

Business Education as an instrument for poverty and unemployment reduction in Lesotho

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Abstract- This study is based on a larger study undertaken by Thaanyane, 2010, whose aim was to investigate the teachers' experiences of implementing Business Education in three secondary schools in Maseru, Lesotho. Lesotho is recently experiencing high rate of poverty and unemployment which impact badly on its economy. This paper tries to bridge the gap between schooling and world of work. It examines how Business Education can be used as an instrument for poverty and unemployment reduction. It, specifically, explores how Business Education teachers equip learners with entrepreneurial skills and allow learners experience the business by running their own projects. Interviews were carried out with Business Education teachers. The results of these interviews revealed that some teachers lack business orientation and may not be able to effectively impart the desired knowledge and entrepreneurial skills to the students. Some parade themselves as Business Education teachers, and have in some cases, as a result of their numbers and the instrumentality of their institutions and don not let students to lay hands or experience running a project. The examinations are major drive of the curriculum to be taught in class. Some teachers are engaged in rote learning in the last days of school. As a result, Business Education does not achieve what is intended to do at schools.

Index Terms- Business Education, instrument, poverty, unemployment, project, entrepreneurial skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

Lesotho is recently in the midst of experiencing an increase in the rate of poverty and unemployment. The government of Lesotho, through its Ministry of Education and Training, has sought to use Business Education to increase employment rates to tackle poverty and unemployment. This is because; all people are expecting to be employed by the government, irrespective of its initiatives of introducing practical subjects. Business Education included as a subject to be used to increase self-employment. Business Education has been increasingly accepted as an important means and valuable strategy for job creation.

The Ministry of Education and Training in Lesotho, like any other countries, has recently reconstructed their secondary schools curricula to suit the existing economic and social life by trying to provide students with education that can adequately prepare them for the world of work (MOET, 2008). For the Lesotho's education system to truly respond to the needs of poor and contribute to wealth creation in communities and society at

large, like other countries, has to take the issue of poverty into special consideration in the planning of educational services. Essentially, it has to stress the preparation of all children to achieve at school, and empower them by lightening their awareness of their rights and responsibilities, their abilities, and enhance their self-confidence to enable them to improve their lives (UNESCO, 2001). Despite this initiative of Ministry of Education and Training to eradicate unemployment and poverty, the nation's economy is still characterized by high rate of unemployment and poverty. This uncontrolled rate of unemployment and poverty has brought about the need to carry out some modifications in the curriculums in schools so that the students are exposed to creative thinking sufficient enough to establish and run their own businesses. The introduction of Business Education has to influence individuals to contribute meaningfully to economic growth and development of the nation. This is done through the integration of the project into the curriculum of Business Education to provide additional skills, resources, and methodologies appropriate to the teaching of Business Education curriculum (Nketekete & Motebang, 2008). As part of the community, I have observed that there are a lot of students who dropped out of school before even sitting for the Junior Certificate Examinations (JC) because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees. These drop outs are sometimes tempted to idle and involved in some illegal crimes such as theft, hijacking and rape. Some students are seen in streets loitering; some of them end up engaged in robbery and burglary because of unemployment. Ebeigbe and Nwaham (2013) add that Business Education therefore can be said to imply safety from harm, it is the protection of individual, state or organization against criminal activities such as terrorism, kidnapping, stealing, robbery, gangsterism, riot, killings, and arson among others. Regarding the current level of unemployment in the country, entrepreneurship Business Education has the potentials to reduce poverty through involvement of business education graduates in small scale business operations (Naboth-Odums, 2012).

This new curriculum was intended to transform and reflect the skills learned and their application in the society or world of work (Majara, 2004). As Setoi (2012) points out, Lesotho faces a big challenge in relation to youth unemployment which is partly a result of the failure of the school system to retain youth and partly the result of global trends that highlight the importance of the knowledge economy. There is a growing concern that schools are not producing citizens that are able to apply their knowledge across a variety of context. Business Education is supposed to solve these problems because it develops learners who are 'job

creators instead of job seekers'. To cater for the nature of Business Education and business knowledge, a number of teaching methods have been suggested. These include action-oriented learning in which students participate in small in-school business projects, virtual and real businesses-like training firms and case study methods and study visits (Hytti and O'Gorman, 2004; Co and Mitchell, 2006).

