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**STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS PERFORMANCE IN FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING IN NCE BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH -EAST NIGERIA****Abstract:**

A cursory look at the results of N.C.E Business Education students in Business Education courses in Nigeria over the years indicates that their performance in financial accounting courses is poor when compared with the students performance in other business courses. This study was therefore undertaken to determine the strategies to be adopted to improve students performance in financial accounting in N.C.E Business Education programmes in colleges of education in South East Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. It answered two research questions. The population comprised all the 76 lecturers in Business Education programmes of the colleges of education in South East Nigeria. Since the population is small, the entire population was used for the study. A 28 item four (4) point scale questionnaire was the major instrument used for data collection. Mean score was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed among others that non-possession of accounting as one of the prerequisite entry subjects, non-ownership of accounting textbooks and poor quality entrants militate against students performance in financial accounting while making pass in accounts in senior school certificate examination a prerequisite for admission, retraining of accounting lecturers, prompt marking of assignments/exercises, writing or recommending textbooks having graded exercises or short exercises among others are strategies for improving students performance in financial accounting in colleges of education. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that graded financial accounting textbooks should be written or recommended and that a pass in Accounts in S.S.C.E. should be a compulsory requirement for admission into N.C.E. business education programme.

**Keywords:**

Accounting, Business Education, Strategies, Performance, Financial Accounting, Improving, Nigerian Certificate in Education

## Introduction

Accounting is a generic term covering both the bookkeeping and accounts aspect of an economic entity, According to American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) accounting is the art of recording, classifying, and summarizing in terms of money, transactions and events which are in part at least, of financial character, and interpreting the result thereof (Agbo, 2007: 2). Similarly Asaolu in Okoli (2013:99) saw accounting as the process of recording, classifying, measuring, interpreting, summarizing and reporting financial data of an organization to the users for objective assessment and decision making: Accounting provides quantitative financial information about economic entities for internal and external users to use in making decisions such as whether to invest further or not.

It is an information and measurement system that identifies, records and communicates relevant, reliable and comparable financial data about an organization's business activities (Wild,2003:4) It helps us make better decision, including assessing opportunities, products, investments and social and community responsibilities, Accounting activities according to Needles et al embraces all the line functions performed in accounting process and which include general financial accounting, accounting systems and design, cost accounting, budgeting, taxation, auditing and data processing.( Agbo, 2007:3)

Accounting can be classified in terms of career opportunities and according to sub areas of study. Accounting as an area of study can be classified into financial accounting, cost and management accounting, auditing and taxation (Agbo, 2007:6). Financial accounting is that aspect of accounting concerned with recording of business transactions and the preparation of financial statements and reports to be used internally by management for planning, control and decision making, and externally by investors, creditors as well as government agencies for investment decisions cum tax returns, computation and assessment.

Generally, financial accounting is the scope of accounting covered in Nigeria secondary schools and technical colleges. At the secondary school level, it is usually called Principles of Accounts. At the Nigeria Certificate in Education level, financial accounting is taught as beginning accounting courses BED 111, Book keeping 1/Principles of Accounting 1, BED 121 Bookkeeping II/Principles of Accounting II in the first year, BED 211 Financial Accounting 1 and BED 221 Financial Accounting II in the second year while in the third and final year BEA 324 Advanced Financial Accounting is taught along with three other accounting courses namely, BEA 321-Cost and Management Accounting BEA 326- Auditing, and BEA 328-Taxation.

The topics covered in financial accounting courses from NCE I to NCE III classes include: evolution of bookkeeping, importance of bookkeeping, distinction between bookkeeping and accounts, subsidiary books and methods of keeping them, the ledger

and its classifications, records in the ledger/principles of double entry, balancing of accounts and extraction of trial balance (including purpose of trial balance, identification and correction of errors (including suspense accounts, the cash book (including simple, double and three column entries petty cash book, preparation of elementary final account.(ie Trading and Profit and Loss Accounts and Balance sheet , year end adjustments( accruals prepayments, discounts and their provisions, bad and doubtful debts and their provisions, depreciation(definition attributes, methods of providing for depreciation, computation of depreciation using the methods and the accounting entries. Sales of asset, treatment of repairs, renewals and replacement of assets, preparation of final accounts of a sole trader, bank reconciliation statements.

