

Strategies for Improving Implementation of Pre-Vocational Business Studies Curriculum in Taraba State Junior Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This paper conceptually explores and highlights the major obstacles to the proper implementation of pre-vocational Business Studies in public schools in Taraba State. These obstacles among other things include- inadequate facilities and instructional materials, unqualified business teachers, and societal and parental attitudes towards Business Studies. Pre-vocational Business Studies subjects were introduced in junior secondary schools alongside other pre-vocational subjects. The sole aim of the inclusion of pre-vocational subjects in the junior secondary school curriculum was to expose the students to various occupational areas and to equip them with the necessary basic skills in the areas of their choices, based on their interests, abilities and aptitudes. Unfortunately, since the introduction of pre-vocational Business Studies subjects in secondary schools in Taraba State, the impact has not much been felt by the recipients. Consequently, it is suggested among other things that the government, community and business organizations should help in funding vocational Business Studies in secondary schools. Only qualified business educators should be employed by the government to teach pre-vocational Business Studies. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should occasionally organize Business Studies programs through the mass media to educate society on the usefulness of Business Studies in equipping the recipients for both salaried and self-employment.

Keywords: Pre-vocational Business Studies, curriculum implementation, strategies, junior secondary schools, Taraba state

Introduction:

The 6-3-3-4 system of education was introduced in Nigeria in 1981, as stated in the FRN, National Policy on Education (2013). This is to overcome the observed inadequacies of the old system of education. In the 6-3-3-4 system, the emphasis is on education for self-reliance, self-employment and technological development of the nation. As a result, some pre-vocational subjects alongside traditional academic subjects were introduced in junior secondary schools. The

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pre-vocational subjects that were introduced in the junior secondary school curriculum include Agriculture, Business Studies, Home Economics, Introductory Technology and Local Craft. Computer studies were later incorporated as one of the pre-vocational subjects to be taught in junior secondary schools (FRN, National Policy on Education 2013). The main reason for introducing vocational subjects is to expose the students to various occupational areas to equip them with the necessary basic skills in the area of their choice based on their interests and aptitude. This is to enable each student to discover his/her area of interest and to be equipped with the basic skills in such areas. It is expected that after their junior secondary school, the students should be streamed into technical colleges or senior secondary schools, depending on their choices. Those students, who cannot advance their education, can proceed to out-of-school vocational training centres or apprenticeships, based on their inclination.

Again, according to Akpan (2015), the 2012 Revised Edition of 9- 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum by the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), Business studies is one of the ten subjects selected to be taught in the upper Basic (JSS) classes. The nine other subjects in the Basic Education Curriculum include- English language, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Religion and National Values, Cultural Creative arts, Nigerian Languages, Pre-vocational Studies, French and Arabic. The aim of developing the 9-Year Basic Education curriculum is to achieve the ‘Education for All’ goals. Akpan (2015) also noted that the general objectives of business studies in the JSS schools are as follows:

- i. To provide the orientation and basic skills with which to start an occupation for those who may not have the opportunity for further training.
- ii. Provide basic business skills for personal use now and in the future.
- iii. Provide students with further training in business studies.
- iv. Relate the knowledge and skills to the national economy,
- v. And finally, develop basic skills in office occupation.

Therefore, pre-vocational Business Studies is to equip the recipients with basic business skills and knowledge to enable them to assess their potential in the area of business. This will help them to decide whether to further their education in the area of business, after graduating from junior secondary school or not. It will also enable them to engage in their small businesses upon completion of their program if they cannot continue their education.

Unfortunately, this noble objective seems to have been defeated. Since the introduction of pre-vocational Business Studies in public secondary schools in Taraba State the students have never been equipped with the required basic business skills as expected. Ndinechi (2001) noted that the purposes and functions of Business Studies have not been achieved. Students are not exposed to reasonable business skills to enable them to assess their potential in the area of business. The knowledge they acquire is neither adequate to equip them with the expected basic business skills that will enable them to engage in their small businesses if they cannot further their education nor enable them to decide whether to opt for business courses at the senior secondary school levels after graduation from junior secondary school or not. However, the researcher through her 20 years of experience as a business studies teacher in various secondary schools in different parts of the country² and discussion with some of the business studies teachers in JSS and through interaction with some of the students offering business studies at JSS realized that business studies has not recorded a remarkable success as expected by the curriculum planners. Many of the students who

