

PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOL OF THOUGHT (PRAGMATISM) AND ITS ROLE IN FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential of pragmatism, a philosophical school of thought, to enhance the sustainability and relevance of business education in Nigeria. Pragmatism emphasizes practical application, experiential learning, and continuous adaptation, aligning educational practices with the dynamic needs of the business environment. By discussing the current state of business education in Nigeria, the paper highlights the challenges of outdated curricula, insufficient infrastructure, and disconnect between academia and industry. It proposes pragmatic solutions such as curriculum development based on industry trends, experiential learning opportunities, fostering critical thinking, and promoting lifelong learning. The paper also addresses the challenges of implementing pragmatism in business education, including resistance to change and limited resources, and suggests strategic initiatives like professional development for educators, industry partnerships, and policy support. The study concludes that embracing pragmatism can significantly enhance the sustainability of business education in Nigeria, preparing students to navigate and thrive in an ever-evolving business landscape. The authors recommended among others, that there should be emphasis on learning by doing at all levels of education in such a way that teaching learning situations should be designed in a way to provide solutions to real life problems.

Keywords: Philosophical School of Thought, Pragmatism, Business Education, Sustainability

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of global education, the integration of philosophical frameworks is crucial for the sustainability and relevance of educational programs. One such philosophical school of thought, pragmatism, offers a dynamic and adaptable approach to learning and problem-solving. This paper explores how pragmatism can be harnessed to ensure the sustainability of Business Education in Nigeria, aligning educational practices with the evolving needs of the business environment. Business Education is one of the instruments used in maintaining peaceful and prosperous society. It is the bedrock for sustainable livelihood and national development. Business education is one of the core aspects of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Nigeria, which is planned and organized to equip recipients with the knowledge and skills to confidently engage in lifelong learning and employability (Edokpolor & Muritala, 2017; Edokpolor & Agbonkpolo, 2018; Edokpolor & Adeniyi, 2019). Oyewole (2022) opined that Business Education students must be competent enough (that is, possess variety of knowledge and skills) to innovate and create new products and services. They must be able to cope outside the school work after graduation. Oyewole (2021) also denoted that each areas of general business courses such as office, marketing, accounting, and entrepreneurship have saleable skills that can be of value for self-employability, sustenance and self-dependent without having to depend on someone for a living. The is a pointer to the fact that there is a need for sustainability

in Business Education in Nigeria through a philosophical school of thought known as pragmatism.

The term “philosophy” is derived from Greek word "Philo and Sophia" which means ‘love and wisdom.’ According to Metcalf (2020), philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, truth, and knowledge. This suggests that whenever we think about deep, fundamental questions concerning the nature of the universe and ourselves, the limits of human knowledge, values and the meaning of life, we are thinking about philosophy. Philosophical thinking is found in all parts of the world; present, and past. One cannot discuss the concept of philosophy without mentioning the areas it covers such as philosophy of religion, education, etcetera. Siegel (2022) defined philosophy of education as philosophical reflection on the nature, aims and problems of education. Chazan (2022) pointed out that philosophy of education is concerned about the systematic and logical process of understanding and explaining key concepts related to educational practice. Okemakinde (2015) is of the view that philosophy of education is the branch of applied philosophy that studies the nature of education as well as its aims and problems. Philosophy of education has to do with the examination of educational theories, the presuppositions present in them, and the arguments in supporting or antagonizing them.

The aforementioned discussion point to the fact that philosophy is an interdisciplinary field that draws inspiration from various disciplines both within and outside philosophy, like ethics, political philosophy, psychology, sociology, to mention but few. These definitions suggest that philosophy of education is an applied area of philosophy that deals with the application of philosophical principles in providing solutions to educational problems no wonder, Amoran (2022) sees philosophy of education as the application of philosophical principles in the educational practices with the aim of directing educational process towards the realization of the aims of human life. There are many ideologies of philosophy or philosophical school of thought. These include: idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, among others. The major concern of this paper is the application of philosophical school of thought such as pragmatism to sustainability of Business Education in Nigeria.

Concept of Pragmatism

Pragmatism, a philosophical tradition that originated in the United States in the late 19th century, emphasizes the practical application of ideas and the iterative process of learning through experience. Key figures such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey championed the belief that knowledge is not static but evolve through active engagement with the world. Pragmatism prioritizes outcomes and real-world applicability over abstract principles, making it particularly relevant to business education, which demands adaptability and practical skills.

Pragmatism in its history was regarded as an American philosophy which developed in the 1870s but became prominent in the early 20th century. Pragmatists believed that the truth or meaning of an idea or a proposition lies in its observable practical consequences rather than in any metaphysical attributes. Pragmatism can be described by the expression “whatever works, is likely true.” Because reality evolves, “whatever works” will likewise change—thus, truth must also be seen as dynamic, which suggests that no one can claim to possess any final or ultimate truth (Austin, 2019).

