

DEVELOPING WORKFORCE SKILLS THROUGH BUSINESS EDUCATION AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study investigated constructivism instructional approaches utilized in undergraduate business education programme for students' exposure to skills development activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Two specific purposes, research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. Descriptive correlational research design was adopted for the study. The study population consisted of 408 business education final year students from three tertiary institutions namely Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and Federal College of Education (Tech.), Omoku offering the programme at the undergraduate level during the 2023/2024 academic session in Rivers State. 50% of the target population which was 204 final year business education students were selected using systematic random sampling and used as sample of the study. Researchers developed structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts, one of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and two of Business Education from Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt. Test-retest reliability method using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) r value of 0.76 was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation r value was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in undergraduate business education programme to a low extent. The finding also revealed that to a low extent students are exposed to skills development activities. The extent of utilization of constructivism instructional approaches also significantly relates to the extent of students' exposure to skills development activities in undergraduate business education programme in the tertiary institutions. Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, it was recommended among others that business education administrators at the tertiary institutions level in Rivers State should canvass for sponsorship and organize train-the-trainer's workshop to educate their academic staff on how to design and implement skills development activities using constructivism instructional approaches.

Keywords: constructivism, instructional approach, skills development and learning activities

Introduction

The constructivism instructional approaches are based on the educational belief that learners who actively engaged with learning activities related to curriculum content construct their own knowledge through self-exploration in real context (Perkins, 1991). The constructivists believed that both content and context are very important if the learners are to holistically develop all the domains of human learning outlined in Bloom's

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taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956). This literary means that constructivism instructional approaches provide students with opportunities to learn within relevant environments capable of enabling them develop their cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. Consequently, the outcomes of the use of the constructivism instructional approaches should be competent graduate of the educational programmes with requisite knowledge and skills for tasks performance in authentic environments of works.

There are many constructivism instructional approaches that can be used to expose business education students to learning activities. Some of these approaches evidenced in existing literature include project-based, activity-based, internship, jigsaw, experiential, blended learning, and apprenticeship approach (Abdulkarim, 2019; Amesi & Obi, 2020; Chidiebere, Chinazor, & Chimezie, 2022). The need to use constructivism instructional approaches in business education is informed by the fact that non-constructivism approaches such as direct instructions (lecture, tutorial, and discussion) have been found to be less effective and insufficient for competencies development (Chekwube, 2016). Consequently, to ensure skills development with focus on building individual's ability in the performance of learning activities embedded in business education courses, the use of constructivism instructional approaches cannot be overemphasized.

Skill development is a process which requires following basic procedures for performing task leading to an expected outcome known as skill. Supporting this assertion, Omidiji and Ogwu (2020) defined skill development as the process of learning and possessing the expertise required for the performance of predefined tasks in a given occupation. Oluwadare (2020) posited that skill development has to do with the systematic and sequential processes followed to learn to effectively and efficiently perform tasks so as to master the art for the purpose of future performance. Mshelia (2020) opined that skill development is the processes used to grow knowledge and understanding about how things are done and accomplished successfully. Marohombsar (2021) noted that students can be assisted to developed skills related to any task by exposing them to relevant learning activities using constructivism learning theories' principles; however, the pace at which each student develops skills may differ based on their personal profile such as age, gender and prior experience. Similarly, Goel (2021) also noted that individual student can be assisted to gain relevant skills for future endeavors by exposing them to learning activities using constructivism principles. Consequently, it is expected that with the knowledge of constructivism learning theories which is accessible to business education lecturers at all levels, instructional approaches that conform with the principles of constructivism theories would be utilized by them to immense students in learning activities especially as virtually everything learnable in this programme are related to the real business world. This is to enable the facilitation of knowledge and skills development required for real life operations in the business world which is one of the cardinal objectives of business education programme as a means to self-reliant education.

