

# Revamping Business Education Needs to Meet 21st Century Reality the Future of Business Education in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

Since 21<sup>st</sup> century began over two decades ago, there seems to be a paradigm shift in educational values across the globe. This has left us with the options of either to swim or sink. In order not to sink, educational systems of most countries of the world began to rethink educational practices in order to remain relevant in this knowledge economy and communication technology driven age. Up to the advent of the twenty-first century, education systems around the world concentrated on training their students to simply acquire content and knowledge. Students were therefore seen as needing to learn reading and numerical skills in order to acquire content and information. But more recently, information and knowledge have become widely available and simple to obtain because of advances in technology and communication. Business education has been thought to be an instructional model that instills in its client the necessary applicable skills, talents, and competencies for independence. Even though these abilities are still vital and relevant, but are no more enough to keep degree holders employed in the volatile and competitive economy. As a result, there is a massive disparity between the information and expertise that students gain in university and those that they would need succeed in quintessential 21st century cultures and organizations. It is necessary to modify toward offering learners a set of abilities that depended not just on intellect but on all interrelatedness of mental, behavioral, and affective traits if we are to react appropriately to these contemporary innovation, target audience, and cultural transformations. In considering this, the paper examined the concepts of 21<sup>st</sup> century education, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning objectives, the concept of business education, and the communication technological skills in 21<sup>st</sup> century required of graduates. Also, conclusions and key recommendations were offered.

**Keywords:** Business Education, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Revamping, Future of Business Education in Nigeria.

## **1. Introduction**

As a way to enhance business educators' training, the acquisition of 21st century skills are receiving more and more attention. The world is becoming more sophisticated; thus, business education programs need to be more innovative to match the difficulties. In both the educational and professional fields, this has become quite clear. To succeed today, one must be innovative and perhaps resourceful. The educational system, and specifically the business education program, has not properly updated its methods or objectives to meet the difficulties, despite the fact that the meaning of success has expanded. Surprisingly, business instructors have kept teaching their undergraduates the same conventional curriculum using active memorization and “one-size-fits-all” assessment methods, just as educators did decades ago. Countless students struggle academically as a result of their disengagement and subsequent loss of focus and enthusiasm. Students of today, who study and perceive in varied contexts, find traditional approaches confusing. They don't make logical difference in light of the evolving business world, where using knowledge rather than merely memorizing it has become much more useful. This is unconnected to the fact that “business educators seem to be failing to teach its students to respond to rapid change and how to handle new information because they are clinging to obsolete equipment and instructional methods” (Binkley et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2006).

A 21<sup>st</sup> century education “is about giving business education students the skills they need to succeed in this new business world. The coalition P21 (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning) has identified four skills for today: creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration. These four themes are not to be understood as units or even subjects, but as themes that should be overlaid across all curriculum mapping and strategic planning in business education. Creativity is about thinking through information in new ways, making new connections and coming up with innovative solutions to problems. Critical thinking is about analyzing information and critiquing claims. Communication is about understanding things well enough to share them clearly with other people. Collaboration is about teamwork and the collective genius of a group is more than the sum of its parts. The ability to think critically and creatively, to collaborate with others, and to communicate will definitely sets business education students graduates apart for success in their careers and workplace” (Friedman, 2006; Rotherham & Willingham, 2009).

There are “other skills that are important, which fall with these four areas. Entrepreneurship can be considered a skill of its own. Inquiry and problem solving are also key skills. Emotional intelligence (EQ) is one of the most important keys to successful work and relationship. Business education program should be all about empowering students with transferable skills that will hold up to a rapidly changing world not prescribed content that has been chosen for its past relevance. While digital integration is also fundamental to a thorough 21<sup>st</sup> century education, it is not enough to simply add technology to existing teaching methods of business education program. Technology must be used strategically to benefit students. Many a technology class has baffled children by attempting to teach them about programs, and hardware that are no longer relevant or that they understand far better than the teacher or lecturer does” (Santos, 2017).

