

## **Business Education: Its History, Status and Prospects\***

Gennet Zewdie\*\*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Business education subjects have been offered in Ethiopian school system since 1935. However, many individuals have a misconception about them. I, therefore, feel that the concept of business education be clarified before discussing the subject of this paper.

In explaining the term business education, the first attempt was made by Herrick (1904) who stated that business education is a form of instruction which prepares people for their calling.

This notion of business education is not only vague but also very broad which can be used to mean any kind of occupational preparation. Therefore, it cannot be adapted to define the term. Lyon (1922) put his impression of Business Education as follows: "Any education acquired, formally or informally, by a business man in an effort to make him a better businessman." This explanation like the one mentioned above does not serve our purpose as it generalizes any kind of training acquired by the businessman under business education. Some business educators and others also equate commercial education with business education. Nichols (1933) states:

Commercial education is a type of training which has for its primary objective the preparation of people to enter upon business career, or having entered upon such a career, to render more efficient service there in and to advance from their present levels of employment to higher levels.

While Nichol's concept stresses the vocational function of business education, it has completely neglected the social function of the field. Moreover, Nicholas has narrowed the scope of business education by limiting its function to that of training people for commercial activities only.

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\* Presented to the First Annual Seminar of the Faculty of Education, AAU, (May 1990).

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Since this conception has influenced many people, they use commercial education and business education interchangeably. This is also true in the case of Ethiopian situation where business education is referred to in Amharic as "*Yaneged Sera Temehert*". In order to clarify this confusion, Tonne (1947) explained commercial education as only a part of business education that is concerned with the training of individuals for a subordinate occupation such as clerical, secretarial or bookkeeping positions and operations of office appliances. Business education however, is concerned with both occupational and social values of business.

The statements given above were attempts made at conceptualizing business education in the context of its purpose at the time and environment that they were formulated.

The more recent explanation that most appropriately fits the present day concept of business education is the one given below by a committee of experienced business educators in 1961, which the author has sided with. It is defined as the:

... area of the educational process which concerns itself with vocational preparation *for a business career* or vocational and professional *for a career in teaching business* and also with business information important for every citizen and consumer in order that he may better understand and use his business and economic surrounding (emphasis mine).

According to this definition business education has two major purposes these are vocational and general education. In the vocational function or purpose, business education trains individuals for career in business or office education either at a high school or college level including for teaching in business. In fact it is its vocational function that makes business education part of the technical/vocational education. To strength this point, I think, quoting Robert's (1965) conception of vocational education is in order:

Vocational or technical training or retraining ... is given in school or classes (including field or laboratory work) and is conducted as part of a program designed to fit individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians in recognized occupations

including any program designed to fit individuals for gainful employment in business and office occupations.

The general educational value of business education provides individuals with business information so that these individuals understand the business environment that they live in. Actually, the general educational function of business education contributes to the training of people for a business career. However, this contribution is made indirectly. In regard to non-vocational value of business education Roberts (1965) say this:

Business education for general need is one of the non-vocational values. It is designed to assist individuals to develop better understanding of the business system and to enable individuals to more efficient use of the goods and services of industry, agriculture and business.

This concept of vocational education which is adopted by Roberts clearly states that business education is part of vocational education.

## **2. Business Education In Ethiopia: Its History And Present Status**

In discussing its history and present status, I have divided business education into Business Office Education and Business Teacher Education for convenience.

### **2.1 Business Office Education**

Trading and commercial activities in Ethiopia are as old as the nation itself. However, the formalized instruction for individuals involved in trade and commerce was not introduced until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the modernization effort of the country, many government and private organizations had to open offices which had to be staffed by skilled and trained personnel. Thus, a center for the training of such individuals was felt necessary. Talking of the need for such manpower and the circumstances under which a center was established, Seifu (1973) had to say the following:

Immediately after the liberation, the extremely urgent need for well-trained and skilled commercial and office personnel was felt for the important work of rebuilding the nation and this development led to the establishment of the commercial school.

The commercial School, now Junior College of Commerce, was the first school opened in 1943 to offer business education subjects for the purpose of training office workers.

