



Competency-Based Teaching as an Imperative for Skill Acquisition in Business Studies in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

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Abstract

The persistent gap between Business studies curriculum delivery and the practical skills demanded of secondary school graduates in Nigeria remains a major concern for educators and policymakers. Competency-based Teaching (CBT) is an imperative, not an option, for equipping Business studies students' in Rivers State public secondary schools with employable skills. This position paper contends that the prevailing theoretical, exam-focused pedagogy has consistently failed to produce graduates with practical competencies in entrepreneurship, financial literacy and office administration. The paper argue that CBT, rooted in mastery learning, performance-based assessment and real-world-application, offers the only viable solution to this skill deficit. However successful implementation. The paper highlighted the benefits of implementing CBT, identifies key barriers to effective implementation, and outlines strategies for effective implementation. The paper concludes that without decisive government intervention, including mandated CBT frameworks, sustained teacher retooling and public-private partnerships, Rivers state public secondary school will perpetuate graduate unemployability and economic underdevelopment. Among its recommendation is a call upon the Ministry of Education to urgently adopt CBT as a non-negotiable reform, backed by robust funding and accountability mechanisms to ensure Business Education delivers its transformative promise.

Keywords: Business Studies, Competency-Based Teaching, Curriculum, Public Secondary School, Skill Acquisition

Introduction

Education is the real instrument for change, growth, and development, a societal tool for survival and the only means through which poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, poverty and disease can be eliminated. It is the process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into in order to be useful and contribute to the society at large. In contemporary societies, the capacity of an education system to produce skilled and employable graduates is strongly linked to the quality of curriculum implementation. Business studies, as a prevocational subject in the junior secondary

school curriculum is designed to equip learners' with both academic and vocational foundational skills needed for both salaried jobs and self-employment as entrepreneurs.

Business studies occupies a vital place in the Nigerian junior secondary school curriculum as a foundational subject aimed to equip learners' with foundational knowledge in commerce, office practice, book keeping, entrepreneurship, computer, and keyboarding, intended to give learners' a general business background and basic skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not proceed to higher education. It is an integral part of the pre-vocational education which provides students with skills and competencies require for clerical works, self-reliance and future educational endeavor. Business Studies is important because it teaches how the office functions, how to keep accounts and enter transactions into different books, how to keep documents, how to own and run a small business enterprise and how to manipulate the keyboard of a computer for the enhancement of business opportunities (Ebge et al, 2017). The development of this curriculum is primarily overseen by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), which is the statutory body responsible for the school curriculum in Nigeria (NERDC, 2012).

The specific objectives of Business Studies according to Adamu and Sani (2014) is to: provide the orientation and basic skills with which to start an occupation for those who may not have the opportunity for further training; provide basic business skills for personal use now and in the future; provide students for further training in business studies; relate the knowledge and skills to the national economy, and finally develop basic skills in office occupation. This will better match industry requirements for graduate. Business studies contributes to students' ability to analyze market trends, manage finances and identify business opportunities, preparing them for future roles as business leaders or entrepreneurs (Akpomi and Kayii, 2021).

In practice, this is rarely met. Reviews of Nigeria's basic education curriculum consistently reveal a wide gap between the country's content-heavy, exam driven curriculum and the competency-based models now standard internationally, with comparative evidence from countries such as Kenya, India, Finland and Singapore pointing to the importance of flexible curricula, skill integration, formative assessment and sustained teacher development in closing the gap. Globally, CBT has emerged as a response to this problem. Unlike the traditional curriculum, where achievement is judged by a learners' ability to recall information or memorize sequences.