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There are many skills development learning activities that business education student can be exposed to in order to empower them with skills necessary for self-reliance and survival after graduation. According to Donnelly (2010), learning activities are those exercises planned, designed and provided for students to carryout in order to attain the predetermined objectives. Abdulkarim (2019) noted that learning activities used for business education lecturers when using student-centred approaches can be in the form of written and live presentation of business proposal, product or service innovation problems, computer simulations on marketing research and sales activities, marketing research exercises, real-life sales activities, business games, business competition among students, and written and live creative advertising and promotion projects. Obi, Eze and Chibuzo (2021) noted that students can be exposed to learning activities by putting them on observation, providing hands-on activities or asking them to evaluate and assess real life situations. Sitthiworachart, Joy and Mason (2021) noted that learning activities normally used to exposure the students to skills development processes include teaching and learning, laboratory practical, reviewing lessons or documents, video conferencing meetings, business games, short videos watching and analyzing YouTube contents. Inferring from the foregoing, it means that when students are exposed to skills development learning activities, they should not only be able to develop the skills for job performance but also the confidence for taking risk to perform future real life business activities.

Extant studies on different constructivism instructional approaches and students' competencies development have reported positive effects. Amesi, Akpomi, and Okwuanaso (2014) reported the use of cooperative instructional approach in Business Education to provide students with opportunity to work in small temporary groups to accomplish certain tasks leading to the attainment of learning objectives relating to knowledge and skills development. Ordu and Abdulkarim (2016) reported that the use of students-centred learning approaches to immerse business education students in learning activities enriched their development of skills. Mieschbuehler and Hooky (2016) reported the use of formal apprenticeship approach like the informal to facilitate students' skills development in different educational programmes. Kumar and Bhandarker (2017) reported that the use of experiential learning activities enabled students to develop critical thinking skills while evaluating and appreciating opposing viewpoints. Poonam and Gunjan (2019) reported that the use of Jigsaws approach to empower students to develop knowledge and skills related to the learnt tasks enabled them to be accountable and take responsibility for their own actions. Obi, Eze and Chibuzo (2021) reported that the use of studentcentred instructional approaches ensured adequate exposure to learning activities such as simulations, role plays, practice in business laboratories, study of real-life cases, peer assessments, creative competitions and self-directed projects in business education programme. Ezeabii, EkohNweke and Agbo (2022) also affirmed the use of experiential learning activities ensure adequate exposure of students to gain knowledge and skills related to their career path. With these plethora evidences of the influences of specific constructivism instructional approaches tested in earlier literature, there should be no doubt about the use of constructivism instructional approaches in

undergraduate business education for students' exposure to skills development learning activities. However, none of the reviewed studies have actually tailored its investigation to the link between these two aspects of business education instructions for skills development activities; hence the gap in existing literature that the current study sets out to fill.

Statement of the Problem

The design and use of constructivism instructional approaches in Business education programme everything being equal should actually lead to students' exposure to skills development learning activities capable of enhancing their skills. However, this educational programme has come under criticism in recent times as a result of the inability of most of its graduating students to engage with one economic activity or the other in order to be self-employed due to inadequate skills development (Dambo & Ben-George, 2022; Wagbara&Berepugi, 2023). This situation makes one wonder whether or not constructivism instructional approaches which have been found to facilitate exposure of student to self-regulated learning activities leading to critical thinking, problem solving, and tasks related skills development are actually being utilized for instructions in business education, and if yes they are, does their utilization actually link to students' exposure to skills development learning activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State? It is in order to answer this question and provide a clearer picture of constructivism instructional approaches used in business education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State that this study was conceived.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the constructivism instructional approaches utilized in business education programme and how they link to students' exposure to skills development learning activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain:

