



STRENGTHENING BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM THROUGH STUDENT VOICE INCLUSION

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Abstract

The idea of strengthening business education curriculum through students' voice inclusive practices for sustainable human capital development came about as a response to business education students' lack of employability skills amid claims that students are not integrated in shaping the curriculum that affects their lives directly. Students' voice in curriculum development has been associated with positive outcomes in business education students' employability after graduation. This study determined the ways of strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice for sustainable human capital development in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The population of the study comprised 1401 business education students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The population consisted of 284 business education students from universities and 337 business education students from colleges of education that are purposively selected. A structured questionnaire of 25 items was used for data collection after being validated by five experts in business education and measurement and evaluation with an internal consistency coefficient value of 0.79. The data collected in respect of the research questions were analysed using mean and standard deviation while data regarding the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using z-test statistics. As a matter of urgency in strengthening business education curriculum, students need to feel that they have inclusive voice for their curriculum of training.

Keywords: Strengthening, Business Education Curriculum, Student Voice, Inclusive Practice, Sustainable Human Capital Development.

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin once said: "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn." Hands-on learning is a great way to apply a creative twist to traditional course content and engage students on a deeper level. (Fusion Yearbook, 2016).

The benefits of business education to sustainable human development will depend on several factors, but one essential factor will be the ability to address the deficiencies in curriculum through the collective efforts of stakeholders, including students the direct beneficiaries of education. Business education offering institutions seem to fail to give full consideration to the demands of the business world and the law of career development in developing curriculum, choosing teaching content and teaching designs, resulting in the separation of learning from practice.

According to the Students Solidarity Trust (2011), building and strengthening students' world over including business education students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria faces daunting challenges that have compromised the calibre of graduates as a result of the cumulative impact of



decades of victimization of students' activists in their struggle for academic freedom. The challenges are diverse and far reaching to an extent that the curriculum planners cannot effectively address them alone. There is a serious need for a platform where students as stakeholders, should be given opportunity to express their voices. Student voice inclusive practice is the thoughts, views and opinions of students that is concerned with identifying and removing barriers to participation and achievement for all students on an educational journey (Jagersma & Parsons, 2011). This view of student voice inclusive practice according to the Open University Students Association (n.d) in tertiary institutions is not uncommon for students to be represented through the various student unions, guilds or associations so as to ensure that students are treated fairly, as equal partners in the decision making processes.

Supporting the above views, the American Association of University Professors (2014) opined that students want their teachers to step out of their comfort zones and meet students where they are. Students want to teach and learn from each other rather than having an expert to lecture them, and they want an opportunity to teach each other. Students do not feel the need to memorize information as much as knowing where to find and retrieve pertinent facts. The process of engaging users to co-create content, to rate, rank and comment on communications, more so than the resulting message, is increasingly perceived to give a heightened authenticity to messages, improving trust in, and building users' relationships with organizations.

Cunningham (2007) concurred that rather than talking at students, teachers need to talk with them and work with them to provide a more constructivist learning environment. The author further said that shared learning experiences are highly valued by students. Student voice is therefore an integral part of ensuring that learners receive an outstanding educational experience and that students feel empowered and active in either making curriculum or institution wide change. Consequently education in Nigeria is seen as a profession currently marked by the absence of production oriented goals due to the low degree of performance skills among graduates (Iniobong, 2013). It is on this basis that the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) stated that education for values cannot be done by all the school themselves, as it is a shared responsibility of the other stakeholders too. According to Reinventing Schools Coalition (RISC) (2014) education creates better citizens and helps to upgrade the general standard of living in a society. Tertiary institutions offering business education in particular are designed to prepare students that must become goal-oriented and results-driven, hence the need to strengthen the curriculum through student voice inclusive practice. Students throughout their lives will encounter others who do not think or act as they do; by learning how to work and interact with these individuals, they gain an advantage not only in the classroom, but also in life in general. Hence, Wisconsin Education Association Council (2013-2018 Special Education Guide) defines inclusion as "a term which expresses commitment to educate each student, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend".

