

Vocationalisation of Business Studies Curriculum for Self-reliance among Junior Secondary School Leavers in Ebonyi State

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Abstract

The need to stem the tide of growing rate of unemployment among school leavers informed this study. The purpose of the study was to determine new theoretical knowledge-based topics and practical (entrepreneurial) courses that should be included in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State. The study adopted descriptive survey design and was guided by two research questions. The population of the study comprised 52 business education lecturers in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. There was no sampling since the population size was manageable. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study while descriptive statistics was used for data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that identification and evaluation of business opportunity, basic business, inventory management, etc. are some of the theoretical knowledge-based topics that should be included in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers. The finding further revealed that practical (entrepreneurial) courses such as use of Mavis beacon to learn keyboarding, MS word processing, Corel Draw, spreadsheet processing, etc. should be included in Business studies curriculum. It was concluded that stakeholders in Business education should as a matter of urgency, review Business studies curriculum to meet the contemporary realities. Based on the findings, it was recommended that stakeholders in Business education should hold conference on business education curriculum review and come up with a revised curriculum that contains more relevant practical courses at the junior secondary school level.

Keywords: vocationalisation, business studies, curriculum, self-reliance, school leavers

Introduction

The demand for education all over the world is a derived demand. This is because education is not needed for its own sake but for what it helps individuals and society to achieve. Education enables individuals to become literate, acquire knowledge, attitude and functional skills needed to be productive either as employees or employers of labour in all sectors of the economy across the globe. Ezeanya, Ofuase, and Ezeanya (2014) opined that the goal of wealth creation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation, can only be attained and sustained through an efficient education system which impacts the relevant skills, knowledge, capacities, attitudes and values. With adequate education, individuals become useful to themselves and to the society at large. For the society, education is a tool for achieving sustainable economic development. Thus, education is an invaluable asset that

begets other treasures. To underscore the limitless power of education, Shehu Shagari, President of Nigeria in the Second Republic between 1979-1983 asserted that education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources. According to Azih and Samuel (2019), the education that has great force should be able to train individuals to acquire not only academic knowledge typical of the grammar school form of education but also technical and vocational skills. It is upon this premise that the National Policy on Education was introduced in 1977 which led to introduction of technical and vocational education in the Nigerian educational system.

Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is used as a comprehensive term to refer to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (FGN, 2004). TVE comprises many subjects or courses that are taught in various levels of Nigerian educational system. In secondary schools, these subjects are grouped into Mechanical Trades, Computer Craft Practice, Electrical Engineering Trades, Building Trades, Wood Trades, Hospitality, Textile Trades, Beauty Culture Trades and Business Trades (FGN, 2004). However, discussion in this study was restricted to Business Trades at the junior secondary school level. Business trades at junior secondary school level in Nigeria are encapsulated in a subject called Business Studies. The subject has no consensus definition as many scholars have offered various definitions of the subject in an attempt to explain what it means. Yakubu (2016) defined Business studies as a skill-based programme designed for sub-professional level education and based on a specific vocation. The author further stated that the subject encompasses business principles, theory and practice that underpin the development of entrepreneurial initiatives, sustainable enterprises and economic growth of the school leavers.

Similarly, Ayuba (2018) explained that Business studies is an aspect of vocational education, which equips individuals with the necessary skills, attitude and theoretical knowledge needed for performance in the business world either for job occupations or for self-employment. Business Studies prepares students to make informed decisions in their everyday business life, contributes to the student's understanding of the world of business, encourages a positive attitude to enterprise and helps students to develop appropriate skills in that field. Azih and Samuel (2019) stated that Business studies also enables the learner to acquire knowledge and awareness of business' vital terminologies when discussing business issues and its environment, appreciate the role of business in the society and to acquire necessary entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. For this purpose to be realized by the students, Business studies curriculum must be religiously implemented by all the relevant stakeholders.

Curriculum according to Udesen (2016) refers to the planned and guided learning experiences and learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the auspices of the school, for the learners' willful growth in personal-social competence. Thus, Business studies curriculum is the totality of learning experiences and intended learning outcomes provided to business studies students under the guidance of the school. Business studies curriculum at the junior secondary school level comprises stenography (shorthand), typewriting, book-keeping, commerce and office practice. The objectives of Business studies as enumerated by Akpan (2015) are: to provide the orientation and basic skills with which to start an occupation for those who may not have opportunity for further training, to provide basic business skills for personal use now and in future, to prepare students for further training in business studies, to relate the knowledge and skills to national economy and to develop basic skills in office occupations. Business studies according to Akintola and Alao (2015) aims at equipping students with practical business skills which will enable them to participate meaningfully in production in future. As a practical subject, it is intended to prepare students for the world of work both as employees and employers of labour.