The first group of students to join the school were selected from among those who successfully completed grade 8; and the first business education courses offered in the school were bookkeeping, business practice, commercial mathematics and English typewriting for the duration of one year.

The State Bank of Ethiopia, The Ministries of Finance, Interior and Education were among the institutions which first employed the graduates.

As the immediate and urgent need of office personnel was partially satisfied, it was felt necessary to raise the competence level of the graduates by giving more courses, and for a longer duration. Therefore, business education courses like shorthand, economic geography, economics and Amharic typewriting were added, and the duration of the training was extended to 3 years. Though the commercial school had played a major role in providing skilled and trained personnel, it could not fully meet the demands of the emerging offices in terms of numbers. Many new government and private organizations were being established which required trained office personnel.

Recognizing the fact that the Commercial School could not solely provide the manpower need of the nation, many private agencies and missionaries started training programs in business education. As shown in Table 1 below, these organizations gave business training for a duration of 2 or more years in accounting, secretarial, and related areas.

Most of these mission and private schools trained middle level office workers mostly secretaries and junior bookkeeping clerks at secondary school level.

**Table 1: Institutions With Business Programs**

Name of Institution	Admission Requirement	Duration of Course
National Commercial School	Passed 8 grade	48 months Dip.
Ethiopian American Insti. A.A	“ 10 “	24 “ Cert.
Menelik I Academic & Commercial School, A.A	“ “ “	24 “ “
Berhane Ethiopian School, A.A	Passed 8 “	24 “ “
Berhane Zare New. A.A	“ 10 “	24 “ “
St. Marys School for girls	“ 8 “	48 “ Dip.
Combani College, Asmara	“ 9 “	36 “ “
Notredam School, Dire Dawa	“ 6 “	24 “ “
St. Joseph's School Nazreth	“ 9 “	36 “ “
The Bible Academy, Nazreth,	“ 10 “	24 “ “
Ethiopian Adventist College, Kuyera	Pass E.S.L.C.E 3 subjects	24 “ “
Col. J. Robinson Memorial School, AA	Commercial Passed 8 grade	24 “ “

Source: Technical & Vocational Education Handbook (1973)

Only one of them, Ethiopian Adventist College, offered courses beyond secondary education.

With the exception of some of the Mission schools such as St. Mary's in Addis Ababa, most of the schools listed in the table above have been either closed or nationalized by the government after the 1974 revolution, and thereafter have discontinued their commercial and/or business progress.

Programs in business education were further widespread when the concept of comprehensive schooling was introduced to Ethiopian high schools in 1960's by U.S.A.I.D. Mission. Since the objective of the comprehensive high school program was to provide high school students with marketable job skills and know-how (Abebe, 1989). Commercial subjects found their way into the high schools run by Ministry of Education.

In the 60's and 70's the comprehensive schools mushroomed which helped to popularize business education programs. All comprehensive high schools, (41) which were in all administrative regions, offered commercial subjects from grades 9-12 in two streams that were identified as secretarial and accounting.

Students in secretarial streams were trained to be junior secretaries and the others to be book-keeping or record-keeping clerks. Commercial subjects such as typewriting, book-keeping, general business, commercial mathematics, filling, shorthand (in some) were offered in these public comprehensive schools.

By 1984, the Ministry of Education declared a new educational directive and the programs of the comprehensive high schools were modified to a new "Socialist" concept of polytechnic education. Under this new directive, vocational subjects were organized in four categories. These are: General Polytechnical subjects offered in grades 7-8; Higher General Polytechnic in grades 9-10; extended polytechnic in grades 11-12; and Technical Vocational Education, 10+3. Under the Polytechnic Program, Business Education subjects are offered in grades 7-12 as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Business Education Subjects Offered in Polytechnic Education

Subjects	Grades	Period a week
General Business	7 and 8	1
General Business	9 and 10	2
Bookkeeping	9 and 10	2
Bookkeeping	11 and 12	4
Amh. Typewriting	11 and 12	2
Eng. Typewriting	11 and 12	2
Political Econ.	11 and 12	2
Office Practice	11 and 12	1

Business education subjects are also offered in the 10+3 technical/ vocational schools under secretarial and accounting programs.