Discussing pragmatism, Adeleye (2017) and Amoran (2022) stated that the word "pragmatism" is derived from the Greek word ‘Pragma’ which denotes activity or the job done and ‘Pragmatikos’ which is translated as practicability or ‘utility’. Therefore, this philosophical ideology lays high weight on practicability and utility. Also, pragmatists thought that activity or experiment is performed first and then on the basis of results obtained, principles or concepts are derived. Pragmatism is often referred to as experimentalism or consequentialism. It is referred to as experimentalism because pragmatists felt that experiment constitutes the only criterion of truth. To them ‘truth’, ‘reality’, ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ are all relative concepts. The aforementioned conceptions are not inherently preset, but rather substantiated by the empirical observations and personal encounters of individuals. In addition, proponents of pragmatism claim that truths are multiple and ever evolving, and that individuals may only investigate these realms by personal experimentation and lived encounters. Therefore, in the realm of scientific inquiry, only phenomena that can be empirically tested and validated are considered to be valid. Pragmatists assert that the truth that was valid in the past does not always remain unchanged in the

present. Given the prevailing conditions, it is evident that no unequivocal and established principle or prevailing convention can impede the relentless advancement of society along the trajectory of progress.

Similarly, pragmatism is commonly known as consequentialism because to its evaluation of human activities based on their outcomes and consequences. According to this perspective, if an activity leads to utility or the generation of helpful ideas, it is considered to be true. One could posit that the foundational essence of pragmatism lies in the concept of "change," which posits that truths are not absolute or permanent, but rather subject to constant fluctuation across time, space, and circumstances. Hence, the concepts and principles that demonstrate utility within specific contexts, periods, and locations may not necessarily retain their efficacy when confronted with altered situations, settings, and temporal conditions. Consequently, pragmatists refrain from endorsing any preconceived philosophy of existence. The proponents held the belief that veracity is attributed solely to ideas and values that yield utility to humanity within specific contexts, locations, and temporal frameworks. Rai and Lama (2020) asserted that the term "pragmatic" refers to the capacity to approach an issue in a rational manner that is most suitable for the prevailing circumstances, as opposed to adhering to rigid theories, concepts, or regulations. Pragmatism is an educational ideology that advocates for the instruction of practical knowledge and skills to students, with the aim of fostering personal growth and development. Pragmatists espoused the notion of pragmatic learning, wherein education is oriented towards practical application in the actual world. It is imperative for the various stakeholders in Nigerian society, including educators, curriculum planners, and developers, to grasp this particular aspect of reality.

Concept of Sustainability of Business Education

The notion of educational sustainability varies among authors and researchers. For instance, Adeagbo (2016) presented the UNESCO's perspective, which conceptualizes it as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). UNESCO defines ESD as an educational approach that enables individuals to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values essential for fostering a sustainable future. According to Plymouth (2022), Education for Sustainable Development encompasses the incorporation of significant sustainable development concerns, including as climate change, disaster and risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumerism, into the pedagogical framework of teaching and learning. Hence, the sustainability of Business Education necessitates the implementation of participatory pedagogical approaches that have the capacity to inspire and empower students to modify their behaviours and actively engage in sustainable development initiatives. This approach aims to foster essential competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, poverty reduction, enhanced societal values, as well as the ability to anticipate and forecast future trends. Additionally, it emphasizes the cultivation of collaborative decision-making skills.

The State of Business Education in Nigeria

Business Education in Nigeria is currently facing numerous challenges, including outdated curricula, insufficient infrastructure, and a disconnection between academic programs and industry needs. Despite these obstacles, there is a growing recognition of the importance of Business Education in equipping students with the knowledge and skills that are directly applicable in the business world. This necessitates a shift from traditional pedagogical approaches to more innovative, flexible, and practical methodologies.

Pragmatism and Long-term Sustainability of Business Education

There is a substantial body of evidence indicating that education, including Business Education, in Nigeria has had significant shortcomings and has not achieved desired outcomes. These pieces of evidence encompass a multitude of societal challenges, such as a significant unemployment rate, instances of kidnapping, heightened poverty levels, the proliferation of social vices, religious intolerance, and political instability, among others. This solicitation for the utilization of philosophical concepts rooted in pragmatism. Bawa (2022) posited that an examination of pragmatism reveals the existence of three distinct forms viz: Humanistic, Experimental and Biological pragmatism, which shall be

expounded upon in the subsequent discussion.

