

## REBRANDING BUSINESS EDUCATION IN AFRICA FOR RESPONSIVENESS

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### ABSTRACT

*Before business education was introduced, students were leaving school without essential business skills and knowledge needed to be prepared for a career, and to function as informed, intelligent, and productive consumers and citizens. Business education was introduced to equip students to be successful organisational employees. However, in Africa, business education is regarded not by achieving its major objectives of why it was introduced into secondary schools and universities. Curriculum responsiveness in the literature is regarded to be very important if business education in Africa is to thrive. Therefore, this paper set out to assess how business education in Africa can be rebranded to achieve curriculum responsiveness. Curriculum responsiveness is mostly measured using economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness. The paper therefore recommends that business education curriculum consider the four dimensions of responsiveness be used to rebrand business education if business on the continent are going to thrive. By ensuring curriculum responsiveness the sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Africa would be guaranteed as they contribute to national development.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Business education, curriculum responsiveness, rebranding, Africa & students*

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### INTRODUCTION

Until recently, business education was not taken seriously by researchers, governments and private agencies. It was considered to be a combination of disciplines dealing mainly with the art of shorthand writing, typewriting, accounting, business mathematics, secretarial duties, economics, commerce and office practice (Olabisi, 2017). Business education as we know it today was introduced to teach students and employees how best to operate in the work environment. Before business education was introduced, students were leaving school without essential business skills and knowledge needed to be prepared for a career, and to function as informed, intelligent, and productive consumers and citizens. More specifically, business education was introduced in Africa just as in other parts of the world to equip students and employees alike to know the best practices at work, to reduce unemployment and to boost national development (Vanevenhoven, 2013). This typifies the multi-dimensional importance of business education right from the academic institution to the society at large. Students of business education learn how to research information using quantitative skills, and then develop ideas based on that information to solve problems. Business education equips students with numeracy skills necessary for business practice and for making informed decision. The business world is one faced with series of challenges ranging from ensuring that business thrive even in the face of declining economy, customer satisfaction, imbalances in demand and supply etc. Business school or business education graduates need to be well equipped with skill sets that enable them to apply their commercial knowledge in organisations to achieve profit maximisation (Burgh-Woodman & Saha, 2014). Mavromichalis (2017) opined that business education is key to business success and how skilful or knowledgeable employees are when it comes to the operationality of business the more profitable

such the organisations they find themselves in will become more profitable. Vitez (2014) argued that a highly educated workforce would create a competitive advantage for organisations in the business environment. Despite the importance of business education, Milon and Chowdhury (2017) reported that business education is growing rapidly without achieving the required mark for imparting quality education among graduate and post-graduate students. This means there is increase in the number of graduates of business education but no corresponding positive effects on the organisations that recruits these graduates. The reasons for these are varied and some of these factors include poorly formulated business education curriculum, unqualified teachers, poor funding and poor facilities (Edokpolor & Egbri, 2017). Some of the curriculum generally in Africa are not tailored to solve the current challenges and they are still taught to students. Times are changing, so also is the need to ensure that the curriculum changes to meet up with current realities. Moll (2004) outlined that business education has mostly graduated students with inappropriate attitudes, students that lack employability skills, and students who have spent hours studying outdated contents. These are all consequences of poor curriculum, unqualified teachers, poor funding and poor facilities in Africa. This has resulted to various consequences on the general productive capacity of the region. As graduates without the requisite skillset needed to face the challenges of life are released into the labour market.

Curriculum responsiveness may be the only realistic way to ensure business education is equipping students to be better employees that contributes to the greater good of the organisations they work for and the society at large. A curriculum that is responsive addresses the changing needs of students, organisations and society at large, also continually bridging the gap between theory and practice (Ameyaw, Turnhout, Arts & Wals, 2017). For business education to achieve its objectives, it is necessary that some form of rebranding be done so as to ensure stakeholders are always responsive to business education. Therefore, this paper will assess how rebranding can help business education in Africa achieve curriculum responsiveness using the four dimensions of responsiveness. These dimensions include economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness. However, before looking at this, it is vital to have an overview of business education.