The few teaching methods that are used by teachers in teaching and learning contexts in Lesotho are found to be teacher dominated, leaving little or no room for learner-centred pedagogies (Nketekete and Motebang, 2008). Studies have been done on similar problem and the results of the study showed that education transforms the raw human beings into productive human capital by inculcating the skills required by both the traditional sector and the modern sector of the economy and makes the individuals more productive not only in the market place but also in the household. In other countries they use Entrepreneurship Education, which is similar to Business Education, as a start-up model to keep at-risk students in school by helping them plan and operate a small school-based or independent business. These programs have the benefits of offering a traditional education of entrepreneurial and business principles, a real-world application in business operation, and the generation of valued income for the students (Riggieri, 2010). Smit and Liebenberg (2003); Yagi, (2001) tested the prediction that unemployment and poverty may be caused by the high rate of learners who drop out of schools at early age of schooling which include a wide variation in the learners' backgrounds, slow progress and irregular attendance of the learners, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of basic materials. They also pointed out that learner-centred or constructive learning may be a cure for this problem. Such a teaching-learning environment means that extra support is necessary to enable teachers to build up their motivation, confidence and skills to engage in teaching.

The study used structured interviews, which were open-ended to allow participants to answer in whatever way they chose. Meaning those interviews were conducted in a manner that is similar to a friendly conversation with no predetermined order of questions or specified wording to the questions. The researcher used open-ended questions because they are more important because they solicit more information than closed questions. They are also important because they provided the participants with opportunities to express themselves freely, and they eliminated the possibility of interviewer's bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). After data has been collected by the researcher, it was then analysed. The first step in analysing data was to read and write memos about all field notes, transcripts and observer's comments to get the initial sense of the data. In analysing data the researcher familiarised herself with the audio recordings by listening to the entire audio recordings several times and reading the transcripts a number of times in order to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and later on themes (Cohen et al, 2007). Analysing raw data requires the researcher to establish categories which were applied on the raw data and then be broken into few manageable groups and given codes. Codes then built relationships or differences supporting or conflicting with original (Thaanyane, 2010).

This is also argued by the teachers that these skills will help students survive even if they drop out of school at any level.

But the same policy is silent about the financing of the Business Education Project as a practical subject that equips students with these skills. Therefore, contributing money for the start prohibits students into participating in the project. Some of these students are orphans who are sponsored hence have no money to contribute for the project. They are not allowed to continue with the project for this reason. It was also reported that the training that was offered when this curriculum was first introduced did not adequately guide teachers on how to help students on carrying the project.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR HYPOTHESES

1. What methods are used by teachers in teaching Business Education?
2. Do Business Education teachers teach businessly?

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The study used the semi-structured interviews as a method of collecting, which involved direct interactions between the researchers and participant. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as methodology allows the researchers to interact with each respondent on the basis of a set of pre-determined questions. It also opens the way for more questioning and negotiation of meaning between researcher and respondent within the context of the research (Minichiello & Kotler, 2010). The researcher preferred semi-structured interviews in administering questions for data collection purposes. Prompt questions were designed to stimulate discussion and elicit teachers' opinions. To avoid free movement of the conversation in covering any issue of interest or going astray guided questions were used. Supplementary questions were also asked to explore participants' opinions in more detail (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Manion (2000) maintains that the semi-structured interview which is scheduled enables re-ordering digression and probing further. These questions were open-ended and were used to allow participants to answer in their own way. This implied that those interviews were conducted in a manner that is similar to a friendly conversation with no predetermined order of questions or specified wording to the questions. Each interview was audio-taped, with approximately 30 minutes per interview. Participants were advised of issues ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. All interviews were recorded and transcribed as a way of understanding data for analysis and were subsequently coded. They are also important because they provided the participants with opportunities to express themselves freely, and they eliminated the possibility of interviewer's bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). They are also important because they provided the participants with opportunities to express themselves freely, and they eliminated the possibility of interviewer's bias (Cohen et al, 2007). Probing questions were also used in the interviews as a guide to allow the participants the freedom of expressing themselves. After data has been collected by the researcher, it was then analysed. The first step in analysing data was to read and write memos about all field notes, transcripts and observer's comments to get the initial sense of the data. In analysing data the researcher familiarised herself with the audio recordings by listening to the entire audio

recordings several times and reading the transcripts a number of times in order to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and later on themes (Cohen et al, 2007).Analysing raw data required the researcher to establish categories from data which were applied on the raw data and then be broken into few manageable groups and given codes. Codes then built relationships or differences supporting or conflicting with original (Thaanyane, 2010).

