

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF THE NIGERIAN ACCOUNTANT FOR EFFECTIVE ROLE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Accounting plays significant role in the developmental processes of a country. Accountancy profession in across the globe has been under severe criticism over the years. Nigeria has been regarded as one of the most corrupt nations of the world by transparency international and the fact that there is hardly any act of corruption that would be perpetrated from start to finish without the active connivance of an accountant is a matter of concern. The aim of this paper is to examine the education and training of Nigerian accountants for effective role in national development. To achieve this objective, qualitative research methodology was employed. The paper revealed that much deserves to be done in terms of curriculum for accounting education; hence the accounting role is contextualized in a dynamic socio-economic and political environment. It was recommended, among others, that accounting curriculum should be redesigned to have moral education and ethics as one of its key components. Also, that the contents of accounting curriculum need to be well rounded such that accounting graduates are well positioned to cope with the nation's developmental challenges

**Key Words:** Education and training, accountants, role, national development,

### Introduction

Accounting was originally perceived as a practical course not to be impacted in a class room environment but through interactive approach among the students and the trainers. While in office of the trainer, the student is closely monitored in terms of character as well as rate of acquisition of technical competence (Idialu and Oghuma, 2007). This implies that the training of accountants in the past was through apprenticeship. In this training regime, if a person being trained is found to have issues with integrity or the fellow is found to be lagging behind in the academic component of the training, the person is de-articled. Through this process, it is ensured that the future members of the profession are trained in character and in learning that enables the products of the training process to be worthy to be called accountants. After a prescribed period, those considered to be making progress in character

formation and skill acquisition are enrolled for the professional examination by the trainer who vouches for the character of the candidate.

The current practice is that candidates are enrolled into a University or Polytechnic for accountancy education for a period of four or more years (Okafor, 2012). Those seeking professional certification simply register and write professional examination and if successful get qualified as professional accountants. Accountancy is currently regarded as a thought programme in Universities and Polytechnics. This method of training gives room for mass production of accountants as opposed to what obtained in the old dispensation. However, the class room method of training accountants, as maintained by Babalola (2012), has seriously cut down on the person to person interaction which was the case. The implication of this is that character formation has been grossly de-emphasised in the curriculum. In

the old dispensation, the trainers served as role models to the trainees. In the current training technique, the professors and lecturers are equally expected to be role models. However, the unfortunate scenario now is that most of the lecturers are no longer role models as their conduct is not in any way exemplary.

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy was implemented in 2004 by Obasanjo government. One of the main thrust of the policy, according to Osisioma (2008), is the achievement of transparency and accountability in governance, and the minimization of scourge of corruption on our national life. He noted that the twin concept of transparency and accountability is rooted in the ethical foundation of good governance. Idialu and Oghuma (2007) emphasized the need for educational curriculum that is adaptable and promotes attitude and behavior as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

With Nigeria been regarded as one of the most corrupt countries of the world by transparency international and the fact that there is no act of corruption that is perpetrated from start to finish in an organization without the active connivance of an accountant, the need to improve on the current accountancy curriculum cannot be overemphasized.

The main aim of this article is to examine the education and training of Nigerian accountants so as to prepare them for effective role in national development. To achieve this aim, secondary and primary data were employed. The secondary data were obtained from existing publications and research findings while the primary data were obtained from the personal observation of the author as an accounting educator. Accordingly, the paper is arranged in five sections. Following the introduction is section two which discusses accounting and national development, section

three examines Nigerian accounting education while section four focuses on the problems facing accounting profession in Nigeria. The fifth and final section draws conclusion and offers recommendations.

