

BUSINESS EDUCATION PRACTICUM AND ITS ROLE IN PREPARING BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION FOR A FRIENDLY WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN THE DIGITAL ERA

OGWUCHE GABRIEL SHAIBU^{1*}, CHINWE EBENEZER-NWOKEJI²

¹**Department of Business Education, Alvan Ikoku University of Education,
Owerri, Imo State**

²**Department of Office Technology and Management, Imo State Polytechnic,
Omuma, Imo State**

**Corresponding author: gabbyacademia123@gmail.com*

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Abstract

This paper discussed how business education practicum exposes business education students in colleges of education to a friendly working environment in the digital era. Concept of Business education practicum, concept of friendly working environment in relation to the digital era, relationship between Business education practicum and friendly working environment, challenges affecting the implementation of Business education and ways to overcome the challenges bedeviling the implementation of Business education practicum were the major subheading discussed in the paper. It was established that the Business education practicum is a panacea for preparing business education students for a friendly working environment in the digital era. The paper concluded that government and other stakeholders should endeavour to pay more attention to Business education programme in Colleges of education. The paper further recommended among others that a periodic review of the Business education curriculum should be undertaken by Business educators and curriculum planners at all levels taking into cognizance global and local peculiarities.

Keywords: Business Education, Digital Era, Friendly Working Environment, Practicum Curriculum.

Introduction

Practicum in Business education in Colleges of education in Nigeria is considered key in the wake of digitalization. Since colleges of education in Nigeria are seen as teacher training institutions established with the sole aim of producing middle level personnel to teach at the basic education level, they also provide diverse programmes at the sub-degree level leading to the award of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). However, a good number of the colleges of education offer first degree programmes in affiliation with prominent universities within and outside Nigeria.

Business education is an all-encompassing programme with contents derived from business management, business administration, office technology and management education, purchase/supply education, accounting education, communication skills, distributive education, marketing education, business law, and so on (Ezeabi, Ekoh-Nweke, & Agbo, 2021). Similarly, Amesi (2016) observed that Business education refers to education for office occupation, marketing occupation, distributive

education, accounting, business teaching, office technology, business management and economic understanding of the individual. This presupposes that business education covers a wide range of economic activities in any society. It also refers to the pedagogical and desirable business competence needed for self-employment, gainful employment and entrepreneurial mind-set with a view of making the recipients self-reliant. Across various levels of education, Business education scholars are expected to acquire wide-range of skills and knowledge in a business discipline, logical reasoning capacity, communication skills, numeracy and computer literacy. From the foregoing, it is obvious that Business education is work-focused, skill-based, result-oriented and technology-driven in nature.

Business education plays an important role in economic development by providing adequate knowledge and skills to the learners as it enables them to impart knowledge unto others and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems (Amoor, 2010). This is in agreement with the Business education goals of producing competent, skillful and dynamic business teachers, office administrators and businessmen and women that are competent enough to compete in the world of work. In the same vein, Oyebade, Oladipo and Adetoro (2008) described education as that vital instrument of economic growth and technological advancement of a nation. This depicts the relevance of education in whatever form it may be acquired, be it general, business, vocational or technical. In addition, Business education is focused on meeting general education and career and technical education needs of students at all levels, be it in the primary and secondary schools, colleges of education, polytechnics, other teacher training institutes or universities. It is that aspect of education processes that involves general education, study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in different aspects of economic and social life. Acquiring skills in business education programmes will result in economic viability, prosperity, employment generation, social equity, attraction of foreign investors due to availability of technically skilled manpower, local control of goods and services, community well-being, cultural richness, physical integrity, economic diversity, effective management of resources and environmental purity (United Nations, 2004). Business educators need proper training in order to utilize appropriately the resources and instructional materials available for effective teaching and learning processes, the need for up-to-date knowledge for the use of instructional materials cannot be rights, freedom, equity, justice, among others (Agbonaye & Akele, 2017). A developed society is the one that has succeeded in providing a source of livelihood for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its citizens.

