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ADAPTING BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME TO NIGERIAN ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES: STRATEGIES AND INNOVATIONS

Akudolu, Chikerenma Adanma (PhD)
Department of Technology and Vocational Education
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka - Anambra State
ca.akudolu@unizik.edu.ng
&

Uteh Chioma Kate
Department of Office Technology and Management
Abia State Polytechnic, Aba – Abia State
chiomaute@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated innovative strategies implemented in business education programme to adapt to Nigerian economic uncertainties. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted survey research design and 112 business educators in four public tertiary institutions offering business education programme in Anambra State studied without sampling. A-15 item self-developed questionnaire titled "Innovative Strategies Implemented in Business Education Programme to Adapt to Nigerian Economic Uncertainties (ISIBEP-ANEUs) was used for data collection. Face validity of the instrument was determined using three experts in the field of Business Education and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using trial-testing, and data collected were calculated with Cronbach Alpha formula which yielded correlation coefficient of .84. The researcher with the help of two research assistants administered copies of the questionnaires to the respondents. Out of 112 copies distributed, 106(95%) copies were correctly filled and returned which was used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question and determine the homogeneity of the respondents' mean ratings while independent t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that business educators agree that regular updating of curriculum; entrepreneurship training programme, and use of innovative teaching strategies are implemented to adapt business education programme to Nigerian economic uncertainties, while they disagree that business education-industry partnerships, internship and work-study programmes, and guest lectures and seminars from industry experts are implemented to adapt the programme to Nigerian economic uncertainties. It was also found that ownership of institution was not a significant factor on the perception of business educators in this regard. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that there exists a significant discrepancy between the perceptions of business educators and the actual implementation of strategies to adapt business education programme to Nigerian economic uncertainties. The researcher recommended among others that; Heads of department of business education programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions should place greater emphasis on integrating practical experiences such as internships, work-study programmes, and guest lectures into the programme. These opportunities not only provide students with valuable insights into industry practices but also enhance their adaptability and problem-solving skills in dynamic economic environments.

Keywords: *Implementation, Business education programme, Innovative Strategies, Economic Uncertainties.*

Introduction

Economic uncertainty is ubiquitous in both developed and underdeveloped nations influencing decisions made by organizations, governments and individuals. It is a situation in which the future economic climate is difficult to predict. Economic uncertainties are unpredictability in market fluctuations, policy changes and geopolitical tensions, introducing risks that impact economic growth, investment strategies and overall stability (Catalán et al., 2023). In developed countries, the United States of America (USA), China, and Italy have faced experienced economic uncertainties (International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2023). In developing nations, particularly Africa, Kuwonu (2024) noted that countries such as Zimbabwe, Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, South Sudan and Nigeria among others face economic uncertainties due to concerns about debt sustainability, budgetary constraints and climate change.

Nigeria's economic uncertainties are marked by declining oil production, severe inflation, and foreign exchange issues. The high public debt and liquidity problems are complicating economic reforms and financial stability of Nigeria (Adedokun et al., 2022). The Nigerian economy is heavily impacted by the Russia-Ukraine war, exacerbating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and existing structural challenges (Nigeria Economic Summit Group, 2023). Nigeria's heavy reliance on crude oil for fiscal revenues and export earnings has led to macro-economic instability characterized by high inflation, volatile exchange rates, constrained fiscal space, and weak external reserves issues. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been severely impacted by these economic uncertainties, evidenced by underfunding, low-quality educational delivery, stymied research and development (R&D) practices, insecurity and brain drain. Economic challenges have also led to increased tuition fees, making higher education less accessible to citizens (Edinoh et al. 2023). Admittedly, Suleiman (2023) stated that poor funding of education sectors has worsened teaching and learning facilities, as the Nigerian government has not met UNESCO's recommendation of allocating 15-20% of the national budget to education for the past 10 years.

In the face of ongoing Nigeria’s economic uncertainties, business education programme must be responsive and adaptive to ensure quality delivery. Business education is a skill-oriented education programme that equips students with knowledge and skills for gainful employment or self-employment (Alabi, 2022). It is a component of vocational education that trains recipients on requisite skills and competencies for self-reliance (Ugbe & Ogunleye, 2020). Business education is offered in universities and colleges of education with course options in Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Office Technology and Management (OTM), Economics and Marketing/Distributive Education. Mintzberg and Gosling (2022) asserted that skills taught in business education include; critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, adaptability, emotional intelligence, ICT and social skills. Mintzberg and Gosling posited that these skills prepare students not only to handle personal difficulties, but also to contribute positively towards addressing complex global economic uncertainties.

