

Pedagogical Practices of Business Studies Teachers in Botswana Junior Secondary Schools: Are Teachers and Curriculum Planners Singing from the Same Hymnbook?

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the extent to which the teaching practices of Business Studies teachers in Botswana junior secondary schools conform to pedagogical practices recommended by curriculum planners. The findings of this study suggest that teachers and curriculum planners are not singing from the same hymnbook, thus, the pedagogical practices of Business Studies teachers are at variance with the expectations of the curriculum planners. Teacher-centred pedagogy is the dominant mode of instruction used to teach Business Studies in Botswana junior secondary schools despite the fact that curriculum planners advocate for a paradigm shift from teaching to learning through the employment of learner-centred entrepreneurial-directed teaching methods. The study concludes with the recommendation that, for pedagogical practices of business teachers to be aligned with those prescribed by curriculum planners, educational authorities and school administrators should put in place support structures aimed at monitoring and ensuring that the delivery of business education is done according to the stipulated business curriculum standards as well as enforcing the fulfillment of pedagogical practices set in the syllabi.

Key words: Business studies, Entrepreneurial pedagogy, Entrepreneurial-directed approach, Mini enterprise, Vocational education.

BACKGROUND

Business Studies was recommended as part of the junior secondary school curriculum in Botswana as early as 1977 and in 1994 the Revised National Policy on Education recommended that Commerce, Bookkeeping /Accounting and Office Procedures be incorporated (Georgescu et al., 2008). Business subjects fall under Creative, Technical and Vocational Subjects within the entire secondary school programme. The subjects are classified as “practical subjects” in the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE). The subjects aim at equipping students with practical business skills which will enable them to participate meaningfully in production in future. As practical subjects they are intended to prepare students for the world of work both as employees and employers. To equip learners with these skills, it is recommended in the business subjects syllabuses that teachers employ learner-centred teaching approaches in which they are facilitators of learning. Teaching methods prescribed include project work, educational visits, use of business resource persons, business simulations, group discussions, case studies and the use of school-based mini enterprises run and operated by students (Republic of Botswana, 2008a; Republic of Botswana, 2008b). Available literature (Fuller & Snyder, 1991; Farstad, 2002; Dube & Moffat, 2009) suggests that teacher-centred pedagogy in which periods of instruction are occupied wholly or mainly with exposition by the teacher is the

dominant mode of instruction in Botswana secondary schools. The organization of classes and teaching are quite rigid and leave little room for practicals, site visits to industry and employment of entrepreneurial pedagogies as prescribed in the business subjects syllabi (Farstad, 2002). Similar findings were made by Dube and Moffat (2009) in their study on Social Studies instruction in Botswana secondary schools. They came to the conclusion that the techniques used by teachers were incompatible with the goal of trying to prepare learners for the world of work. Data they collected showed that the majority of teachers were still yoked to the conventional teaching methods such as lecturing. Using traditional teaching methods to develop practical business skills is inappropriate and can be likened to teaching “to drive a car using the rear mirror” (Gibb, 1993 in Garavan & Cinneide, 1994). The teaching of business skills requires the use of kinaesthetic and experiential pedagogical approaches which encourage learning by doing in real or closely simulated contexts which will lead to the development of key business and life skills (Borrington, 2004).

Business subjects are to be taught using a pedagogical approach which Jamieson (1984) described as “education through enterprise” which involves the use of teaching styles which use entrepreneurial situations such as school-based mini enterprises. The best way of learning business skills is through direct experience and practice and this can be achieved through the establishment of mini enterprises in schools which are run and managed by students themselves. The mini enterprise mode of delivery has the advantages of focusing on the development of basic business skills, business management skills and personal entrepreneurial skills. This approach will enable young people to set up and run a project with a business or community focus. It involves “active learning” on their part which leads to the acquisition of skills which are transferable. Mini enterprise methodology is used fairly extensively in Botswana’s junior secondary Business Studies in which the mini enterprise project constitutes approximately 40% of the total teaching time of the three year course (Lauglo, 2004). According to Swartland (2008) the mini enterprise methodology as employed in Botswana junior secondary school Business Studies involves learners in description and explanation of the economic institutions of recording, processing and storing business information and of studying business management functions.

