

RESPONSIVE BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper reviewed responsive business education curriculum and graduate employability in Nigeria. Any curriculum that does not respond to the major waves of changes in the learners' environment, that is, equipping them with the competency skills of solving their current or future problems and that of the society is valueless. The paper discussed concepts such as responsive curriculum, graduate employability and business education. The paper also discussed the characteristics of responsive business education curriculum. It was concluded that business education curriculum requires a re-thinking of the nature of the curriculum, particularly of the relationship between the curriculum, everyday life and the world of work. It was therefore recommended among others that due to the increasing pace of change in the skills needed by graduates of professional or career oriented programmes such as business education, the review cycle of the curricula should be shorter than the normal five-year cycle that is used in traditional curricula. This will make the curricula more responsive to the emerging societal needs.

Keywords: Responsive, curriculum, business education, graduate, employability

Introduction

Business education is a major component of vocational education which the National Policy on Education (2009) emphasized. Business education as a branch of vocational education provides students with requisite skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical that equip the learner with knowledge and skills to teach effectively, work in an office or be self-reliant (Okoro, 2020). It is a medium by which people can acquire office and business skills. Business Education plays a significant role in Nigeria's economic growth and development. It improves personal qualities and builds the attitudes of individuals that are necessary for adjustment to personal and employment situations, and also provides knowledge and, skills for individuals to function well in office occupation and also create jobs for themselves and others (Amoor & Udoh, 2008). In order to be able to understand the concept of business education, it would be necessary to look at the definitions of business education in the past and present time. This is because technology has helped to change the concept of things. It, therefore, implies that business education, as a course of study should move with the trends of the time.

The earliest form of Business Education according to Osuala (1975), and Njoku (1997) was the apprenticeship training. At that time an individual had to learn a trade under another person who had the skill for the trade, or who was experienced in a particular area. These were craft, bookkeeping, farming, and sales. In 2004, Osuala, gave another definition as a programme of instruction which consists of two parts, (1). Office education, a vocational programme of office careers through initial, refresher and upgrading education and (2). General business education - a programme to provide students with information and competences which are needed by all in managing personal business affairs and in using the services of the business. According to Osuala (2009)

business education is an academic programme offered in tertiary institution which is designed to provide learning situations for skill acquisition among students who could apply such skills in their occupation, managing personal business, for personal living in the society and for nation building.

It can be seen from the foregoing discussions that as the years go by; the definitions of business education continue to change. This means that business education is not static. Having looked at different definition from authors, it can be said that business education is a component of vocational technical education that prepares students for careers in business by providing them with the necessary competencies, skills, knowledge, learning the use of technology (electronic commerce), understanding of becoming self-reliant and attitudes to perform as workers in industries as well as to be informed consumers of goods and services. The society is dynamic and the changes are integrated into the curricula of schools for effective dissemination of the required knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. The word “curriculum” was derived from a latin language “currus”, which means a race course. This implies that the child has been exposed to an informal curriculum before arriving at school; it suggests that the child is beginning to run intellectually and educationally. This is why curriculum is explained as the experiences of the child which the school uses in the process of educating the child (Atah, 2019). In any field of education, curriculum is seen as the reconstruction of knowledge and experience, systematically developed with the guidance of the school or relevant agencies, which will enhance the learners and the society’s well-being (Moronkola, Akinsola & Abe, 2003). According to Ogwo and Oranu (2006), curriculum is the planned guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the auspices of a school, for the learners’ continuous and willful growth in personal, social competence. Curriculum refers to all of the planned experiences that the school provides as part of its instructional responsibilities, as well as the tools and content with which students will interact for the goal of accomplishing designated educational outcomes (Indiana Department of Education, 2010). Curriculum is defined as a group of courses or planned experience, in proper sequence of topics designed to prepare an individual for efficient service in a specific vocation. Curriculum is seen as the instrument/means of which educational institutions seek to translate the hopes of the society into a concrete reality (Isyaku, 2006 & Okike, 2011).

These definitions show that for a curriculum of any course to be meaningful, it must take into cognizance, the learners and the environment. This means that curriculum should not be rigid; it should be adaptive to changes and flexible (Odesanya & Bwala, 2004). Therefore, for business education to attain its’ goals and objectives, business education curriculum need to be flexible in order to accommodate the necessary changes that may arise as a result of changes in technology. The term business education curriculum refers to course contents that prepares students for employment and vocational business careers (Osuala, 2009). Worthwhile business education curriculum should be dynamic and relevant, possessing the following characteristics as outlined by Okoro (2013) such as: business education courses should provide for students’ development of knowledge, manipulation competencies, attitudes and values which should be applied in real work setting, business education courses should be based on societal needs. Economics, accounting, shorthand, typewriting, office practice, management, marketing, commerce, business law, computer application/ appreciation and entrepreneurship in Vocational and Technical Education to mention but a few, are taught in University

business education curriculum. In business education, curriculum thrives on relevance and usefulness. The extent to which a curriculum assists students to enter and succeed in the business world-of-work is what matters most.