### **Overview of Business Education**

The first institutions of business education were founded in the 17th century in Plymouth (European higher education) where students were taught bookkeeping and business correspondence administration. The first element of business education started in Germany in 1727, Sweden 1750, Russia 1804, France 1819, Austria and Hungary 1856, Italy 1868 (spender, 2016). The trend was seen in Europe in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of changes in the European society termed industrial revolution. The industrial revolution led to increase qualification of low and middle management associated with trade industry and banking (Reinisch & Frommberger, 2004). Modern trends in business education and management science was shaped in the 19th century when pioneers in the field such as Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania and Haas School of Business at University of California, Berkeley, Harvard Business school in 1919 and by 1925, around 40 schools were in existence. This has changed over time as various courses such as human resources, management, economics, management of non-profit, preparation for entrepreneurship (Walter, *et al*, 2016) and other advanced courses are infused into it. According to Ajisafe, Bolarinwa & Edeh (2015) business education was defined as a programme of instruction that helps in developing skills in accounting, marketing and office technology management. Some of the topics covered include office practice, bookkeeping, business mathematics, business communication, secretarial duties, word processing and advertising. Hell (2012) adds that business education generally

refers to the variety of courses designed to provide students with the skills needed for success in business, especially those related to launching and running businesses. Similarly, Anyaduba (1986) opined that business education is concerned with the education of individuals for business and about business. From this definition, it is clear that business education should be for all students irrespective of their career ambitions. This is the case mostly in all higher institutions recently, as mostly all university students irrespective of their course of study are expected to take at least a course in business. This will ensure that they have the needed knowledge necessary for venturing into business and it also encourages independence and self-confidence.

Business education is seen by some authors to be a form of education that grooms and produce only quality employees and nothing more. However, Ubulom (2012) argued that in the real sense, business education does more than just grooming better employees. The American Vocational Association (1980) explained that business education is a broad comprehensive discipline that teaches how to effectively manage their personal business, economic system, knowledge and skills needed for entry level of employment and advancement in a broad range of business careers. As such, business education not only build better employees, but also teaches citizens how to manage and sustain their personal businesses. Osuala (2004) was of the opinion that business education is a vast area of knowledge that has ties with a nation's economic system. Amoor (2010) argued that business education gears towards developing the student to become productive in three dimensions which are learning, paid employment and self-employment. This showcases the importance of business education in developing sustainable livelihood skills in people be it in paid employment or through entrepreneurship.

Amoor and Udoh (2008) asserted that business education plays a significant role in organisational development by producing employees that can adequately impart knowledge, solve organisational problems, take complex and swift decisions and handle sophisticated information systems. The major goal of business education is to contribute to organization goals and having adequate knowledge of business education will ensure that the skill set necessary for making sound decisions that will impact the organization positively are made. Odunnaike and Amoda (2008) argued that the major goal of business education is to primarily produce competent, skilful and dynamic employees for the use of organisations to achieve profit maximization goal. Business education is important as it develops human capital competencies, which in the end will be beneficial to organisations (Panasenкова & Przhedetskaya, 2014). Business survival and sustainability is one of the major goals of entrepreneurs and each strives to achieve this using minimal resources and maximising profit. To Gana (2001), when a business stops production or functioning, it is termed business failure. With the knowledge of business education, various strategies will be put in place in anticipation of possible failures as well as plans to minimize damage even if it eventually occurs. A major part of this is insurance which seeks to protect business from all forms of risks.

One of the major reasons for business education is to ensure organisations achieve their goals more consistently and in a more systematic way. Business education provides employees with significant benefits, managerial credibility, certified skills, employment and earning power (Hell, 2012). Organisations with more skilled employees are likely to function more seamlessly, efficiently and systematically, than organisations with less skilled employees. Business education ensures employees and business owners are equipped with necessary skills and competencies to be successful in business. Some of the skills and competencies enjoyed by business education students and graduates include communication skills, information and communication technology skills, research and analytical skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, organisation and time management skills and self-management. Edokpolor and Egbiri (2017)

opined that the goal of business education is to prepare students for specific careers in office occupations, saddle them with the requisite skills needed for job creation and entrepreneurship and to expose them to have knowledge about the business and also incorporating computer technology, information and communication technology. This is needful more in developing countries as there are serious issues of unemployment and underemployment among the populace. Business education can help in identifying viable business opportunities in the society. As a result of the knowledge of business education, people will be more expose to opportunities around them they can leverage on for businesses and by their education, they will be able to evaluate the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOTs) of the business. It is important to bear in mind that opportunities are everywhere and anywhere people are, there is an opportunity for business. There is a need for business education so as to help improve financial prudence in people. With accounting education under business education, people will learn how to manage their finances properly and make decisions that are worthwhile economically. According to Adamu (2009) the inability of small and medium scale entrepreneurs to properly manage their finances is a major drawback for SME growth.

