



INTEGRATION OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES INTO THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN UNIVERSITIES IN EBONYI STATE IN POST COVID-19 ERA.

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Abstract

This study investigated innovative approaches for curriculum development and implementation that could be integrated by Business Educators in universities in Ebonyi State in Post COVID-19 era. Two purposes of the study with their corresponding research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. Population for the study consisted of 19 business educators in Alex-Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo and Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. There was no sampling since the population was manageable and was used for the study. A structured questionnaire validated by three experts was used as instrument for data collection. Reliability of the instrument was ensured by trial-testing it at Akanulbiam federal polytechnic Unwana and responses gotten were correlated and it yielded an index of 0.75. Responses to the questionnaire items were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the null hypothesis was tested using P-value at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that business educators agreed that integrating Blended learning approach into the curriculum, Data analytic tools into the curriculum, Electronic based collaborative projects among others are innovative approaches that could be adopted for curriculum development except integration of electronic gaming, Business Educators agreed that Computers, Internet connectivity, Projectors, Interactive whiteboards, Mobile phones among others are some of the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era. Integrating different innovative approaches in curriculum development into business education curriculum will help in sustaining teaching and learning of business education programmes even in events that would lead to closing down schools in the future The study recommended among others that University managements should train and retrain business educators on integration of modern technologies in curriculum development and implementation.

Introduction

Countries across the globe are evidently interconnected and this makes spread of any disease outbreak to be easier. The outbreak of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was not restricted to any boarder as its spread from its originating country (China) to other countries was immediate. The first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Nigeria when an Italian arrived Nigeria and tested positive to COVID-19 (Maclean & Dahir, 2020). Spread of the virus within Nigeria affected all the sectors of the country including education. At tertiary educational level, educational programmes (including Business education programs) were abruptly stopped making it imperative for technological embrace in education. Li, Zhang, Dai and Hu (2021) reported closure of schools led to development of curriculum that support students learning at home. In countries like China, United States of America, Australia among others, courses were developed to help students develop their competencies while learning at home. In Nigeria, schools were closed without such provision for courses that could learned at home and this affected business education programmes in tertiary institutions across the country.

Business education is offered in tertiary institutions with the aim of equipping students with knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding needed for inclusive in the business world. This implies that Business Education prepares students who will participate effectively in business and as well use their skills and knowledge in creating enterprises for self employment and job creation for others. This implies that it prepares individuals for career and knowledge about the world of business. In line with this, Osuala



(2009) described business education as an instructional programme which consists of vocational education programme for office careers, acquisition of competencies and provision of information which are needed by students to effectively manage personal businesses as well as intelligently use business products. According to Azih and Nwosu (2012), this aspect of vocational education is offered in Universities and Colleges of Education as Business Education while polytechnics offer secretarial option of Business Education as office technology and management (OTM). They posited that Business Education at all levels is aimed at providing training which equips the recipients with business skills needed to function effectively in a working environment as well as contribute to inclusive societal development. Business Education curriculum is structured to contain courses that are used in producing trained manpower with functional vocational skills.

One of the aims of business education is to produce graduates that are equipped with vocational skills and competencies required in modern offices and schools. This makes it imperative that business education curriculum planners need to articulate the curriculum content based on realities in the world of business. Business Education curriculum is designed to lead students through skill acquisition process, help them to in having knowledge and abilities necessary for success in the world of business. Therefore, business education curriculum contains planned activities used in guiding learning processes towards helping the students with requisites for effective participation in the world of Business (Peter, 2005). Business education curriculum should be prepared towards enhancing performance of business education graduates in contemporary and emerging business environment brought by COVID-19.

Shereen, Suliman, Abeer, Nadia and Rebeca (2020) described Covid-19 as World Health Organization's nomenclature for coronavirus disease. They described coronavirus as a single stranded RNA with minute size of sixty five to one hundred and twenty five nanometer which transmits Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) found mostly in animals. This virus is said to be infecting only animals till 2012 when it was first found in humans in Middle East and some European countries (Wang, Shi, Jiang, Zhang, Wang, Tong, Guo, Fu, Cui, Liu, Arledge, Chen, Zhang and Wang, 2013). The existence of this virus in human is believed to have been noticed first in Guangdong but most recent of the spread of this virus emerged in Wuhan China in late 2019 (Shereen et al, 2020). Its emergence in the business hub of Wuhan led to the death of thousands of people as well as overwhelming infection of inestimable global population. According to Adhikari, Meng, Wu, Mao, Ye, Wang, Sun, Sylvia, Rozelle, Raat and Zhou (2020), this novel virus that rampaged the world affects lower respiratory organs of the patients making it difficult for adequate respiration. This novel virus was discovered in humans on 17th November, 2019 but was officially reported to World Health Organization (WHO) by China authorities on 31st December, 2019 (Brahm, Chakraborty and Menokey, 2020). Brahm et al explained that this virus within three weeks of China's report to WHO spread into countries like Japan, South Korea and United States. From these countries, the virus spread to almost all the countries of the world infecting people of all ages and killing many. With this spread however, schools were closed and such closure led to distortion of academic activities across the globe making it difficult to continue traditional ways of teaching. Worsley, Billington, Balabanova and Watkins (2022)