² both urban and rural schools

offered the subject in the examination have failed woefully. In Adamawa and Taraba states respectively, there have been cases of student's failure in business studies examinations in public secondary schools. Ahmed (2015) commented that the rate of students' failure in business studies examinations is among other disturbing developments- in the education sector in recent times. According to him investigation carried out in 2018 on the percentage performance of students in business studies for 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 JSCE results, revealed the percentage failure as 63.2%, 51.4%, 49% and 54.2% respectively.

The major obstacles to the proper implementation of pre-vocational Business studies in public secondary schools in Taraba State are hereby highlighted in this paper. Some possible strategies for the effective implementation of the program are also suggested based on the problems pointed out earlier. The hindrances to the effective teaching and learning of pre-vocational business studies in Taraba state secondary schools and the possible solutions to them are the focal points of this paper.

Curriculum Implementation:

Curriculum implementation is the actual teaching and learning of subject matter as specified in the curriculum. According to Ogunode & Ejike (2023) and Oga (2007), curriculum implementation is the actual engagement of learners with planned learning opportunities. Oga (2007) explained that curriculum implementation is the stage in the curriculum process where the students are exposed to the planned curriculum contents in the form of teaching and learning. Students and teachers must be actively involved in the implementation process; otherwise, the chief aim of drawing the curriculum will be defeated. Oga (2007), noted that curriculum implementation implies putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study. The whole process is tailored to help students acquire certain subjects for their study. Curriculum implementation is not possible without students. He enumerated the following eight factors as affecting curriculum implementation in Nigeria- Teachers; Learners; Resource Materials and Facilities, Interest Groups, The School Environment; Culture and Ideology; Instructional Supervision and Assessment.

Without the teaching and learning of the curriculum content, the curriculum planning program is useless. Therefore, a curriculum is effective to the extent that it is well implemented, in terms of the delivery of the subject matter to the learners. The learners and the teachers are the two major actors in the curriculum implementation. Hence, the learners must be ready and motivated to learn while the teachers must be equally ready, prepared and well-equipped to teach, using the appropriate teaching materials and methods as suitable for the learners. This explains why the teacher must be the master of his subject matter. The objectives of the curriculum will not be achieved no matter how well it is planned if it is not well implemented. An enabling environment should be created for both teachers and learners for effective curriculum implementation by the school. Therefore, the two parties must be disposed to participate in the teaching and learning activities for the objective of any curriculum program to be accomplished.

Current State of Pre- vocational Business Studies in Secondary Schools:

The aims and objectives of the pre-vocational Business Studies programs are outlined in the FRN, National Policy on Education (2013). It was based on the specified objectives that the curriculum content of the pre-vocational Business Studies was developed. The student's readiness and disposition to learn Business Studies depends on the teacher's competencies, teaching

methods, resources available for teaching, societal perception of Business Studies, parental attitudes towards Business Studies and the school administration/management. All these factors directly or indirectly affect the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Therefore, any deficiency in any of the sub-systems or components will in turn affect the entire system.

Most of the junior secondary schools in Taraba State have never been able to equip their students with the expected pre-vocational Business Studies skills. Ogunode & Ukozor (2023) noted that most schools are confronted with the problem of implementation of curriculum and curriculum of pre-vocational Business Studies programs. The students are normally streamed into senior secondary school, to continue with general education, irrespective of their aptitudes, interests and potentialities. The aim of introducing Business Studies in junior secondary school is, therefore, defeated. Most of these students graduate from senior secondary schools without being properly equipped for either further studies in the area of Business Studies³ or employment as typists, bookkeepers, account clerks, proprietors and so on.

Most students who may have the potential to excel in business careers are not encouraged to continue with business courses in higher institutions after graduating from senior secondary school. This is evident in the small number of students that enrol in the Business Studies departments in many Nigerian universities and colleges of education. The unfortunate consequence is that most of the students who would have performed better in the area of business and become well equipped for both self and government employment are discouraged by their parents or guidance or even their fellow students from doing so. They will be advised to opt for other subjects or disciplines in which they may not excel or where there may be few employment opportunities.