Other topics include accounting convention and concepts, accounts of non-profit making organizations ie receipts and payments, income and expenditure accounts, control accounts, incomplete or single entry records, bills of exchange (definition, uses and accounting entries, manufacturing accounts, partnership accounts (formation, admission of new partner, retirement of old partner and dissolution of partnership, joint venture accounts, stock valuation, introduction to company accounts, accounts of limited liability companies, purchase and amalgamation of business, interpretation of accounts, departmental accounts, hire purchase, royalty accounts, consignment account and introduction to public sector accounts, (NCCE,2010 )

The major purpose of NCE Business Education programme as enunciated in the NCE minimum standard for Business Education is to produce NCE teachers who will be qualified and competent to teach the various components of business education at junior secondary school level and be able to pursue degree programmes in business education. Besides, the graduates of NCE business education programme have opportunities for employment as teachers and as office workers where they work as executive officers (accounts) among others.

So the products of NCE business education programme, especially those who majored in accounting ought to be able to perform competently as accounting teachers and as office workers. To be able to produce competent NCE business education accounting option graduates, they have to be adequately taught by competent, committed and well qualified teachers. This is in line with the view of Ukeje (1991) that the quality of the out put of the school system is a manifestation of the quality of teachers who taught them. This was corroborated in National Policy on Education (2004). In fact according to Ukeje the teacher is the hub of any educational system and no educational system rises above the quality of its teachers. It is upon their number, their education, training, quality and devotion to duty, their effectiveness and efficiency, their competence, their productivity and their capability that the entire educational system and enterprise depends (Chukwuma, 2012:229)

Akinpelu in Aguokogbuo 1990:145 defined teaching as the deliberate effort by a mature or experienced person to impart information, knowledge, and skills and so on to an immature or inexperienced person. Teaching is the science and art of assisting a

person to learn (Ogwo, and Oranu 2006:54). To ensure effective teaching and learning and ultimately improve performance by the learner, the teacher has to organize the teaching process systematically from the known to unknown, and from simple to complex (Aguokogbuo, 1990:47)

Specific or performance objective is a statement which describes what the learner should be able to accomplish at the end of a given learning undertaking (Mkpa, 1989, Osuala, 2004 and Obi, 2005). The extent to which the student will attain the set objectives is dependent largely on the effectiveness and efficiency of the teaching carried out by the teacher.

According to Advanced Learners Dictionary 2008 to improve is to make better or to raise in value. Improving students performance is therefore the different measures, techniques or tactics which can be adopted by the teacher and the students to enhance students performance. One of the ways to improve performance is to provide assistance and encouragement to students (Ekere,1990:86) Similarly, Ogwo and Oranu, 2006 stated that to improve students performance the teaching and practice of skills in a typical vocational education class should follow a gradual process. This implies that the exercises should be graded and administered gradually to students. Obi (2005:72) emphasizing the need for guided practice sessions stated that drill and practice are indispensable to a business teacher whose duties include aiding the learner to achieve a level of proficiency in the study of some business subjects like keyboarding, shorthand, accounting, filing and indexing. Under drill and practice, the teacher demonstrates and guides the student to practice under his close supervision. As the student master the skill, he is allowed to practice on his own while the teacher goes to watch what he is doing from time to time.

World Bank (2004) reported that teachers recruited in Africa do not meet the entry requirement of effective teaching. Similarly, Eze(2006) and Ile(1999) stated that Nigerians have bad attitude to work which seriously militate against productivity of Nigerian workers. In fact they are generally lazy, slothful and like to avoid work at any slightest opportunity.