reported that spread of the virus facilitated the implementation of remote method and procedures in teaching and learning using electronic resources which helped in bridging the gap created by the pandemic. In Nigeria, spread of COVID-19 was a challenge to school system as there was paucity of resources needed for switch to online teaching especially in public universities thereby affecting curriculum development of such universities.

Aquah (2014) defined curriculum as a document comprising of goals and objectives, the subject matter or content and other details of a particular course/subject. By this definition, curriculum is seen as educational programme upon which educational activities are organized. Curriculum of a course provides detailed framework fro objective of the programme to evaluation which forms basis for organization of such programme. Oluwadare, Omidiji and Awe (2022) described a curriculum as a document containing plans for all the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are imparted into the recipient of educational programmes. Oluwadare, Omidiji and Awe explained that a curriculum is an embodiment of all the positive attributes and skills expected of a citizen of a nation in order to be competent in a specific field which are imparted through the school system. Curricula of programmes in universities are planned to help in transforming the students to be creative, innovative and productive towards inclusively contributing to the comprehensive growth and development of the society. A well planned curriculum is a pivotal of transformation of individuals using formal education system and getting them set for contribution to national development. Shabi (2016) explained that important element of a curriculum is the integration of the needs and aspirations of the society into the educational training of the citizens. From the above discussions, it is



imperative to observe that curriculum prepares individuals for inclusive participation in economic development of their societies and this is one of the goals of business education.

Business education curriculum is designed to prepare students for effective participation in the business world as producers and wise consumers of business products. The curriculum comprised of program contents, teaching methods and activities geared towards producing individuals that will have necessary competencies required for survival in the business world (Abdulkadir, 2011). The curriculum is designed with the understanding that competencies and knowledge acquired by learners affects their interests, aspirations and capacity to thrive in modern business world and as well inclusively contribute to economic development of their immediate environment. Tukur (2016) explained that business education curriculum contains contents that lead to development of skills and knowledge in business related areas, processes of instructional delivery and continuous evaluation of learning outcome. Developers of business education curriculum integrate programs that facilitate gaining planned and unplanned learning experiences within and outside the school environment. These learning experiences help learners be competent to handle various business related engagements thereby becoming self-employed or become gainfully employed after graduation.

With the increasing rate of unemployment especially among the youths, business education curriculum is planned and organized to help learners become self employed and as well employ others (Gradun in Oluwadare et al, 2022). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020) noted that curricula are developed with emphasis on what the students should be taught, what they should learn within a specific period in a formal educational setting. The document emphasized that curriculum development by schools need to integrate acquisition of needed knowledge, skills and values that helps the learner to survive outside the school and also contribute effectively to societal development. A well developed curriculum as described in National policy on education should align with helping the learner to acquire appropriate skills and proficiency necessary for societal development (FGN, 2014). In this light, curriculum of business education need to be developed to help curriculum implementers to effectively adapt to the changes brought into the educational system by COVID-19 through innovative approach to curriculum development.

Statement of the problem

The index case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Nigeria on 27th February, 2020. To stop spread of pandemic, federal government of Nigeria through its ministry of education directed for immediate and indefinite closure of schools at all levels. This directive was generally seen by relevant stakeholders in education as a good measure to control spread of the virus. Unfortunately, this shutdown negatively affected schools as it led to disruption of academic programmes thereby affecting curriculum development and implementation. Business education was not isolated as its programmes in all the public tertiary institutions were disrupted and students suffered academic setbacks as they were forced to stay at home throughout the shutdown period. Even as some private institutions in the country were carrying out their educational activities through virtual platforms, public institutions were completely shut down as there was lack of infrastructures for adoption of virtual approaches. Historically, schools in Nigeria are usually shutdown as a result of disease outbreak because there are little or no innovative approaches to curriculum development that integrate use of technologies.