Some of the impediments to the effective implementation of the pre-vocational Business Studies curriculum in most public junior secondary schools in Taraba State are highlighted below under the following subheadings:

i. **Non-coverage of the Curriculum Content of Pre-Vocational Business Studies:**

The content of the pre-vocational Business Studies curriculum is drawn based on the objectives of the program. Pre-vocational Business Studies comprises five separate subjects grouped and referred to as integrated Business Studies. The subjects are commerce, office practice, book-keeping, shorthand and typewriting. These subjects are designed to inculcate junior secondary school students with the required basic business knowledge and skills that will prepare them for further studies in the area of business at the senior secondary level and tertiary levels of education, for those who would like to continue their education. The basic business knowledge and skills will equally equip students with the skills they require to engage in little businesses, assuming that they cannot further their education.

Unfortunately, it has been by many researchers including Ahmed 2015 that Business Studies teachers, hardly cover all the topics contained in the curriculum. Ahmed noted the inability of curriculum coverage as one of the reasons for many students' failure in business studies. For instance, out of the five pre-vocational Business Studies subjects included in the syllabus, only three - commerce, office practice, and bookkeeping - are effectively taught in most public or state-owned secondary schools in Taraba State. The two practical subjects – typewriting⁴ and

³ Such as Accounting, Commerce, Banking, secretaries, Business education, Marketing etc.

⁴ word processing

shorthand - are not well taught for one reason or the other. These subjects are meant to provide students with the technical skills needed to function effectively in the offices. The result of this regrettable scenario is that only the theoretical aspects of business subjects are taught to students which are not encompassing enough to provide them with a meaningful learning experience in business activities.

- ii. **Teachers of Pre-Vocational Business Studies:** The teachers are the curriculum implementers. This explains why the teachers must be the masters of their subject matter. Ogunode et al. (2023) and Odike (2013) opined that teachers should possess certain qualities which are peculiar to the teaching profession. He noted that as a matter of necessity, a good and efficient teacher must be: Master of his subject matter,⁵ Master of the methodology of teaching,⁶ and Master of the psychology of learning.⁷

According to Ogunode (2021), it is the teacher's personal qualities coupled with his professional competencies and appropriateness of the teaching techniques to the age of the learner that makes for effective teaching. Analysis of teacher components also revealed that there is a dearth of well-qualified business educators in most state secondary schools. The categories of teachers stipulated in the National Curriculum for senior secondary schools to teach business subjects according to Ogunode et al. (2020) are- holders of B.Sc, and NCE in Business Studies, B.Sc. and HND in business administration plus a diploma certificate in education. They noted that most teachers of pre-vocational Business Studies might just have taken a few business courses in colleges or universities. They are the non-Business Studies majors.

Many researchers regretted that in many instances untrained teachers are employed to teach Business Studies in secondary schools. Such teachers do not possess either N.C.E. or a first degree in Business Studies from any higher institution. Indeed they might have studied business courses in higher institutions without any depth of training in pedagogy. Recruitment and retention of qualified business teachers seem difficult.

Ogunode (2020) has explained the reason for this by noting that the teaching profession is unattractive because of the low status accorded it. Consequently, many qualified Business Studies graduates prefer to be employed in industries, banks and other places, where remunerations are high and opportunities for growth and development are numerous and inviting. Offorma (2005 & 2014) and Ikegwuani (2016) also noted the dearth of suitable qualified teachers as one of the factors militating against the proper implementation of Business Studies programs at all levels of education. Nneka & Ejike (2018) and Agboola (2015) stated that Business Studies departments even at the tertiary level are often poorly staffed sometimes, with non-business educators pretending to impart to students the knowledge they do not have. The few available qualified business educators are often over-stretched thereby rendering their teaching ineffective.