Considering the lofty nature and how laudable the Business studies objectives are, it is important to ask, does its curriculum contain enough practical courses to make the subject vocational in nature? Is the depth or scope of knowledge and practical skills imparted on students at this level adequate enough to make them participate meaningfully in production as employees and employers in future? These questions are pertinent considering the fact that Business studies at junior secondary school level is pre-vocational. A subject is said to be pre-vocational if it is not meant to adequately prepare students for employment or self-reliance in any vocation without further training. According to Esene (2014), Business studies is pre-vocational because, at that level, the intention of the curriculum planners is the arousing of interest and creating awareness of the various career options available in the office. Business studies as a Pre-vocational subject is meant to equip the recipients with basic business skills and knowledge to enable them assess their potentialities in the area of business (Odike & Menkiti, 2019). The authors further stated the subject enables students to engage in their own small businesses upon completion of their programme, if they cannot continue their education. The authors further stated that this noble objective seems to have been defeated and that since the introduction of pre-vocational Business studies in public secondary schools, the students have never been equipped with the required basic business skills as expected.

Corroborating, Ndinechi (2011) noted that students are not exposed to reasonable business skills to enable them assess their potentialities in the area of business. The author further asserted that the knowledge students acquire is neither adequate to equip them with the expected basic business skills that will enable them to engage in their own small businesses if they cannot further their education nor enable them to decide whether to opt for business courses at the senior secondary school level after graduation from junior secondary.

Similarly, Esene (2014) observed that business subjects offered in Nigeria secondary schools are not adequate to prepare students for further studies in business studies and to provide orientation of basic office skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not go further. There is no gain saying the fact that the scope of knowledge, experience and practical skills that Business studies students are exposed to is not enough to make them self-reliant or employable in this 21st century knowledge-driven economy where there is sophistication in knowledge and stiff competition in all sectors of the economy.

The economy is now dominated by use of artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced information and communication technology skills, software accounting packages, electronic commerce and marketing as well as modern office equipment and gadgets that Business studies students are not exposed to in their school classes. There are also many graduates looking for same jobs that are meant for school leavers but have not found any due to paucity of job vacancies to meet the growing number of graduates turned out of the Nigerian higher institutions annually. This situation makes it difficult for school leavers with just basic knowledge and orientation acquired in Business studies at junior secondary school level to get employed easily as secretaries, stenographers, proof-readers, machine operators, computer operators, filing clerks, salesmen, receptionists, accounting clerks, bank clerks, bank teller, record keepers, insurance agents, etc. as Ehiamletalor (1996) had predicted long ago.

Mafikuyomi and Ojetunde (2019) observed that many secondary school leavers who are unable to further their education due to one reason or the other are unemployed, and the rate of unemployment is increasing everyday generally in Nigeria. This situation has led to incessant increase in the rate of unemployment in Nigeria which according to the National Bureau of Statistics stands at 33.3% in the 4th quarter of 2020. The Bureau reported that Nigeria's unemployment rate rose from 27.1% recorded in the second quarter to 33.3%, translating to about 23.2 million people being unemployed, the highest in at least 13 years and the second-highest rate in the world (Ayodeji, 2021). A thorough perusal of the 4th quarter of 2020 report of National Bureau of Statistics reveals that youth unemployment is 42.5% while youth under-employment is 21%, a combination of the two unemployment rates of Nigerian youths will give 63.5%.

Thus, the need to slow down this rising unemployment profile in Nigeria (especially among the youths) informed the present emphasis on acquisition of vocational skills by school leavers as against paper qualifications. To actualize this clarion call, it is necessary to go beyond the provision of basic knowledge and orientation in business studies since some students may not have the opportunity for further training. The need for provision of in-depth knowledge and practical skills for self-employment in Business studies, calls for vocationalisation of the subject.

Vocationalisation means placing greater emphasis on skills development for employability, and for economic and labour force needs of the society (Fien & Mclean, 2008). To Nwazor and Nwaukwa (2015), vocationalisation is a term designed to suggest the

need for a serious re-adjustment of theoretically-based vocational education to more practical approaches. In this study, vocationalisation of Business studies is used to mean making Business studies to be vocational in nature by broadening the scope of knowledge and learning experiences in all the topics to be taught and making it more practical-oriented so that the students can acquire sufficient knowledge and practical skills needed to be employable or self-reliant upon graduation without necessarily going for further training. Extant studies (Akintola & Alao, 2015; Nwazor & Nwaukwa, 2015; Ajisafe, Bolarinwa & Edeh, 2015) identified major issues facing business education programme to include inadequacies in the curriculum content of business education, irrelevance of the course content and poor implementation of the curriculum.