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT), also often referred to as Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach is an instructional strategy that emphasizes the attainment of specific skills and competencies as the primary goal of education. It represents a paradigm shift from teacher-dominated to instruction to learner-centered pedagogy that emphasizes mastery of demonstrable skills. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operative and Development (OECD) (2018), CBT focuses on what learners can do with knowledge rather than merely what they know, fostering a more practical and application-oriented learning. This model assesses students' based on their ability to demonstrate proficiency in key skills rather than just academic performance (Obasi and Eboh, 2019). The rationale for CBT is not just knowledge acquisition but the ability to apply learning in practical exposure, real-world tasks, collaborative learning, and performance-based assessment to foster competence. In junior secondary school, a competency-based curriculum attempts to align schooling with labor market needs and to improve job readiness. Implementing Competency-based teaching in Business Studies Curriculum makes schooling more relevant, adaptive, and learner-centered. CBT focuses on what the learners' know and can do, measuring learning itself rather than time spent in the classroom. And requiring learners' to demonstrate mastery they can apply in real-life situations. Yet adoption at the classroom level, particularly in Business related subjects, remains weak.

However, teaching Business Studies effectively in public secondary schools in Rivers State remains challenging due to its abstract concepts and the need for practical application. Current educational framework (traditional methods) often emphasize rote learning and theoretical knowledge which may not effectively prepare students' for a real-world business challenge. Their limitations are profound. They often fail to develop the deep, conceptual understanding, critical thinking abilities and collaborative skills required in the 21st century. Furthermore, they are poorly aligned with modern principles of motivation, assessment and inclusive pedagogy that caters for diverse learners. As a result, many students' graduate from junior secondary with weak practical skills in book keeping, office documentations, entrepreneurship and problem solving, despite the curriculum stresses hands on learning. The disconnect between curriculum goal and actual classroom practice has created a growing disparity among students, particularly those who plan to pursue business related subjects in senior secondary schools or start up their own business. Hence the shift towards student-centered, active learning through Competency-based approach which is essential for enhancing students skills acquisition and better prepares students' for future employment and entrepreneurship unlike the traditional teacher-dominated method.

Despite the importance of business studies in junior secondary schools, the method of delivery remains largely theoretical, with limited opportunity for demonstrable skills, practical tasks and learner performance, leading to a significant gap in practical skills and competencies that aligns with current workplace demands. In Rivers State, Public Secondary School face the dual challenge of implementing the newly introduces Competency-based Curriculum reforms while contending with infrastructure deficits, large class sizes and limited teacher preparation for pedagogical innovation. While the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) has adopted a Competency-based Curriculum framework and Federal Government has introduced skill acquisition programmes into basic education, the promise of these reforms remains largely unfulfilled in business studies. This is because, there is insufficient evidence that teachers have transitioned to CBT strategies, uncertainty about the actual skills students acquire and the persistent systematic factors that continue to impede effective implementation. The result is a curriculum that exist on paper but fails to deliver knowledge –to-wealth creation. Competency-Based Teaching is not an optional but an imperative for skill acquisition in Business Studies in Rivers State public secondary schools. Yet its adoption remains limited to and systematic barriers continue to undermine effective implementation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Curriculum

A curriculum is regarded as the core and guiding framework of any educational institution, essentially making schools depends on it for its existence. It Curriculum is a structured set of educational experiences provided by an educational institution (Mohanna, 2023). It outlines what students are expected to learn, the methods used for teaching, the instructional materials, and the standards and assessments for evaluating their progress. More specifically, it includes content, teaching strategies, organizational structures, learning activities, and assessment methods (McDonald, 2024). Similarly, Wahab and Arubuo (2021), viewed Curriculum as the totality of knowledge to be transmitted to the students by the instructors in and outside the school setting in order to achieve the stated objectives. It goes beyond a mere collection of subjects; it is the catalyst for intellectual growth. The knowledge, skills, norms, values, aspiration a nation imparts on it's citizens are arranged in the school subjects at various levels of education. The Curriculum goes beyond a mere collection of subjects; it is the catalyst for intellectual growth.

