

## BUSINESS EDUCATION AND THE QUESTION OF RESPONSIVENESS

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### ABSTRACT

*Business education is regarded to be useful in ensuring business success. However, it has been discovered that business education is not necessarily making organisations achieve their objectives. As the business environment is constantly changing, there is a need to have systems that will be capable of responding to market changes in order to achieve overall business goals. . Responsiveness may be a useful tool in solving the issues plaguing business education. Therefore, this study assessed whether business education being responsive will help push for higher organisational success. Responsiveness has always been studied using cultural responsiveness, economic responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness. This study thus examined how these dimensions of responsiveness may be used to solve the issues with business education and hence solve organisational problems. The study concluded that all the four dimensions of responsiveness are important to solve the challenges of business education and therefore ensure organisational success. This study therefore recommends that to address the challenges facing business organisations, it is important to solve the problem from the root by making business education responsive along economic, cultural, disciplinary and pedagogical lines.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Business education, economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness & learning responsiveness*

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### INTRODUCTION

Business education is important for the equipping individuals to achieve business success. Business education teaches students about key principles in business (Falae, 2018). It is a composite of many disciplines which covers areas like business management, business law, entrepreneurship, and economics. Manifestations of business education can be seen all over the school structure from secondary education doctorate. Amongst the numerous rational for business education, is the drive to aid business students or future entrepreneurs gain worthwhile knowledge on the workings of a business and help them develop skills which can help them function better in the business world. All human beings are involve in business whether directly or indirectly and there is the need to understand the intricacies of the business world which can be successfully be learnt through business education. Successful individuals in the business environment usually have a mix of education and experience relating to business concepts and principles (Scott, 2014). Such education and experience might not necessarily be from the four walls of the educational institution, it might have been passed across by superiors, parent's, friends or even from the environment where such person grew up. Business education involves teaching and grooming students on the rudiments of business and how to apply what they have been taught in real life situations. Business education programmes in most cases equip students with fundamental knowledge for those who may wish in the future to fully engage in business. It is important for an organisation to have employees who have some understanding of the business world and particularly so because a highly educated workforce in business education would create a

competitive advantage the organisation, help in the development and implementation of creative and innovative ideas, as well as ensure proper management of the business. To Mack (2015), business education makes employees communicate better with customers and co-employees, achieve higher sales and higher success rate, and help organisations have better financial management. Falae (2018) argued that business education help individuals have needed theoretical base, avoid making too many mistakes and help employees operate seamlessly in the modern business world. This typifies the importance knowledge and skills develop through business education has on the conduct of businesses as its influences on the success of the organisation.

Despite the opportunities and skills made available through business education to help organisations function efficiently, it has been documented in the literature that organisations still face quite a number of challenges. The Lean Method Group (2015) in the result of their interview analysis outlined that businesses globally a facing a number of challenges. Egbule (2016) corroborated this by arguing that most business face a lot of challenges and these challenges have greatly impacted the way such business operate. Falae (2018) added that when business experts are not properly trained, the company is bound to experience challenges. This raises several questions about the quality of business education and its level of responsiveness.

Moll (2004) explained that responsiveness is the ability of business education taught in schools to address student needs, organisational needs, as well as societal needs. Business education is supposed to be responsive so students', organisational and societal needs are constantly met. Since the business landscape is constantly evolving, ensuring that business education remains responsive is a critical approach to ensuring that it remains relevant and achieve its objects both in the lives of the student, the organisation the find themselves in or the society in which they live. It is therefore important that business education is continually responsive to the changing business environment. Fomunyan and Teferra (2017) argues that responsiveness can be understood from four different perspectives; economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness. Business education being economically responsive will produce students that responds swiftly to organisational and economic challenges by being creative and inventive. On the other hand, business education will be culturally responsive when students and employees alike embrace diversity in the culture of people and deal with diversity efficiently. Disciplinary responsiveness is the ability of business education to continually develop with the recent happenings in the business world and finally, learning responsiveness is understanding the individual needs of students and tailoring each lesson to meet students' individual needs (Molly, 2004; Fomunyan & Teferra 2017). Thus, blending the four dimensions of responsiveness into business education may be important in solving the problems plaguing business education and as well as ensuing that those faced by organisations nationally and or globally can be solved in the near future also solve the challenges faced by organisations globally.

