THE ROLE OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN ANAMBRA IN PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

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ABSTRACT: *Business Education has the potential of promoting diversity and inclusion in the society. The survey research design study was adopted to investigate business educators' perceptions of effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion. The population comprised of all the 83 Business Educators in two colleges of Education in Anambra state. They were not sampled. Four research questions guided the study. A 42-item structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Data were analysed using mean. The findings indicated that effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion are by incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the course content; and creating opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning, among others. It was recommended that Faculties should integrate diversity and inclusion into their curriculum by, for instance, making use of case studies, guest speakers, and classroom discussions, among others.*

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Inclusion, Business education, curriculum, inclusive environment.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and inclusion are not just social justice issues, but also business issues. A diverse and inclusive society is a more just and equitable society (Sharma, 2023) and it is also a more innovative and productive society (Schuelka, 2018). Business schools have the responsibility to prepare their students to be successful in this kind of society; promoting diversity and inclusion is an important part of that responsibility. Studies have shown that companies that are more diverse and inclusive are more profitable. Companies with a diverse workforce are 35% more likely to outperform their competitors (Robinson, 2022). Such companies are also better able to attract and retain top talent (Dauth et al., 2021). There are a number of reasons for this, for instance, diverse teams are better at solving complex problems, and also diverse perspectives lead to better decision-making.

Business education plays a vital role in promoting diversity and inclusion. It can help to foster a culture of inclusivity and respect for different perspectives and experiences, for instance, augmented reality can be used to create virtual environments that represent diverse perspectives and experiences, and encourage students to engage with and learn from these perspectives (Singaravelu & Sivakumar, 2020). This can help to foster empathy and understanding among students. Business schools, therefore, prepare future business leaders to work in a global economy that is increasingly diverse and interconnected. One of the key ways that business schools can promote diversity and inclusion is through their curriculum (Cerna, 2023). This can be done by incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the course content and by promoting critical thinking and reflection on issues of diversity and inclusion. For example, diverse case studies, readings, and guest speakers can be included in the curriculum. In addition, schools can offer courses that specifically focus on diversity and inclusion, such as courses on cultural competency or social justice and also, incorporate diversity and inclusion into the core curriculum, rather than treating it as an add-on or elective. Another way to promote diversity and inclusion through the curriculum is to create opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning (Adkins et al., 2021). For example, students could participate in service-learning projects that connect them with diverse communities; participate in international study or internship programs; and give opportunities to work on real-world projects that address issues of diversity and inclusion. This experiential learning type can help students apply the concepts they are learning in the classroom to real-world situations. It can also help to develop students' empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives (Kumasi & Manlove, 2015).

Similarly, business schools can promote diversity and inclusion through their co-curricular activities that are welcoming and inclusive of all students (Schuelka, 2018). This includes things like student organisations, campus events, and other extracurricular activities. These activities can give students opportunities to engage in dialogue about diversity and inclusion. For example, there could be student-led discussions on current events, or opportunities for students to share their own experiences and perspectives. In addition, schools can create programs that specifically focus on diversity and inclusion, such as workshops or training sessions.

Another way to promote diversity and inclusion is through the school's faculty and staff. This can be done by hiring a diverse group of faculty and staff members and by providing training and support for these individuals (Booker, 2018). When students see people who look like them and come from similar backgrounds in positions of authority, it can help them to feel a sense

of belonging and inclusion. It's also important for schools to create a climate of inclusion, where all faculty and staff members feel valued and respected. This can be achieved through policies and practices that are inclusive of all identities and experiences (Schuelka, 2018). For example, schools can create policies that support family leave and flexible work schedules. They can also create mentoring and networking programs for underrepresented groups.

In addition to the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and faculty and staff, business schools can also promote diversity and inclusion through their facilities and resources (Lo, 2019). This includes things like creating spaces that are welcoming and accessible to all students, faculty, and staff. For example, schools can create dedicated prayer and meditation rooms, gender-neutral restrooms, and lactation rooms. In addition, schools can make sure that their libraries and computer labs have resources that are relevant to all students. Finally, schools can create and promote on-campus resources for students who are members of diverse communities (Carvalho et al., 2019). This could include things like cultural centres and support groups.