From the forgoing, the author agree that the strategic importance of the curriculum in the educational system is pretty obvious. The curriculum does the following; Guides Teaching,

Guarantees students' learning Ensures standardization, Determines procedure for assessment, Directs resource allocation and Tracks progress. To achieve this goal, the curriculum ought to comprise subject matter that is meticulously chosen to foster skills, practical competencies, heighten students' participation, drive economic progress and stimulate entrepreneurial ventures in the 21st century. Building on this, Curriculum can be understood, for the purposes of business studies in secondary schools as the totality of planned content, instructional activities and assessment procedures through which learners are exposed to business concepts and expected to acquire defined competencies in bookkeeping, commerce, office practice, and computer.

Concept of Business Studies

Business Studies is a pre-vocational subject taught in the junior secondary level in Nigeria. Aimed to equip learners' with foundational knowledge in commerce, office practice, book keeping, typewriting, computer, and other business-related competencies. It prepares and arm learners' with knowledge aimed at creating career awareness of saleable skills that will enable them to fit into the world of work with little or no difficulty (Ohaka, 2017). The curriculum was introduces into Secondary education under the 6-3-3-4 system of education as a prevocational course. The development of this curriculum is primarily overseen by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), which is the statutory body responsible for the school curriculum in Nigeria (NERDC, 2012). It's primary purpose is to provide practical skills for learners' who wish to move directly into workplace, enabling graduates to take up appointments as clerical officers, receptionists, stenographers, create their own small business, and how to manipulate the keyboard of a computer for the enhancement of business opportunities (Ebge et al, 2017).

The importance of Business Studies cannot be overemphasized; it teaches how the office functions, how to keep accounts and enter transactions into different books, how to keep documents, how to own and run a small business enterprise and how to manipulate the keyboard of a computer for the enhancement of business opportunities. It is expected that upon graduation, students' should acquire one or more skills in Business studies such as keyboarding skills, secretarial skills, book-keeping skills, etc to be self-reliance.

The specific objectives of Business Studies according to Adamu and Sani (2014) is to: provide students with a basic understanding of the principles and practices of business, to equip students' with skills for office occupation and self-employment, to inculcate in students the habits of orderly and systematic work; to prepare students for further training in business-

related subjects at the senior secondary level and finally, to develop in students a positive attitudes work as a means of achieving personal and national development (FRN, 2013). These objectives can only be realized through effective integration of competency-based teaching methods in business studies curriculum for effective skills acquisition. This will better match industry requirements for graduates. Business studies contributes to students' ability to analyze market trends, manage finances and identify business opportunities, preparing them for future roles as business leaders or entrepreneurs (Akpomi and Kayii, 2021).

Skill Acquisition

Skill acquisition is a practical knowledge acquired through repetitive activities that is obtained through training and retraining. Mohmoud and Yunusa (2018) defined skill acquisition, as a process undergone in a programme to achieve efficiency for self-reliance and national development. For Ochoma and Ezeyi (2020), it is specific form of learning or training in a particular field or function so as to become an expert in it. Skill acquisition ensures that students are able to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting, making them more employable upon graduation (Adegboye, 2021). The necessity for skill acquisition cannot be overemphasized. It is seen as a means of eradicating poverty and hunger by creating avenue for employment, thereby creating job opportunities and wealth creation. Therefore, a curriculum anchored in competencies better supports the bridging of theory and practice.

In Nigeria, educational context, skill acquisition involves systematic learning provided to learners as qualifications for specific jobs or occupational areas. Skill acquisition differs fundamentally from theoretical certificate-based learning. While traditional education emphasizes intellectual capacity and theoretical knowledge, skill acquisition cultivates hands-on abilities that foster self-employment, innovation and productivity. This distinction is particularly critical in addressing Nigeria's youth unemployment challenge as skill acquisition promotes entrepreneurship and reduces dependences on white collar jobs. In junior secondary schools, students are at a formative age to cultivate entrepreneurial mindset, financial literacy, and small business management skills. A CBE-based Business Studies curriculum can emphasize transferable skills such as critical thinking, decision-making, collaboration, and communication. The author contends that effective skill acquisition in education is the key to creating a self-reliant nation. By exposing learners to demonstrable skills through Competency-Based teaching, learners will become job creators and not job seekers.