1. the extent constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in business education undergraduate programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.
2. the extent undergraduate business education students are exposed to skills development learning activities while utilizing constructivism instructional approaches in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are constructivism instructional approaches being utilized in business education undergraduate programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?
2. To what extent are undergraduate business education students exposed to skills development learning activities while utilizing constructivism instructional approaches in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. The extent to which constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in business education undergraduate do not significantly relate to the extent of students' exposure to skills development learning activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on Cognitive flexibility theory by Spiro, et al(1988) which states that presenting learners with same content using different media and/or approaches learning activities enable easy grasping and construction of meaning. The theory proposes that same content should be provided using multiple representations appealing to different contexts to enable students develops intellectual scaffolding necessary for considering the applications of same knowledge in new situations. This suggests that the theory is largely concerned with how knowledge and skills can be development and transferred beyond their initial learning context to possibly other contexts similar. This theory is essential in designing of learning activities relating to different constructivism instructional approaches. This is due to the fact using different constructivism instructional approaches to contextualized content to be learnt should be able to assist learners develop deep understanding of the application of concepts therein in real context. Consequently, the use of the term '*Flexibility*' which is described by the theorists as the principles for creating learning activities capable of supporting learners' development of the capacity to understand content from multiple perspectives. Inferring from the above, it would be realized that the crux of this theory is to guide educators in the designing learning activities or instructions capable of assisting learners to develop their cognitive processes by adapting to new or alternative strategies for dealing with new, unexpected and changing conditions in their future endeavor.

This theory is relevant to the present study because it provides guide for designing students learning activities related to same content using different constructivism contexts in any business education programme. The expectation is that when the students are engaged with the content using different approaches for constructing their own knowledge and skills, they should develop the confidence to transfer skills developed to later life endeavors similar to the context of learning. Consequently, it is expected that where various constructivism instructional approaches are being used to expose student to content in real context, they should positively influence their skills development in such areas. It is this expected outcome that would be test through the hypothesis formulated.

Methods

Descriptive correlational research design was adopted for this study. This research design was considered appropriate because the researcher sought to first describe the variable under investigation before establishing the relationship that exists between them.

The population of this study was made up of 408 business education final year students from three tertiary institutions offering the programme at the undergraduate level during the 2023/2024 academic session in Rivers State. The population is considered to be the most appropriate because only final year students who have been

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studying courses in business education for more than two years can provide data on the instructional approaches used by their lecturers and the skills development learning activities given to them. The sample size for this study was made up of 50% of the target population which was 204 final year business education students. Systematic random sampling was used to select the students across the three institutions namely Rivers State University – 54 students, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) – 79 students, and Federal College of Education (Tech), Omoku – 71 students

The researchers developed a structured questionnaire titled “Constructivism Instructional Approaches and Skills Development Learning Activities Questionnaire (CIASDLAQ)” for data collection. The instrument was made up of two clusters of items, cluster 1 to assess the various constructivism instructional approaches used in implementation of business education courses; while the cluster 2 to assess the skills development learning activities used when utilizing the approaches adopted. The response options of the instrument were based on four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE – 4points), Moderate Extent (ME – 3points), Low Extent (LE -2 points), and Very Low Extent (VLE – 1point). The instrument was validated by three experts, one of Educational Measurement and Evaluation, and two of Business Education from Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt. Test-retest reliability method was used to generate two sets of data within two weeks of twice administration of same instrument on 10 final year students of Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. The r value for the two administrations was determined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) computed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) which gave 0.76.

The researchers personally administered all the copies of the instruments to the sample size in order to avoid loss and misrepresentation. The administration was done within 15 working days.

However, out of the 204 copies administered, only 194 copies were properly filled and returned. This constituted approximately 95% of the entire copies administered.

Data collected for this study were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions raised. Pearson Product Moment Correlation r value was used test the hypothesis raised at 0.05 level of significance. All computations were done using SPSS version

24.0, hence to interpret the p value obtained, the judgment applicable to results computed using SPSS was utilized. This interpretation states that when p value obtained is equal to or less than the p-value provided at 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis upheld. However, where the p-value obtained from the computation is greater than the p-value provided at 0.05, the null hypothesis be accepted.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are constructivism instructional approaches being utilized in business education undergraduate programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent to Which the Constructivism Instructional Approaches are being utilizedn = 194

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	Std.	Remark
1	Project based approach	2.51	0.50	ME