Therefore, this paper will therefore theorise the challenges of business education while exposing the problems faced by businesses globally. It will also explore how business education can be used as a tool in solving the challenges faced by organisations globally. Lastly, the paper articulates how responsiveness in business education can be used as a pathway for business excellence.

### **Business Education and the Business Landscape**

Business education has been defined by a number of authors. Schell (2014) sees business education as a program which involves training students in topics relevant to the business world such as accounting and marketing. To Schell, business education involves training students in the softer skills such as leadership. These skills become useful to students when

they become employees. Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Edeh, (2015) adding to this argue that business education refers to a programme of instruction that offers different skills along the various disciplines which include accounting, marketing, office technology and management. Idialu (2007) further explained business education as a form of education that is directed towards developing the learner to become productive and skilled employees. This makes business education the centre of the business world. Ubulom (2012) offers an alternative view of business education seeing it as an educational programme offered at the higher institution of learning which prepares students for careers in business. From these perspectives it is clear that business education gears towards empowering students to either become entrepreneurs or make a useful contribution in the business world whether directly or indirectly. The imperative of business education is to equip learners with skills that will make them better employees after leaving their educational institutions and transiting into the world of work. Njoku (2006) defined business education as an educational programme that equips people with the necessary functional skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that will ensure that they thrive in any environment they themselves. By these definitions, it is important to note that business education is not static, and it is subject to changes in time, environment, discipline etc. The success and survival of businesses will therefore depend on its ability to adapt to these changes and meet up with the demands of the recipients of the business. It is therefore essential for business education to be responsive to meet up with the various demands of the recipients of the business and to achieve preconceived goals and objectives.

Lean Method Group (2015) in the findings of their study pointed out that amongst the challenges faced by business globally, uncertainty is at the top of the list. Uncertainty in the global economy, uncertainty in the credit markets, uncertainty in how new regulations will affect businesses, uncertainty about what competitors are doing, and uncertainty about how new technology will affect the business are amongst several difficult questions business owners and practitioners globally have to answer. Furthermore, 7 out of the 10 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) they interviewed pointed out that globalisation is also a major challenge facing businesses today. The CEOs revealed that the incredible degree of government intervention in nearly all major economies of the world is leading to much greater uncertainty in the world. Other challenges facing businesses today are innovation, government policy and regulations, technology, diversity, complexity, information overload, supply chains and strategic thinking and problem solving (Egbule, 2016; Oteh, 2009).

Oteh (2009) and Egbule (2016) further argue that the lack of an enabling environment and infrastructure, poor power supply, poor transport network, poor access to funds and inadequate government support are all challenges facing several businesses especially those in Africa and Asia. This is confirmed by Obisi and Gbadamosi (2016) who argue that most or some business environments in Africa are insecure and act as a repellent to new foreign investors and even those that have already invested in such insecure and volatile environments are moving their investments to other more secured and more stable environments. This means insecurity is another major challenge faced by businesses recently. Ease of doing business is another factor that seriously affect the operations of businesses in any given country. It is easier to do business in some countries than in others. For example, it is easier to do business in South Africa and Kenya than to do business in Nigeria, because of their relaxed taxes and government policies (Okeke & Eme, 2014). Hence, it will be more profitable for investors to take their investments to South Africa and Kenya than to invest in Nigeria. It is clearly seen that businesses still face lot of challenges as outlined by aforementioned authors. These challenges always impede businesses from carrying out their day-to-day operations. How then can these challenges be mitigated to ensure business efficiency?

Business education may be used as a tool to solve the challenges faced by businesses globally. Adeleke (2015)

opined that business education can be a solution to the contemporary issues facing businesses globally. Business education as a programme if well-structured and packaged can contribute positively towards easing the challenges faced by businesses. It is therefore safe to say that business education if responsive, well-packaged and well-taught will help employees and organisations as a whole in coping and dealing successfully with issues/challenges they are facing in the environment they operate in. Robinson (2002) argued that there is a correlation between business education and organisational problem solving. The only challenge at this point is the lack of responsiveness in business education taught in most countries. Most business studies programs have outdated curricula, lecturers and tutors are not qualified or lack business experience to impart worthwhile knowledge (Edokpolor & Egbri, 2017). Edokpolor and Owenvbiugie (2017) continue that business education is not impacting as it should be because in most countries there are no wide-range of modern infrastructure and facilities, such as the state-of-the-art lecture halls, workshops, studios, libraries, entrepreneurial research centres, and Information Technology (IT) services. Business education is taken with levity (Oladunjoye, 2016) and may be impeding business and national development (Edokpolor & Owenvbiugie, 2017). There are also new approaches to business which might not have been incorporated into the curriculum taught in schools. There is therefore a need to ensure that the curriculum in business education is responsive. From the above, it can be deduced that how responsive or unresponsive business education received by students is determine how effective they would be in the world of work.