IV. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Lack of business orientation

The results of this study showed that there are some teachers who lack business orientation. Teachers who are mainly not trained for the implementation of the Business Education or not made aware of how to implement it are not informed about business. This is argued by Elena and Markku (2003) that even though teachers awareness of Business Education, has grown and attitudes towards the theme has become more positive but teachers may not know enough about the aims, contents and work method of Business Education and therefore, may not be able to effectively impart the desired knowledge and entrepreneurial skills to the students. So, for quality of education to be guaranteed, emphasis should be placed on the quality of teaching, in order to ensure impressiveness, efficiency and productivity of education (Odunaike, Ijaduola and Epetimehin, 2012).

Lack of practice

Business Education is capital intensive since both teachers and students need money to practicalise the theory of initiating, establishing and running an enterprise some students do not actually do the project part because they do not have capital (money contributed to carry out the project). This may constitute a constraint and will subsequently frustrate the practice of entrepreneurship in Business Education at schools. Some teachers complained that school principals do not provide students with money to start the project as some do not afford paying it. They complained that schools can make students pay special fees paid like other in practical subjects like Woodwork, Agriculture and Home Economics. If properly implemented, the objective of Business Education curriculum is capable of inculcating in learners the ability to float small scale businesses on graduation. In support to this, Agi and Yellowe (2013) also argued that educational managers and administrators are the ones who make education a building block of socio-economic empowerment, prosperity, self-reliance, employment crime reduction and national security, through improved access to quality.

Inadequate training

Most teachers seemed not to have been trained on the new curriculum so much that they were helped by the neighbouring schools with implementation and materials that were used then as not all schools did not received materials the first time. According to Conco (2004), the successful implementation of any new curriculum depends on the orientation, training and support teachers receive, and on the quality and use of learning support materials. He further indicates that if trainers lack confidence, knowledge and understanding to make the training process succeed, the cascading will result in good teaching. The action-

oriented learning in which students participate in small in-school business projects, virtual and real businesses-like training firms and case study methods and study visits (Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Co and Mitchell, 2006). This is also supported by Asher (1998) outlining that a major factor of any curriculum failure is the lack of regard for the proper role played by teachers in the development of such curriculum. The teachers’ role as developers lies in the translation of the conceptions of the society, learners and the subject. Unless teachers are given regular training on the implementation of the Business Education Project teachers will continue disseminating what they think is appropriate for the knowledge of the students and students will continue on failing

Teachers’ commitment

Another problem seemed to be teachers who do not commit and engage themselves in helping students solve problems they encounter in running the project; hence they drill students in answering examinations questions. Agi and Yellowe (2013) argued that the problem is not about curriculum or investment in education neither is it non-availability of manpower for the sector, but that many have tended to look in the direction of management of education which include lack of policy analysis to make students to fit into society. This is argued by Okoli (2010) that in Business Education, people have more opportunities to exercise creative freedom, higher self-esteem and greater sense of control over their own lives. This has to be so because entrepreneurship in Business Education serves as an instrument for students through which they are powered to control their future. Other complained that `project is most troublesome and tiresome part to the school as a whole, because students buy and sell during classes. Ekpenyong (2010) explained that the traditional method of instructions in Business Education created a gap between schooling and the world of work. These missing resources in the place of instructions are responsible for the inability of Business Education graduates from venturing into self-reliant employment but instead, prefer to join the endless queue of unemployed graduates.