Implementing education business education programme becomes crucial to prepare students effectively for the challenges of a dynamic economic. To fulfill present expectations, business education must be comprehensive, sustainable and ever-advancing. The push for implementing strategies and innovations in business education programme is to produce graduates capable of overcoming economic challenges and make important contributions to a country's growth. Today, business education programme in Nigeria is under growing pressure to implement innovative strategies that give students the tools they need to address today's and tomorrow's economic concerns. A strategy is an overall blueprint to accomplish one or more objectives. Strategies in education as defined by Nickols (2016), is a carefully thought-out plans intended to accomplish teaching and learning goals. Fullan (2017) saw strategies as techniques educators employ to get over barriers to accomplish instructional goals. Key strategies in education as highlighted by Guskey and Yoon (2019) are curriculum, assessment, technology integration, instruction and professional development strategies. Innovative simply means carrying out the same action in a different way. In the context of this study, innovative is the act of employing new strategies with depth and originality to implement quality delivery of business education programme.

Some innovative strategies can be implemented in business education programme to enhance students' adaptability to economic uncertainties could include integrating real-world case studies, simulations, project-based learning and interactive workshops course deliveries. Neck et al. (2019) noted that these strategies enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, resilience and emotional intelligence skills to navigate uncertain economic landscapes. Similarly, Gitman et al. (2015) listed school-industry partnerships, internships and mentorship programmes as innovative strategies that can be implemented to keep students updated on economic trends. In addition, Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) suggested incorporating scenario planning and risk assessment exercises in teaching students how to anticipate and mitigate economic uncertainties. In the same vein, Reimers (2024) advocated for providing robust support for professional development of lecturers. Serdyukov (2017) identified innovative strategies in higher education as adopting new technologies, engaging in international partnerships and exchange programmes, and engaging with community and regional economic initiatives. Ajayi (2020) enumerated internships, use of global case studies, collaboration with international institutions to advance acquisition of emerging employability skills, introducing social entrepreneurship programmes, Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) courses.

The implementation of innovative strategies in business education programme in Nigeria has become challenging due to the continuous change in the economic demands of Nigeria (Rani, 2019). Business education programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions is facing a lot of criticism for its inability to adequately prepare students to face economic challenges (Ojukwu, 2018). Business education courses in many Nigerian tertiary institutions are taught traditionally without the use of innovative strategies (Okeke-Ezeanyanwu & Nweke, 2021). The over reliance on traditional teaching methods is insufficient in equipping students with survival skills. Emeasoba (2017) reported that partnership between business education and industries in Nigeria was very weak while Nungse et al. (2020) regretted lack of industry-business education collaboration to close employable skills gaps. A cursory look at the programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State by the researcher shows that it seems to be lagging behind in this aspect. The lack of implementation of innovative strategies could result to teaching of outdated course contents, excessive focus on theory over practical and student disengagement and passive learning experiences. The programme could also fail to adequately address the skills gap between business education graduates and the demands of modern economy.

Types of institutions could influence business educators' perceptions on innovative strategies implemented in business education programme for adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties. Some universities in Nigeria that offer business education programme could be implementing these innovative strategies when compared to colleges of education. This could be attributed to differences in institutional structure, experience and competency of lecturers employed in the respective institutions, availability and accessibility of modern technologies, leadership styles preventing them from implementing these innovative strategies in programme delivery. Based on this backdrop, the study determined innovative strategies implemented in business education programme for enhancing students' adaptability to economic uncertainties of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's economic concerns, which include rising inflation, variable exchange rates, and a large public debt, pose considerable challenges to the country's business education programme. These challenges jeopardize financial stability; restrict academic financing, and lower quality delivery, making it difficult for business education programme to appropriately prepare graduates for the current economic uncertainties. Despite the importance of business education in enhancing entrepreneurial skills and economic progress, it appears that business education programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions is struggling to update its curriculum and teaching techniques to reflect economic reality. Traditional teaching methodologies are insufficient for providing business education students with the skills needed to deal with modern business challenges driven by economic uncertainties. Furthermore, low budget and resources result in out-of-date materials, insufficient staff professional training, and a lack of access to digital technology, which is exacerbated by a brain drain among skilled business educators. As a result, there is an urgent need to implement strategies and innovations in business education to enhance the programme's adaptation to current economic situations. However, a preliminary assessment by the researcher appears to indicate that the business education programme in Anambra State is not applying many strategies and innovations that can help students prepare to face economic uncertainties However, this has not been empirically proven, perhaps due to a lack of research papers in this area. Addressing this gap in knowledge is critical to ensure that Nigeria's business education programme remains relevant, resilient and capable of producing graduates who can contribute to and flourish in the country's changing economic landscape.

