

EMBEDDING COMPETENCY- BASED TEACHING METHOD IN BUSINESS STUDIES CURRICULUM FOR EFFECTIVE SKILLS ACQUISITION IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

Juliana Isa MOHAMMED, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, E-mail: juliana.isa@ust.edu.ng
GSM: 08036737471/07051215651*

And

Onyekwelu Henry Belonwu

*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State.
E-mail: belonwunwamkwo@yahoo.com/bonyekwelu@gmail.com
GSM: 08035444029, 08059642786*

Abstract

The dynamic nature of the 21st century global economy demands a shift from knowledge-based education to skill-centric learning. The traditional business studies curriculum often emphasizes theoretical knowledge, leaving a gap in students' readiness for the real-business world environment. This paper advocates for the systematic integration of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) method in Business Studies Curriculum for effective skills acquisition in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The traditional method of rote-memorization has failed to equip students' with actionable competencies; thereby limiting their employability and entrepreneurial potentials. Thus, a shift in CBT is imperative to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The paper highlights the benefits of implementing CBT methods and outlines strategies for effective implementation. It also addresses the potential challenges. The paper concludes and recommended amongst others that teachers should be trained in competency-based pedagogy on how to design, deliver and assess competency-based instruction effectively to equip students with essential skills for future employment and entrepreneurship. This will ensure that students are better prepared for the complexities of a dynamic economic landscape.

Keywords: Business Studies Curriculum, Competency-Based, Skill Acquisition, Secondary School

INTRODUCTION

Education is the real instrument for change, growth, and development. It is a societal tool for survival and the only means through which poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, poverty and disease can be eliminated. It is the process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into in order to be useful and contribute to the society at large. Business Studies is one of the subject designed to equip learners' with both academic and vocational skills needed for both salaried jobs and self-employment as entrepreneurs'. Therefore obtaining certificate alone without a corresponding creative and mental power has no serious bearing on education. Nigeria economy is facing technological changes in business and industry.

According to Ezeani, (2012), the need for skill acquisition in junior secondary schools could only become the foundation stone of a sustainable society only if it succeeds in imparting the necessary life skills. This have left learners are left half-baked. As economies evolve and the job market becomes increasingly competitive, equipping students with essential business skills for their future success becomes imperative. Many education system, particularly in developing countries, prioritize memorization and content knowledge over skill development and application thereby having graduates who often lacks skills for entrepreneurship, financial literacy and adaptability in a rapidly changing economy.

Business studies is one of the pre-vocational subjects introduced in the curriculum of Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria; Aiming to equip learners' with foundational knowledge in commerce, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and other business-related competencies. It prepares and arm learners' with knowledge aimed at creating career awareness of saleable skills that will enable them to fit into the world of work with little or no difficulty. Business Studies is a vital subject in junior secondary education, equipping students with foundational knowledge in commerce, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy (Adeyemi & Ogundele, 2020). The development and implementation of this curriculum are primarily overseen by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), which is the statutory body responsible for the school curriculum in Nigeria (NERDC, 2012).

It is a practical course that is taught practically by making the teaching situation real as possible and it is classified into office practice, bookkeeping, commerce, keyboarding and computer. Business Studies is important because it teaches how the office functions, how to keep accounts and enter transactions into different books, how to keep documents, how to own and run a small business enterprise and how to manipulate the keyboard of a computer for the enhancement of business opportunities (Egbe et al, 2013). In addition, Ajoma (2021) sees Business studies as that which provides its graduates with training in business skills and economic competencies necessary to advance a business career or establish a business enterprise.

The specific objectives of Business Studies according to Egbe et al, (2013) is to: provide the orientation and basic skills with which to start an occupation for those who may not have the

opportunity for further training; provide basic business skills for personal use now and in the future; provide students for further training in business studies; relate the knowledge and skills to the national economy, and finally develop basic skills in office occupation. These objectives can only be realized through embedding competency-based teaching methods in business studies curriculum for effective skills acquisition. This will better match industry requirements for graduate. Business studies contributes to students' ability to analyze market trends, manage finances and identify business opportunities, preparing them for future roles as business leaders or entrepreneurs (Akpomi & Kayii, 2021).