The aim of these technical /vocational schools, as stated by the Ministry of Education (1978 E.C.), is to train skilled manpower for the various sectors of the economy. In line with the stated objective of the 10 + 3 vocational/technical schools business education programs train middle level office workers in accounting and secretarial areas.

The period allotted to the vocational/skill subjects, for example, Typing, Secretarial practice, and the competence of teachers as well as the content of the subjects make one skeptical about the effectiveness of the programs. Though shift system is not used in these 10 + 3 schools, only 3 to 4 periods a week are allotted to vocational subjects. There aren't office machine laboratories in which

students get secretarial practices. Most of the teachers are not trained to teach at 10 + 3 level as they are 2 years diploma holders.

The trend of business education programs in junior and senior secondary schools, their success in contributing to the training of skilled manpower at middle level is not yet known as there is no clear directive about them by the Ministry of Education. However, business education's position at a higher level is encouraging. The former Commercial School is now offering almost all business education courses under four departments at a junior college level. The Junior College of Commerce is the only institution in the country which trains middle level office workers to all sectors of the economy. However, the manpower need in each area could not be met by the College alone (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3:** A chart which shows number of graduates and their demand after the college become under the higher Education and the Central Planning Office started to assign the graduates to a different working places.

No	Acad emic Year	Accounting			Sc. Science			Banking			Purchasing & Supplies Mgt.			Total		
		demand	graduates	%	demand	graduates	%	demand	graduates	%	demand	graduates	%	demand	graduates	%
1	1979	648	161	25	208	109	52	-	-	-	-	-	-	856	270	31.5
2	1980	476	111	23	252	79	31	100	86	86	-	-	-	828	276	33
3	1981	628	141	23	249	62	25	120	114	95	-	-	-	997	317	32
4	1982	700	202	29	358	113	32	74	68	92	-	-	-	1132	383	34
5	1983	521	190	37	245	76	31	89	62	70	-	-	-	85	328	38
6	1984	568	232	41	296	126	43	76	56	74	-	-	-	940	414	44
7	1985	631	234	37	243	45	13	67	67	100	264	59	22	1305	405	31
8	1986	525	275	52	407	138	34	91	91	100	191	77	40	1214	581	48
9	1987	793	233	29	517	124	24	106	67	63	216	64	30	1632	488	30
<b>Total</b>			1779	32%		872	30%		611	84%		200	30%		3462	35%

Source: Junior College of Commerce

## 2.2 Business Teacher Education

As presented above, in the 60's and early 70's comprehensive high schools as well as commercial schools were widespread and required trained business teachers. Most of the teachers teaching the commercial subjects in the comprehensive and/or commercial schools were either foreigners, mostly Americans who came to Ethiopia under the Peace Corps Program, or Ethiopians

with some knowledge of commercial subjects but no training in the teaching profession.

There was no institution which trains business teachers and the comprehensive and commercial schools could not be staffed with competent teachers. As a result, business subjects taught in commercial and comprehensive schools were not effectively taught and the programs envisaged to main office personnel could not be successful in their endeavors.

Taking of the inefficient instruction of vocational subject due to the lack of trained instructors, a team organized to study the situation of comprehensive schools stated:

A total of 5 streams may be found in these schools, which include academic, agricultural, commercial, home economics and industrial education. Where programs do exist, it has been found that they are inadequate in terms of equipment, materials, organization and staff. Many laboratories, some equipped from U.S.A.I.D. found are laying idle due to lack of teachers. Others are being operated by teachers not qualified for the job.

Teacher shortage became more acute as students enrollment in comprehensive and commercial schools increased. Enrollment in the commercial school increased from 650 to 956 in one year. The Department of Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of Education projected the requirement of teachers as follows (See Table 4):

**Table 4:** Projected Need of Commercial Teachers (Between 1965-69)

Year	Number
65 - 66	45
66 - 67	52
67 - 68	56
68 - 69	56

**Source:** Practical Arts-Vocational Teacher Education Program in Ethiopia.

In order to overcome this shortage of commercial teachers, it was necessary to start a business teacher education program by the government. Thus, in 1967/68 academic year, the present Technical Teacher Education Department of the

Faculty of Education was opened with the intention of training teachers in three major areas. These were: Business, Industrial, and Home economics education.