- iii. **Societal/Parental Attitude towards Pre-Vocational Business Studies:** The attitude of society, including parents, towards Business Studies, discourages most

⁵ knowledgeable

⁶ pedagogy

⁷ a good educational psychologist

students who would have cultivated interest in studying vocational Business Studies in secondary schools and who, by that fact, would have opted to study business courses in higher institutions. Society holds the view that Business Studies, erroneously conceived of as only typewriting and shorthand, is for dullards, that is, academically stunted students. Agboola (2015) noted that the students offering commercial subjects are often regarded as inferior by their secondary school contemporaries. He equally noted that in the tertiary institutions, many opt for Business Studies only after they have failed to gain entrance into other courses.

The parents see Business Studies as a program for someone else's child, while their children are vigorously shielded from the slightest contact with it. Hence parents hardly encourage their children to study business subjects. Every parent should encourage and motivate his/her children to study science subjects, which will lead them to bombastic courses in the universities, without taking into consideration their children's interests and abilities. Okocha (2009) equally observed that not minding the fact that parents recognize the employment value inherent in vocational education which Business Studies is part of they are still prepared to accept the superiority of socially prestigious and white-collar professions over technical-related occupations.

Today, the ranking of science over and above other discipline areas has come to affect the education policy of many Governments. In Nigeria, for example, the official policy on enrollment into universities is 40% and 60% into Arts and Sciences respectively. It is this entrenched honour for science and corresponding dishonour for arts and social sciences, bolstered by Government policies that have conditioned Nigerian students to disesteem any subjects other than the ones that are science-related. Emphasis is now on science and technology. This negative attitude of the parents, and by extension society, towards Business Studies has made many students develop contempt for the subject. Ahmed (2015) noted that students have a neutral attitude towards vocational education and therefore find it difficult to opt for that. As a result, it is only the students who could not excel in those choice courses will consider opting for any other courses in the curriculum including Business-related courses even in the tertiary institution.

- iv. **School Management/Administration:** Single control of both vocational Business Studies and general education as is still practised in the state secondary schools poses great difficulties in the management of secondary schools. Often, the administrators or principals of secondary schools are graduates of general education, without a good background in vocational education subjects including Business Studies. As a result, such principals usually pay inadequate attention to teaching and learning of Business Studies. The bias of some secondary school principals against Business Studies has led to inadequate allocation of resources for teaching Business Studies. For instance, there was a case where the principal of a school refused the inclusion of Business Studies textbooks in the list of recommended textbooks for students. He argued that Business Studies is not as important as other subjects in the curriculum. Agboola (2015) also observed that sometimes the headship of Business Studies units falls on non-business educators

- or at least those without advanced degrees in Business Studies. This according to him creates crises leading to poor administration and coordination of the program.
- v. **Facilities/Instructional Materials:** Business Studies like other vocational subjects are so capital-intensive that special attention ought to be paid to their implementation in the school system. A lot of facilities and instructional materials are needed for effective teaching and learning of Business Studies. This is because it comprises skill subjects that require different facilities other than those used to teach other subjects. All the equipment that students are expected to use in the office when they graduate is supposed to be used in teaching them in the classroom. Ogunode et al. (2023) and Odike and Nnaekwe (2017) emphasize that effective vocational training can only be given where training is carried on with the same technology as it is performed in the real-life environment, with the same operation, the same tools and the same machines as in the occupation itself. For instance, effective teaching and learning of Business Studies demand that the school should have the facilities or equipment like a business laboratory containing the following office automation: cyclostyling machines, photocopying machines, stopwatches, stapling machines, and a computer lab.⁸ Unfortunately, there are hardly such facilities in most public or state-owned secondary schools in Taraba State.
- Olumide (2016) reported that available human and material resources needed for effective teaching of business studies in secondary schools were not adequate. How then can effective teaching and learning of Business Studies subjects take place if the enabling environment is not created for both teachers and learners? Ogunode & Ohibime (2021) and Ohiare et al. (2021) discovered that inadequate modern facilities and lack of maintenance of available facilities constitute a major problem in the teaching and learning of Business Studies.
- Chikumbi & Makamure (2000) and Ibrahim (2016) also highlighted the lack of training facilities and inadequate funding as the major problems militating against effective teaching and learning of Business Studies. According to him, Business Studies is a highly capital-intensive program. Funds are required to acquire numerous necessary Infrastructures, workshops, workshop materials, stationeries, hand tools, books and other reading materials to ensure regular maintenance of equipment and to retain highly qualified teachers, demonstrators, laboratory assistants and other personnel needed. Most times budgetary allocation tends to be discouraging and there are hardly enough funds to run the Business Studies program effectively. Agboola (2015) also noted the paucity of business studies facilities in secondary schools. According to him, very often, physical facilities and equipment are inadequate for Business Studies offerings. Many secondary schools offering commercial education do not have adequate facilities for imparting knowledge to students. He equally observed that many Business Studies programs are challenged by the paucity of funds for the acquisition and maintenance of physical facilities and equipment.
- vi. **Time/Period for Business Studies:** Another major factor militating against Business Studies in secondary schools is insufficient time. There are insufficient periods in the school timetable for effective teaching of Business Studies. All the