Furthermore, the policies and practices of business schools ought to be inclusive and supportive. This can be achieved by creating a diversity and inclusion task force. This task force could be made up of students, faculty, and staff, and could be charged with reviewing and improving the school's policies and practices (Cerna, 2023). In addition, the task force could provide training and support for all members of the school community. It could also create a forum for discussion and feedback on diversity and inclusion issues. Finally, the task force could help to ensure that the school's policies and practices are aligned with its mission and values.

To ensure that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive, business schools can take a number of specific steps. First, they can create a written diversity and inclusion policy that outlines the school's commitment to these values. This policy should be made available to all members of the school community, and it should be regularly reviewed and updated. In addition, the school should create a process for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination or harassment. This could include things like a hotline or an online reporting system. Finally, the school should create a system for tracking and measuring its progress on diversity and inclusion goals (Derek et al., 2022).

Another way to ensure that policies and practices are inclusive and supportive in the view of Rodan et al. (2021) is to create an inclusive environment in the classroom. This can be done by using inclusive language and ensuring that all students feel comfortable participating in class discussions. In addition, faculty members can create lesson plans and assignments that incorporate diverse perspectives (Jackson, 2023). They can also incorporate content from a variety of sources, including books, websites, and other materials that are representative of diverse voices. Faculty can also make an effort to connect with students outside of the classroom, through office hours, mentoring, and other activities (Coristine et al., 2022).

To ensure that policies and practices are inclusive and supportive, business schools can also provide support for students from underrepresented backgrounds (Sharma, 2023). This support can take many forms, including financial assistance, mentoring, and tutoring. In addition, Bullen, Kordeck, and Capner (2018) submitted that the school can create and promote opportunities for these students to connect with alumni and other professionals. This can include things like networking events, job fairs, and career counselling. It's also important for

business schools to create and support student organisations that represent diverse identities. These organisations can provide students with a sense of community and belonging.

Similarly, business schools can ensure that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive by creating a culture of inclusion throughout the entire school. Watts (2022) opined that this can be done by implementing a code of conduct that is inclusive and respectful of all individuals. The code of conduct should be communicated to all members of the school community, and it should be enforced consistently. In addition, the school should conduct regular climate surveys to assess the level of inclusion on campus (Moreu, Isenberg and Braver, 2021). This data can be used to identify areas for improvement and to track progress over time. Finally, the school can create opportunities for all members of the community to engage in dialogue and learn about diversity and inclusion. Business schools may face certain challenges in promoting diversity and inclusion.

One challenge that business schools can face is the lack of diversity among faculty and staff. In many cases, the faculty and staff at business schools do not reflect the diversity of the student body. This can make it difficult for students to feel like they belong on campus and to connect with faculty members. Another challenge is the lack of resources for supporting students from diverse backgrounds. This includes things like a lack of scholarship funds, limited access to mental health services, and a lack of representation in the curriculum.

Also, the prevalence of implicit bias and microaggressions in the classroom can be a challenge (Finley, 2019). Even when a school is making an effort to promote diversity and inclusion, unconscious biases and microaggressions can still be a barrier to inclusion. Microaggressions are subtle comments or behaviours that can be unintentionally offensive to members of marginalised groups. These can include things like using stereotypical language or making assumptions about a person's abilities based on their appearance. It's important for faculty and staff to be aware of implicit bias and microaggressions, and to take steps to prevent them from occurring.

Another challenge in the view of Wong (2023) is the lack of support from the top levels of administration. Without the support of the dean, provost, and other top officials, it can be difficult for a school to make meaningful progress in promoting diversity and inclusion. This support can take many forms, such as providing funding for initiatives, prioritising diversity and inclusion in the strategic plan, and communicating a strong commitment to these values. Finally, business schools often face challenges related to the lack of diversity in their local community. This can make it difficult to attract and retain diverse students, faculty, and staff.