However, teaching this subject effectively remains challenging due to its abstract concepts and the need for practical application. Current educational framework (traditional methods) often emphasize rote learning and theoretical knowledge which may not effectively prepare students' for a real-world business challenge. The limitations of these methods are profound. The methods often fail to develop the deep, conceptual understanding, critical thinking abilities and collaborative skills required in the 21st century. Furthermore, they are poorly aligned with modern principles of motivation, assessment and inclusive pedagogy that caters for diverse learners. Hence, the shift towards student-centered, active learning through Competency-based approach which is essential for enhancing students skills acquisition and better prepares students' for future employment and entrepreneurship.

Skill acquisition is practical knowledge acquired through repetitive activities that is obtained through training and retraining. Mohmoud and Yunusa (2018) saw skill acquisition as a process undergone in a programme to achieve efficiency for self-reliance and national development. It is seen as a means of eradicating poverty and hunger by creating avenue for employment, thus creating job opportunities and wealth creation. Skill acquisition ensures that students are able to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting, making them more employable upon graduation (Adegboye, 2021). The necessity for skill acquisition cannot be overemphasized. A curriculum anchored in competencies better supports the bridging of theory and practice. In Junior Secondary Schools, students are at a formative age to cultivate entrepreneurial mindset, financial literacy, and small business management skills. A Competency-Based (CB) Business Studies curriculum can emphasize transferable skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, collaboration, and communication. Include experiential tasks like mini business projects, case studies, role-play, and simulations, thereby making learning hands-on. Thus, embedding Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) can transform Business Studies from a theoretical, exam-driven subject to a dynamic, skills-oriented discipline.

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT), also often referred to as Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach is an instructional strategy that emphasizes the attainment of specific skills and competencies as the primary goal of education. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operative and Development (OECD), (2018), CBT focuses on what learners can do with knowledge rather than merely what they know; fostering a more practical and application-oriented learning. This model assesses students based on their

ability to demonstrate proficiency in key skills rather than just academic performance (Obasi & Eboh, 2019).

The rationale for CBE is not just knowledge acquisition but the ability to apply learning in practical, real-world tasks. For example, in business education, it's less useful that students memorize definitions than that they can prepare a simple business plan, perform cost-benefit analyses, or engage in simulated entrepreneurial decision-making. In junior secondary school, a Competency-Based Curriculum attempts to align schooling with labor market needs and to improve job readiness. Implementing Competency-based Education makes schooling more relevant, adaptive, and learner-centered.

One of the goal of Business Studies is the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. Teaching of business studies at Junior Secondary School also arm students with the necessary skills and knowledge aimed at creating career awareness of saleable skills that will enable them to fit into the world of work with little or no difficulty instead of relying on government for jobs. It is therefore assumed that, upon graduation, our students have developed skills through training and experience that could further enhance their opportunities, capabilities and success in their life endeavor (Abanyam, 2014). Our students upon graduation should be job creators or self-employed and not job seekers. Sadly many students graduate from junior secondary school to work for others and not themselves. This is due to the fact that the current educational framework often emphasize rote learning and theoretical knowledge, leading to a significant gap in practical skills and competencies that aligns with current workplace demands.

Despite the importance of Business Studies Curriculum in Junior Secondary Schools, business studies graduates cannot apply practical skills such as computer/ICT skills, book keeping skills in real-world contexts graduation. Also, there is a disconnect between curriculum goals and the labour market demand and technological advancement. One will wonder, as a practical course, if the subject was not taught practically by making the teaching situation real as possible and if the teacher lacks the knowledge of the subject matter. To this end, there is need to embed Competency- Based Teaching method in Business Studies Curriculum to enhance business skills acquisition in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. This will enhance entrepreneurial skills development, practical life skills (financial literacy, marketing awareness), and students' engagement, contribute to economic development in the 21st century.

