



STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRACTICUM CURRICULUM FOR PREPARING BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR DECENT WORK IN DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

This paper discussed various strategies for effective implementation of practicum curriculum for preparing business education students for decent work in the digital era. The paper conceptualized decent work and also enumerated the objectives and course outlines of the NCE business education practicum curriculum. It was established that the business education practicum curriculum is a veritable tool for preparing business education students for decent work in the digital era. The paper equally highlighted some impediments to the effective implementation of the business education practicum curriculum to include; inadequate funding, shortage of qualified and highly skilled personnel, inappropriate teaching strategies as well as government apathy towards business education. In order to overcome the aforementioned challenges, the paper suggested the following strategies; adequate funding, employment of the right calibre of personnel, adoption of appropriate instructional strategies and revitalization of professional bodies at national and state levels. In conclusion, the paper asserted that the NCE business education practicum curriculum has the potentials for instilling appropriate work-ethics, social skills, creative cum problem-solving skills, time and stress management skills for business enterprise thus preparing students for decent work in the digital era.

Keywords: Decent jobs, E-world, Hard skills, Soft skills, On-the-job training.

Introduction

In the Nigerian education system, colleges of education are teacher training institutions established with the core mandate of producing middle level personnel to teach at the basic education level. The colleges offer 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.

As at December 2021, there were 163 colleges of education in Nigeria, comprising 27 (federal), 54 (states) and 82 (private) (Wikipedia, 2022). It is instructive to note that business education is one of the most common programmes in colleges of education. 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-employment. 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, business law and so on (Ezeabi at al., 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.

Overview of business education practicum in colleges of education

Business education in colleges of education is a double major programme and therefore cannot be combined with another programme. In order to ensure depth in knowledge and skills, four options or areas of specializations are approved and they include: Accounting Education option (BEA), Entrepreneurial Education option (BEE), Marketing Education option (BEM) as well as Office Technology and Management option (BEO). (FRN, 2020: 26)

One of the most comprehensive courses in the NCE Business Education programme is BED 213 titled "Business Education Practicum". As enunciated in the Nigeria Certificate in Education minimum standards for Vocational and Technical Education (2020), the inclusion of Business Education Practicum became imperative due to the following needs;

- a. The need for 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 competence in the world vis-à-vis the challenges of globalization and emerging functional cum knowledge education.
- b. The need 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.
- c. The need to expose business education students to work ethics and the methods/techniques in handling equipment and machinery that may not be available in schools.
- d. The need to keep abreast with modern skills and operational competencies; as well as new trends in technological development especially in small business enterprise operations.

In line with the philosophy of the NCE Business Education programme, BED 213 was designed to be a credit unit course and the following outlines are expected to be covered;

- a. Personal and career development skills in working environment e. g. attendance to duty, punctuality, integrity and dexterity skills.
- b. Human relations and social skills in the working place.
- c. Information and communication technology skills (the focus areas should be- relevance of experience in 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).
- d. Identification of business enterprises.



- e. Social skills (leadership and management skills).
- f. Work ethics and office code of conduct.
- g. Creative and problem-solving skills (study of recent innovation in business and use of analytical ability in solving problems in businesses).
- h. Time and stress management in business enterprise.
- i. Practical application skills.

The curriculum stipulates that after the teaching of the aforementioned course outlines in the classroom, the students will go for practical field trips in relevant business areas/centres where they will observe and acquire the business practical skills. Students must write report of their experiences which will be part of their assessment in the course. (FRN 2020: 37-38). The word, PRACTICUM refers to 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. Therefore 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 among others.

Meaning and attributes of decent work in digital era

In 1999, Juan Somavia, then director-general of the International Labour Organization, first proposed /men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity with the core mandate of boosting the realization of rights at work, employment equality, social protection and social dialogue (ILO; 1999 cited in Haiming & Yan, 2020). Consequent upon the initial mention of the term, it has gained a wider acceptance from labour relations experts thus goal 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a vision for decent work and economic growth by the year 2030. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015), decent work can be described as work 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 organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. A decent work is also expected to offer equality of opportunities and treatment to all qualified individuals, irrespective of gender, tribe, race or religion.

In a nutshell, decent work can be conceptualized as work 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 decent work serves as impetus to national development. However, there are factors that inhibit decent 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 quite obvious that corporate organizations and work places are becoming increasingly 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.

Nexus between business education practicum and decent work

Without any doubt, business education practicum is a potent tool in preparing students for decent work in digital era. A cursory 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). 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.

With the emphasis on practical knowledge and field trips to relevant industries for observation and mentoring, the 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 moulding 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 decent work 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. On the other hand, 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 (Bortz, 2017; Okanazu et al, 2019).

The link between Business Education Practicum and Decent work 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 that marries theory with practical.

Challenges of effective implementation of business education practicum curriculum

Without any equivocation, the NCE business education practicum curriculum has the capacity to engineer the required liberation and stimulation of the citizens for global competition and national development. However, the implementation of the curriculum has been hampered by a myriad of impediments. Some of the challenges are discussed below;

1. Inadequate funding: Generally, acute shortage of financial resources has been identified as the greatest challenge confronting the education sector in Nigeria (Edokpolor and Owenvbiugie, 2017). The nature of the 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.
2. Shortage of qualified and skilled personnel: Another challenge militating against 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 and Mbudai (2016), to lament the inadequacy of skilled personnel and indifferent attitude towards the teaching of business education courses.
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 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. 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 and Udegbonam, 2019). This negatively affected the effective implementation of the business education practicum curriculum is 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.
5. Haphazard implementation of the curriculum: The 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 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.

Strategies for effective implementation of the business education practicum curriculum

In order to effectively implement the business education practicum curriculum in Nigerian colleges of education, the following strategies are suggested;

1. 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.
2. Employment of the right calibre of personnel: Those in charge of staff recruitment should ensure that the right calibres 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.
3. Adoption of appropriate instructional strategies: Business education practicum should be taught as stipulated in the NCCE minimum standards with more emphasis on practical field trips, business office/centre observation and report writing at the end of the field trips and observations. There should be less emphasis on the adoption of lecture/traditional method of instruction.



4. 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, 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 in 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.
5. 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. 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.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it was concluded that business education practicum has the potentials for preparing colleges of education students for decent work in digital era. This was predicated on the 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 the 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. The implication of this is that an effective and passionate implementation of the business education practicum curriculum will usher in the much needed revolution in vocational and entrepreneurial skills in the digital era hence the need for continuous evaluation of the business education practicum curriculum and its implementation strategies in colleges of education.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this paper, it was recommended that;

1. Heads of Business Education Department in colleges of education should 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.
2. 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 maximise the pool of expertise.
3. 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 the business education practical curriculum.



4. Participation in field trips should be made compulsory for all BED 213 candidates. The college management and relevant stakeholders should be regularly carried along while working out the modalities and logistics for actualizing the field trips.
5. 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.

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