Assessment driven-curriculum

Teachers reported that Lesotho’s curricula is seen driven by assessment body who makes it easy on its part by encouraging examiners to set easy questions to save time and money spend during marking exams(in this case the project as the integral part, carries not even a half of the examination marks. To fit in situation like this, teachers tend to drill their students for examinations instead of following the logic of assessing the implemented curriculum. Examination of project should start as early as the schools begin to find if students really do it. Some teachers showed that Business Education project can be more effective if the appropriate (assessment) can begin as early as Form A so that students are forced to really do it. This would prevent teachers in drilling and doing it as the last item on the curriculum.

Resistance to change

Some teachers are resistant to change their traditional methods of instruction in Business Education which was used in teaching Bookkeeping and Commerce and this still created a gap between schooling and the world of work. This is supported by Ekpenyong (2010) when explaining that the traditional method of

instructions that teachers use in Business Education created a gap between schooling and the world of work. The missing resources in the place of instructions are responsible for the inability of Business Education graduates from venturing into self-reliant employment but instead; prefer to join the endless queue of unemployed graduates.

Some teachers complained that school principals do not give students money they can use to start the project which can be in the form of fees that are paid for other practical subjects like Woodwork, Agriculture and Home Economics. If properly implemented, the objective of Business Education programme is capable of inculcating in learners the ability to float small scale businesses on graduation. Marsh (2001) found that projects receiving the principal's support were more likely to succeed, since the principal's involvement indicates that the project is being taken seriously, and it helps in recruiting both material resources and psychological support). These students would be able to address the emerging issues pertaining to new demands, practices and life challenges of the modern global world.

But even the trained teachers did not have adequate skills to disseminate what they were trained on by other teachers. According to Conco (2004), the successful implementation of any new curriculum depends on the orientation, training and support teachers receive, and on the quality and use of learning support materials. He further indicates that if trainers lack confidence, knowledge and understanding to make the training process succeed, the cascading will result in good teaching. This is supported by Agi and Yellowe (2013) that educational managers and administrators to make education a building block of socio-economic empowerment, prosperity, self-reliance, employment crime reduction and national security, through improved access to quality,

Another problem seem to be that of teachers who do not want to engage themselves in helping students solve problems they encounter in running the project, they drill students in the last days towards examinations. Agi and Yellowe (2013) showed that the problem is not about curriculum or investment in education neither is it non-availability of manpower for the sector, but that many have tended to look in the direction of management of education which include lack of policy analysis to make students to fit into society. Agi and Yellowe (2013) also supports this when they asserted that the goals of wealth creation or generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation can only be attained and sustained through an efficient education system which impacts the relevant skills, knowledge, capacities, attitudes and values. Evidence can be seen with many primary and secondary schools and tertiary institution's graduates not gainfully employed either by self or government.

Entrepreneurship education is about developing attitudes, behaviours and capacities at the individual level. It is also about the application of those skills and attitudes that can take many forms during an individual's career, creating a range of long-term benefits to society and the economy. If students are not guided or given chance to put the theory learned into practice, still it can be difficult for Business Education to have impact on students.

V. CONCLUSION

Inclusion of business projects in Business Education curriculum was to bring in the aspect of entrepreneurship to the fore. Despite this logical design of the curriculum, it has emerged from experience that projects are not integrated as originally intended but treated as preparing learning for examination by some teachers. The examiner's report states that the project part of the examination is always not well performed by some schools. It is also reflected in the society where poverty is overruling in Lesotho from experience.

It has been a practice to most of the teachers that they do not let students practice or put hands on the project that is proposed to be the integral part of Business Education in equipping students with skills that last longer in life. In applying these skills, these students, in their own communities would create jobs for themselves and for other people. This will in turn, increase economy of the country. It seems it is still a problem that some of the teachers are experiencing problems or lacking something in their implementation. Not only teachers impact negatively on the results or products (students), but examination body as well does as it seems to be driving the curriculum in determining what to be taught. This is not a normal practice because examinations have follow at the end of the course. There is a growing concern that schools are not producing citizens that are able to apply their knowledge across a variety of context. It is therefore, central to the whole vision of the Ministry of education that Basotho shall be a functionally literate society by the year 2020. This is not encouraging youth and adults to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path as Business Education expand the pool of potential entrepreneurs but also help trigger wider interest in and support for those seeking to start and grow new companies. Such diversity among potential entrepreneurs means a broader source of ideas and perspectives in opportunity recognition and solution development.

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