Again, the lack of awareness about the benefits of diversity and inclusion can pose another challenge (Shahid and Raghavendra, 2016). Some business schools may view diversity and inclusion as a "nice to have" rather than a "must have." As a result, they may not prioritise these issues or invest the necessary resources. It's important to make a strong case for the benefits of diversity and inclusion, both for the individual students and for the school as a whole. This includes the benefits of a diverse workforce, such as increased creativity and problem-solving, and the benefits of an inclusive environment, such as increased employee retention.

According to Marina et al. (2022), the lack of knowledge and training on how to create an inclusive environment can also be a challenge. Even when a business school is committed to diversity and inclusion, its faculty and staff may not know how to create an inclusive

environment. This can be especially true for faculty members who are not trained in diversity and inclusion. As a result, students may not feel welcome or included in the classroom. Business schools must have to address these challenges.

To address this challenge, business schools can create a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion at the highest levels of the business school (Arnold, 2023). This commitment should be reflected in the strategic plan, budget, and other key documents. In addition, the school should create a dedicated office or position to oversee diversity and inclusion initiatives. This office or position should have the authority and resources to make meaningful changes. Again, the school should invest in diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff on how to create an inclusive environment (Bullen, Kordeck & Capner, 2018). This training should be ongoing and should be required for all faculty and staff. Also, it should be tailored to the specific needs of the school.

The school should invest in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body (Castrejon, 2022). This can be done through outreach to diverse populations, such as first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds. In addition, the school should provide financial support for students from these populations and create a welcoming and inclusive campus environment (Strom, 2018). This can be done by creating spaces that are safe and inclusive for all students, and by supporting student organizations that promote diversity and inclusion.

Finally, the school should hold itself accountable for its progress on diversity and inclusion (Aronson, 2021). One way to do this is by collecting and analysing data on the diversity of the student body, faculty, and staff. The school should also survey students, faculty, and staff about their experiences on campus. In addition, the school should create a diversity and inclusion report that is published annually. This report should include the school's goals, progress, and areas for improvement. By holding itself accountable, the school can ensure that it is making real progress on diversity and inclusion. Finally, the school should create a culture of respect and understanding. This can be done by promoting dialogue and understanding of different perspectives and experiences.

Another way to create a culture of respect and understanding is by creating a code of conduct that explicitly prohibits discrimination and harassment. The code of conduct should be enforced consistently and should have clear consequences for violations. In addition, the school should provide support for students and staff who have experienced discrimination or harassment. This support can include counselling, legal assistance, and other resources. By creating a culture of respect and understanding, the school can ensure that all students and staff feel safe and welcome on campus. All these steps can help a business school overcome the challenges of promoting diversity and inclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the role of business education in promoting diversity and inclusion in business schools. Specifically, the study aims to investigate:

1. Effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion
2. How business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations
3. Challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion

4. Ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion
2. How business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations
3. What are the challenges business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion
4. What ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion

METHODS

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. This was done by seeking the opinions of Business Educators on the problem of the study. The study was carried out in the two Colleges of Education in Anambra state- Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe (NOCEN) and Federal College of Education (Tech), Umunze (FCETU). The population is made up of 83 Business Educators, consisting of 66 Business Educators in FCETU and 17 Business Educators in NOCEN. The whole population was used because the size was manageable, hence, no sampling and sampling technique.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire constructed by the researchers based on the research questions. The questionnaire was made up of 42 items and was divided into four parts 1, 2, 3 and 4. Part 1 with 11 items to elicit information on effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion; part 2 has 11 items which cover how business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations; part 3 has 9 items which cover challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion and part 4 has 11 items covering ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion. The instrument was validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The instrument was pilot-tested to ensure its reliability and the data collected was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha. This gave a coefficient reliability of 0.73 which was considered to be high. The questionnaire was administered by the researchers using the direct administration method. Out of the 83 copies of the questionnaire administered only 67 copies were used for analysis representing about 80.72% which was considered adequate for the study. The other 16 copies were either not duly filled or not retrieved.

Data obtained were analysed using a mean based on the 4-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" of 4 points to "strongly disagree" of 1 point. Any item with a mean response of 2.50 and above was considered 'agreed' while anyone with a mean response below 2.50 was considered 'disagreed'.