To reposition Business studies in actualizing the much sought-after self-reliance among school leavers, its curriculum which is pre-vocational needs to be readjusted to become vocational in nature by broadening its scope of knowledge and learning experiences and making it more practical-oriented. Besides, to vocationalise Business studies, some obsolete components or topics in its curriculum need to be replaced with contemporary ones to meet with the realities of the world of work. Although researchers (Azih & Samuel, 2019; Akpan, 2015; Akintola & Alao, 2015; Nwazor & Nwaukwa, 2015) tend to agree on the inadequacies of Business Studies curriculum and the need for improvement, no study was found to have been carried out on how to vocationalise Business studies curriculum to enhance self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers. It is this gap in literature that this present study intends to fill.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What new theoretical knowledge-based topics should be included in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State?
2. What practical (entrepreneurial) courses should be added in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate for this study since it was concerned with exploring the opinions of a sample of respondents without manipulating the data and generalizing the findings on the entire population. Population of the study comprised 52 business education lecturers in tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State. Six (6) of these business educators are in Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike; Fourteen (14) in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki; Fourteen (14) in Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo; and eighteen (18) in Federal Polytechnic, Uwana . There was no sampling since the size of the population was manageable. A 13-item questionnaire with 5-point response options of Strongly Agree (5points), Agree (4points), Disagree (3points), Disagree (2points) and Undecided (1point) was developed by the researchers and

used as instrument for data collection. Validity of the instrument was established using three experts. Two of the experts were from Business education while one expert was from Educational measurement and evaluation. Cronbach Alpha's method was used to determine the reliability of the two sections of the instrument and it yielded coefficient values of 0.75 and 0.77, respectively. The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents through email, face to face contact and WhatsApp accounts. The respondents were told that any information given by them will be used for research purpose only and that their email addresses and whatsapp accounts will be protected from unauthorized users. Out of 52 copies of the questionnaire administered, 48 copies (representing 92.3% return rate) were correctly filled, returned and used for data analysis. Data collected in respect of the research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and standard deviation. Weighted average score was used as a criterion for decision-making. Items with mean scores that are greater or equal to the weighted average score were accepted while those with mean scores below the weighted average score were not accepted. The standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents in their responses.

Result

Research Question 1: What new theoretical knowledge-based topics should be included in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on the new theoretical knowledge-based topics that should be included in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Identification and evaluation of business opportunity	3.45	1.13	Accepted
2.	Basic Business	3.45	1.11	Accepted
3.	Inventory management	3.50	1.14	Accepted
4.	Office machines and equipment	3.61	1.09	Accepted
5.	Filing systems and file classification	3.52	1.12	Accepted
6.	Office communication	3.10	1.10	Not Accepted
7.	Marketing in small-scale businesses	3.52	1.08	Accepted
	Weighted Average	3.45		Accepted

Data in Table 1 reveal that respondents accepted that all the items except office communication should be added to the Business studies curriculum of junior secondary schools and the scope of knowledge to be covered in these topics be broadened in order to promote self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers. This interpretation is based on the fact that all the items except office communication have mean scores that are greater or equal to the weighted average score of 3.45 used as the criterion for decision-making. The

standard deviation scores are within the same range, which implies that the respondents are similar in their opinions.

Research Question 2: What practical courses should be added in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings on practical courses that should be added in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers in Ebonyi State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	I learn to type using Mavis beacon	2.67	0.85	Accepted
2.	I will be self-reliant if I learn to use MS word package for word processing	2.59	0.88	Accepted
3.	I will run a computer center if I learn Corel draw package for designing	2.64	0.97	Accepted
4.	I need spreadsheet processing as a practical skill for calculation and tabulation of figures	2.60	1.01	Accepted
5.	I can open a photocopying business if I learn how to operate photocopying and other office machines	2.70	0.98	Accepted
6.	I can use my knowledge on entrepreneurship course to set up and run a business on my own	2.63	0.93	Accepted
	Weighted Average	2.58		Accepted

