APPRAISAL OF CURRICULUM INNOVATIONS FOR ENHANCING TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN BUSINESS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

[1]BISONG JOSHUA AKOUNJOM, [2]EDIAE ROBERT EGHOSA
& [3]EDIAE RAYMOND IKPONMWOSA

Department of Business Education,
Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State.
(bisongjoshua69@gmail.com), (ediaerobert2@gmail.com), (ediae.raymond@gmail.com)

Abstract

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted at the Department of Business Education, Federal College of Education (Technical) Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State. The population of the study was 160 which comprised of all the students in Business Education Department at Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State. The study adopted the census approach of studying the entire population due to the fact that the population is small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire with fifteen (15) items entitled "Appraisal of Curriculum Innovations for Enhancing Tertiary Education Students' Academic Engagement in Business Education in Nigeria" which was designed by the researcher following the satisfaction scale of 3 point Likert scale of (yes, no, not-sure). The study had a reliability coefficient of 0.94. The study revealed that business education students at the Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Ekiadolor have a 60% high and 40% low perception on the integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact on student motivation and engagement in Nigeria. The study recommended that policymakers should develop and enforce policies that promote equitable access to educational resources, including online materials and digital tools, to reduce disparities based on socioeconomic status. Ensure that all students have equal opportunities to benefit from online learning. Introduce and support programmes aimed at improving digital literacy across various socioeconomic groups. This should include training programs and resources to help students build the skills needed to navigate online learning platforms effectively.

Keyword: Appraisal, Curriculum, Innovation, Academic Engagement, Business Education.

Introduction

The landscape of tertiary education, particularly in business education, is undergoing significant transformations, driven by the need to equip students with skills that align with the demands of the 21stcentury workplace. Curriculum innovations, such as Problem-based learning (PBL) and online learning, have emerged as pivotal approaches to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. In Nigeria, these innovations are increasingly being adopted to address the challenges of traditional teaching methods that often result in passive learning and limited critical thinking skills (Oladipo & Adenuga, 2021).

Problem-based learning, which involves students working on real world problems in a collaborative setting, fosters active learning, critical thinking, and problem solving abilities (HmeloSilver, 2004). By placing students at the centre of the learning process, PBL encourages them to take ownership of their learning and apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. This approach has been shown to increase student motivation and engagement, which are critical for academic success in business

education (Savery, 2015).

In addition to PBL, the integration of online learning platforms has become a significant component of curriculum innovation. The flexibility and accessibility of online learning allow students to engage with course materials at their own pace, thereby accommodating diverse learning styles and schedules (Anderson, 2008). In Nigeria, the adoption of online learning has gained momentum, particularly in response to the COVID19 pandemic, which necessitated a shift from traditional classroom settings to virtual learning environments (Nwoke & Okoye, 2020). However, the implementation of online learning in Nigeria faces challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited internet access, and the need for faculty training in digital pedagogy (Babalola & Olagbaju, 2022).

On the other hand, the traditional lecture-based teaching approach often fails to actively engage students, leading to limited development of critical thinking, problem solving, and practical skills necessary for the modern business environment (Oladipo & Adenuga, 2021).

Problem based learning (PBL), which emphasizes student cantered, experiential learning through real world problem solving, has been identified as a promising alternative to traditional methods. However, the adoption of PBL in Nigeria's higher education institutions faces numerous challenges, including resistance to change among educators, insufficient resources, and a lack of structured frameworks for implementation (Savery, 2015). These challenges may impede the effective integration of PBL and diminish its potential impact on enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (HmeloSilver, 2004).

Similarly, the shift towards online learning platforms presents both opportunities and obstacles. While online learning offers flexibility and can cater to diverse learning needs, the effectiveness of this approach is often compromised by issues such as inadequate technological infrastructure, limited internet access, and insufficient training for educators (Anderson, 2008; Babalola & Olagbaju, 2022). These issues can hinder the successful implementation of online learning and its ability to significantly enhance academic engagement among business education students.