Responsiveness may be a useful tool in solving a number of these challenges faced by business both in the now and in the future. This is so because the students of today would be the business leaders and law makers of tomorrow. Ensuring that the businesses education being offered today is responsive, is ensuring that these students work to mitigate the challenges facing businesses (Arlen, 2014). Therefore, to be responsive means to be produce the desired results on a variety of fronts. Business education need to be responsive to deal with the current problems faced by organisations. Solving the problem of poorly structured businesses through responsiveness may ultimately make it easier for organisations to successfully withstand challenges they face as they will be better equipped for such challenges. Each of these variables will be reviewed individually, explaining how they may be used to solve problems in business education and challenges faced by organisations globally.

### **Economic Responsiveness**

Economic responsiveness deals with the ability of business education to train skilled professionals in different sectors of the economy (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). Fomunyan and Teferra (2017) argued that being economically responsive will make students not just receive degrees but will make them to be very skilled and ready for jobs in the real world. Economic responsiveness will make students develop swift solutions in the workplace. Economic responsive in business education will produce students that responds swiftly to economic challenges by being creative and inventive. This will make them good recipients of the degrees they are conferred with and from the gown to the crown, their expertise will be useful to better lives in the society. Boughey (2009) adds that economic responsiveness is premised on the ability of the curriculum to train skilled professionals in the different sectors of the economy. It is a wakeup call to attend to professionalize business education and to do this, the skill banks of individuals are enriched to meet up with personal and societal goals. For business education to be responsive economically, graduates of business education should be able to solve organisational problems, as well as contribute to the general growth of the economy they operate in. To corroborate, Nthabiseng, Heather and Martin (n.d.) asserted that economic responsive in business education will enable students make organisations achieve

higher competitive advantage and achieve general societal economic growth. More specifically, business education that is economically responsive will meet the specific needs of the economy. The essence of education should be to make positive changes in the individual and the society and this can be possible when issues of responsiveness are addressed.

With the many challenges faced by businesses today, business education may not have been economically responsive. As highlighted earlier, most organisations are not achieving their stated objectives, businesses are folding up, businesses are being merged and acquired and small businesses are folding up. There still abound societal problems that should ordinarily be solved by business education graduates. Therefore, economic responsiveness may be used as a tool to solve the problems in business education and challenges that face businesses in recent times.

### **Cultural Responsiveness**

Cultural responsiveness is the ability of business education to teach students how to positively accept and respond to cultural dissonance at workplace (Moll, 2004). Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that cultural responsiveness recognizes the importance of including students' cultural preferences in all aspects of learning. Therefore, cultural responsiveness means putting into consideration the diversity of students and employees. In organizations, there exists people from different background and cultural heritage and they tend to perpetuate this in their engagement with others. These cultural differences may be in form of ethnicity and race (Fomunyam & Teferra, 2017). Gay (2010) observed that where business education is culturally responsive, employees will have detailed knowledge that there are always different groups within the workplace, and how to deal successfully with these cultural differences at the workplace. Culturally responsive in business education will equip employees to learn about the cultural differences at the workplace and enable employees to recognize the importance of employees' cultural backgrounds and experiences. Villegas and Lucas (2007) confirm this by arguing that culturally responsive in business education will inculcate into students the habit of embracing a wealth of diversity and cultural strengths, which helps in achieving organisational objectives. Business education being responsive culturally will teach students how well to manage diversity in the workplace. Researchers mostly concluded that diversity is to be encouraged in the workplace, as it has enormous benefits. Shemla (2010) added that diversity in the workplace gives organisations access to a greater range of talent, not just the talent that belongs to a particular ethnicity. Diversity in the workplace helps to provide insight into the needs and motivations of all customer base, rather than just a small part of it. Cultural responsive in business education would give students the opportunity of drawing from their experiences and working in their organisations to produce solutions to the challenges around them. Since no business operates in a vacuum, taking the cultural underpinnings of both the people and the environment in which the business functions into consideration would ensure that not only the education is responsive, but the business remain relevant and effective or productive. This would also ensure that employees that do not have grounded knowledge of how to cope in a diverse organisational setting may find it difficult to operate efficiently, hence affecting overall organisational productivity and efficiency. This is why making business education culturally responsive is paramount in the drive to build functional teams who would work together to solve the challenges experienced by the organisation. Where employees are comfortable working with other employees from different backgrounds or religious settings, such organisations will be able to comfortably put together a diverse group that will provide solutions to problems from different perspectives, hence, helping organisations achieve their objectives.