### **Statement of Problem**

A cursory look at the results of NCE Business Education students in Business Education courses over the years indicate that students performance in financial accounting is poor when compared with their performance in other business education courses especially within the first and second years of the three year Nigerian Certificate in Education programme. For instance, in FCE, Eha-Amufu and some other colleges of education in South East Nigeria which the researcher visited prior to the study, between 20 and 30 percent of the students in each first year and second year financial accounting course fail financial accounting. This persistent poor performance of students in financial accounting is very worrisome as it affects the quality of NCE Business Education graduates in Nigeria. Could one link this poor performance of students to teacher factors such as poor

quality of teachers in terms of poor knowledge of subject matter and poor method of teaching or to student factors such as poor entry level knowledge, non – ownership of relevant textbooks and inadequate practice session. There is paucity of verifiable data to answer the above question. It is therefore necessary to carry out a study to determine the factors responsible for poor performance in financial accounting and the strategies that can be adopted to improve the students performance.

### **Purpose of study.**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the strategies for improving students' performance in financial accounting courses in NCE business education programmes in South East Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Determine the factors responsible for poor performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programme in South East Nigeria.
2. Determine the strategies for improving students' performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programme in South East Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the factors responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programmes in South East Nigeria?
2. What are the strategies for improving students' performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programme in South East Nigeria?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. This design was adopted because the study was on opinion of respondents. Survey design is appropriate for studies dealing with people's opinions, beliefs, attitudes, motivation and behaviour. (Osuala, 2005) The population for the study was 76 respondents comprising. 8 heads of departments and 68 lecturers. The instrument used for data collection was a 30 item questionnaire consisting of 2 items on personal data in section A and 28 items pertaining to the research questions in section B. The items for research questions have 4- point scale of strongly agree(4), agree(3), disagree(2), strongly disagree(1).

The instrument was validated by three experts, two in business education department of Federal College of Education Eha-Amufu and one from accounting department of Enugu State College of Education Technical Enugu .The two sections of the instrument were subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability test to test the internal

consistency of the items. The sections yield reliability scores of 0.84 and 0.88 respectively.

The 76 copies of questionnaire were administered by the researcher and one research assistant. Out of the 76 copies of questionnaire distributed, 70 copies were retrieved, and used for data analysis. Mean was used to analyze the research questions. Any item with a mean of 2.5 and above was accepted as a factor affecting performance or a strategy for improving performance.

## Results

The results of the study were obtained from analysis of data pertaining to the research questions and presented in Tables I and II below.

### Research question 1

What are the factors responsible for students' poor performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programmes in South East Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Mean score of respondents on factors responsible for students' poor performance in Financial Accounting Courses in NCE Business Education Programmes.

S/NO	Item statements	Mean
1.	Not having accounts as a compulsory prerequisite entry subject. Agree	2.82
2.	Non-ownership of accounts textbooks by students Strongly Agree (SA)	3.7
3.	Failure of students to practice accounts after lectures Agree	3.4
4.	Poor teaching method Agree	2.9
5.	Poor knowledge of accounting by some lecturers Disagree	2.2
6.	Poor teaching of some accounting topics by lecturers Agree	3.1
7.	Failure of lecturers to mark assignments and give students feedback promptly Agree	3.2
8.	Non-utilization of short exercises for class demonstration Agree	2.8
9.	Failure of lecturers to solve enough exercises with students before giving class exercises Agree	3.4

10.	Inadequate contact hours for accounting lectures	2.8
	Agree	
11.	The rush by lecturers, to cover enough ground within available time	3.2
	Agree	
12.	Scarcity of accounting textbooks with short exercises.	2.7
	Agree	
13.	Lack of solution to exercises in many accounting textbooks	3.5
	SA	
14.	Failure of lecturers to guide students' practice sessions or class exercises	3.0
	Agree	
15.	Failure of institutions to provide tutorials or students practice sessions in the lecture time table	2.9
	Agree	

The results in Table 1 indicate that the respondents strongly agreed that two factors non-ownership of accounting textbooks by students and lack of solution to exercises in many accounting textbooks are responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programme in South East Nigeria while they agreed that twelve (12) factors are responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting courses. On the other hand, they disagreed that poor knowledge of accounting by some lecturers is responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting.