Despite the numerous business schools and universities offering numerous degrees in business education, the business landscape in Africa is yet to feel the impact of the same (Swanepoel, Strydom & Nieuwenhuizen, 2010). Swanepoel et al (2010) continue that more than eighty percent of start-ups in Africa fail within the first three years. Yang (2016) concurred with this and added that business education has failed to produce the designed results in the African business landscape. Several researchers (Boateng, Boateng & Bampoe, 2014; Mkala & Wanjau, 2013; Mehari & Belay, 2017; Larsen & Nagel, 2013; Sabokwigina & Olomi, 2010; Ruiz-Navarro, Lopez, Sanchez & Nechar, 2017; Adi, 2017) have pointed the failure of business education to produce the desired result on the continent. The fundamental question therefore remains how to wee make business education responsive on the African continent? A number of challenges have been raised by researchers to be responsible for the poor effect of business education on graduates and employees. Edokpolor and Egbri (2017) argued that some of the challenges facing business education in Africa include funding, lack of qualified and experienced personnel, inadequate facilities, poverty of the curriculum and the lack of educational resources. This is supported by Ajisafe et al (2015) who add that curriculum content of business education, the relevance of the said content, poor implementation strategies, poor time allocation, qualification and quality of teachers and facilities are some of the reasons responsible for lack of responsiveness in business education in Africa. To resolve the question of responsiveness, there is the need for rebranding business education in Africa to ensure that it becomes responsive.

### **Rebranding Business Education for Responsiveness**

Curriculum or educational responsiveness is the ability of curricula taught in schools or universities to address student needs as well as societal circumstances (Moll, 2004). Moll (2004) continues that there are four dimensions of responsiveness which economic responsiveness, cultural responsiveness, disciplinary responsiveness and learning responsiveness. The rebranding of business education on the continent in the light of these four dimensions would ensure that the business education become responsive at all levels. The paper would explore these four dimensions of responsiveness in the effort to rebrand business education for responsiveness in Africa.

### **Economic Responsiveness**

For business education to be responsive economically, business education has to equip students with the knowledge needed in making them to be highly skilled and ready for jobs in the real world (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). Economically responsive business education will imbibe in students the skills to be creative and innovative in solving organisational and

societal problems. Thus, for business education to be economically responsive, it requires a re-thinking of the current nature of the curriculum (Ameyaw, Turnhout, Arts & Wals, 2017). This can be done by focusing of the skills which are critical in this era of the fourth industrial revolution. One way to achieve this, is to ensure that students are exposed to real life organisational problems and situations, teaching them how to best tackle these problems and situations. By engaging the notion of the curriculum as a process, business education would be ensuring that the curriculum becomes part of the lived experiences of the students and vice versa. This approach would ensuring students become lifelong learners who have learn how to learn and not just learnt a few things which they would have to stick to for the rest of their lives. This will equip students to know what to do when they are faced with similar situations as they grow to become employees or entrepreneurs. If these students cannot add any real economic value to the business who employ them or the economy at large creating other businesses, the question of responsiveness is yet to be answered (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). Ensuring that business education students are ready for the job market or to add value to the economy would require the simulation of complex organizational problems in the classroom and giving students the opportunity to solve them, encourage synergy between the academia and industry so that there will also be cross fertilization of ideas.

Furthermore, economic responsiveness can be achieved in business education through university and industry programs such as learnerships or internships. Especially in universities, an internship of at least six months should be considered for all business students. This would ensure that these students do not only understanding the functioning of the economy and the forces aplay but also how they can add value to it. Students should be made to work in organisations for at least six months, this will give them first-hand experience of organisational settings and how best to make decisions at the workplace. By seeing and solving real world challenges during the course of the internship, business education would be ensuring economic responsiveness because upon graduation students would have gotten value for money which is a hallmark of quality and would be able to produce the public returns that higher education is expected to produce in a nation.