Data in Table 2 reveal that the respondents are in agreement with all the items on practical (entrepreneurial) courses that should be added in Business studies curriculum to promote self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers upon graduation. The interpretation is premised on the fact that all the items have mean scores above the weighted average score of 2.58 used as a criterion for making decision. The standard deviation scores are within the same range, which implies that the respondents are similar in their opinions.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study revealed that the new theoretical knowledge-based topics that should be included in Business studies curriculum to enhance self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers are identification and evaluation of business opportunity, basic business, inventory management, office machines and equipment, filing systems and file

classification and marketing in small-scale businesses. The finding of this study is so because starting a business and running it profitably for a long time without failure is not an easy task. Some skills and knowledge about rudiments of business management are required for a success in business. The lack of these knowledge and skills by operators of small scale businesses often leads to business failure after a short time of floating the business. An entrepreneur must first of all have the ability to identify and evaluate the prospect of an identified business opportunity in order to decide whether to venture into it or not. When the proposed business is eventually floated, inventory management and marketing skills will be required to avoid unnecessary stock-outs and tying up of capital by stocking inventories excessively with its attendant high holding costs. Hence, the inclusion of these areas of business knowledge in Business studies as revealed by the findings of this study will help to bridge the knowledge gap among Business studies school leavers and make them self-reliant.

This finding agrees with Esene (2014) who noted that business studies curriculum is not adequate to prepare students for further studies in business studies, and provide orientation of basic office skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not go further. In observance of the inadequacies of Business studies curriculum, Esene (2014) had earlier suggested the inclusion of basic business in place of commerce at the JSS level. The reason, according to him, was that basic business incorporates all the features of commerce and also includes ethical, cultural and social education as they affect business. He further asserted that basic business incorporates all the rudiments of business subjects with the necessary background to different specialization areas of business subjects. The incorporation of these topics into the Business studies curriculum is necessary in order to broaden the students' horizon beyond the acquisition of basic knowledge and orientation for work so that the students can acquire sufficient knowledge for self-employment in the business world. This is in line with Mafikuyomi and Ojetunde (2019) who advocated the need for alternative school curriculum that can engender self-employment since wage employment is hard to come by in recent times.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the practical (entrepreneurial) courses that should be added in Business studies curriculum for self-reliance among junior secondary school leavers are use of Mavis beacon to learn keyboarding, MS word processing, Corel Draw, spreadsheet processing, entrepreneurship course, use of photocopying machines and other office machines. Business studies is a practical-oriented course and as such should contain practical courses that are required in the contemporary business economy so that students can leverage on it and become self-employed. Before now, typewriting was the major practical course in Business studies curriculum. Acquisition of typewriting skill made school leavers to become self-employed by establishing the then much sought-after typing business center while many gained employment as office secretaries, clerks, receptionists, stenographers, etc, using their typewriting skill. Presently, the world has become digital and typewriter is no longer in vogue as information and communication technology or computer skill is now a contemporary skill in every sector of the economy.

The use of computer now dominates every aspect of human life, business and office activities. Therefore, it is expedient to replace many practical typewriting courses with computer courses or topics so that school leavers can use the skills and become self-employed by setting up computer business centers and gain office employment using their computer skills. This will help to bring solution to the inadequacies and irrelevance of business education curriculum content pointed out by Akintola and Alao (2015). The finding agrees with Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Edeh (2015) who maintained that highly needed courses are not available in the Business education curriculum and that most of the courses do not cover the scope of knowledge and skills required to function efficiently in the world of work. Thus, there is need to vocationalise Business studies curriculum at the junior secondary school level in order to make its objectives realistic and achievable in the present time. When this is religiously done, it will make students' enrolment into the subject to increase drastically and also reduce unemployment among our school leavers in no small measure.

Conclusion

The world has become globalized and the economy is driven by knowledge and technology in recent times. Besides, the dynamic nature of the world of work and business economy has made the knowledge and skills required by employers of labour to change from time to time in keeping with the present realities of work. Changes in technology and its use in virtually every aspect of human life has also made some previously acquired knowledge and skills to become obsolete. Thus, it is important that the curriculum used in the school system in preparing students for optimum productivity in the world of work be changed to reflect the demands of the contemporary business world. It is high time Business studies curriculum is vocationalised and more practical courses included in it in to produce school leavers who will become self-employed and employable in this present knowledge and technology-driven economy and thus help to slow down the rising unemployment rate among the youths.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Ministries of Education and Universal Basic Education Commission should synergies with the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN) to organize a conference on business education curriculum review and come up with a revised curriculum that contains more relevant practical courses at the junior secondary school level.
2. Ministries of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission and Secondary Education Management Board should put more efforts in supplying computers and its accessories to secondary schools so that Business studies students can use them to practice and learn. This will help the students to acquire the various practical

computer skills that they can leverage on to become self-employed upon leaving secondary school.

3. Business studies teachers should be retrained regularly through seminars and workshops by school principals and Ministries of Education so that they can keep abreast with contemporary knowledge and practical skills for business. No teacher teaches what they don't know, as such, retraining teachers of Business studies will equip them to be able to impart contemporary business knowledge and practical entrepreneurial skills on the students.

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