RESULTS

The results from research questions are presented in the tables below

Research Question 1 What are the effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Effective Ways Business Education Promotes Diversity and Inclusion

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	REMARK
1	by incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the course content	28	19	13	7	67	3.01	Agreed
2	incorporating diversity and inclusion into the core curriculum, rather than treating it as an add-on or elective	40	10	10	7	67	3.23	Agreed
3	Creating opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning.	17	35	10	5	67	2.96	Agreed
4	Incorporating content that promotes critical thinking and reflection on issues of diversity and inclusion	30	27	5	5	67	3.22	Agreed
5	Creating opportunities for students to work on real-world projects that address issues of diversity and inclusion	29	25	7	6	67	3.15	Agreed
6	Incorporating diverse case studies on issues of diversity and inclusion	28	29	4	6	67	3.18	Agreed
7	through co-curricular activities that are welcoming and inclusive of all students	20	20	13	14	67	2.69	Agreed
8	by hiring a diverse group of faculty and staff members	22	25	11	9	67	2.90	Agreed
9	creating a climate of inclusion, where all faculty and staff members feel valued and respected	19	21	12	15	67	2.66	Agreed
10	Providing facilities that are welcoming and accessible to all students, faculty, and staff.	23	20	11	13	67	2.76	Agreed
11	providing training and support for faculty and staff members	26	20	7	14	67	2.87	Agreed

Source: Authors' computation, 2023

In Table 1, all 6 items have mean ratings greater than or equal to 2.50, showing that the study of Business Education in colleges of education develops decision-making abilities for human capital development in Anambra state.

Research Question 2 How does business education ensure that its policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on how Business Education ensures that their Policies and Practices are Inclusive and Supportive of Diverse Populations

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	REMARK
1	by creating a diversity and inclusion task force that reviews and improves the school's policies and practices	22	26	16	3	67	3.00	Agreed
2	having a written diversity and inclusion policy which is available to all members of the school community	20	20	17	10	67	2.75	Agreed
3	creating a process for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination or harassment	27	18	14	8	67	2.96	Agreed
4	Creating a system for tracking and measuring its progress on diversity and inclusion goals.	26	30	7	4	67	3.16	Agreed
5	Creating an inclusive environment in the classroom that ensures that all students feel comfortable	40	10	10	7	67	2.63	Agreed
6	making an effort to connect with students outside of the classroom	35	17	9	6	67	2.96	Agreed
7	Providing moral and financial support for students from underrepresented backgrounds	29	28	4	6	67	3.18	Agreed
8	promoting opportunities for students to connect with alumni and other professionals	24	21	9	13	67	2.84	Agreed
9	creating and supporting student organisations that represent diverse identities	21	19	12	15	67	2.69	Agreed
10	implementing a code of conduct that is inclusive and respectful of all individuals	22	21	11	13	67	2.76	Agreed
11	conducting regular climate surveys to assess the level of inclusion on campus	23	23	10	11	67	2.87	Agreed

Source: Authors' computation, 2023

Table 2 above shows that all 7 items are above 2.50 which is the cut-off point. This means that the study of Business Education in colleges of education inculcates conceptual knowledge for human capital development in Anambra state.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Challenges that Business Schools face in Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	REMARK
1	lack of resources for supporting students from diverse backgrounds.	10	30	19	8	67	2.63	Agreed
2	implicit bias and microaggressions in the classroom	10	32	22	13	67	2.88	Agreed
3	lack of support from the top levels of administration	28	19	13	7	67	3.01	Agreed
4	lack of awareness about the benefits of diversity and inclusion by school community members	22	34	10	11	67	3.30	Agreed
5	lack of knowledge of how to create an inclusive environment	17	35	10	5	67	2.96	Agreed
6	lack of training on how to create an inclusive environment	18	27	14	8	67	2.96	Agreed
7	Lack of awareness of implicit bias and microaggressions by staff and students	20	26	13	8	67	2.87	Agreed
8	The fact that faculty and staff at business schools do not reflect the diversity of the student body	21	26	12	8	67	2.90	Agreed
9	lack of diversity in their local community	21	25	12	9	67	2.87	Agreed

Source: Authors' computation, 2023

From Table 3, it is seen that all the items have means above 2.50. It is therefore evidenced that the study of Business Education in colleges of education develops forecasting abilities for human capital development in Anambra state.