### **Cultural Responsiveness**

Moll (2004) argued that cultural responsiveness is the ability of business education to access and respond to the cultural dissonance in the classroom. As such, cultural responsiveness would ensure that students accept cultural differences and how to manage diversity. Business education being culturally responsive ensure students are able to function efficiently in the workplace as they manage diversity. Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that culturally responsive curriculum teaches students to recognize the importance of including students' cultural preferences in all aspects of learning. Culturally responsive curriculum will motivate students to learn to respect diversity, create a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment and promotes equitable learning (Teel & Obidah, 2008). It is important that students are taught to be culturally responsive at the workplace. Employees being culturally responsive will make it easier for all other employees in the organisations to seamlessly work in tandem. Teel and Obidah (2008) suggest the need for a rebranding or restructure of business education in Africa to become culturally responsive. By introducing diversity management in the curriculum, students would be taught about racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices and all form of racism. Diversity management will teach students how to react best to racial and cultural differences in the workplace. Such curriculum should engage students on how to become change agents for social justice and academic equity, and how to mediate power imbalances in classrooms and at the workplace based on race, culture and ethnicity. Diversity has been proven to be crucial for organizational growth as students from various background, knowledge and expertise bring to the fore their competencies

to influence the organization positively.

### **Disciplinary Responsiveness**

Disciplinary responsiveness will address the constantly changing needs of organisations. Disciplinary responsiveness will ensure business education is updated frequently by promoting new ideas and discoveries in the field of business (Ferdinand, 2009). Dar-es-Salaam-Declaration (2010) argued that the business world is changing so rapidly, therefore business education curriculum easily become obsolete, resulting in gaps between what is taught and the realities in society and the world of work. However, recent business graduates tend to always get confused when they are faced with unique situations at the workplace, raising the need for disciplinary responsiveness.

One way to rebrand business education is for curriculum developers to synchronise on timely basis findings of recent researches in the field of business (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). This will ensure curriculum developers are constantly improving on business education curriculum by imputing new knowledge gotten from new researches in the field of business. This will definitely make business education graduates have updated knowledge on the ever-changing needs of organisations they work in (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). Therefore, rebranding business education curriculum based on the findings of recent studies in the field will go a long way in ensuring business education is disciplinary responsive. Furthermore, business education may be restructured by curriculum developers to ensure that the curriculum in use is the curriculum as a process and not a product which would ensure practitioners can get first-hand information from selected organisations or scholarly outlets whenever such is available and use is for the training of its students.

### **Learning Responsiveness**

Learning responsiveness is believed to be the ability of a teacher to respond to the individual needs of his or her students (Moll, 2004). Students are different and each student has unique learning needs that must be met. It is important that business education responds to the individual needs of the learners. Responsive learning ensures the individual needs of students are met, therefore encouraging learning by promoting collaboration rather than isolation of students. It is therefore important that business education curriculum be restructured in such a way that it will constantly and uniquely respond to the different needs of the students (Fomunyan and Teferra (2017). As such, rebranding business education to ensure responsive learning is to make sure that lessons are students centred. In most cases, classes are teacher centred and students have very little say on their learning especially at the undergraduate level of business education (Fomunyan & Teferra, 2017). However, to make business education responsive, students and lecturers are both to agree on the structure of learning, how the learning how be enacted and assessed and what role each individual is expected to play. Where decisions are forced on students, they make become disinterested in learning. On the other hand, where decisions are jointly taken by both students and lecturers' responsiveness is often guaranteed to a certain extent.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Business education in Africa gears towards equipping students and employees alike on the best business practices and hot to improve the lot of the continent by reducing unemployment and boosting national development (Vanevenhoven, 2013). This typifies the multi-dimensional importance of business education right from the academic institution to the society at large. Business has been a key driver of economic development in nations globally and it also encourages international diplomacy. Business education has been revealed to be a major boost for developing entrepreneurship skills in people and this therefore contributes to societal development. As earlier pointed out business education as it is, is not responsive in



Africa (Mehari & Belay, 2017; Mkala & Wanjau, 2013; Larsen & Nagel, 2013), thus, expressly showing the need for business education in Africa to be rebranded.

Responsive business education will be a vital tool for developing knowledge and skillset associated with doing business. Rebranding business education would see to its responsiveness, since business performance is important for economic development in Africa. The paper therefore recommends that business education should be shown more importance in the educational curriculum and efforts should be intensified on the sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Africa as they have the propensity to contribute to national development in the region.

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