Resourcing for the delivery of business education should include the provision of computer laboratories. In Botswana ICT is a major focus of the country’s economic agenda and the Revised National Policy on Education (1994) highlighted the need for all learners to be taught computer skills at all levels of school. Botswana has made a tremendous effort to provide resources for its junior secondary schools and this is evidenced by the fact that all junior and senior secondary schools have fully equipped computer laboratories (Isaacs, 2007). ICT has considerable potential in the business classroom (Borrington, 2004) in that it can be used whilst undertaking a variety of classroom activities such as research assignments, key business applications like spreadsheets, databases and presentations, including the use of the Internet as a resource for acquiring knowledge. The Internet opens up vast knowledge sources, is available around the clock and it optimally supports student-centred teaching (Motschinig-Pitrik, 2001).

In light of the above, this study sought to examine the approaches to the teaching of Business Studies in Botswana secondary schools in an attempt to find out if the aims and objectives of curriculum planners were being realized through teachers’ pedagogical practices. Of particular concern were the research questions:

1. What are Business Studies teachers’ perceptions on the vocational relevance of the subject?
2. What are the pedagogical practices of Business Studies teachers in Botswana secondary schools?
3. Do Business Studies teachers employ experiential and entrepreneurial pedagogies as stipulated in the syllabi?
4. Do Business Studies teachers incorporate ICT into their lessons?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from the teachers participating in the study. The sample for the questionnaire survey consisted of 28 junior secondary school Business Studies teachers (T1, T2, T3,... and T28) who were selected from secondary schools which the researcher visited during teaching practice supervision. The teachers were chosen using the guidelines of purposeful sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997) and they were chosen because (1) they taught Business Studies and (2) they agreed to participate in the study. The secondary schools selected were made up of (1) government schools, (2) independent/private schools and (3) schools in both rural and urban settings.

An 11 – item questionnaire adapted from Hemmasi and Graf (2003) was used to collect data from the respondents. It elicited information about their ideas, beliefs and experiences in the teaching of Business Studies with regard to the imparting of entrepreneurial skills, use of entrepreneurial pedagogies including contextualized learning

and adequacy of support systems. These aspects encompass the main ingredients of effective business education teaching (Borrington, 2004; Coucom, 2005). The data collected through questionnaires were complemented with interviews organised with 6 selected teachers in the sample (Ti, Tii, Tiii, Tiv, Tv and Tvi). The interview schedules were designed to cross-check teachers' practices with regard to the pedagogical issues outlined in the questionnaire. The use of triangulation or multiple data collection methods was a way of enhancing the credibility of data collected (Wiersma, 2000).

Limitations of the study

There are limitations inherent in this study. First, the questionnaire response rate of 82% was not anticipated and this resulted in a sample size slightly smaller than initially expected. This might have exposed the study to potential bias from non-response in the event that non-respondents differed significantly from the survey population (Dillman, 2007). Secondly, due to budgetary constraints, only two data collection methods, questionnaires and interviews with 6 teachers, were used and these limited the researcher's capacity to carry out methodological triangulation of the data. Methodological triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two data collection methods in the study of the same phenomenon (Wiersma, 2000). In this study, the credibility of the findings could have been enhanced if interview and questionnaire data were complemented with lesson observations and the analysis of teaching documents such as lesson plans and schemes of work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of teachers

Of the 28 teachers in the sample, 17 (61%) were holders Diploma in Secondary Education (DSE) while 11 (39%) held university degrees. Of the degreed teachers, 3 were holders of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education while 2 studied for Bachelor of Commerce + Education degrees. The remaining 6 (21%) had no teaching qualifications. Diploma holders specialized in Commerce, Accounting and Office Procedures while degree holders specialized in various fields of business education such as Marketing, Accounting, Economics and Business Administration. Teachers' teaching experience ranged from 6 months to 10 years. 20 (71%) of the teachers had teaching experience of 5 years or more. Table 1 below summarises the profile of the participants in this study:

Table 1: Profile of Participants

		N	%
Qualification	DSE	17	61
	Bachelor's degree holders	11	39
	Master's degree holders	2	7
Professionally qualified degree holders	PGDE	3	11
	Bachelors degree + Education	2	7
Area of specialisation	Commerce	18	64
	Accounting	22	79
	Office Procedures	17	61
	Other	4	14
Experience/length of service	Less than 5 years	8	29
	5 years +	20	71

The majority of respondents in the sample were well-experienced teachers and the mean length of teaching service/experience for the sample was 5.3 years. It is assumed that the responses that the teachers gave relating to the pedagogy of Business Studies were a result of their experience(s) in the teaching of the subject.