Humanistic pragmatism, as a philosophical perspective, posits that truth and reality are contingent upon their ability to fulfill the wants, goals, aspirations, aims, and objectives of human beings, while also prioritizing the welfare of mankind. This particular variant of pragmatism espouses the notion that any proposition or action that serves to accomplish one's objectives satisfies personal desires, and foster personal growth is deemed to be genuinely true. Hence, in order to ensure the sustainability of Business Education, it is imperative to design it in a manner that caters to the needs, requirements, aspirations, aims, and objectives of its recipients, while also prioritizing their welfare. Consequently, it becomes essential to question the utility of a commercial education such as business education if it fails to address pressing societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and business failure.

Experimental pragmatism is an ideological perspective that posits the truthfulness of propositions based on their verifiability through experimentation. Hence, the proposition "that which can be empirically validated is considered true, or that which yields practical results is considered true" holds significance. Consequently, it is imperative to afford learners the opportunity to use and exercise their acquired knowledge and skills.

Biological pragmatism is an ideological perspective that places significant importance on the human ability to actively influence and mold one's own fate within the surrounding environment. The statement posits that the inherent capacity of an individual holds significance as it allows for adaptation to the surroundings and modification of the environment to suit personal needs and desires. This suggests that the design of the Business Education curriculum should enable learners to establish connections between their talents and the requirements of the environment, thereby fostering their ability to assume responsible roles within society.

Additionally, it is crucial to get a comprehensive understanding of the principles of pragmatism in order to effectively apply them to the sustainability of Business Education. Pragmatists reject the notion of set and immutable values and ideals, instead advocating for their adaptation in response to evolving societal conditions and temporal dynamics. Values and ideals are constructed by human beings. One of the advocates of this particular philosophy, Dewey, expressed the viewpoint that truth is constructed via the process of experience, similar to the way in which health, money, and strength are acquired. This suggests that it is necessary to modify teaching techniques, pedagogies, and content in order to accommodate the evolving aspects of life, such as values, attitudes, technologies, economics, and so on. According to Oluwafemi (2020), it is imperative that teaching and learning environments allow opportunities for the cultivation of creativity and innovation. This notion is based on action or activity.

The significance of activity is underscored by pragmatists, who prioritize action over contemplation and claim that ideas are derived from practical engagement. To ascertain the significance of an idea or thought, it is imperative to subject it to the litmus test of practical application. The principle of pragmatism emphasizes the importance of learning by practical application or action (Nzulumike, 2018). Consequently, educational materials and teaching methods should incorporate chances for students to engage in hands-on practice of the concepts being taught. The foundation of pragmatism is on the concept of experience, making experience the central focus of reality. Therefore, the anthropocentric nature of naturalism and idealism is evident, as it prioritizes human beings over nature and the psyche. The determination of values in life is contingent upon the individual's personal experiences. The philosophy under consideration, known as humanistic philosophy, derives its foundation from the lived experiences of individuals. In light of this, it is imperative for educators to impart knowledge through a lifestyle that is commendable and serves as a model for others. Consequently, it is recommended that the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) be accorded greater significance and recognition within the framework of the Business Education Programme.

The principle of Experience, Pragmatists denounces the practice of cramming and prioritizes the centrality of experience as the guiding concept in curriculum design. Therefore, the curriculum should incorporate activities that foster critical thinking and offer learners opportunities to engage in authentic, real-world experiences of diverse kind. The Principle of Activity posits that the learner assumes an active and dynamic role in the learning process, wherein knowledge is imparted through intentional and

meaningful activities. Hence, it is imperative to prioritize the inclusion of practical exercises within the curriculum. Practical exercise makes things flexible and adaptable. The Principle of Flexibility is a fundamental aspect of curriculum design that highlights the importance of adapting the curriculum to align with the evolving requirements and circumstances of individuals' lives. Hence, the curriculum is distinguished by its lack of inflexibility, necessitating periodic reassessment.

The principle of integration is a fundamental tenet embraced by pragmatists, who advocate for the synthesis and unification of information. Pragmatists advocate for the integration of information around specific life problems, rather than splitting knowledge into fragmented areas. The correlation of teaching distinct units is essential in order to foster the development of accurate conceptualization and comprehensive comprehension among learners. A comprehensive comprehension of the contributions of pragmatism is crucial for effectively applying it to the realm of educational sustainability. *Pedo-Centric Education*: Pragmatism promotes an educational approach that prioritizes the learner, taking into consideration their needs, interests, abilities, capacities, attitudes, and temperaments. The learner is granted the freedom to recognize their social responsibility and provide solutions to real-life problems as they arise. This observation indicates the necessity of implementing educational approaches that facilitate personalized learning. Umoru and Oluwafemi (2019) found that programmed instruction facilitates the customization of learning, leading to enhanced academic performance and improved retention of knowledge among students studying business courses.

