigeria. However, the status of this tool is weak and challenged because of numerous constraints which the study has identified. There is therefore need for school administrators and managers of industries to collaborate effectively to ensure quality graduates are turned out of business and office education programme of various tertiary institutions across the country. The industrial organizations should provide the necessary human and material resources to institutions to enable them forge ahead in their task of producing highly skilled office workers/technologists and business-oriented graduates to generate and sustain the industrial growth and advancement of the country.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Institutional administrators should ensure that business education students are given adequate awareness and exposure to industrial activities and experience while in training to acquire practical knowledge needed to cope with the demand of digital economy through collaboration with industry.

2. Government should make provisions for tax waiver and incentives to industries considered to be active in school and industry collaboration so as to motivate others along that direction and ensure guidelines for industrial participation in school programmes are well documented and available to industries.
3. Tertiary institutions should improve on the quality of research activities and also ensure that research carried out that will be of benefit to both industries and government should be advertised and made known to the public because this may motivate both individuals and industries to put interest in contributing to schools and it will help in school industry collaboration.
4. Industrial partnership in training and retraining of business and office technology educators in the use of digital technologies to ensure better quality of students are turned out for industrial attachment.

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