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT)

Competency-Based Teaching (CBT), also often referred to as Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach is an instructional strategy that emphasizes the attainment of specific skills and competencies as the primary goal of education. It is a learner-centered instructional approach that emphasizes the development and demonstration of practical abilities, behaviors and knowledge that students can apply in real life situations. Unlike traditional education, which emphasizes content memorization. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operative and Development (OECD) (2018), CBT focuses on what learners can do with knowledge rather than merely what they know, fostering a more practical and application-oriented learning. The fundamental principle is that learners advance upon demonstrating competency, not when academic calendar dictates. The features of Competency-based teaching include:

1. Learners-centred approach: instruction is built around the learners' pace and active engagement. It is personalized and individualistic, rather than a uniform teacher-led lecture model. This flexibility supports diverse learning needs and encourages self-directed learning.
2. Outcome/Mastery Orientation: focus is on what learners can actually do, not how long they spend in class. Progression depends on mastery and not seat time. There is no fixed term or semester duration. The learner must learn a skill before subsequent one.
3. Learning pathways are flexible. Learners advance once they demonstrate competence, rather than following a fixed timeline for everyone. A variety of methods are used to accommodate every learner and to make sure that everyone progress accordingly
4. Application and Performance-based are emphasized: what matters is the ability of learners to transfer/make use of what he/she has learnt in the classroom to workplace or everyday use.
5. Prioritizes problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, collaboration, and communication.
6. Active and experiential learning methods: this includes experiential tasks like mini business projects, case studies, role-play, simulations and project thereby making learning hands-on.
7. Continuous/formative feedback: it provides timely feedback to help learners close gaps and reiterate improvement rather than a single end-of-term judgment.

For Business Studies in public secondary schools, these features are essential because they shift instruction away from passive memorization towards demonstrable skill acquisition, thereby

improving learners' readiness for further education, self-employment and participation in the world of works.

Challenges to the adoption of Competency-Based Teaching (CBT) in Business Studies

Despite its clear benefits for skill acquisition in Business Studies, its adoption is constrained by several systematic and instructional challenges.

1. **Inadequate Teacher preparation:** Most Business Studies teachers in Rivers state public secondary schools were trained and are accustomed to the traditional, content-driven, examination focused teacher education programmes. This makes them lack the pedagogical skills required for competency-based instructional design, demonstration techniques or performance-based assessment, making implementation dependent on retraining that has not yet happened at scale.
2. **Large Class Size:** Mastery-based, individualized progression as a core feature of CBT, is difficult to manage in overcrowded classroom typical of public secondary schools, where one teacher may face 50-150 students thereby making practical impossible for a teacher to provide the personalized attention, continuous assessment and tailored back feedback that are the hallmark of CBT. Teachers often revert to lecture method (Chalk-and-Talk) as a means of crowd control and curriculum coverage.
3. **Inadequate Funding and Infrastructure:** Public secondary schools often operate with limited budgets and sometimes funds are delayed for procurement of instructional materials and the maintenance of existing facilities and teaching training programs (Nwabueze & Eke, 2021). This limits teachers' ability to translate theory into practice. CBT relies on hands-on-activities, experiment and projects.
4. **Ineffective Assessment and Examination Culture:** assessment is the engine of CBT. Competency-based teaching emphasis continuous students-based assessment of competencies. The high-stake Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) remains largely a paper-and-pencil theory based test. This forces teachers to "teach to the test" neglecting the practical competency-building activities to focus on drilling students' for the final exam (Wokocha, 2019). As a result, learners' competencies become sidelined.

Weak Monitoring and Supervision: supervisory agencies rarely assess the extent to which competency-based methods are used in the classroom, rather they focus on lesson documentation, leaving CBT adoption largely to individual teacher initiative, leading to inconsistent or superficial implementation across school.