Business education is a form of vocational education that is directed towards developing the learner to become productive in teaching, paid employment and self-employment (Anyaneh & Nkegwu, 2015). Business education prepares beneficiaries for gainful employment and sustainable livelihood. It is an education that provides knowledge and understanding of the economic, financial, marketing, accounting, management system and other branches of Business endeavours. Hence, education about Business prepares students to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in a Business economy. Business education plays a significant role in the economic development by providing knowledge and skills to the learners, thereby, enabling them to adequately impart knowledge into others, and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems (Chiadika, Iwendi, Fassasi & Onianwa, 2014). The goal of business education is three folds, namely: to prepare students for career in office occupation; to equip students with the requisite skills and knowledge for job creation and entrepreneurship; and to expose students to the knowledge about business including a good blend of computer technology, which incorporates the Information and Communication Technology (Edokpolor & Egbri, 2017; Edokpolor & Oduma, 2018). Ajisafe, Bolarinwa & Edeh (2015) noted that since the primary goal of Business education is to produce

competent, skillful and dynamic Business teachers, office administrators and businessmen and women that will effectively compete in the world of work and as such making business education to be an impetus and sine qua non to national transformation

The acquisition of skills, competencies and knowledge as influenced by Business education helps to address unemployment and its attendant vices, increases productivity, and accelerates the development of the nation. By engaging in paid job or running of private Businesses, graduates of Business education programme are able to reduce social crimes among youths (Udo, 2014). This leads to social gratifications such as personal amusement, love, happiness, affection and enjoyment which are necessary indices for measuring level of national development. Business education plays a significant role in the economic development by providing knowledge and skills to the learners thereby, enabling them to adequately impart knowledge to others and handle sophisticated office technologies and information system (Anyaneh & Nkegwu, 2015).

Business education is a programme of study designed to produce teachers of Business subjects in our Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools. To this school of thought ably supported by the assertions of Otamiri and Adiele (2009), Otamiri and Odigie (2010) and Agomuo (2001), that Business education is education “for” Business teachers. This school of thought perceives Business education as a specialized and professional arm of the technical and science education focused at preparing and equipping those to impart Business skills and competencies to students and other business trainees. This may provide the rationale for including educational courses in the curriculum of Business education. Business education is education for business. This view of Business education received the support of a host of authors and theorists. In their view Ubulom and Ukwuije (2000) stated that Business education is an aspect of educational programme that prepares students for careers in business. Business education lecturers’ training needs are all directed towards more skill acquisition and effectiveness as they are important and essential issues that the management also need to take proper steps in tackling such teaching problems, so that issues like computation and keying-in aptitude test scores of students’ results and other information into the school website will not be contracted out. Business education lecturers are bound to acquire the needed skills of effective classroom communication, computation and computer skills, modern classroom management information system, as well as public/human relations skills (Agomuo, 2001). According to Ezeabi (2017), Business education is an aspect of vocational education which equips individuals with the necessary skills and theoretical knowledge needed for effective performance in the business world either for paid employment or self-reliance. It is therefore, imperative to state that Business education is one of the most common programme in colleges of education that equip students with skills and knowledge to create jobs and seize employment opportunities immediately after graduation.

Concept of Business Education and Business Education Practicum

To sustain practical knowledge and skills in Business education, four (4) optional areas are approved and they include: Accounting Education option, Entrepreneurial Education option, Marketing Education option and Office Technology and Management option (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2020). To enhance its usage in Colleges of education, a course titled: BED 213 - Business Education Practicum was introduced (Nigeria Certificate in Education, 2020). Business Education Practicum was launched to fill the following gaps:

1. To provide Business education students opportunities to apply their theoretical and practical knowledge in real work situations, thereby bridging the gap between class/paper works and actual practical skills or competencies.

2. To help Business education students to be acquainted with the dawn of a new millennium which has triggered a burning and thirstier desire for the attainment of technological competencies in the world vis-a-vis the challenges of globalization and emerging functional cum knowledge education.
3. To expose Business education students to work ethics and the methods/techniques in handling equipment and machinery that may not be available in schools.
4. To keep abreast with modern skills and operational competencies; as well as new trends in technological development especially in small business enterprise operations.