Teachers' views on the vocational relevance of Business Studies

Business Studies in Botswana schools curriculum is intended to prepare students for the world of work both as employees and employers and this belief was shared by 24 (86%) of the respondents who were of the view that it is vocationally relevant because it leads to learner acquisition of knowledge relevant to the world of work. This belief is captured, for instance, in the following selected statements:

T3: “Business studies does prepare learners for the world of work by imparting entrepreneurial skills, developing Accounting problem-solving skills (sic) and giving them a feel of the world of work”.

T9: “The mini enterprise gives students insights into the working of the world of business”.

T13: “As learners learn Business Studies they bear in mind that there are many careers/job opportunities that they can do, not relying on teaching alone (sic)”.

T23: “Business Studies is a combination of various disciplines including marketing, human resources, finance, economics and general business management, thereby preparing students for careers in any of the fields mentioned above, thus giving them a wider choice to choose from”.

This is significant because teachers play a key role in successful curriculum implementation and their beliefs will have a bearing on their pedagogical practices. Kennedy and Gibson (1992), whilst discussing vocationalisation of curricula in Australian schools, have argued that policy makers in vocational education must not ignore the beliefs, perceptions and concerns of the teachers who are the curriculum implementers.

Pedagogical practices of teachers

Available literature suggests that traditional teacher-centred methods of teaching are prevalent in Botswana secondary schools. Using traditional teaching methods to teach business subjects was discredited as long ago as 1972 when Brendel and Yengel (1972) stated that methods of teaching such as the lecture, question and answer and drill are not conducive to the development of business ideas, concepts, understandings and attitudes because such methods only help students to learn about the theory of business without knowing how to apply that theory (ibid). The National Business Education Association (2004) believes that the most effective instructional strategies for business understanding should include case studies, cooperative and individual research projects, guest speakers, role play, debates, simulations, surveys and critical- thinking exercises for teaching global business concepts. These same teaching methods are the ones prescribed in the Botswana junior secondary Business Studies syllabus. To find if teachers’ pedagogical practices conform to the aspirations of the curriculum planners, respondents were asked to indicate how often they employed instructional strategies suitable for imparting business skills and understanding. Below is a summary of their responses:

Table 2: Pedagogical practices of respondents, N=28

	Most of the time		Sometimes		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Use the lecture and direct instruction as methods of teaching	9	32	17	61	2	7
Use interactive teaching strategies in your class(es), e.g. group work, pair work, team presentations, panels, etc.	18	64	10	36	0	0
Take students on field trips to business organizations	2	7	17	61	9	32
Use assignments requiring students to identify potential business ventures	9	32	16	57	3	11
Require students to develop a business plan for a personal or school-based operation	13	46	13	46	2	7
Use business simulation game(s) in class(es), e.g. experiments, role play.	5	18	22	79	1	4
Assign research projects related to the world of business and economics	4	14	16	57	8	29
Assign case studies that relate to business management and operations	4	14	18	64	6	21
Use materials from local newspapers and periodicals to develop case studies for use in your class(es)	10	36	12	43	6	21

Use business people as guest speakers in class(es)	2	7	7	25	19	68
Use ICT s in your class(es) e.g. internet, spreadsheets, PowerPoint, etc.	6	21	14	50	8	29

Questionnaire responses show that teachers try, to some extent, to employ teaching approaches relevant to business subjects. Teacher-centred methods such as the lecture are prevalent as indicated by 32% and 61% of respondents who use the method “most of the time” and “sometimes” respectively. Although 64% of respondents claimed to use interactive strategies most of the time, responses from all 6 interviewees revealed that the commonest interactive strategy used was group work. Interactive strategies such as simulations, games and case studies are used “most of the time” by only 18% and 14% of respondents respectively. Furthermore 79% of respondents use simulations and games “sometimes”. Responses provided in interviews helped to clarify this. All 6 interviewees said that they use the lecture method most of the time:

Tii: “I use the lecture method 90% of the time. I am not conversant with the other methods.”