Employability has increasingly been adopted by some universities as a credible fourth mission, in addition to teaching, research, and community service (Pereira et al. 2020; Bennett 2018). According to Kazilan et al. (2009), employability refers to a group of important skills instilled in each individual in order to produce productive workforce. According to Hind and Moss (2011), employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individuals, employability depends on the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) they possess, the way they present those assets to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work (Hind and Moss, 2011). Graduate employability broadly comprises of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attributes that enables a graduate to get a job, stay on a job, do well on a job, find another job if necessary, and progress in their chosen career (Mainga et al. 2022; Wickramasinghe and Perera 2010; Finch et al. 2013; Behle 2020; Romgens et al. 2020; Van Harten et al. 2022). In this paper, employability or employability skills are the skills needed by individuals to function effectively and efficiently in the world of work either as an employee or an employer of labour. Thus, Curriculum should practice innovation continuously in response to the changes and needs of the society.

Concept of Responsive Curriculum

Responsive Curriculum is a flexible, learner-centered, and context-sensitive curriculum designed to adapt to learners' needs, interests, abilities, and experiences. It emphasizes inclusiveness, cultural relevance, active participation, and developmental appropriateness, ensuring that teaching and learning respond effectively to the changing demands of learners, society, and the learning environment. Ema (2009) defined the responsive curriculum as the "curriculum that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the learners". He further said that it is the curriculum that equips the learners for development in Information, Communication and Technology (ICT); local and global challenges of ensuring peace and resolving conflicts, devastating health problems and myriads of social, economic and political demands that stare individuals and societies frontally on daily basis. A responsive curriculum takes cognizance of vital changes and challenges in the environment and prepares the learner to meet them. Any curriculum that does not respond to the major waves of changes in the learners' environment, that is, equipping them with the competency skills of solving their current or future problems and that of the society is valueless. A responsive curriculum addresses the learners' background and recognizes their learning differences.

It tilts towards curriculum diversification and transformation of school curriculum (Mkpa, 2009) and offering instructions which are responsive to students' multi-ethnic and cultural heterogeneous setting. It demands a shift from the traditional, classical "curriculum of grammar school, lyces, and gymnasium which stressed classical language and academic subject. It is the type of curriculum which are mindful of the vocational and technical imperative of today's education, arising from the fast pace of scientific, technological, political, social development and change. Dike, (1995) defined a relevant curriculum as one that endows its learners with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable them to harness resources (material and human) in order to improve the quality of life and the environment. It is the type of curriculum that would enable her products responds to the society's goals, economic realities and future life challenges.

Responsive Business Education Curriculum for Graduate Employability

Business education curriculum is designed to build in the learner different skills and knowledge that would enable her individual's earning living by becoming an employee, entrepreneur, employer and self-employed (Aliyu, 2006). Iseniyi, (2009) observed that the present situation of business education curriculum is not meeting employers demand. The author observed that the present curriculum of business education is outdated, theoretically based, no correlation of subjects, as a result, no uniformity in the courses taught. Business education curriculum must be responsive to technological changes in the society. New developments in the area should be incorporated into the curriculum so that graduates can be better equipped to compete for jobs. Equipment, facilities, supplies and instructional resources must be obtained for effective implementation of the curriculum. Consequently, an outstanding characteristic of a business education curriculum is that it should never be static. Responsive business education curriculum is not static, rather, it is dynamic and flexible in nature due to changing needs and values of society, dynamism of knowledge that improve teaching and learning, new findings in educational research, challenges posed by technological innovation in different parts of the world and so on.

Characteristics of Responsive Business Education Curriculum

A worthwhile responsive business education curriculum should be dynamic and relevant, possessing the following characteristics as outlined by Isyaku (2006):

1. Business education courses should provide for students development of knowledge, manipulation competencies, attitudes and values which should be applied in real work setting.
2. Business education courses should be based on societal needs, hence, curriculum oriented towards both students and the support the curriculum should derive from employment opportunities that exists to the graduates.
3. A business education curriculum must be responsive to technological changes in the society. New developments in the area should be incorporated into the curriculum so that graduates can be better equipped to compete for jobs.
4. Equipment, facilities, supplies and instructional resources must be obtained for effective implementation of the curriculum. Esene (2012) also identified the qualities of responsive business education curriculum as: Comprehensiveness and varied in nature and scope, providing an understanding of the business world, ability to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills, correlation of subjects, individualization of instruction, prevention and reduction of dropouts, constant review, provision for entry into jobs and acceleration at all levels, desirable equipment for maximum productivity and so on.

Conclusion

Business education curriculum requires a re-thinking of the nature of the curriculum, particularly of the relationship between the curriculum, everyday life and the world of work. Consequently, business education curriculum should always be in the process of being created and reconstructed to fit changing circumstances. Business education curriculum need to be relevant, flexible, diverse, and integrated to provide what todays graduates need to address future challenges. Moreover, a business education curriculum must be responsive to technological changes in the society; new developments in the area should be incorporated into the curriculum so that graduates can be better equipped to compete for jobs.

Suggestions

1. Universities offering professional business education programmes like accountring education and management education should be researching the emerging needs of the profession and should also be reviewing or creating new curricula in response to the changing knowledge and skills requirements of the employers.
2. Universities offering business education programmes should introduce innovations aimed at enhancing interdisciplinary in their curricula, using teaching and learning methods that are linked with problems in the society and the world of work, and that allow students to take greater responsibility for their own learning process. These innovations should all aim to make the curricula more responsive to emerging societal needs.
3. Due to the increasing pace of change in the skills needed by graduates of professional or career oriented programmes such as business education, the review circle of the curricula should be shorter than the normal five-year cycle that is used in traditional curricula. This will make the curricula more responsive to the emerging societal needs.
4. New developments in the area of technology should be incorporated into the curriculum so that graduates can be better equipped to compete for jobs.

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