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2	Internship approach	2.15	0.81	LE
3	Blended learning approach	1.65	0.81	LE
4	Activity based approach	2.14	0.69	LE
5	Inquiry approach	2.95	0.50	ME
6	Experiential approach	2.02	0.81	LE
7	Cooperative approach	2.28	0.69	LE
8	Flipped classroom approach	1.95	0.50	LE
9	Apprenticeship approach	1.74	0.45	LE
	Cluster mean and standard deviation	2.15	0.64	LE

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 reveals that respondents opined that project-based approach and inquiry approach to a moderate extent are being utilized in business education programme with mean scores of 2.51, 2.95 and standard deviation of 0.50 and 0.50 respectively. The respondents also opined that to a low extent internship approach, blended learning approach, activity-based approach, experiential approach, cooperative approach, flipped classroom approach and apprenticeship approach are being utilized in business education with mean scores of 2.15, 1.65, 2.14, 2.02, 2.28, 1.95, 1.74 and standard deviation scores of 0.81, 0.81, 0.69, 0.81, 0.69, 0.50, and 0.45. Similarly, when the cluster mean score of 2.15 and standard deviation score of 0.64 are considered, it can be concluded that constructivism instructional approaches assessed in this study were to a low extent utilized in business education programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent are undergraduate business education students exposed to skills development learning activities while utilizing constructivism instructional approaches in tertiary institutions in Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent to Which the Undergraduate Business Education Exposed to Skills Development Learning Activities Utilizing Constructivism Instructional Approaches n = 194

S/N		X	Std.	Remark	Items
10	Writing and live presentation of business proposals	2.51	0.67	ME	
11	Product or service innovation and development activities	2.13	0.50	LE	
12	Business and marketing decision simulations	2.11	0.73	LE	
13	Purchasing, exhibition and sales activities	1.43	0.68	VLE	
14	Market survey activities	2.42	0.54	LE	
15	Cost determination activities	1.32	0.77	VLE	
16	Marketing competitions	2.10	0.50	LE	
17	Laboratory practical activities	2.48	0.81	LE	
18	Micro business establishment and management games	2.53	0.51	ME	
19	Business modeling games	2.31	0.50	LE	

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20	Digital marketing planning and execution activities	2.33	0.63	LE	
	Cluster mean and standard deviation		2.23	0.63	LE

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that the respondents opined that to a very moderate extent they are exposed to writing and live presentation of business proposals and micro business establishment and management with mean scores of 2.51, 2.53 and standard deviation scores of 0.67 and 0.51 respectively. The respondents also opined that to a low extent they are exposed to product or service innovation and development activities, business and marketing decision simulations, market survey activities, laboratory practical activities, business modeling games, and digital marketing planning and execution activities with mean scores of 2.13, 2.11, 2.42, 2.10, 2.48, 2.31, 2.33 and standard deviation scores of 0.50, 0.73, 0.54, 0.50, 0.81, 0.50, and 0.63. The respondents also opined that to a very low extent they are exposed to purchasing, exhibition and sales activities and cost determination games 1.43, 1.32 and standard deviation 0.68 and 0.77. Nevertheless, when the cluster mean score 2.23 and standard deviation score of 0.63, it can be concluded that to a low extent undergraduate business education students are exposed to skills development activities utilizing constructivism instructional approaches in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Testing

The extent to which constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in business education undergraduate programmed not significantly relate to the extent of students are exposed to skills development activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the Extent to which Constructivism Instructional Approaches are being Utilized in Business Education Undergraduate Programme do not Significantly relate to the extent of Students are Exposed to Skills Development Activities

		Constructivism Instructional Approaches Utilized		Students' Exposure to Skills Development Activities	
Constructivism Approaches Utilized	Instructional	Pearson tailed)	Correlation Sig. (2-1		.121 .04
	N		194		194
Students' Exposure to Skills Development Activities	Pearson tailed)	Correlation Sig. (2-	.121* .04		1
	N		194		194

Table 3 shows PPMC $r = 0.121$, $p < .05$ at 0.04. Since the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means the extent to which constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in business education

undergraduate programme significantly relates to the extent of students are exposed to skills development activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This result emanated to the fact that the utilization of constructivism instructional approaches at low extent can only lead to low extent of students' exposure to skills development activities as seen in this study.