While curriculum innovations such as problem based learning (PBL) and online learning are widely acknowledged for their potential to enhance student engagement in business education, there is a significant research gap in their application and impact within the Nigerian higher education context. There is a scarcity of research integrating both PBL and online learning to assess how these innovations can be combined to improve student engagement. Most studies tend to examine these approaches in isolation rather than exploring their potential synergistic effects. This integrated approach is crucial for developing a holistic understanding of how to leverage these innovations together to address the unique needs of Nigerian business education students. Filling these research gaps is essential for creating effective strategies to enhance academic engagement through curriculum innovations in Nigerian higher education.

It is against this backdrop that the study aims to address these problems by evaluating the effectiveness of PBL and online learning innovations in improving student engagement in business education at Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State. Objective of the Study: the general objective of the study was to carry out an Appraisal of Curriculum Innovations for Enhancing Tertiary Education Students' Academic Engagement in Business Education in Nigeria. While the specific objectives were to:

Examine the integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact in student motivation and engagement in Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State,

Ascertain the perceptions of business education students in Nigeria regarding the effectiveness of online learning tools and platforms in facilitating student-cantered learning and engagement,

Identify the socio-economic factors and digital literacy levels among Nigerian business students that influence their readiness and success in engaging with problem-based and online learning approaches,

Research Questions

How does the integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact student motivation and engagement Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State?

What are the perceptions of business education students in Nigeria regarding the effectiveness of online learning tools and platforms in facilitating student-cantered learning and engagement?

How do socio-economic factors and digital literacy levels among Nigerian business students influence their readiness and success in engaging with problem-based and online learning approaches?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted at the Department of Business Education, Federal College of Education (Technical) Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State. The population of the study was 160 which comprised of all the students in Business Education Department at Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State. The study adopted the census approach of studying the entire population due to the fact that the population is small and manageable. A census eliminates sampling error, as every individual is included, ensuring complete and accurate data collection (Yin, 2018). The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire with fifteen (15) items entitled "Appraisal of Curriculum Innovations for Enhancing Tertiary Education Students' Academic Engagement in Business Education in Nigeria" which was designed by the researcher following the satisfaction scale of 3 point Likert scale of (yes, no, not-sure). The study had a reliability coefficient of 0.94. The face and content validity of the research instruments was validated by a measurement and evaluation expert in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, University of Benin, Edo State for cross examination, correction and approval of items as worthy of use. The instrument consists of 160 questionnaires which was used to collect data from 160 respondents. However, 160 copies of questionnaire were successfully filled and returned. A statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data of the descriptive statistics of mean, frequency counts, percentages and standard deviation, and was used to answer the research questions that were formulated in the study.

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

How does the integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact student motivation and engagement in Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State?

Table 1: The integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact on student motivation and engagement in Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Benin, Edo State

S/N	Statements	YES	NO	NOT SURE	$\overline{X}$	Std D	Decision
1	Has problem-based learning (PBL) increased your interest in studying business-related subjects?	134 (83.8)	17 (10.6)	9 (5.6)	1.22	.534	High perception
2	Has problem based learning PBL helped you understand business concepts better than traditional methods?	137 (85.6)	17 (10.6)	6 (3.8)	1.18	.474	High perception
3	Has problem based learning (PBL) improved your critical thinking skills in business education?	146 (91.3)	6 (3.8)	8 (5.0)	1.14	.469	Low perception

4	Do you believe problem based learning PBL has made learning business subjects more enjoyable?	145 (90.6)	7 (4.4)	8 (5.0)	1.14	.474	Low perception
5	Has PBL encouraged you to collaborate more with your classmates?	134 (83.8)	16 (10.0)	10 (6.3)	1.23	.549	High perception
	Weighted average				**1.18**		

Decision Rule: if mean is less to weighted average 1.18 = low perception; equal or above 1.18 = high perception

The data analysis from Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondents perceived highly that problem-based learning (PBL) increased their interest in studying business-related subjects, they also perceived that problem based learning PBL helped them understand business concepts better than traditional methods, they also felt that problem based learning (PBL) encourage them to collaborate more with their classmates. These findings are consistent with the report by Yew and Goh (2016) that students engaged in PBL often find the learning process more relevant and engaging, which in turn increases their motivation and interest in studying business related topics. The real world application of business concepts in PBL scenarios makes the subject matter more appealing to students, HernándezSellés, MuñozCarril, & GonzálezSanmamed, (2019) who found that PBL allows students to explore and apply business theories in practical contexts, leading to a deeper understanding of the material. The hands on, problem solving approach of PBL helps students internalize complex concepts better than passive learning through lectures, and Savery (2015) highlighted that students working in teams to solve business problems develop essential teamwork skills and learn to value diverse perspectives, making collaboration a central part of the learning process.

