

PRACTICUM CURRICULUM IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR PREPARING BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION TOWARDS A FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Practicum Curriculum in Business Education in Preparing Students in Colleges of Education for a Friendly Work Environment. The practicum curriculum is well thought out and designed to provide students with hands-on experience and practical skills in Business education thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. The study argues that a well-structured practicum curriculum can equip students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to thrive in a dynamic and ever-changing work environment. Findings reveal that a practicum curriculum can enhance students' professional development, improve their problem-solving skills, and foster a positive attitude towards work. The study concludes that a practicum curriculum is a panacea for preparing Business Education students for a friendly work environment, and recommends its integration into Business Education programme in Colleges of Education.

Keywords: *Practicum Curriculum, Business Education, Colleges of Education, Friendly Work Environment, Professional Development.*

Introduction

The world of work is rapidly changing, and the need for well-prepared and adaptable business education graduates has never been more pressing (World Economic Forum, 2020). Colleges of Education play a crucial role in shaping the next generation of business professionals, but traditional teaching methods often fall short in equipping students with the practical skills and experience needed to succeed in the modern workplace (AACSB International, 2018). This is where the practicum curriculum comes in - a hands-on, experiential learning approach that bridges the gap between theory and practice (Kolb, 1984), providing students with real-world experience and mentorship, the practicum curriculum can help prepare business education students for a friendly work environment, where they can thrive and make meaningful contributions (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020).

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) looked at 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, etc (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 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 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.

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. Hence, 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). Ajisafe, Bolarinwa, and 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 it is an impetus and sine qua non to national transformation and development because economic development usually engenders national transformation.

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), 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. Ubulom and Ukwuije (2000) in their view 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). It is therefore, imperative to state that Business education is one of the most common programmes in colleges of education (Ezeabi, 2017).



Concept of Business Education Practicum

For sustainability sake, four (4) optional areas in Business education are approved and they include: Accounting Education option (BEA), Entrepreneurial Education option (BEE), Marketing Education option (BEM) and Office Technology and Management option (BEO) (FRN, 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 bridge 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: to provide personal and career development skills in working environment e. g. attendance to duty, punctuality, integrity and dexterity skills; to provide human relations and social skills in the working place, 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, to identify business enterprises; to provide social skills such as leadership and management skills; to help identify work ethics and office code of conduct; 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; to help understand time and stress management techniques in business enterprises, and to provide practical application skills.

After the teaching of the above course outlines in the classroom, the students are required to embark on practical field trips in relevant business areas/centres 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 Friendly Work Environment

A friendly work 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 (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2015). 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.



The Relationship Between a Practicum Curriculum in Business Education and a Friendly Work Environment

The Practicum Curriculum in Business Education has a significant relationship with preparing students for a friendly work environment in the following ways:

1. **Practical Skills Development:** A practicum curriculum helps students develop essential skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are crucial for a harmonious and productive work environment that one can think of. 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. Bortz, (2017); Okanazu, Orhororo, and 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.
2. **Real-world Experience:** By working in real-world settings, students learn to navigate diverse workplace cultures, building their adaptability and emotional intelligence. It will go a long way in standing the students out among their peers. Business education practicum is a potent tool in preparing students for a friendly work. 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 the International Labour Organization (ILO).
3. **Mentorship and Feedback:** Practicum experiences provide students with guidance from experienced professionals, helping them understand workplace expectations and develop a growth mindset.
4. **Professional Networking:** Practicum opportunities facilitate connections with professionals in the field, potentially leading to valuable relationships and a supportive work community. 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).
5. **Emphasis on Soft Skills:** A practicum curriculum highlights the importance of soft skills like empathy, time management, and conflict resolution, essential for a friendly and inclusive work environment.
6. **Exposure to Diverse Perspectives:** Practicum experiences expose students to various workplace dynamics, promoting understanding and appreciation of different viewpoints and cultures.
7. **Development of a Growth Mindset:** By facing real-world challenges, students learn to embrace failures and setbacks, cultivating a growth mindset that fosters resilience and positivity in the workplace. It is key to note that by incorporating a practicum curriculum in Business Education, students can develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to thrive in a friendly work environment, characterized by collaboration, respect, and open communication.