Tiii: “I lecture most of the time. It is the best method to teach Commerce”.

Tv: “The syllabus is too long and there is no way I can cover it using group work and other methods”.

Responses from interviews also indicated that action-oriented teaching methods such as case studies, simulations and role play are rarely used in teaching Business Studies:

Ti: “To tell you the truth I have never used simulations. I don’t really understand the method”.

Tii: “Sometimes I use games, for example when I teach production, needs and wants where I make students compete for resources”.

Tiii: “I have never used games or simulations. I sometimes use role play to teach the duties of receptionists in Office Procedures”.

Tvi: “No, I want to cover as much (of the syllabus) as possible. The methods are also difficult to use in my classes where slow learners are mixed with bright pupils”.

The best way of learning business skills is through direct experience and practice, and the use of closely simulated contexts. Teachers could experiment more with simulations and games in their teaching. They constitute a highly versatile and flexible medium whereby an extremely wide range of educational aims and objectives can be achieved, being particularly useful in achieving higher-cognitive objectives of all types, affective objectives and interpersonal objectives (Percival & Ellington, 1980). In Business Studies they can be used for developing a wide range of skills such as problem-solving, improving teamwork, building communication skills, honing negotiation techniques and developing functional/technical skills such as marketing, human resource management and financial management (Doyle & Brown, 2000).

Employment of entrepreneurial pedagogies and use of business community resources

The teaching of business skills requires the use of kinaesthetic (learning by doing) and experiential pedagogical approaches (Borrington, 2004). A teaching approach that is well-suited to the teaching of vocational business subjects is the entrepreneurial-directed approach which involves the use of teaching styles which use entrepreneurial situations such as school-based mini enterprises. 23 (82%) of the respondents said they run mini enterprises in their schools while 5 (18%) indicated that they do not. This is not surprising at all because the mini enterprise constitutes a core part of the three-year junior secondary school course in Government schools while private schools follow the IGCSE curriculum. The types of mini enterprises established in schools mostly involve the retailing of consumables (50%) such as confectionery. Some are involved in micro-production of items such as popcorn, fat cakes, hotdogs, and in one case, basket-weaving. This study did not go as far as assessing the quality of the entrepreneurial activities involved using mini enterprise methodology such as the developing of business ideas and drawing of business plans by students. What was established, however, confirms the findings of Lauglo (2004) that mini enterprise methodology is used extensively in Botswana secondary schools and that, through the use this

approach, students may be able to gain real experience in raising money and planning all the business management functions such as production, marketing, finance and the real business operation.

Teachers' responses also indicate that some teaching strategies that encourage enterprise activities among students such as assigning mini research projects related to the world of business and economics and assigning case studies that relate to business management and operations are never used by a significant number of teachers. Teachers who "never" use and "sometimes" use these approaches are respectively 29% and 21%, and, 57% and 64%. In responding to the item on the frequency with which they assign case studies and/or project-based activities some of the teachers interviewed had this to say:

Ti: "I rarely use case studies. They are time-consuming and it is difficult to come up with cases. Kids (sic) are limited mentally (sic) to work on cases and it takes too long to work on them".

Tii: "They require lots of materials and are time-consuming. We need to cover the syllabus".

Tv: "I sometimes use newspaper articles or magazine stories to come up with case studies but mostly I use the lecture method to cover the syllabus".

It is apparent from both questionnaire and interview responses that local business community resources are grossly underused. For instance 9 (32%) of questionnaire respondents indicated that they never took students on field trips to business organizations, 19 (68%) have never used local business people as guest speakers or resource persons and 6 (21%) never use materials from local newspapers and periodicals to develop case studies for use in their classes. Of the 6 interviewees, 3 once took their class(es) to visit the Post Office, once in each case, and the rest have never used field trips. Constraints to using this approach are mostly to do with organization and funding:

Tiii: "I have never used educational visits. It is difficult to organize such visits"

Tvi: "I have never used them (field trips). Scheduling them is cumbersome...you need to write letters get school permission, get funds, arrange transport..."