Outbreak of covid-19 adversely affected business education programmes and it seems there are no plans to keep the students engaged in case there is reoccurrence of another disease outbreak. With the obvious negative effects of covid-19 outbreak on business education programmes in tertiary institutions, it was expected that curriculum planners should have come up with innovative approaches in post covid-19 era that would help in keeping students engaged remotely. This is to get them set and ready to reduce the adverse effect of possible shutdown of schools any time there is another outbreak but it seems such expected effort is not in place. Even in our contemporary society where almost all the students of business education in tertiary institutions have mobile phones and internet access, planners of business education curriculum are yet to adopt innovative approaches in curriculum development. Without adopting innovative approaches that focuses on the use of technologies in academic programmes, business education programmes will still be disrupted any time there is another disease outbreak. With the way the outbreak of COVID-19 laid bare the wretchedness of business education programmes to migrate academic activities to virtual learning platforms, it becomes worrisome the extent the programme could survive in case of any other outbreak. Since the curriculum is seemingly lacking innovations especially in the use of technologies to remotely teach and learn in post COVID-19 era, business education programmes may likely suffer greater disruption caused by many other factors other than disease outbreak in the future.



Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era.
2. What are the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant differences on the mean response of male and female respondents on the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era.
2. There is no significant differences on the mean response of respondents from federal and state owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era.

Method

The study was a descriptive survey of the opinions of Business Educators from public universities in Ebonyi State. The population was made of 19 business Educators from Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki and Alex Ekwueme Federal University (AE-FUNAI), Ndufu-Alike Ikwo. The entire population was used as it is manageable. A structured questionnaire that was divided into two parts (Part A and Part B) was used for data collection. Part A was used to collect personal data of the respondents while part B contained 21 items used in answering the research questions. Reliability of the instrument was ensured by trial-testing it at Akanulbiam federal polytechnic Unwana and responses gotten were correlated and it yielded an index of 0.75. A total of 19 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and were all correctly filled and returned giving 100 percent on return. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze responses to the items in the questionnaire. Responses to the research questions were analyzed thus: items with 3.5 and above were rated as Strongly Agreed (SA), items with mean score of 2.5-3.49 were rated as Agreed (A); items with mean score of 1.5-2.49 were rated as Disagreed (D) and items with mean score of 0.1-1.49 were rated as Strongly Disagreed (SD). The hypotheses were tested using t-test at alpha level of 0.05 level of significance. A hypothesis whose calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value at 0.05 level of significance is accepted while hypothesis whose calculated t-value is greater than the critical t-value at 0.05 level of significance is rejected.

Results

Research Question One

What are the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era.

Table 1: Mean scores on the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era.

S/ N	Innovative approaches to curriculum development in business education include integrating:	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Blended learning approach into the curriculum	2.84	0.77	Agreed
2	Virtual industrial training for students	2.11	0.52	Disagreed
3	Electronic gamification into the curriculum	2.39	0.85	Disagreed
4	Data analytic tools into the curriculum	2.67	1.04	Agreed
5	Electronic based collaborative projects	2.51	0.90	Agreed
6	Virtual classrooms for interaction between industry based experts and the students	2.88	0.87	Agreed
7	Adaptive learning technologies that provides personalized learning experience	2.64	0.95	Agreed
8	Different online assessment methods	3.01	0.84	Agreed
9	The use of artificial intelligence for personalized learning	2.72	0.69	Agreed
	Grand	2.64	0.83	Agreed



Table one shows the mean and standard deviation ratings of the responses the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era. The analysis showed that all the items except items 2 and 3 were rated between 2.5-3.49. The weighted mean of 2.64 implies that business educator agreed that all the items are innovative approaches that could be adopted for curriculum development except integration virtual industrial training for students and integration of electronic gaming.

Research question two

What are the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities remotely in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era.

Table 2: mean scores on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State

S/N	resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Computers	3.11	0.63	Agreed
2	Mobile phones	3.28	0.73	Agreed
3	Interactive whiteboards	2.77	1.02	Agreed
4	Projectors	2.91	0.84	Agreed
5	Internet connectivity	3.21	0.88	Agreed
6	Learning management systems	2.52	0.91	Agreed
7	Software applications	2.99	0.80	Agreed
8	Skilled human resource	2.82	0.66	Agreed
9	Electronic books	2.89	0.84	Agreed
10	Multimedia contents	2.58	0.93	Agreed
11	Dedicated physical learning space	2.60	0.59	Agreed
12	Electronic assessment tools	3.00	0.65	Agreed
	Grand	2.89	0.79	Agreed

Table two shows mean and standard deviation ratings of the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State. They agreed that all the resources are needed as all the items had mean ratings of 2.5-3.49. the grand mean of 2.89 implies that Business Educators agreed that Computers, Internet connectivity, Projectors, Interactive whiteboards, Mobile phones among others are some of the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum remotely in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant differences on the mean response of male and female respondents on the Innovative approaches that could be integrated into the development of business education curriculum by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era.

Table 3: comparison of mean responses of male and female respondents on the innovative approaches for curriculum development adoptable by business educators in universities.

Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	Df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
Male	2.43	1.10	17	0.26	2.11	Accept
Female	2.31	0.89				

Table 3 shows the mean rating of male and female respondents on the innovative approaches for curriculum development adoptable by business educators in universities. Detailed analysis showed that male responses of male and female respondents did not differ significantly (P > 0.05). That is, the P-value of 2.11 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. This means that the mean response of male and female respondents on the innovative approaches for curriculum development adoptable by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era did not differ significantly.