Challenges in Implementing Practicum Curriculum in Business Education

The following are some bedeviling challenges in implementing Business education practicum:

1. **Resource Constraints:** Implementing a practicum curriculum may require significant resources, including funding, personnel, and industry partnerships. Basically, acute shortage of financial resources has been identified as the greatest challenge confronting the education sector in Nigeria (Edokpolor & Owenvbiugie, 2017). 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 and Mbudai (2016) to lament the inadequacy of skilled personnel and indifferent attitude towards the teaching of Business education courses.
2. **Curriculum Redesign:** Integrating a practicum curriculum into existing Business Education programs may require substantial changes to course structures and content.
3. **Industry Partnership Development:** Building and maintaining relationships with businesses and organizations to provide diverse and relevant practicum opportunities can be time-consuming and challenging.
4. **Faculty Training and Support:** Educators may need training and support to effectively mentor and guide students through the practicum experience.
5. **Student Preparation and Expectations:** Students may need guidance on how to maximize the practicum experience and manage expectations around workload, responsibilities, and outcomes.
6. **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.

7. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Developing effective assessment and evaluation tools to measure student learning outcomes and program effectiveness can be complex.
8. **Scaling and Sustainability:** Implementing a practicum curriculum across multiple programs or institutions can be challenging, requiring careful planning and resource allocation.
9. **Balancing Theory and Practice:** Integrating theoretical foundations with practical experiences can be difficult, requiring careful curriculum design and delivery.
10. **Addressing Diverse Student Needs:** Practicum experiences may need to be adapted to accommodate students with varying learning styles, abilities, and career goals.
11. **Maintaining Relevance and Currency:** The practicum curriculum must stay up-to-date with industry developments and trends to ensure students are prepared for the modern workplace.
12. **Haphazard Implementation of the Curriculum:** The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) (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.

Ways Forward

The following ways forward were advanced for by the researchers inline with the study:

1. **Integrate Practicum Curriculum into Business Education Programmes:** Colleges of Education should prioritize the inclusion of practicum experiences in their Business Education programs.
2. **Enhance Industry Partnerships:** Foster strong relationships with businesses and organizations to provide diverse and relevant practicum opportunities.
3. **Emphasize Soft Skills Development:** Incorporate training on essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving into the practicum curriculum.
4. **Provide Mentorship and Feedback Mechanisms:** Ensure that students receive guidance and constructive feedback from experienced professionals during their practicum experiences.
5. **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.
6. **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.
7. **Encourage Reflective Practice:** Help students develop a reflective mindset to analyze their experiences, challenges, and growth during the practicum.
8. **Develop Assessment and Evaluation Tools:** Establish clear assessment criteria to measure student learning outcomes and program effectiveness.
9. **Promote Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between Business Education and other disciplines to foster a holistic understanding of business practices.
10. **Support Ongoing Professional Development:** Offer resources and opportunities for Business Education educators to enhance their own knowledge and skills.
11. **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.

Conclusion

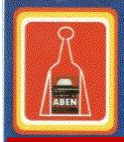
In conclusion, the Practicum curriculum in Business education is a vital component in preparing students for a friendly work environment. By providing hands-on experience, mentorship, and real-world exposure, the practicum curriculum equips students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to



succeed in the modern workplace or world of competition. The relationship between the practicum curriculum and a friendly work environment is evident in the development of practical skills, emotional intelligence, professional networking, and a growth mindset. As the world of work continues to evolve, it is essential for Business Education programmes to prioritize practicum experiences, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to thrive in dynamic and inclusive work environments. By doing so, we can foster a new generation of business professionals who value collaboration, empathy, and respect, ultimately contributing to a more positive and productive work culture.

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