On the whole 14 items had mean scores of more than 2.5 implying that fourteen factors are responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting in NCE Business Education programmes of Colleges of Education in South East Nigeria.

### **Research Question 2**

What are the strategies for improving students' performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education programmes in South East Nigeria?

**Table II:** Mean score of responses on strategies for improving students performance in financial accounting courses in NCE Business Education Programme.

S/N	Item statements	Mean	Remarks
16.	Demonstrate with plenty short exercises prior to students assignments or evaluation exercises	3.5	SA
17.	Allocate at least 3. Lecture contacts of 90 minutes each to financial accounting lecture per week .	3.7	SA
18.	Recommend accounting textbooks having short exercises or graded exercises	3.6	SA
19.	Making at least a pass in Accounts in S.S.C.E a prerequisite for admission to Business Education Departments.	3.1	A
20.	Lecturers devoting time to revise/practice each topic before their lecture contact	3.6	SA
21.	Regular retraining workshops for accounting lecturers	3.2	A
22.	Allocating at least 4½ hours per week for lectures in each financial accounting course (2lectures and1tutorial)	3.5	SA
23.	Administering sufficient exercises to students	3.4	SA
24.	Marking exercises promptly and giving them back to students	3.5	SA
25.	Going through students exercises with them during tutorials.	3.5	SA
26.	Recommending accounting textbooks having solutions to exercises	3.4	A
27.	Lecturers should avoid rushing topics while teaching.	3.2	A
28.	Lecturers guidance of tutorials or students practice sessions	3.5	SA

The results in Table II indicate that the respondents strongly agreed that eight items numbered 16, 17,18, 20,22,24, 25, and 28 are strategies for improving students performance in financial accounting in NCE Business Education programme of Colleges of Education in South East Nigeria.

The results also indicate that the respondents agreed that five items numbered 19, 21, 23, 26 and 27 are strategies that can improve students performance in financial accounting in NCE Business Education programme.

### Discusion of Findings

The findings in Table 1 indicate that 14 factors are responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting in NCE Business Education programmes in South East Nigeria while one factor – lecturers' poor knowledge of some accounting topics was not responsible for students poor performance. The findings that lecturers poor knowledge of some accounting topics is not responsible for students poor performance in financial accounting is suggestive that World Bank(2004) report that teachers recruited in Africa do not meet the requirement for effective teaching does



not apply to accounting lecturers in business education departments of colleges of education in South East Nigeria. However, the finding that lecturers' failure to guide students practice session or class exercises, failure of students to practice accounts after lectures, failure of lecturers to mark assignments promptly agree with the view of Eze(2006) and Ile(1999) that Nigerian workers are lazy, slothful and avoid work at any slightest opportunity.

The findings pertaining to research question 2 indicates that the respondents agreed that all the items are possible strategies for improving students performance in financial accounting. These findings agree with the view of Ogwo and Oranu(2006) and Obi(2005) that for effective teaching and learning, the students learning and practice have to be guided by the teacher and that the exercises should be graded to ensure learning from simple to complex.

### **Conclusions:**

Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that a lot of factors including non-ownership of accounts textbooks by students and lack of solution to exercises in accounts textbooks to guide students private practice sessions militate against students performance in financial accounting and that ameliorating these constraints will help to improve students performance in financial accounting.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that for students to perform optimally in financial accounting courses effort should be made by the lecturers, heads of business education departments and the relevant units in colleges of education to:

1. Allot adequate time in the college time table for lectures and tutorials in accounting courses.
2. Recommend textbooks that have short or graded exercises
3. Insist on lecturers guiding students practice sessions within the class or lecture room.
4. Insist on lecturers marking assignments and class exercises promptly and making the result known to students promptly.
5. Encourage students to practice accounts topics after lectures in the topics.
6. Insist on lecturers practising the topics they want to teach before entering the class to teach

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*Paper Presented at the 11th International Academic Conference of the International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences held at Grand Hotel Reykjavik Iceland 24 – 27 June, 2014*