### **Disciplinary Responsiveness**

Disciplinary responsiveness is the ability of business education to be up to date with current research in the field as well as

promoting new discoveries within the discipline (Ferdinand, 2009). Organisations face new challenges always, and therefore, it is important that business education be structured in such a way that students will be able to cope with whatsoever new challenges they face in the world of work as they graduate. Fomunyan and Teferra (2017) argued that for business education to be disciplinary responsive, it has to be up to date in relation to research in the field, and also be structured in ways that are applicable to everyday life especially since knowledge is largely for application. For business education to be disciplinary responsive, its curriculum must cover recent happenings in the business world, and also encourage students to think globally to ensure organisational success. This can be made possible by encouraging research along that dimension. Disciplinary responsiveness in business education would also be about considering or taking into consideration global paradigms in teaching and learning and keeping students abreast with international practices on the subject matter (Moja, 2004). Organisations are bound to be faced with new challenges as time goes by, it is therefore important that business education be disciplinary responsive by inculcating findings of new researches into lessons given to students. This will brace up students to be capable of facing whatever new challenges they may face at their workplace, as they apply the same approaches and procedures, they were taught to develop new solutions to these problems.

### **Pedagogical or Learning Responsiveness**

Finally, pedagogical or learning responsiveness is the ability of business education to respond to the individual needs of students. Fomunyan and Teferra (2017) opined that in every classroom, there are always different students with different needs and abilities as far as teaching and learning is concerned. Therefore, business education is supposed to be structured in such a way that it will respond to the needs of individual learners. Without this, learning might not take place. To ensure students learn as they should, business education should be responsive to the individual needs of learners. This will make students co-constructors in the knowledge construction process and give them the opportunity to express themselves, their challenges and find solutions to them. Making business education responsive to individual students' need will ensure that students are open-minded in the knowledge construction process and give them the opportunity to articulate their needs and work with the lecturer to see these needs actualise or met (Ferdinand, 2009). Pedagogical responsiveness sees each student as a target group with specific knowledge to be co-constructed with to them (Ogude et al, 2005).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Business education is still the basis of human resource development which ensures that the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude pivotal for thriving in the workplace is provided. The kind of skills possess by graduate would determine how they shape the future of work and which direction the global economy will take. The four dimensions of responsiveness if put into consideration will improve the quality of graduates of business education and ensure that they become responsive in line with their education. As businesses in the world market are undergoing constant and dynamic increase, it is important to have responsive systems that are capable of responding to market changes in an attempt to meet the requirements of the market and other business competitors. For business education to achieve its major objectives, it must be responsive economically, culturally, disciplinary and pedagogically. It is important for business education to be economically responsive as it will empower both students and the society and which they are to function to be more effective. Cultural responsiveness is also vital, as it will help employees embrace diversity at the workplace and also teach employees how to manage diversity. Disciplinary responsiveness will see business education inculcate new developments at the workplace, equipping employees' skills on how to deal with these new developments. Finally, learning responsiveness is also vital as classes will be tailored toward the needs of the students and this will make students more involved in the teaching and



learning process.

From this perspective, this paper makes the following recommendations. Firstly, the nature, structure and curriculum of business education needs to be restructured to ensure responsiveness at all levels. Secondly, business education should priorities educational experiences that gives student firsthand knowledge of what happens in the workplace and how to navigate their way in such an environment. Thirdly, the challenges business organizations are facing must be explored at multi-level; the training of current and future employers to develop specific skills needed by the business as well as the structuring of business education in ways that can empower students to void such challenges in their organizations. Lastly, the four dimensions of responsiveness (i.e. economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness) are very important in solving challenges related to business education, organisational challenges and societal problems. As such, all measures must be taken to ensure that responsiveness is achieved at all levels.

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