The local and national business community should provide the laboratory of business teachers and students. Community institutions, people and business firms are a rich reservoir of instructional materials for business teachers and the more teachers relate what they do in the classroom to the real world, the better for the students. Business Studies is the study of businesses and educational visits are a way of bringing alive the topics taught. A visit to a business firm will enable students to see/watch batch or flow production taking place, stock control, motivation of employees, management styles, quality assurance and control and a host of other things teachers take for granted (Borrington, 2004).

Use of ICT in teaching

Information communication technology (ICT) has immense potential to motivate and engage students in learning. Innovations in technology can be used in enhancing existing teaching and learning tools in the classroom in order to facilitate the development of computer-related competencies in Business Studies (Joshi & Chugh, 2009). Technology allows students to have control over their learning environment and to act as self-directed learners, promoting more active learning. In this study, 21 (75%) indicated that they use ICT in their teaching, 5 said they do not and 2 did not respond to this item. Responses indicate that computers in schools are not enough to go round but teachers do use computers in teaching topics such as computerized accounting, spreadsheets, internet searches and computerized filing (in Office Procedures) as well as PowerPoint. Selected questionnaire responses to this item:

T3: "Yes, I use ICT when teaching database and computerized accounting".

T4: "I sometimes use ICT because it helps learning to take place effectively and efficiently. e.g. a lesson using PowerPoint will be more effective".

T10: "No, we do not have computers in the Business Studies lab".

T17: "Often I make use of the internet to research on certain topics and I do use multimedia to teach topics like breakeven charts".

T25: "Yes, in computerized accounting and filing. It enhances the teaching and learning because students learn by doing and they don't forget easily what they have done".

Despite limitations caused by the inadequacy of computer resources, it is evident that ICT is being used as a tool to aid learning and/or as the major facilitator in the learning process. This was confirmed by all 6 teachers interviewed who explained in detail how they use computers in teaching Accounting and Office Procedures. In this era of rapid advances in information and communication technologies, teaching and learning strategies should move away from procedural tasks and memorising professional standards towards more conceptual and analytical teaching and learning (Ramsden, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Business education curriculum planners in Botswana expect junior secondary school students who go through the three-year junior secondary school Business Studies programme to acquire “practical business and entrepreneurial skills and attitudes to prepare them for self-employment” (Republic of Botswana, 2008). To equip learners with these skills, they recommend that teachers employ learner-centred teaching methods such as project work, educational visits, use of business resource persons, business simulations, group discussions case studies and school-based mini enterprises run and operated by students. The findings of this study suggest that teachers and curriculum planners are not singing from the same hymnbook, thus, the pedagogical practices of Business Studies teachers are at variance with the expectations of the curriculum planners. Teacher-centred pedagogy is the dominant mode of instruction while entrepreneurial pedagogies are used sparingly. Teachers seem to be more concerned with completing the Business Studies syllabus in time for examinations at the expense of imparting business skills and literacy through the use of constructivist pedagogies as prescribed in the syllabi.

Implication for Practice and Research

The findings of this study suggest that the practices of Business Studies teachers do not conform to the expectations of curriculum planners in that teacher-centred and not learner-centred pedagogy appears to be the dominant mode of instruction in schools. If business education curriculum planners want their prescriptions translated successfully into practice, they must factor in support structures to ensure that these prescriptions are fully adopted and implemented. There is need for staff development to assist teachers with the implementation of the business education curriculum through the provision of readily available local, specific workshops and in-service activities designed for the implementers of the business education curriculum (Kennedy & Gibson, 1992). The school inspectorate, the National Business Studies Panel and school administrators should monitor and ensure that the delivery of business education is done according to stipulated curriculum and set standards as well as enforce the fulfillment of pedagogical practices set in the syllabi. If there is discord in a choir, it is the duty of the choirmaster to direct the choristers in a way that ensures that harmony, rhythm and tempo are maintained. In the same vein, if teachers are deviating from prescribed teaching methodologies, it is the responsibility of school administrators and heads of Business Studies departments to ensure that the best standards in the teaching and learning of the subject are complied with.

Due to the limitations of the study cited above, future studies might do well to use multi-method research designs to examine more fully the current practices of Business Studies teachers including their weaknesses with a view to proffering pedagogical models and approaches that would help to maximize learner acquisition of business skills, literacy and competencies. Such studies could also focus on identifying specific intervention strategies that will assist teachers to employ recommended pedagogical practices in Business Studies classrooms.

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