On the other hand, majority of the respondents had a low perception that Problem-based learning (PBL) improved their critical thinking skills in business education, they also had a low perception that problem based learning (PBL) has made learning business subjects more enjoyable. This is in line with a study by Ertmer and Simons (2006) who noted that while PBL is designed to promote critical thinking, some students may not fully recognize or appreciate these gains, especially if the problems are not challenging enough or if the assessment methods do not adequately measure critical thinking outcomes, and Masek and Yamin (2012) who found that while PBL can be effective, it may not always be enjoyable for all students, particularly those who prefer more structured and straightforward learning methods. The challenges and demands of PBL, such as the need for self-directed learning and group work, can sometimes detract from the enjoyment of the learning experience.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of business education students in Nigeria regarding the effectiveness of online learning tools and platforms in facilitating student-cantered learning and engagement?

Table 2: the perceptions of business education students in Nigeria regarding the effectiveness of online learning tools and platforms in facilitating student-cantered learning and engagement

S/N	Statements	YES	NO	NOT SURE	$(\overline{X})$	Std D	Decision
1	Have online learning tools and platforms enhanced your ability to learn independently?	133 (83.1)	2 (1.3)	25 (15.6)	1.33	.732	High perception

2	Do you find online learning tools and platforms facilitate easier access to study materials?	121 (75.6)	17 (10.6)	22 (13.8)	1.38	.717	High perception
3	Do you think online discussions and forums help in better understanding of business concepts?	137 (85.6)	12 (7.5)	11 (6.9)	1.21	.554	Low perception
4	Has online learning improved your collaboration with peers on group projects?	142 (88.8)	7 (4.4)	11 (6.9)	1.18	.536	Low perception
5	Do you think online learning has made it easier to interact with your instructors for questions and feedback?	131 (81.9)	18 (11.3)	11 (6.9)	1.25	.572	Low perception
	Weighted average			**1.27**			

Decision Rule: if mean is less to weighted average 1.27 = low perception; equal or above 1.27 = high perception

The data analysis from Table 2 above shows that majority of the respondents highly perceived that online learning tools and platforms enhanced their ability to learn independently, they also perceived that online learning tools and platforms facilitate easier access to study materials. These findings are consistent with the report by Broadbent and Poon (2015) who found that the flexibility and self-paced nature of online learning empower students to take control of their learning process, leading to increased self-regulation and independence, and also Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones (2013) who reported that students appreciate the convenience of having digital resources available at any time, which allows for more efficient study practices and easier retrieval of course content.

On the other hand, majority of the respondents had a low perception that online discussions and forums help in better understanding of business concepts, they also had a low perception that online learning improved your collaboration with peers on group projects, they also have a low perception that online learning has made it easier to interact with your instructors for questions and feedback. This is in line with a study by Hrastinski (2008) who noted that while online discussions can facilitate knowledge sharing, they may not always lead to a deeper understanding, particularly if the discussions are not well moderated or if students do not actively participate, McConnell (2018) also found out that the lack of face to face interaction and the challenges of coordinating online group work can lead to feelings of isolation and reduced teamwork effectiveness in online settings, and also Jaggars and Xu (2016) found that students often perceive a lack of immediate feedback and personal connection in online courses, which can make it difficult to engage with instructors and seek clarification or guidance.

Research Question 3: How do socio-economic factors and digital literacy levels among Nigerian business students influence their readiness and success in engaging with problem-based and online learning approaches?