### **Accounting and National Development**

Accounting as a process is about provision of financial information needed to make economic decisions in respect of acquisition and utilization of scarce corporate resources as well as elimination of waste in the process of wealth creation. (Agada, et al, 2018). The subject matter is about the provision of financial information needed to make economic decisions in respect of acquisition and utilization of scarce corporate resources as well as elimination of waste in the process of wealth creation. Accountants by virtue of their position as custodians of public and private sector resources, and playing active involvement in agencies, ministries, parastatals and extra-ministerial departments, play active role in curbing corruption in the society. It is argued that if the primary focus of politics in a political milieu is who gets what, when and how in the society, then the role of accountants in determining the flow of resources around the country especially in a political tool called the budget cannot be overemphasized. Also, the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy is increasingly evolving into a private sector driven economy. Against this background, accounting as a language of business is assuming greater prominence.

### **Accounting Education System in Nigeria**

The Education and training of accountants in Nigeria is carried out by educational institutions, notably Universities and Polytechnics, and accounting professional institutes. Universities and Polytechnics provide a variety of programmes that are accessible to all students who meet the minimum entry requirements.

Professional certification is the epitome of an

accountant's education and training. It is described as an outward symbol of acceptance for membership of the profession. The certification attests to the fact that the accountant acquired sufficient minimum preparation to practice the trade. Okafor (2012) opined that, in Nigeria, there is a major difference in the way and manner the professional institutes train and certify accountants as against the academic method of training. The pioneer accountancy professional institute in Nigeria - ICAN was registered in 1965. It enjoyed the monopoly of accounting professionalization for well over twenty years but could not meet the national demand for certified accountants. This did not only encourage the incursion of other professional accountancy bodies but also paved way for the rivalry and struggle for supremacy between ICAN and other professional bodies (Uche, 2007).

The Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) was incorporated in 1993. Three other professional bodies have since joined the fray, namely, the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria (CITN), the Chartered Institute of Cost and Management Accountants (CICMA), and the Institute of Certified Public Accountants (ICPAN) (Okafor, 2012). It is worthy of note that the last two, CICMA and ICPAN are yet to be chartered by an Act of National Assembly though they are registered as accountancy professional institutes. While the academic method of education has interdisciplinary framework which involves core accounting and cognate courses drawn from other areas in management sciences, the professional approach uses in-house on the job training based on a programme of internship in recognised accounting firms. For some years, the relationship between those in the profession and those in the academia was not quite cordial. Also, ICAN membership has little content of membership of the academia, thus the symbiosis of accounting

research and practice is non-existent (Babalola, 2012; Agada and Abrokwah, 2016). Babalola (2012) opined that ANAN on the other hand has very high percentage of her members made up of those in the academia.

The educators in the academia and those in the profession try to exclude and exercise monopoly on the training of accountants. This scenario has had negative effects on the development of accountancy profession not only in Nigeria but across the globe. This is because the development of any profession anywhere in the world is expected to be a combined effort of those in academia and the professionals. This applies to other professions such as Medicine, Law, Engineering, etc. However, this state of affairs has abated in Nigeria as the two groups are increasingly collaborating in the task of training and certification of accountants.

There are some institutional influences which have effects on the development of accountancy curriculum in Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria. These are the quality and orientation of accounting lecturers, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and ICAN. The NUC and NBTE are the principal regulatory authorities for Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics respectively. They set the minimum academic standards for each University and Polytechnic academic programme (NUC, 2004; NBTE, 2004).

The following are the general provisions for the contents to be covered in a minimum of four years undergraduate programmes:

- preliminary courses in Economics, humanities, management sciences and general administration,
- Courses to develop communication and analytical skills which include the use of English, basic mathematics, statistics,

Business law, Library studies and courses in Information Communication Technology (ICT);

- Courses to develop specific accounting skills like financial accounting, cost and management accounting, auditing and investigation, taxation, public sector accounting and finance;
- Course (s) in research methodology to develop analytical/research skills;
- Industrial attachment for exposure to practical job experience.

Unfortunately, the industrial attachment component of the curriculum has not been implemented due to the massive population of students which make it practically impossible to secure funded industrial placement for students.