⁸ In place of typing pool with typewriters

- Business Studies subjects are grouped under integrated Business Studies in the junior secondary school timetable. Only two periods of 90 minutes a week are allocated to Business Studies. This is scarcely enough to teach both theory and practical aspects of the subjects. This makes it impossible for effective teaching and learning of Business Studies and proper coverage of the Business Studies syllabus.
- vii. **Teaching Method/Pedagogy:** When teaching Business Studies the three domains of learning, namely: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor should be involved. Unfortunately, most business teachers emphasize only the cognitive domain because of the teaching method employed by the teachers and the resources available for teaching the subjects. The teaching methods employed by non-business educators that teach Business Studies make the aim and objectives of Business Studies unattainable. Most of the teachers are not knowledgeable in the practical aspects of Business Studies and, therefore, cannot teach them. Hence the practical aspects of business subjects are skipped entirely by such teachers. Besides, the few qualified Business Studies teachers in the schools do not have enough time, and necessary equipment to teach the practical aspects of Business Studies. The students, therefore, do not have the opportunity to practice with machines or other equipment as is required. Without a doubt, this hinders the effective teaching and learning of the subject.

Conclusion:

The introduction of pre-vocational Business Studies in junior secondary schools is a laudable scheme. Unfortunately, the program has been faced with many problems, hindering its successful implementation. The analysis of the different components of teaching and learning of the pre-vocational Business Studies program revealed some of the possible impediments to the effective implementation of the program. The identified factors that hinder effective teaching and learning of pre-vocational Business Studies in the public secondary schools in Taraba State include: lack of qualified Business Studies teachers; Inadequate facilities and other instructional materials; Negative societal attitudes towards Business Studies; Students' lack of interest in Business Studies; Absence of encouragement from parents; Insufficient periods for teaching and learning; and methods of teaching business studies subjects. If the above-identified problems are properly addressed and ameliorated, the noble objectives of the pre-vocational Business Studies program will be attained.

Recommendations:

The following suggestions were made based on the findings of the study:

- i. The government, community, business organizations and industries should help in funding pre-vocational Business Studies in the secondary schools. The fund should be used for equipping the schools with the necessary facilities and materials for effective teaching and learning of business subjects.
- ii. The state education commission should ensure that only qualified Business Studies graduates are employed to teach business studies in schools instead of employing just anybody who studied business courses.

- iii. The state education commission should also organize seminars, and workshops for business teachers from time to time to update their knowledge and skills in the area of teaching Business Studies.
- iv. The state government should make the teaching profession attractive by ensuring that teachers are properly remunerated. The teachers should be paid their salaries and other fringe benefits as and when due to make them develop an interest in the teaching profession.
- v. To overcome the problem of insufficient periods, Business studies teachers should be allowed and encouraged to organize, lessons for their students at least twice a week after school hours. This will enable them to cover the Business studies curriculum. The school management should remunerate such teachers from the school purse. Alternatively, the students should be made to pay for the extra lessons to be given to them outside normal school hours.
- vi. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should organize a Business Studies program through the mass media.⁹ Through these media, parents and society should be made to understand the importance of the Business Studies program in solving the unemployment problems of youths.
- vii. Parents also have a responsibility to encourage their children to read the courses which they have aptitude for and are interested in. They should not force their children to study a course because of the prestige value. The student's ability and interests should override any other consideration.

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⁹ Television, radio, etc.

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