Discussion of Major Findings

The results related to research question one revealed that constructivism instructional approaches assessed in this study were to a low extent utilized in undergraduate business education programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The finding emanated from the fact that the respondents opined that to a low extent internship approach, blended learning approach, activity-based approach, experiential approach, cooperative approach, flipped classroom approach and apprenticeship approach are being utilized in undergraduate business education programme. This finding is supported by Amesi, Akpomi, and Okwuanaso (2014) when reported the use of cooperative instructional approach in Business Education to provide students with opportunity to work in small temporary groups to accomplish certain tasks leading to the attainment of learning objectives in the area of skills development. The finding is also supported by the finding of Ordu and Abdulkarim (2016) when they reported that the use of students-centred learning approaches to immerse business education students in learning activities enriches their development of their skills. However, it is important to note that the present study stated the extent of utilization of the instructional approaches classified as constructivism while the earlier studies did not.

The results related to research question two revealed that to a low extent undergraduate business education students are exposed to skills development learning activities while utilizing constructivism instructional approaches in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This is due to the fact that the respondents opined that to a low extent they are exposed to product or service innovation and development activities, business and marketing decision simulations, market survey activities, laboratory practical activities, business modeling games, and digital marketing planning and execution. The results of test of hypothesis reveal that the extent to which constructivism instructional approaches are being utilized in business education undergraduate programme significantly relates to the extent of students are exposed to skills development activities in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This result emanated to the fact that the utilization of constructivism instructional approaches at low extent can only lead to low extent of students' exposure to skills development activities as seen in this study. This finding is contrary to the finding of Obi, Eze and Chibuzo (2021) when they reported that the use of student-centred instructional approaches ensured their adequate exposure to learning activities such as simulations, role plays, practice in business laboratories, study of real-life cases, peer assessments, creative competitions and self-directed projects in business education programme. The finding is also contrary to the finding of Ezeabii, Ekoh-Nweke and Agbo (2022) who also affirmed the use of experiential learning activities ensure adequate exposure of students to gain knowledge and skills related to their career path. It is important to note that the low extent to

which students are exposed to skills development activities while using constructivism instructional approaches in undergraduate business education programme is not a healthy development if the desired to attain the self-reliance goal of the programme must be taken seriously.

Conclusions

It was concluded based on the findings of this study that constructivism instructional approaches such as internship approach, blended learning approach, activity-based approach, experiential approach, cooperative approach, flipped classroom approach and apprenticeship approach are being utilized in undergraduate business education programme to a low extent. It was also concluded that the low extent of utilizing this constructivism instructional approach also significantly relates to the low extent to which students are exposed to skills development learning activities. Consequently, it was concluded that undergraduate business education students are not adequately engaged with learning activities capable of facilitating skills development and this can hinder the attainment of the self-reliant goal of the programme as well as affect the products' employment chances.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. Business education administrators should utilize the Tertiary Education Trust Fund workshop funding to ensure management organize workshops for their academic staff on how to plan, design and utilize constructivism instructional approaches such as internship approach, blended learning approach, activity-based approach, experiential approach, cooperative approach, flipped classroom approach and apprenticeship approach to help their students develop skills.
2. Business education administrators at the tertiary institutions level in Rivers State should canvass for sponsorship and organize train-the-trainer's workshop to educate their academic staff on how to design and implement skills development activities using constructivism instructional approaches.
3. Business education administrators should provide all necessary training materials supports for lecturers who want to utilize constructivism instructional approaches such as internship approach, blended learning approach, activity-based approach, experiential approach, cooperative approach, flipped classroom approach and apprenticeship approach to implement courses in the programme.

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