Conceptual Clarifications

A curriculum is regarded as the core and guiding framework of any educational institution, essentially making schools depends on it for its existence. It represents a structured set of educational experiences provided by the institution (Mohanna, et al, 2023). The curriculum specifies what learners are expected to learn, the methods of instruction, the materials to be used and the standards and assessment for evaluating students' progress. It outlines what the

learners' are expected to learn, the methods by which they should be taught, the instructional materials to be used and the standards and assessments to be used to evaluate their meaning. More specifically, the curriculum encompasses the content, instructional strategies, organizational structures and assessment methods involved in the learning process (McDonald, 2023). The primary purpose of a curriculum is to ensure that students acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to succeed in life and contribute positively to society. From the foregoing, the author agree that the strategic importance of the curriculum in the educational system is pretty obvious. The curriculum does the following; Guides Teaching, Guarantees students' learning Ensures standardization, Determines procedure for assessment, Directs resource allocation and Tracks progress. To achieve this goal, the curriculum ought to comprise subject matter that is meticulously chosen to foster skills, practical competencies, heighten students' participation, drive economic progress and stimulate entrepreneurial ventures in the 21st century.

Business Studies is a subject that prepares and arm students with knowledge aimed at creating career awareness of saleable skills that will enable them to fit into the world of work with little or no difficulty (Ohaka, 2017). It is a vital subject in Junior Secondary School, equipping students with foundational knowledge in commerce, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy (Adeyemi & Ogundele, 2020). Business Studies is important because it teaches how the office functions, how to keep accounts and enter transactions into different books, how to keep documents, how to own and run a small business enterprise and how to manipulate the keyboard of a computer for the enhancement of business opportunities (Egbe et al, 2013).

The General objectives of Business Studies includes;

1. To provide students with a basic understanding of the principles and practices of business.
2. To equip students with skills for office occupation and self-employment.
3. To inculcate in students the habits of orderly and systematic work.
4. To prepare students for further training in business-related subjects at the Senior Secondary level.
5. To develop in students a positive attitude towards work as a means of achieving personal and national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2013).

These objectives can only be realize through effective embedding of Competency- Based Teaching method in Business Studies Curriculum for effective skills acquisition in Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. This will enable the students' to analyze market trends, manage finances and identify business opportunities, preparing them for future roles as business leaders or entrepreneurs (Akpomi & Kayii, 2021).

Skill acquisition is practical knowledge acquired through repetitive activities that is obtained through training and retraining. According to Mahmoud and Yunusa (2018), skill acquisition, is a process undergone in a programme to achieve efficiency for self-reliance

and national development. Ezeyi and Ochoma (2020) assert that Skill acquisition is a specific form of learning or training in a particular field or function so as to become expert in it. It is seen as a means of eradicating poverty and hunger by creating avenue for employment, thereby creating job opportunities and wealth creation. The author contends that effective skill acquisition in education is the key to creating a self-reliant nation. By exposing learners to demonstrable skills through Competency-Based teaching, graduates will become job creators and not job seekers.

Competency-Based Teaching emphasize transferable skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, collaboration, and communication. CBT approach is an instructional strategy that emphasizes the attainment of specific skills and competencies as the primary goal of education. According to the OECD (2018), CBT focuses on what learners can do with knowledge rather than merely what they know, fostering a more practical and application-oriented learning unlike the traditional methods where students' progress is tied to hours of instruction. This model assesses students' based on their ability to demonstrate proficiency in key skills rather than just academic performance (Obasi & Eboh, 2019). This will better match industry requirements for graduate

Benefits of Competency-Based Teaching in Business Studies

Implementing a CBT method in business studies offers several benefits that enhance both learning outcomes and real-world applicability. They include:

1. **Practical skill development:** CBT in business studies ensures that learners acquire relevant and applicable skills such as financial literacy, decision-making, communication and strategic thinking. These competencies are aligned with real-world business demands
2. **Enhances Employability:** by aligning curriculum with industry standards and expectations, Competency based programs are designed to meet labor market demands and increase graduates readiness for employment (Adelman, 2015).
3. **Improves Assessment Quality:** Assessments in Competency-Based learning are performance-based rather than theoretical, encourages students' to demonstrate practical application of knowledge, which is vital in business studies.
4. **Learner-centered and personalized:** Competency-Based learning allows students to progress at their own pace, focusing on mastering a competency before moving forward. This flexibility supports diverse learning needs and encourages self-directed learning.
5. **Development of 21st century skills:** CBT fosters critical 21st-century competencies such as collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking. Group projects on developing a business proposal, for instance, necessitate teamwork, problem-solving and effective presentation of skills, which are invaluable in any future career path.
6. **Enhancing Students' engagement and reduce attrition:** The hand-on approach of Competency-based Teaching (CBT) is more engaging for JSS students than traditional methods. By applying concepts to real life scenarios, such as calculating profits from a school sale, students see the relevance and experience, increase motivation and improve academic performance.