Purpose of the Study

This study therefore specifically asserted innovative strategies implemented in business education programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study;

1. What innovative strategies does business education programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State implement for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties?

Null Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators on innovative strategies implemented in business education programme in tertiary institutions, Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties based on type of institution.

Method

The study adopted survey research design. It was carried out in Anambra State in South East, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 112 business educators in four public tertiary institutions offering business education programme in the state. There are 22 business educators in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam with 7 business educators, Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, Anambra State has 66 business educators and Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State with 17 business educators (Source: Academic Planning Unit of the institutions as at 28th May, 2022). There was no sampling since the population was manageable and accessible. The instrument for data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire titles "Innovative Strategies Implemented in Business Education Programme for Adapting to Nigerian Economic Uncertainties (ISIBEP-ANEU). The questionnaire is in two sections; A and B. Section A contained item on demographic information of the respondents such as type of institution while section B contained 16 items structured on a four-points rating scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly

Disagree. Face validity of the instrument was established using opinions of three experts, two from the field of Business Education and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation all in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using pilot test and data collected were calculated with Cronbach Alpha formula to determine the internal consistency of the instrument which yielded correlation coefficients of.84.

The researcher administered the questionnaire to the respondents in their offices with the help of three research assistants who were adequately briefed on the method of administration and retrieval of the questionnaires. On the spot distribution and collection of questionnaires was employed and those who did not fill their copies immediately were revisited on another agreed date. Out of 112 copies of questionnaire distributed, 105(94%) were correctly filled and returned and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question and determine the homogeneity of the respondents' mean ratings while a t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at a.05 level of significance. In testing the null hypothesis, where p-value is less than.05 (p <.05), the null hypothesis was rejected. Otherwise, the null hypothesis was accepted. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25.0.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation on Innovative Strategies Implemented in Business Education Programme for Enhancing Students' Adaptability to Nigerian Economic Uncertainties

S/N	Items on Implemented Innovative Strategies	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Integration of collaborative and projects-based methods in teaching business education courses	3.24	.65	Agree
2	Use of interactive teaching strategy in teaching business education courses	2.70	.71	Agree
3	Provision of career counseling and job placement services to business education students	1.92	83	Disagree
4	Provision of regular workshops and training sessions for business education students	2.41	.82	Disagree
5	Regular business education curriculum updates to include current economic issues	2.52	.78	Agree
6	Incorporation of experiential learning opportunities such as industrial visits, guest lectures and seminars from industry experts	1.50	.69	Disagree
7	Arrangement of internships and work-study programmes for business education students	2.44	.84	Disagree
8	Provision of entrepreneurship training programmes for business education students to acquired skills for self-reliance	2.50	.75	Agree
9	Inviting industrial experts as guest lecturers to speak at seminars and workshops organized in business education departments	1.93	.88	Disagree
10	Incorporation of AI technologies in teaching business education courses	1.49	.58	Strongly Disagree
11	Use of real-world case studies in teaching business education courses	2.38	.63	Disagree
12	Implementation of online and blended learning models in teaching business education courses	2.54	.75	Agree
13	Engaging in international partnerships and exchange programmes	1.58	.71	Disagree

14	Engaging with community and regional economic initiatives	2.21	.76	Disagree
15	Collaboration with international institutions to advance students' acquisition of emerging employability skills	1.38	.54	Strongly Disagree
16	Provision of regular in-service training programmes for business educators	2.57	.79	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.08**		**Disagree**

Table 1 shows a cluster mean score of 2.08 which indicates that business educators disagree that majority of innovative strategies listed in this study are implemented in the programme to enhance students' adaptability to Nigeria's economic uncertainties. The item by item analysis reveals that business education lecturers agree that innovative strategies in items 1, 2, 5, 8, 12 and 16 are implemented with mean scores ranging from 2.50 to 2.56. Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 are rated disagree with mean scores ranging from 1.50 to 3.24. Meanwhile business educators disagree that innovative strategies listed in items 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 14 are implemented with mean scores ranging from 1.50 to 2.44 while they strongly disagree with the remaining two strategies with mean score of 1.38 and 1.49. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range showing that the respondents are not wide apart in their ratings.