#### **Problems Facing Accounting Education**

Bablola and Tiamiyu (2012) identified institutional problems, technical problems and structural problems as some of the problems confronting accounting education in Nigeria. The system of accounting education has experienced some positive changes but one major challenge is that the collaboration required between the academic institutions and the professional bodies over the years have not been encouraging. There is no strong connection between teaching, research and practice. Similarly, there is no balance of theory and practice in curriculum. Existing Accountancy professional institutes see one another as rivals and the symbiotic relationship that should exist between research findings and practice is non-existent. What is required is a dynamic development of curriculum, a good synergy between research and practice in accounting (Babalola and Tiamiyu, 2012). Agada and Abrokwah, (2016) also maintained that for accountancy profession to fulfill its expected role in the economic development of Nigeria, the existing gap has to be

bridged.

World Bank (2015) opined that corruption is an enemy of economic development. It distorts the rule of law as well as weakens institutions which provide bedrock for development. Obasenjo (1999) observed that the root of the corruption quagmire in Nigeria is the failure and virtual collapse of governance, the contamination of democratic values, the erosion of accountability and the prevalence of bad leadership. In a country where corruption has become so endemic and the get rich quick syndrome has become a cankerworm, the accountant and accountancy profession can hardly be free of certain level of compromise. As a matter of fact, there have been public discourses revealing how accountants have been involved in unethical behavior.. For instance, Williams (2005) observed that accountants acting in various capacities help their clients to discover loopholes in regulations and use such to the disadvantage of the grater majority

Integrity is recognized as the hallmark of accountancy profession globally. It has been argued that accounting skills without integrity are like equipping someone with a weapon to steal. What makes an accountant is the core value of integrity. Therefore the education and training of accountants must of priority lay emphasis on integrity rather than on technical skill acquisition only. Technical skill alone in this era of information technology may not be able to give an individual a distinctive character.

An observation of the contents of accounting curriculum, both at the professional and academic mode of training reveals that emphasis has been on acquisition of technical skills rather than character molding. In the core accountancy curriculum, hardly can one find a place where would be accountants are imbued with standard of integrity required of an accountant. The curriculum is laced with learning principles and techniques of

financial accounting, auditing, taxation, management, law computer, public sector finance and accounting, etc. without a single course in ethics and value system that would affect the character of the candidates. Therefore, nothing on the standard of behavior required of accountants is thought throughout the four or more years training period. The only time character is brought into question is if a candidate during the course of his/her training is found to have breached any of the rules and regulations governing their studentship. Such candidates are tried on the basis of such rules and regulations. No student is denied a degree or HND or professional certification because he or she is found deficient in character.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The education and training of an accountant must be such that can produce professionals who has the capability to render effective service to mankind. Such an individual should have a good working knowledge of the core accounting subjects. However, the accountant in a human society is not a monolith. He/she is a member of the society which he/she serves. The implication of this is that his education and training package should include a sufficient appreciation of other human activity. Consequently, the Nigerian accountant is also expected to be exposed in his education and training to cognate disciplines like economics, law, management, quantitative techniques, information technology, psychology, sociology, ethics, etc. Such an interdisciplinary framework is rest upon the belief that a well prepared accountant for the challenges of professional life is one with a sufficiently broad conceptual base to appreciate the social, economic, political, cultural and legal dimensions of the society. Historically, it is important to point out that this type of education and training curriculum is only a recent development resulting

from the rapid changes and challenges that are taking place in the society in which the modern accountant is expected to assume greater roles. The older generation of accountants, in view of the prevailing realities of their time did not have to experience this kind of broad interdisciplinary training regime.

The level of development of any society usually determines her accounting needs. The key factorto be considered in developing accountancy curriculum is the diverse groups in the society, namely, business group, public sector and international agencies. In view of this, accountancy curriculum is supposed to accommodate a broad knowledge base including the inculcation of good behavior in students. This should be emphasized .in addition to the acquisition of accounting skills. In other words,accounting curriculum should be redesigned to have moral education and ethics as one of its key components. Also, that the contents of accounting curriculum need to be well rounded such that accounting graduates are well positioned to cope with the nation's developmental challenges

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