Key strategies for effective implementation of Competency-based Teaching (CBT) in Business Studies

For effective implementation of competency-based teaching, some strategies are used to offset the challenges of CBT such as: `

1. **Curriculum Redesign and Alignment:** business studies curriculum must be redesign explicitly around competency outcomes rather than content coverage. Topics should articulate specific measurable competencies students must demonstrate. Integration of 21st century skills alongside subject-specific competencies and curriculum must have industry relevance content.
2. Overcrowded classroom makes mastery-based progression impractical. In the interim, group-based practical work and peer assisted learning can mitigate resource and staffing.
3. Schools should collaborate with local business owners, skills centers to give students exposure to authentic workplace practices. This bridges the gap between classroom knowledge and labor market expectations.
4. **Provision of Instructional resources and ICT tools:** equip classroom with simulation materials, basic business documents (spreadsheet, receipts templates, invoices) and basic ICT infrastructure needed for demonstration and project-based learning, since the lack of such resources has been identified as a recurring constraint in Nigerian Business studies delivery.
5. **Teacher Professional Development:** There should be a mandatory, intensive training of teachers in Competency-based instructional design, demonstration techniques and performance assessment. Most teacher are trained under traditional content-delivery models, thus lack the practical knowledge of competency-based pedagogy. This will help teachers shift from theoretical instruction to performance learning (Kolawale, 2021). Teachers need to transition from being instructors to facilitators.
6. **Policy backing and Supervision:** State Ministry of Education and school inspectorate support through monitoring, incentives and clear implementation guidelines to ensure CBT adoption isn't left to individual teacher initiative alone.

Conclusion

This position paper contends that Competency- Based Teaching (CBT) is an imperative for effective skill acquisition in business studies in public secondary schools in Rivers State. The current traditional Business Studies curriculum, largely theoretical, has failed to produce graduates with practical competencies required for entrepreneurship and employability. While policy reforms have been initiated at the national level, implementation gaps persist due to

limited teacher training, resource constraints, assessment misalignment and weak administrative support. This shift (Teacher-centered methods to learner-focused, hands-on-approaches) is not merely a pedagogical trend but a fundamental response to the persistent gap between academic preparation and real demand of the global economy.

Effective skill acquisition can only be realized when teaching emphasizes doing, demonstrating and mastering rather than memorizing. However, achieving this potential requires concerted efforts from the government, policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers and the wider community to redefine learning outcomes, adopt student-centered pedagogies like project-based learning and implement robust, authentic assessments. When effectively integrated and implemented, it has the potential to significantly reduce youth unemployment by creating a generation of empowered, proficient, innovative, skilled, and innovative job creators rather than job seekers. This is the time to empower our student not just with knowledge of business, but with the competency to succeed in it. We therefore call on the Federal Ministry of Education to urgently adopt competency-based teaching as a non-negotiable reform to ensure business studies delivers its transformative promise for individual learners' and national development.

Recommendations

To effectively bridge the gap between policy and practice, the following actions are required:

1. Curriculum planners and the Rivers State Ministry of Education formally embed Competency-based teaching strategies (demonstration, simulation, project work and performance assessment) into the Business Studies Curriculum.
2. Nigerian Educational Research Development Council and State Universal Basic Education Board should institutionalize mandatory, continuous professional development for Business Studies teachers, including coaching and lesson study.
3. Assessment bodies should redesign Business studies examinations to incorporate practical, performance-based components alongside theoretical papers, so that assessment rewards demonstrated competency rather than recall alone.
4. School administrators and Government should invest in basic instructional resources (ICT tools, ledgers, book keeping forms, business/simulations materials) to support Competency-based delivery in public secondary schools.

Without these targeted interventions, Nigeria's Competency-based curriculum risks remaining a policy document rather than a pathway to knowledge-to-wealth creation.

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