In light of the urgency of providing trained teachers to the comprehensive and technical /vocational schools, a four year degree program was not felt realistic. Therefore, a two year diploma program was started with a total number of 56 students out of which 12 were in the business area. The entrance requirement of the program was slightly different from the requirement of the programs of the University. Admissions criteria were:

1. Selected graduates from commercial schools, trade schools or from practical arts streams of comprehensive secondary schools.
2. Experienced teachers who have completed high schools successfully and have a minimum of 2 years teaching experience.
3. Those who have scored a grade of "C" or above in 3 subjects in ESLC examination, one of which had to be "English".

Applicants who sought admission to the department using the first two criteria above had to take and successfully pass special tests administered by the department.

The program in the business education area was divided into general education which took 27%, major courses about 56% and professional education about 17% of the credit hours. The major courses such as typewriting, accounting, shorthand, commercial mathematics, office administration, introduction to business, economics, offered were adequate enough to prepare teachers who would be able to teach in either secretarial or accounting streams of the comprehensive high school. However, the program was not adequate enough to prepare teachers for specialized programs like the former Commercial School. Unlike the comprehensive high schools, the specialized schools used to train secretarial and accountants that were above clerical level.

The program so far thus trained many business teachers at a diploma level in its regular, evening, and summer programs as shown in Table 5. As shown in this table, the number of yearly graduates were small. In terms of facilities and staff the regular program was not adequate enough to meet the required manpower in business teachers.

Therefore, upon the request of the Ministry of Education, an in-service program

**Table 5:** Teachers trained in Business Education Department of A.A.U. Between 1970-88 in Day Program

Year	Male	Female
1970	3	4
1971	12	2
1972	15	2
1973	5	2
1974	8	3
1975	7	4
1976	8	3
1977	10	5
1978	17	4
1979	15	9
1980	24	8
1981	19	2
1982	25	6
1983	21	1
1984	28	6
1985	25	1
1986	24	3
1987	18	4
1988	21	1
Total	305	71

Source: Records' Office, Faculty of Education, A.A.U.

was started in 1979 to upgrade the qualification of teachers and also minimize the shortage of trained business teachers. In the in-service program, a total of

**Table 6:** Teachers Trained in Business Education Department of A.A.U. in In-service Program (Between 1974-1981 E.C)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1974	-	-	-
1975	14	5	19
1976	17	8	25
1977	22	4	26
1978	15	5	20
1979	16	3	19
1980	12	5	17
1981	-	1	1
Total	96	31	127

Source: Continuing Education Office, A.A.U.

127 teachers graduated with a diploma in business education until 1981 (E.C.) as depicted in Table 6.

Though teacher education is the main objective of the program, students who graduated were also able to gain employment in some government and non-government offices. The nature of the Program is such that individuals who graduate from it can efficiently perform middle level office work such as office administration, accounting, etc. In fact some of the graduates of the department who have gainful employment in many offices under different capacities confer that the training that they undertook in the department helped them in handling their present responsibilities.

**Table 7:** Teachers Trained in Business Education Department of A.A.U. in Evening Program Between 1974-1981 E.C.

Year	Male	Female	Total
1974	27	22	49
1975	17	4	21
1976	7	18	25
1977	5	11	16
1978	13	17	30
1979	11	9	20
1980	9	8	17
1981	4	8	12
Total	93	97	190

**Source:** Continuing Education Office, A.A.U

It is also because of the dual nature of the program that many office workers are willing to follow the evening program of the department.

In 1972 (E.C) an evening program in Business education was started which became one of the popular programs offered in the University where more than the required number of students applied for admission. This is because the program enables prospective graduates either to be teachers or office workers. Table 7 indicates the number of graduates of the evening program. Most of these graduates are gainfully employed in various offices.

Apart from expanding the program by offering courses in three delivery modes, the Department of Business Education has started to train teachers at a degree level as of 1986/87 Academic year in the day program. Thus, sixteen students with a B.Sc. degree in Business Education graduated in June 1988/89 academic year. Four of the graduates are teaching at the Junior College of Commerce, two in the Department of Business Education of A.A. University, while the rest are assigned in the various schools of the Ministry of Education. With the exception

of one, all of those who are with Ministry of Education are not teaching in the 10 + 3 programs for which they are trained.