Inclusive education has grown into a broader concept encompassing respect for human rights, justice, tolerance, cooperation, social responsibility and the respect for the cultural diversity in addition to a firm commitment to democracy and non-violent conflict resolution (Baroutsis,



McGregor, & Mill, 2016). Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of “integration” and “main streaming”, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and “special education needs” and implied accommodation of all categories of learners in the classroom (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2014). It is about the student's right to participate in school's duty and programmes regardless of his or her disabilities as against special education that is meant for students with disabilities only (Adetoro, 2014). Freire in Seale (2012) argued that to be denied the opportunity to speak is to be oppressed and de-humanised. The author further said that to be denied the opportunity to challenge the way other people speak about you, can be oppressing and de-humanising. In the United Kingdom for instance, most schools, colleges and Higher Education institutions have Student Voice, where students are consulted on their learning experience - or debate issues that are affecting students (Ngussa, & Makewa, 2014).

The key challenge of ever increasing unemployment affecting business education students due to lack of employability skills, the stakeholders should reform the mode of training with special emphasis on restructuring the curriculum, strengthening practical training and developing teachers who will double as teachers of theory and instructors of practical skills (Donnini, 2015). Thus, implementing promising practices like site-based management, cooperative learning, or interdisciplinary teaching is not enough. Tertiary institutions and their business educators need to do something towards phasing out failing curriculum that has failed in preparing students for active role in the years ahead by implementing and obtaining solid, purposeful, enduring goals (Glickman, 1993).

As Nigerian education sector makes effort towards joining the rest of the world in benefitting from the unfolding of 21st century, it is laden with uncertainties, because no society can really develop beyond the level of its education (Nebo, 2012). Business education curriculum planners must not fail to address the realities of the present day skills gap and non-inclusive practices among students. According to Ajuwon (2012), inclusive education is a process of ensuring and enhancing the capacity of the education system through appropriate curricular that reach out to diverse learners. An inclusive classroom is one that values the contributions of all students, their families, and communities. It recognises that every learner is unique and builds on specific languages, cultures, and interests; and identifies and removes any barriers to achievement.

Gewertz (2016) recommended that the central theme of any curriculum should be to teach students “how to learn.” Thus, it is necessary to create a forum whereby students are given opportunity to voice (make input) in deciding the content of their curriculum. Student voice has had and will continue to have a dramatic impact on the school curriculum. In the view of Olibie (2013), as the environment changes and societies portray new needs, the curriculum must keep changing to address those new needs. Unfortunately involving students in deciding about aspects of the curriculum that affect their lives directly is an area where Nigerian education sector is very deficient. This situation necessitates this study to explore ways of strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice. The study calls for the strengthening of business education curriculum to enable the programme to respond in a sustainable and effective fashion to help to equip business education students to stay current and responsive. Unleashing the potential of students voice will therefore require not only their students following already designed curriculum, but even more importantly, their dynamic contribution from planning the curriculum into lifelong learning systems.



Statement of the Problem

The need for strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice for the overall sustainability of human capital development cannot be over-emphasised. The benefits inherent in listening to students informed its introduction into the global education reform agenda. Preliminary survey conducted by the author indicates that the way business education is taught makes it not interesting, and that students fail to recognize the value of what they are learning. Furthermore many business educators rely too heavily on lectures for transmitting information. Recognizing the need for comprehensiveness to meet the ever changing needs of the rapidly changing world and greater accountability by the school system, demand curriculum that link appropriateness to performance as well as meeting students' technological needs. Unfortunately, involving students in deciding aspects of curriculum that drastically affect their lives is an area where Nigerian education sector is very deficient. There is therefore, a convincing reason to explore ways of strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice.

Purpose of the Study

The study determined the effect of student voice in strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practices. Specifically the study determined:

- The involvement of students' voice in strengthening business education curriculum.
- The essential skills required by business educators in strengthening the business education curriculum.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study

- What is the importance of involving students' voice in strengthening business education curriculum?
- What essential skills do business educators require in strengthening the business education curriculum?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Business education students in universities and colleges of education in Nigeria do not differ significantly in the importance of involving student voice in strengthening business education curriculum.
- Business education students in universities and colleges of education in Nigeria do not differ significantly on the essential skills do business educators require in strengthening the business education curriculum.