Research question 4 Ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion

Table 4: Mean Ratings of Respondents on Ways to Overcome Challenges that Business Schools face in Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	REMARK
1	Creating a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion as reflected in the strategic plan, budget, and other key documents.	10	30	19	8	67	2.63	Agreed

2	Creating a dedicated office or position to oversee diversity and inclusion initiatives	10	32	22	13	67	2.88	Agreed
3	investing in diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff on how to create an inclusive environment	28	19	13	7	67	3.01	Agreed
4	investing in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body through programmes like outreach to diverse populations,	22	34	10	11	67	3.30	Agreed
5	providing financial support for students from diverse populations	17	35	10	5	67	2.96	Agreed
6	Providing a welcoming and inclusive campus environment by for instance providing facilities that are safe and inclusive for all students	18	27	14	8	67	2.96	Agreed
7	Creating a diversity and inclusion report that should include the school's goals, progress, and areas for improvement.	20	20	12	15	67	2.97	Agreed
8	Creating a culture of respect and understanding. This can be done by promoting dialogue	21	19	12	15	67	2.69	Agreed
9	Creating a code of conduct that explicitly prohibits discrimination and harassment	22	23	9	13	67	2.81	Agreed
10	surveying students, faculty, and staff about their experiences on campus	22	21	10	14	67	2.76	Agreed
11	consistently enforcing the code of conduct and having clear consequences for violations	24	21	9	13	67	2.84	Agreed

Source: Authors' computation, 2024

DISCUSSION

The finding in research question 1 revealed that effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion are by incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the course content; and creating opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning, among others. It was found that creating a climate of inclusion, where all faculty and staff members feel valued and respected promotes inclusion and diversity. This aligns with the submission of Watts (2022) that creating an inclusive culture -including whole school representations of diversity can be a powerful tool to promote inclusion. The findings of this study also conform to Adkins et al. (2021) who submitted that creating opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning promotes diversity and inclusion.

The findings in research question two revealed that business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations by creating a process for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination or harassment; Providing moral and financial support for students from underrepresented backgrounds, among others. This aligns with Rodan et al. (2021); Derek et al. (2022) and Sharma (2023) who gave ways business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations as: creating a system for tracking and measuring its progress on diversity and inclusion goals; creating an inclusive environment in the classroom and providing support for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Findings from research question 3 revealed that the challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion include: a lack of diversity between faculty and staff; a lack of resources for supporting students from diverse backgrounds; and a lack of awareness about the benefits of diversity and inclusion, among others. The result of this study conforms with the view of Finley (2019) that microaggressions can hinder diversity and inclusion. Similarly, the finding agrees with Wong (2022) that a lack of support from higher hierarchies like provosts, deans, etc can hinder diversity and inclusion.

Research question 4 revealed that creating a code of conduct that explicitly prohibits discrimination and harassment; consistently enforcing the code of conduct and having clear consequences for violations and so on are ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion. This conforms to Carvalho et al. (2019) that providing financial support for students from diverse populations can ameliorate the challenges hindering diversity and inclusion. The finding also aligns with Bullen, Kordeck and Capner (2018) that providing a welcoming and inclusive campus environment, as well as, providing education and training programs aid in addressing the challenges limiting diversity and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of business education in promoting diversity and inclusion. It examined effective ways business education promotes diversity and inclusion; how business education ensures that their policies and practices are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations; challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion and ways to overcome challenges that business schools face in promoting diversity and inclusion. The study concludes that diversity and inclusion are vital issues that should be treated with great concern as they ensure a more just and equitable society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. Faculties should integrate diversity and inclusion into their curriculum by, for instance, making use of case studies, guest speakers, and classroom discussions.
2. Appropriate bodies should provide training opportunities like workshops, webinars, and other professional development opportunities for faculty members on how to effectively incorporate diversity and inclusion into their teaching.
3. School authorities should increase the representation of underrepresented groups in leadership positions within the business school. This could be done through targeted recruitment and mentorship programs.

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