Business Teachers are also trained at a diploma level at Kotebe Teachers Training College. Unlike the ones trained in business education program of A.A. University, those who graduated from Kotebe Teachers College specialize in teaching either bookkeeping or secretarial courses.

### **3. Future Directions**

Other subject areas like Geography, Mathematics, History etc., have been in the curriculum of the school since the inception of modern education in the country. Thus, these subjects have relatively refined their content, which may not be the case of business education.

Business education programs must be periodically evaluated and appraised objectively with the purpose of improving and refining them. As the major objective of business-office education programs is to train office workers, these programs must be sensitive to the changes in practices and procedures of organizations. As stated by Kelling and Kallaus (1983) the office of the 90's will no longer resemble today's office. Paper, which has once been the important factor of office work, will be substantially replaced with electronic machines. Along with this replacement of paper with electronic machines, the methods, procedures, systems and practices of office work change.

However, the course content and the curriculum of the vocational /technical schools of the 10 + 3 programs do not reflect these changes.

There is no subject that prepares students in distributive education and the content of the courses such as office practice and typewriting are still based on the practice and procedures of the outmoded offices. The Junior College of Commerce also must design its different major areas to fit the needs and desires of modern offices. Students must have more practical knowledge of those office practices and procedures. As it is evidenced by research findings, Mekonnen and Lehtinen (1989) the proportion of practice received by trainees of most training organizations is lower than the requirement of the jobs for which they are trained.

One way of making the business education programs effective in training workers who can meet the challenges of today's automated offices is to consult with the future employers when designing curriculum. The curriculum designed along with the demands of private and government offices will help produce competent office workers.

In the future, more technical vocational schools will start business education programs: and business courses will also be taught by qualified business teachers as indicated in Table 8 below.

**Table 8:** Business Teachers Qualification Required in the Secondary Schools Starting 1985/86

Grade level	TTI	College Diploma	Bachelor Degree
7-8	35%	65%	-
9-10	-	55%	48%
11 - 12	-	-	100%

**Source:** Ministry of Education

The Junior College of Commerce will staff its various departments with qualified (pedagogically trained) business teachers instead of economists. The Kotebe Teacher Training College which is training business teachers at a diploma level also requires competent teachers. Hopefully, other business schools will be opened to train office workers as the present policy of the government may encourage more and more private business firms /organizations to operate. Therefore, there will be an increasing demand of business education teachers.

While there are many common elements in the preparation of all teachers, business teacher preparation must be keen in producing teachers who are technically competent in skills and knowledge highly relevant and specific to business. The curriculum of business teacher education program must be designed in such a way that the prospective teachers acquire the skills and attitudes to adapt to changes in the business world; competency in business at least in some phase of it; competence in teaching all business subjects and general education.

The training of teachers in how to teach business education subjects should not be the only concern of the business teacher program. It must also actively

participate in the curriculum design of the business education programs at all levels of education. In emphasizing this important role of technical teacher education program of which business education is a part, Broberg, et al (1969) had to say this:

Technical Teacher education Department must be concerned with more than "filling orders" from the Ministry. For teachers, it has an equally important role to play in careful assessment of the technical education program in schools and critical examination of the relevance of these programs to the need of the economy. It should be involved in the design of curriculum for the schools and evaluation of its effectiveness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Business-office education and business-teacher education are fairly new areas in the educational structure of Ethiopia compared to other fields of study.

These changes must be reflected in the curriculum, contents and methods of teaching of business education subjects. Students must be trained so that they can meet the challenges of the changing office technologies.

The success of the business office education programs will partly depend on the quality of training that their teachers receive. In order to provide competent business teachers, therefore, the business teacher education program like the programs mentioned above have to be sensitive to the changes in the business world.

Business teacher education program should be strengthened and refined through research. So far, little or no research is undertaken in both business-office education or business-teacher education. Applied research in regard to instruction of many of the skill subjects of the program, survey research to identify the employment needs and requirements of business, and action research in identifying the best method of instructing business subjects should be encouraged.

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