BED 213 was designed to be one (1) credit unit course and the following outlines are expected to be covered in line with the philosophy of the NCE Business Education programme as follows:

1. To provide personal and career development skills in working environment e. g. attendance to duty, punctuality, integrity and dexterity skills.
2. To provide human relations and social skills in the working place.
3. To provide information and communication technology skills through the use of ICT tools, method of communication using ICT tools, use of computer in business analysis and ICT knowledge and skills for intending business educators.
4. To identify business enterprises.
5. To provide social skills such as leadership and management skills.
6. To help identity work ethics and office code of conduct.
7. To provide creative and problem-solving skills or study of recent innovation in business and use of analytical ability in solving problems in business organization.
8. To help understand time and stress management techniques in business enterprises.
9. To provide practical application skills.

After the teaching of the above course outlines in the classroom, the students are expected to embark on practical field trips in relevant business organizations where they have to observe and acquire the business practical skills. Hence, students on practicum must write and submit a report of their experiences which will be part of their assessment in the course (FRN, 2020). Practicum as a concept has to do with a course involving activities with emphasis on practical application of theory, especially one in which a student gains on-the-job experience in a field of study. Business education practicum can be described as the practical application of theories learnt in other Business education courses such as: office practice, management, entrepreneurship, marketing, information technology, business communication and management education.

Concept of a Friendly Working Environment in Relation to the Digital Era

According to the ILO (2015), a friendly working environment can be described as work environment that: is productive, returns a fair income, provides security in the work place and protection for families, offers better prospects for personal development and social integration, allows freedom for people to express their concerns and to organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. A friendly work environment is also expected to offer equality of opportunities and treatment to all qualified individuals, irrespective of gender, tribe, race or religion.

Friendly work environment can also be seen as that environment that guarantees adequate welfare and secured future for the practitioners without discrimination on the bases of gender, disability, creed or race. It is noteworthy that Goal 8 of the SDGs was hinged on the premise of an understanding that friendly work serves as impetus to national development. However, there are

factors that inhibit friendly work and economic growth and these factors vary from country to country according to peculiar circumstances. Some common inhibiting factors include: Lack of access to quality education and low educational achievement, poverty and low socio-economic status, inequality, poor state governance and weak social protection systems, precarious working conditions, lack of inclusive growth, the disruption of firms and short term corporate thinking and the mismatch of skills.

It is a truism that most business organizations and work environment or places are becoming highly dependent on technology; the implication of this is that operational modalities are continuously being transformed and it is incumbent on employees and employers to keep abreast of the emerging technologies in the digital era.

Linking Business Education Practicum to a Friendly Working Environment

With keen attention to practical knowledge and field trips to relevant industries for observation and mentoring, Business education practicum curriculum has the potential to make Business education students in colleges of education acquire hard and soft skills which are very essential for career success in the digital era. Without any doubt, Business education enables recipients to imbibe high moral standards and acquire ethical rectitude at high professional or pedagogic standards (Ademiluyi & Oyedele, 2020). The rationale for business education is anchored on a progressive and dynamic vision coupled with a plethora of hard and soft skills designed for molding students to become knowledgeable and ethical decision makers as they optimally perform their functions as consumers, employees, responsible citizens and astute managers of human, material and financial resources. It is very obvious that career prospects that constitute a friendly working environment require the possession of hard and soft skills. According to Doyle (2018), hard skills refer to knowledge required to perform a job, in other words, they are skills gained through education, training programmes, certification and on-the-job training. According to Bortz, (2017) and Okanazu, Orhororo & Madu (2019), soft skills are a cluster of productive personality traits that characterise a person's relationship in a milieu. Examples of soft skills are: social grace, communicative ability, language skills, personal habits, cognitive or emotional empathy, time management, teamwork and leadership traits.