Method

The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. The area of the study was Nigeria. The population comprised 1,401 business education students in Nigeria universities and colleges of education. Multi-staged sampling technique was adopted for the study. The area of the study was clustered along the two major regions North and South. Adamawa and Anambra States being the States with a concentration of both universities and colleges of education offering business education and were purposively selected to represent the northern and southern regions respectively. For Adamawa State, Modibbo Adama University of Technology Yola and College of Education, Hong were picked, while for Anambra State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Federal College of Education (Technical) Umuozu were used. Proportionate random sampling technique of 50% was used to arrive

at the sample size of 700(331 from universities and 369 from colleges of education). The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researcher. It was validated by five experts in business education and measurement and evaluation who are lecturers in universities and colleges of education. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.79. Seven hundred copies of the instrument were administered out of which 621 were successfully filled and retrieved representing 89% return rate. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question 1

What is the importance of involving student voice in strengthening business education curriculum? **Table 1:** Mean of weighted responses of the ways in which students can be enabled to participate in shaping business education curriculum

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Valuing each child's opinion in curriculum building.	4.08	0.66	Great Extent
2.	Encouraging students curiosity to make input in curriculum building	4.25	0.72	Great extent
3.	Intervention to meeting standard as well as learning content associated with skills acquisition	4.04	0.74	Great extent
4.	Encourage students to understand the purpose of classroom activities and participate actively	4.35	0.65	Great Extent
5.	Encourage students to raise what they take for granted to the level of conscious critical scrutiny	4.01	0.75	Great extent
6.	Students are encouraged to know what they will learn and why, what the expectations of them are, and how they will know that they have learnt well	4.00	0.94	Great extent
7.	Students are encouraged to be unique in doing things and to talk about their experiences with the teacher	3.75	1.06	Great extent
8.	Students are encouraged to participate actively in discussing what happens outside the school	4.15	0.64	Great extent
9.	Encouraging students to be creative, not reactive and to help each other	4.02	0.67	Great extent
10.	Encourage students to participate actively in curriculum development by removing legislative barriers that constrain student and academic staff mobility	3.67	0.82	Moderate extent
Cluster Mean		4.08		Great Extent

Table 1 reveals that the mean responses of business education students on ways in which students can be enabled to participate in shaping business education curriculum in Nigerian



universities and colleges of education ranges from 3.75- 4.35 with a cluster mean of 4.08. This shows that the respondents agreed with all the items presented as ways in which students can be enabled to participate in shaping business education curriculum. The standard deviations range from 0.65- 1.06 indicating that there is a certain level of homogeneity within responses.

Research Question 2

What essential skills do business educators require in strengthening the business education curriculum?

Table 2: Mean of weighted responses of essential skills required by business educators to collaborate with teachers in strengthening business education curriculum?

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
11.	Ability to encourage students to develop creative and entrepreneurial skills that has a greater call on their competencies	3.98	0.66	Great Extent
12.	Ability to be strict when the conditions warrant it.	4.00	0.72	Great extent
13.	Ability to encourage students to develop ICT skills,	4.04	0.74	Great extent
14.	Ability to equip students with skills and opportunities that meet all the needs of knowledge economy.	3.82	0.65	Great Extent
15.	Ability to provide projects that involve manual dexterity among students	4.01	0.75	Great Extent
16.	Ability to personalise learning by grouping students based on capability	4.25	0.94	Great Extent
17.	Ability to have students complete projects that are designed to use information and skills that cut across other subject areas	3.75	1.06	Great Extent
18.	Ability to take risks and sometimes surrender oneself to the students' knowledge	4.15	0.64	Great Extent
19.	Ability to tailor assessment to the talent/needs of the students	3.67	0.70	Great Extent
20.	Ability to have students regularly use technology to find information, network/communicate with each other	3.74	0.60	Great Extent
21.	Ability to use analytics to tailor the curriculum to individual learners	3.83	0.52	Great Extent
22.	Ability to teach students to learn how to ask the right questions, do an appropriate investigation and get answers	3.59	0.77	Great Extent
23.	Ability to have students apply new concepts and skills in actual or simulated work settings	3.85	0.53	Great Extent
24.	Ability to allow students absorb course content outside of class thereby given an opportunity to focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests by identifying what they are doing well and what they need to improve in order to reach the target	3.73	0.67	Great Extent
25.	Ability to teach students to be independent and know how to find answers they need makes the class a different environment	3.80	0.58	Great Extent
Cluster Mean		3.89		Great Extent

Table 2 shows that all the mean responses of the business education students on essential skills required by business educators to collaborate with students in strengthening business education curriculum in Nigerian universities and colleges of education are between 3.59 and 4.25. This indicates that the respondents agreed with all the items presented as the skills required by business education students to collaborate with business educators in strengthening business education curriculum. The standard deviation range from 0.64 - 1.06 indicating some degree of agreement between the respondents in their responses.