Ho2: There is no significant differences on the mean response of respondents from federal and state owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era.

Table 4: comparison of mean responses of respondents from federal and state owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities

Institutions	Mean	Standard deviation	Df	t-cal	P-value	Decision
AE-FUNAI	3.08	0.77	17	1.18	2.11	Accept
EBSU	2.61	0.91				

Table 4 shows the mean rating of respondents from federal and state-owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities. Detailed analysis showed that respondents from federal and state-owned universities did not differ significantly ($P > 0.05$). This evidence as the P-value of 2.11 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. This means that the mean response of respondents from federal and state-owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post COVID-19 era did not differ significantly.

Discussion of findings

Result of the study as shown in table 1 revealed that all the items were rated within the range of 2.5 -3.49 except item 2 and 3 that were rated within the range of 1.5-2.49. With the grand mean of 2.64, it implies that the respondents agreed that integrating blended learning approach, Virtual industrial training for students, Data analytic tools, Electronic based collaborative projects, Virtual classrooms for interaction between industry based experts and the students, Adaptive learning technologies that provides personalized learning experience, Different online assessment methods and the use of artificial intelligence for personalized learning are innovative approaches for business education curriculum development. Items 2 and 3 had mean ratings that were within the range of 1.5-2.49 and this shows that the respondents disagreed that integrating Virtual industrial training for students and integrating electronic gamification were not innovative approaches for business education curriculum development. Supporting the findings, Obunadike (2015) observed that business education curriculum need to be improved by integrating innovative approaches that can help the students to gain practical modern skills. Ojode, Wolde and Claiborne (2021) noted that adjusting business education curriculum in line with emerging technologies will help in improving quality of the programme and position the students for global competitiveness. Integrating technology based innovative approaches in business education curriculum can help in reducing the effects of academic disruptions caused by disease outbreak in the future as educational programmes could be delivered without physical contacts. Analysis of hypothesis one in table 3 shows mean ratings of responses of male and female respondents on the innovative approaches for curriculum development adoptable by business educators in universities. The P-value of 2.11 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, and therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. This therefore, means that the mean responses of male and female respondents on the innovative approaches for curriculum development adoptable by business educators in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era did not differ significantly.

Findings from analysis of the responses to research question 2 as shown in the table 2 revealed that respondents agreed that all the items were resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum. The findings showed that resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum include Computers, Mobile phones, Interactive whiteboards, Projectors, Internet connectivity, Learning management systems, Software applications, Skilled human resource, Electronic books among others. This finding is in line with Ugwuogo's (2012) finding that availability of technologies and human resources will facilitate electronic teaching and learning of business education programmes in universities. Since outbreak of COVID-19 affected implementation of university curricula, it becomes imperative in post COVID-19 era that needed resources for implementation of innovative curriculum should be provided and as well be put to use. Installation and usage of different resources will help both students and their lecturers to be well equipped with knowledge of the workability of online and blended teaching and learning. Nemezu, Enyichukwu and Jonathan (2021) noted that utilization of technologies in curriculum implementation in contemporary universities is imperative as a result of the need to make educational activities to be flexible and remotely accessible. Oyowwi (2022) found that the reason COVID-19 pandemic had great effects on curriculum implementation was because of



lack of necessary technologies that were supposed to be used in teaching and learning remotely. Before these resources would be used in the implementation of business education curriculum in post COVID-19 era, lecturers and students would have been prepared on the usage of different technologies in teaching and learning. This however will get them ready for use of these technologies thereby reducing possible adverse effects of school closure in the future. Analysis of hypothesis two in table 4 shows the mean rating of respondents from federal and state owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities. The P-value of 2.11 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, and therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. This therefore means that the mean responses of respondents from federal and state owned universities on the resources needed for implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19 era did not differ significantly.

Conclusion

Blended learning approach, Data analytic tools, Electronic based collaborative projects among others were opined by business educators from universities in Ebonyi State as innovative approaches that could be integrated into business education curriculum. Integrating these innovative approaches in development of business education curriculum will help to prepare the students for global competitiveness and also sustain teaching and learning of business education programmes even in event of closing down schools in the future. Also, when needed resources are made available, business educators can adopt innovative approaches in implementation of innovative business education curriculum in universities in Ebonyi State in post covid-19.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University managements should train and retrain business educators on various innovative approaches that could be integrated into business education curriculum development.
2. Business educators should encourage students to use their mobile phones in learning by initiating e-learning activities using their mobile phones.
3. Government and other well spirited individuals and groups should help universities by providing needed resources for implementation of innovative business education curriculum.

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