Business education practicum is a potential tool in preparing students for a friendly work in the digital era. A critical look at the objectives and course outlines of the Business education practicum curriculum in colleges of education reveals that the curriculum contents are in tandem with the attributes of decent work as outlined by ILO. If properly implemented, the curriculum has the capacity to produce Business education graduates that are relevant in the digital era. A thorough scrutiny of the NCE Business education practicum curriculum reveals the imperativeness of functional institution-industry collaboration that will adequately bridge the gap between theory and practice by exposing Business education students to out-of-classroom industrial experience. Such experience in the world of work will help to build the students' capacity towards becoming active participants as far as decent work is concerned.

The relationship between Business education practicum and friendly work environment is entrenched in the possession of hard skills and soft skills. Without possessing adequate hard and soft skills it is very difficult for an individual to enter and function effectively in the sphere of decent work either as employee or employer. Meanwhile Business Education Practicum is a very viable platform to inculcate hard skills and soft skills since it is a course/programme that bridges the gap between theory and practice.

Challenges Facing the Implementation of Business Education Practicum

The NCE in Business education practicum curriculum has the capacity to provide the needed liberation and stimulation of the citizens for global competition and national development.

The following are some challenges hindering the implementation of Business education practicum:

1. **Shortage of Qualified and Skilled Manpower:** One major challenge bedeviling the effective delivery of the Business education practicum curriculum is the inadequacy of competent and skilled personnel. It is disheartening to observe that some Business educators do not possess sufficient digital skills to effectively teach Business education practicum. This situation prompted Idris & Mbudai (2016) to lament the inadequacy of skilled personnel and indifferent attitude towards the teaching of Business education courses.
2. **Inadequate Funding:** Basically, acute shortage of financial resources has been identified as the greatest challenge confronting the education sector in Nigeria (Edokpolor & Owenvbiugie, 2017). The nature of Business education practicum curriculum demands adequate funding in order to effectively implement the practical aspects of the course outlines. To effectively implement the curriculum, there is a critical need for a wide range of modern infrastructure and facilities such as state-of-the-art lecture halls, workshops, studios, library, ICT laboratories and model office.
3. **Inappropriate Teaching Strategies:** Business education practicum is a course that is intended to inculcate in the students understanding, values, knowledge, business skills and technical skills required in the world of work in the digital era. The skills to be imbibed by Business education students are technical, manipulative as well as thinking habits applied to global competition, machine operations, procedures and tasks. In view of the foregoing, the business education practicum curriculum stipulates that practical field-trips, office/business centre observation and practical utilization of the model office and ICT laboratory should be the dominant teaching strategies for the course. However, the traditional or lecture teaching strategy has been most commonly utilized for teaching Business education practicum in most colleges of education. The adoption of inappropriate instructional strategy has continued to impede the achievement of the lofty objectives of Business education practicum.
4. **Haphazard Implementation of the Curriculum:** The National Commission for Colleges of Education (2020) minimum standards stipulate that practical field trips to relevant business areas/centres for observation and acquisition of business practice skills should be compulsory activities in teaching and learning of Business education practicum. Students are also expected to write reports which will be part of their assessment in the course. However, it was observed that most Colleges of education do not adhere to the aforementioned stipulations. The college management in most institutions find it difficult to approve field trips for Business education students even within the immediate environments. In addition, many colleges of education have failed to fashion out a pragmatic way of implementing business office observation for business education students with appropriate recording of activities in a log-book as it is done for educational management students who normally undertake classroom observation in basic schools.
5. **Government and Societal Apathy towards Business Education:** Despite the lofty roles of Business education in the economic development of any nation, it is quite evident that major stakeholders in the government circle and management of institutions have been handling Business education programme with levity. Therefore, the programme has suffered inadequate

attention, low public image and poor reputation. (Oladunjoye, 2016; Okoye & Udegbonam, 2019). This negatively affected the effective implementation of the Business education practicum curriculum in Nigerian colleges of education. Many of the institutions do not have model offices and ICT laboratories. However, the provision of the aforementioned facilities is very germane and critical to the effective teaching and learning of Business education practicum in our higher institutions.