Implementation strategies

To effectively implement a Competency-Based Teaching in business studies curriculum, the following strategies are recommended

1. Curriculum review: NERDC, in collaboration with Rivers state ministry of education and industry stakeholders should review and design the existing curriculum to align with current business trends, technology and Nigeria's economic needs.
2. Teacher Training and Professional Development: there should be a mandatory, intensive training of teachers on modern business practices, digital tools and pedagogical innovations. Teachers need to transition from being instructors to facilitators.
3. Development of Learning Resources: schools need resources packs, including case studies, business simulations software, project guide and templates for business models and financial records.
4. Stakeholders Engagement: involve educators, policymakers, businesses, parents in shaping relevant business studies programs.
5. Entrepreneurship Focus: encourage entrepreneurial mindset and skills development suitable for Nigeria's business environment
6. Assessment and Evaluation Methods; develop alternative assessment methods that focus on evaluating students' abilities to apply their skills in practical situations rather than relying solely on exams.
7. Industry collaboration: partner with Nigerian businesses and entrepreneurs for internships, live projects or guest lectures.

Challenges

Despite its well-structured design, the implementation of the Business Studies curriculum in Rivers State faces several challenges:

1. Outdated curriculum: the curriculum may not align with current business trends, technological advancements or labor market needs
2. Insufficient infrastructural materials: limited access to textbooks, technology and teaching aids hamper effective teaching and learning
3. Teaching methods: conventional, theoretical approaches might not foster practical skill development needed in business
4. Shortage of qualified teachers: there is a notable gap in having enough skilled and professionally trained business studies teachers and student population. Some teachers may not be proficient in the practical aspects of the curriculum
5. Poor infrastructure: many schools lack adequate facilities like classroom, laboratories and libraries, typewriters, computers and other necessary office equipment for practical lessons.
6. Emphasis on Theoretical Knowledge: Due to the constraints above, teaching often tilts towards theory at the expense of practical skills, defeating the core objective of the subject (Oviawe, 2016).

Conclusion

This position paper contends that Embedding Competency- Based Teaching method in Business Studies Curriculum for effective skills acquisition offers a promising pathway to transforming Junior Secondary Education from passive content delivery to active skill-building. The Business Studies Curriculum in Nigeria is a vital educational tool for fostering business acumen and entrepreneurial spirit from an early age. Curriculum content must be modernized to align with current economic needs, emphasizing practical skills like financial literacy and entrepreneurship. When effectively implemented, it has the potential to significantly reduce youth unemployment by creating a generation of empowered, skilled, and innovative job creators rather than job seekers. However, achieving this potential requires concerted efforts from the government, policy makers, school administrators and stakeholders to address the existing challenges of inadequate infrastructure, teacher quality, and outdated curriculum. As education systems globally and locally strive to remain relevant, it is imperative for curriculum reformers, policy makers, and educators to embrace competency-based approaches in Business Studies as a vehicle for impactful, skills-based education in junior secondary schools. This is the time to empower our student not just with knowledge of business, but with the competency to succeed in it.

Recommendations

To effectively embed Competency- Based teaching method in business studies curriculum, the following are recommended.

1. Teachers should be trained in competency-based pedagogy on how to design, deliver and assess competency-based instruction effectively.
2. Ensure schools have access to ICT tools (computer, software) relevant business aids, business laboratory/simulation tools
3. Nigerian Educational Research Developmental Council (NERDC) should review the national curriculum and incorporate CBT principles, explicit learning outcomes, and performance-based assessment indicators into JSS Business Studies Syllabus.
4. Private sectors and Community Stakeholders' should partner with schools through initiatives such as mentorship programs, sponsor students' business fairs and competitions and provision of materials or expert volunteers to enhance the practical learning experiences.
5. Government should increase funding and provide specific grant

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