Table 3: how socio-economic factors and digital literacy levels among Nigerian business students influence their readiness and success in engaging with problem-based and online learning approaches

S/N	Statements	YES	NO	NOT SURE	$\overline{(X)}$	Std D	Decision
1	Have online learning tools and platforms enhanced your ability to learn independently?	133 (83.1)	2 (1.3)	25 (15.6)	1.33	.732	High perception

2	Do you find online learning tools and platforms facilitate easier access to study materials?	121 (75.6)	17 (10.6)	22 (13.8)	1.38	.717	High perception
3	Do you think online discussions and forums help in better understanding of business concepts?	137 (85.6)	12 (7.5)	11 (6.9)	1.21	.554	Low perception
4	Has online learning improved your collaboration with peers on group projects?	142 (88.8)	7 (4.4)	11 (6.9)	1.18	.536	Low perception
5	Do you think online learning has made it easier to interact with your instructors for questions and feedback?	131 (81.9)	18 (11.3)	11 (6.9)	1.25	.572	Low perception
	Weighted average			**1.27**			

Decision Rule: if mean is less to weighted average 1.27 = low perception; equal or above 1.27 = high perception

The data analysis from Table 3 above shows that majority of the respondents highly perceived that access to reliable internet affect their ability to engage effectively in online learning, they also perceived that socio-economic status influences their participation in group activities that are part of problem-based learning. These findings are consistent with the report by Holloway, Green, & Livingstone (2012) who found that students with consistent and high quality internet access are better able to participate in online courses and engage with course materials compared to those with intermittent or poor internet connections, and Rienties, Brouwer, & Siebörger (2012) who reported that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may perceive group work differently, often due to varying levels of access to resources and support systems.

On the other hand, majority of the respondents had a low perception that their socio-economic background influenced their access to digital devices required for online learning, they also had low perception that students from more affluent backgrounds have an advantage in accessing online resources compared to others, they also had a low perception that their digital literacy level impacted their ability to navigate and use online learning platforms effectively. This is in line with a study by Hargittai (2010) who found that while socioeconomic status can influence access to technology, many students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds still manage to obtain necessary devices through various support mechanisms, Selwyn (2016) who highlighted that while affluent students may have more resources, efforts to provide equal access to online materials often help mitigate these disparities, and also Van Deursen & Van Dijk (2014) who reported that while digital literacy is important, the impact of digital literacy on navigating learning platforms varies, and many students feel they can manage the platforms despite varying levels of digital skills.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study in table 1, 2 and 3 the study concludes that business education students at the Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Ekiadolor had a 60% high and 40% low perception on the integration of problem-based learning (PBL) in business education curricula impact on student motivation and engagement in Nigeria. The study also confirms that business education students at the Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Ekiadolor have a 60% low and 40% high perception in Nigeria regarding the effectiveness of online learning tools and platforms in facilitating student-cantered learning and engagement. The study revealed that socio-economic

factors and digital literacy levels among Nigerian business education students at Federal College of Education Technical Ekiadolor, Ekiadolor had a 60% low and 40% high influence on student's readiness and success in engaging with problem-based and online learning approaches. Future research should be carried out on a comparative analysis of curriculum innovation implementation and academic achievement of students and its application across various educational settings and disciplines.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

Federal Government of Nigeria should invest in expanding and improving internet infrastructure to ensure that all students have reliable access to online learning platforms. This includes supporting initiatives to increase broadband coverage in underserved and rural areas.

The Federal Government of Nigeria should implement policies that provide financial support or subsidies for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to acquire necessary digital devices, such as laptops or tablets, to participate effectively in online learning.

Policymakers should develop and enforce policies that promote equitable access to educational resources, including online materials and digital tools, to reduce disparities based on socioeconomic status. Ensure that all students have equal opportunities to benefit from online learning. Introduce and support programmes aimed at improving digital literacy across various socioeconomic groups. This should include training programs and resources to help students build the skills needed to navigate online learning platforms effectively.

School Administrators should provide resources and support for students who may struggle with internet access or digital devices. This could include loan programmes for devices and access to local WiFi hotspots.

School Administrators should foster a supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Create initiatives that promote collaboration and support among students to mitigate any perceived disadvantages related to socioeconomic status. Implement regular assessments of students' digital literacy and offer targeted support to help those who may have difficulties with online learning platforms. Ensure that teachers are equipped to assist students in developing their digital skills.

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