The Way Forward

To effectively implement Business education practicum and curriculum in Nigerian, the following ways are key:

1. **Employment of the Right Calibre of Personnel:** Those in charge of staff recruitment should ensure that the right calibre of qualified and skilled personnel are employed to teach Business education courses especially Business education practicum. A legal framework and management structure should be instituted to forestall the employment of indolent and half-baked lecturers to teach Business education courses.
2. **Adequate Funding:** Government and other stakeholders should give more attention to the Business education programme in colleges of education. College management, deans and heads of department should fashion out multiple and viable sources of funds to adequately invest in the Business education programme.
3. **Adoption of Appropriate Instructional Strategies:** Business education practicum should be taught as stipulated in the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) minimum standards with more emphasis on practical field trips, business office/centre observation and report writing at the end of the field trips area observations. There should be less emphasis on the adoption of lecture/traditional method of instruction.
4. **Proper Implementation of the Business Education Practicum Curriculum:** Deans and heads of department (under whose auspices the business education programme falls) should ensure that Business education practicum curriculum is adequately and effectively taught. Deans and heads of department should consider the peculiarity of their institutions before allocating the Business education practicum course to lecturers. There should be adequate use of the model office and ICT laboratory in such a way that the course should be allocated to seasoned and passionate business educators with the appropriate skills, experience, work ethic and temperament to inculcate hard and soft skills in the students.
5. **Revitalization of Professional Bodies at the National, State and Local Government Levels:** Business education practitioners should zealously embrace professional bodies such as Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN) at all levels (national, state chapters and institutions chapters). The presence of viable professional bodies at the various levels will create profound awareness at all levels of the Nigerian society that will help to neutralize the negative effect of societal apathy towards business education. Government officials and heads of institutions, captains of industry and parents need serious enlightenment on the indispensable roles of Business education to economic development. Such enlightenment can only be actualized through the instrumentality of viable and professional associations such as ABEN at all levels. Every Business Education Department/Unit is enjoined to establish a viable and functional students' wing of ABEN.
6. **Tackling the Menace of Inadequate Facilities and Funding:** The College management in the various institutions should think out of the box to tackle the menace of inadequate facilities

and funding that impede the effective implementation of Business education practicum curriculum.

7. **Encouragement of Fieldtrips Participation:** Participation in field trips should be encouraged and made compulsory for all BED 213 students. The college management and relevant stakeholders should be regularly carried along, while working out the modalities and logistics for actualizing the field trips. Heads of Business Education Departments in Colleges of education should also collaborate with appropriate organizations and business firms to accept Business education students for eight weeks internship as part of strategies for implementing the Business education practicum curriculum.
8. **Periodic Review of the Business Education Practicum Curriculum:** A periodic review of the Business education practicum curriculum should be undertaken by Business educators at all levels taking into cognizance global and local peculiarities.
9. **Adopting Co-teaching and Team-Teaching Methods:** Co-teaching and team-teaching methods should be adopted for implementing the Business education practicum curriculum. The objectives and contents of the curriculum are beyond the expertise of a single lecturer. Therefore, a team of seasoned lecturers might be needed so as to maximize the pool of expertise in the field of Business education.

Conclusion

Sequel to the relevance of Business education practicum towards enhancing a friendly working environment in the digital era, it was concluded that government and other stakeholders should give more attention to the business education programme in colleges of education. College management, deans and heads of department should fashion out multiple and viable sources of funds to adequately invest in the Business education programme as business education practicum has the potentials for preparing colleges of education students for friendly working environment in digital era. This was captured as curriculum objectives and contents which have the capacity to instil appropriate work-ethics, social skills, time and stress management in business enterprise, as well as practical application skills. A thorough scrutiny of Business education practicum curriculum revealed that the curriculum is a vital tool for preparing business education students for decent work in the digital era. It was also concluded that effective implementation of the curriculum is being impeded by a plethora of challenges that have rendered the curriculum as mere paperwork without commensurate results.

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