Table 2: Summary of t-test Analysis of Significant Difference in the Mean Ratings of Business Educators on Innovative Strategies Implemented in Business Education Programme for Enhancing Students' Adaptability to Nigerian Economic Uncertainties Based on Type of Institutions

Type of Institution	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Universities	78	2.21	.86	103	2.08	1.10	Not Significant
Colleges of Education	27	1.95	.65				

Table 2 show the mean ratings and standard deviation of business educators in universities as ($\overline{X}$ = 2.21, SD = .86) and those in colleges of education as ($\overline{X}$ = 1.94, SD =.65), with a degree freedom of 103. The t-value of 2.08 has a p-value of 1.10 which is greater than the alpha level of.05 (P = 1.10 >.05). Since the p-value is greater than the significant value, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This means that business educators in universities and those in colleges of education do not significantly differ in their mean ratings on innovative strategies implemented in business education programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed that business educators disagree that majority of the innovative strategies listed in the study are implemented in business education programme in tertiary institutions, Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties. While business educators agree that innovative strategies such as collaborative, projects-based methods, interactive teaching strategy, regular business education curriculum updates, provision of entrepreneurship training programmes and regular in-service training programmes for business educators are implemented in the programme, they however, disagree on other important innovative strategies. Findings of this study agree with the report of Rani (2019) that the implementation of innovative strategies in business education programme in Nigeria to enhance students' acquisition of employability skills was very slow. Rani's report aligns with the earlier observation of Ojukwu (2018) that business education programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions are facing a lot of criticism for its inability to innovate to effectively prepare its students to face economic challenges of the 21st century. Similarly, Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and Nweke (2021) revealed that business education courses in many Nigerian tertiary institutions are taught theoretically without the use of digital technologies. Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and Nweke asserted that the over reliance on theory over practical is insufficient in equipping students with survival skills. Moving further, Emeasoba (2017) found that linkage between business education programme and industries in Nigeria was very weak while Nungse et al. (2020) lamented lack of industry-business education partnerships to close employable skills gaps between its graduates and industries.

Findings of the study revealed that business educators in universities and those in colleges of education do not significantly differ in their mean ratings on innovative strategies implemented in business education programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties. It is possible that business educators in universities and colleges of education in Anambra State have been regularly trained on how to adopt innovative teaching strategies in course delivery. It could also be that business education programme in both institutions adhere to similar curriculum guidelines mandated by accrediting bodies or educational authorities. As a result, regardless of type of institution, there may be consistency in the innovative strategies implemented and those not implemented in business education programme in the Anambra State for enhancing students' adaptability to Nigerian economic uncertainties. Uniformity in curriculum update, in-service professional training programmes and course delivery methods could minimize variations in the perceptions and ratings of business educators across different types of institutions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that**;** business education programme in tertiary institutions in Anambra State are not implementing majority of the innovative strategies that can enable it enhance students' acquisition of survival skills in the face of Nigeria's economic uncertainties.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations;

1. Business educators in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should integrate Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in their instructional delivery. This will enhance the quality of teaching and students' active engagement in classroom processes for optimum skills acquisition.
2. Business education programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions should provide regular career counseling and job placement services to students to enable them make right choices on future careers after graduation. This will help to remove indecision and confusion among the students on business education career paths to enter into after graduation.
3. Business educators in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should integrate industry-relevant case studies in their teaching processes. This will expose business education students on how to handle difficult economic situations and apply what they have learned in the real world.
4. Business education departments in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should strengthen partnerships with industries to gain insights into current and future skill requirements, industry trends, and best practices. This will ensure the relevance and applicability of business education programmes to real-world contexts and employer needs.
5. Head of Department (HODs) of business education programme in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should initiate internship and work-study programmes for students, inviting industry experts as guest speakers during seminars and workshops.

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