The principle of curriculum construction has been influenced by the prevalent pragmatist movement, resulting in the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum that is learner-centered, life-centered, community-centered, and correlated. The incorporation of science and vocational courses into contemporary curricula can be attributed to the perceived influence of pragmatic educational frameworks. Hence, the concept of educational sustainability necessitates the ongoing preservation of all aforementioned elements. Education could be sustained through effective method of teaching. The methods of teaching have been significantly influenced by pragmatism, making it an outstanding addition to educational practice. Pragmatists have promoted several educational approaches such as the project method, experimental method, action learning, experiential learning, lifelong learning, problem-solving, play way learning, and motivation. These approaches have significantly transformed the field of education in recent years.

Pragmatism as a Framework for Business Education

- 1. Curriculum Development:** A pragmatic approach to curriculum development involves continuous assessment and revision of educational content to ensure it remains relevant to current business practices. This requires collaboration between educators, industry professionals, and policymakers to identify emerging trends and skills in the business world.
- 2. Experiential Learning:** Pragmatism emphasizes learning by doing. Integrating experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, co-op programs, and project-based assignments, allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. This not only enhances their understanding but also prepares them for the practical demands of their future careers.
- 3. Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:** Pragmatic education fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By encouraging students to engage with complex, real-world business problems, educators can help them develop the ability to analyze situations, consider various perspectives, and devise effective solutions.
- 4. Adaptability and Lifelong Learning:** In a rapidly changing business environment, the ability to adapt and continuously learn is crucial. Pragmatism supports the idea of lifelong learning, encouraging students to remain curious and open to new experiences and knowledge throughout their careers.

Challenges and Solutions

Implementing a pragmatic approach to business education in Nigeria is not without challenges. These include resistance to change, limited resources, and the need for faculty development. However, these obstacles can be overcome through strategic initiatives such as: (1) Professional Development for

Educators: Providing training and development opportunities for educators to embrace and implement pragmatic teaching methods; (2) Industry Partnerships: Building strong partnerships with businesses to facilitate practical learning experiences and ensure the curriculum aligns with industry needs; and (3) Policy Support: Advocating for policies that support innovative educational practices and provide the necessary funding and infrastructure.

Conclusion

The application of pragmatism to Business Education in Nigeria holds significant promise for ensuring its sustainability and relevance. By focusing on practical outcomes, experiential learning, and continuous adaptation, business education can better prepare students for the dynamic and complex nature of the business world. Embracing pragmatism not only addresses current educational challenges but also paves the way for a more robust and effective business education system in Nigeria. There is the need to apply pragmatism in education for sustainability of Business Education because entrepreneurship education without the development of industries, business education without poverty reduction, science education without discoveries, and religion education without sane society is useless and absolute waste of time. All hands must be on deck to embrace pragmatism so as to disabuse the mind of our youths that "education is a scam".

Recommendations

Based on the reviewed literature, the following recommendations are made:

1. Curriculum Overhaul and Continuous Updating: Institutions should collaborate with industry experts to regularly review and update the business education curriculum to reflect current trends, technologies, and practices. Also introduce flexible course modules that can be quickly adapted to changes in the business environment.
2. Strengthening Industry-Academia Partnerships: Institutions should establish formal partnerships with businesses to create internship, co-operation, and apprenticeship programs that provide students with hands-on experience and involving industry professionals in teaching and mentoring roles to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
3. Emphasizing Experiential Learning: Institutions should integrate project-based learning and case studies into the curriculum to simulate real-world business challenges and develop business incubators and innovation hubs within educational institutions to allow students to work on live projects and startups.
4. Professional Development for Educators: Institutions should offer continuous professional development programs for educators to familiarize them with pragmatic teaching methods and industry developments and encourage educators to participate in industry seminars, workshops, and conferences to stay updated on business trends and practices.
5. Promoting Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills: Institutions should design coursework and assessments that emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills and use real-world business problems as case studies to help students develop analytical and strategic thinking abilities.
6. Policy Advocacy and Support: The policymakers should advocate for educational reforms that support pragmatic approaches to business education and secure funding and resources from government and private sectors to improve infrastructure and provide modern learning tools and technologies.
7. Encouraging Lifelong Learning: Institutions should instill the importance of lifelong learning in students by offering alumni access to advanced courses and certifications and create online learning platforms and resources that enable continuous learning and professional development beyond graduation.
8. Utilizing Technology and Digital Tools: Institutions should leverage digital tools and platforms to enhance learning experiences and facilitate remote learning opportunities and incorporate data analytics, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies into the

- curriculum to prepare students for the digital transformation in business.
9. Monitoring and Evaluation: Institutions should establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of pragmatic approaches in business education and use feedback from students, educators, and industry partners to make data-driven improvements to educational programs.

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