Null Hypothesis 1

Business education students in universities and colleges of education in Nigeria do not differ significantly in the ways in which students can be integrated to participate in shaping business education curriculum.

Table 3: Summary of z-test analysis of the ways in which student voice can assist in strengthening business education curriculum

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	A	z-Calc	z-Tab	Remark
University Business Education Students	284	4.01	1.04	619	0.05	1.73	1.96	Not Significant
Colleges of Education Business Education Students	337	3.97	0.96					

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that the z-calc is 1.73 and the z-tab 1.96. This shows that universities and colleges of education students agreed with the ways in which business education students can be integrated in shaping business education curriculum.

Hypotheses 2

Business education students in Universities and Colleges of Education in Nigeria do not differ significantly in the ways in which essential skills are required in strengthening business education curriculum.

Table 4: Summary of the z-test analysis of the perception of business education students on essential skills required by business educators to collaborate with business education students in strengthening business education curriculum.

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	A	z-Calc	z-Tab	Remark
University Business Education Students	284	3.76	1.53	619	0.05	1.59	1.96	Not Significant
Colleges of Education Business Education Students	337	3.84	1.42					



The data presented in Table 4 indicate that the z-calc is 1.59 and the z-tab 1.96. This shows that universities and colleges of education students agreed that business educators require essential skills in strengthening business education curriculum

Findings of the Study

Findings from the study indicated that:

Encouraging students to be curious and willing to ask questions and to explain what they are doing well, and what they need to improve, and what they need to do to make the identified improvements will help them to succeed.

Interpersonal skills, giving the students the opportunity to focus on career path are some of the essential skills required by business educators

Both college of education and university students did not differ on the ways in which business education students can be enabled to participate in shaping business education curriculum

There is no significant difference between the college of education and university students on the essential skills required in strengthening business education curriculum.

Discussion of the Findings

There is considerable evidence that student success and acquisition of employable skills can be increased if students feel that they have a real voice (Philips, 2015). However, there was also consensus that when students feel heard, feel seen, and feel acknowledged, their motivation to learn grows substantially (Microsoft Education Team, 2018). Encouraging students to be curious and willing to ask questions and to explain what they are doing well, and what they need to improve, and what they need to do to make the identified improvements will help them to succeed. Campbell in Seale (2012) referred to good teaching as seeing learning through the learner's eyes. Understanding students' perspective will help when intervention is done for those students not meeting standard to become better learners. According to Liam Burns, NUS Scotland President (2009), *hearing the student voice: Involving students in curriculum design and delivery* is a timely reminder that, in fact, students are co-creators, not consumers, of their education. The curriculum is a deeply personal thing, and yet far too often it is treated as a one-size-fits-all product which inevitably fails to realise students, academic and true potentials

Conclusion

In conclusion one thing is certain in virtually every question treated in this study, business educators has encouraged business education students dismally in relative and absolute terms. The clear conclusion which glares us in the face is that strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice for sustainable human capital development in Nigeria is low, quite low indeed. Business educators should note that when students have a voice in designing curriculum, they develop democratic civic habits that become embedded in their psyche, rather than their civic action remaining as a 'once only' experience. However, whatever we know so far, in respect of strengthening business education curriculum through student voice inclusive practice will not be as much as we might wish. Student input is the vital link to understanding the advantages and



disadvantages of inclusive educational practices. *Involving students in curriculum design and delivery* is a timely reminder that, in fact, students are co-creators, not consumers, of their education. The curriculum is a deeply personal thing, and yet far too often we treat it as a one-size-fits-all product which inevitably fails to realise a student's, or indeed an academic's, true potential. This paper made few recommendations for enabling business education students to develop and have a voice in fulfilling their rights.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings the following recommendations were made:

Curriculum planners at all level of business education programme should encourage students to participate actively in curriculum development by removing legislative barriers that constraint students' right if the goals of the sustainable development goals as distilled into reform, policy and statements and changes are to succeed.

Business educators at all levels should respond positively to their responsibilities by encouraging students to develop creative and entrepreneurial minds, as well as information and communication technology skills so as to stimulate enquiry and creative expression.

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