Business educators in the twenty-first century must act as a mentor or advisor for their students rather than an all-knowing master who gives them almost all knowledge. Because

they have so much privileges of all kinds, students almost always know something beyond professors and are technologically savvy. Therefore, business educators must be equipped as education accelerators and role models such that they may also inspire their students. “A 21<sup>st</sup> century education is not a bunch of students sitting quietly at desks, in neat rows, writing down every word that the lecturer says or writes on the blackboard or smart board. It is not teaching to the test, testing students what they need to memorize to get the highest grade. The role of educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be helping students learn how to learn. It is inspiring creativity, encouraging collaboration, expecting and rewarding critical thinking and teaching students not only how to communicate but also the power of effective communication” (Hallerman, 2019).

There are skills business education students need to develop in order to thrive on today`s and tomorrow`s dynamic workplace. To be clear, we are not suggesting that business education students no longer need technical training for vocational path. However, we are saying that those things alone are not enough for the students to properly fit into the workplace of today. If we want to provide students with a 21<sup>st</sup> century education, we must foster deeper learning of rigorous academic content with experiences that intentionally cultivate the skills, mindsets, and literacy needed for students to become lifelong learners and contributor in our ever-changing world” (Santos, 2017).

## **2. Conceptualizing a 21<sup>st</sup> century education**

This can't be completely described since the idea is continually evolving, to some degree. Notwithstanding, “the 21<sup>st</sup> century education can be thought as that, that responds to the economical, technological and societal shifts that are happening at an ever- increasing pace. It is an education that sets people up to succeed in the world where more than half of the jobs they will have over their careers do not even exist yet. In fact, it is an education that provides students with the skills and competencies they need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Global interest in low teaching practices and classroom processes affect students learning outcomes and their psychosocial development is growing and with good reason. Instructional quality has proven to be more strongly associated with child learning than structural aspects of schools in both West” (Pianta et al., 2009) “and developing countries” (Chavan & Yoshikawa, 2013).

However, the “breath of skills required for quality students learning and concomitantly quality teaching, call for essential competencies and skills beyond literacy and numeracy, otherwise known as 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set is generally understood to encompass a range of competencies, including critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, meta-cognition, communication, digital and technological literacy, civic responsibility and global awareness” (Dede, 2010). Nowhere is “the development of such competencies more important than in developing country contexts, where substantial lack of improvements in learning outcomes has suggested that the task of improving instructional quality is urgent. A challenge is bringing about the desired improvements which lies in the lack of context-specific understanding of teaching practices as well as meaningful ways of supporting teachers in their professional development” (Seiman et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2016; Wolf et al., 2018).

Expressed in different vocabulary, how else can we develop educators' 21st century talents so that they can create students who are ready for the 21st century? A push toward a wide range of "21st century" abilities has been fueled by an increasingly globalized and complicated

society. The majority of architectures place a strong emphasis on several better skills, including the 4Cs (cognitive processing, communication, cooperation, and cleverness). “These skills are increasingly being recognized as the gold standard for student abilities, as well as requirements to meet the demands for success in work and life” (Binkley, Erstad & Herman, 2012). Yet “the practice of delivery knowledge to students via a transmission process (e.g lecture, dictation) remains dominant in large portions of the world” (OECD, 2009; Dede, 2010; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Soule & Warrick, 2015).

Consequently, if what learners ought to grasp is to transcend over and above memorization, a corresponding change in instructor methodology is required. Instructors in the twenty-first century must understand not just how to utilize a technique, but sometimes when to employ a strategy in order to achieve their objectives with students in a variety of circumstances. This requires “teachers to have a deeper knowledge of how to address a diverse array of learners and more refined diagnostic abilities to inform their decisions. The partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century (P21) has developed a unified, collective vision for learning known as the framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The framework described the skills, knowledge and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life. It is a blend of content, knowledge, specific skills, expertise and literacy. Every 21<sup>st</sup> century skills implementation requires the development of key academic subject knowledge and understanding among the students. Those who can think critically and communicate effectively must build on a base of key academic subject knowledge. Within the context of key knowledge instruction, students must also learn the essential skills for success in today’s world such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration” (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Twenty-first-century learning is a collaboration of learners, educators and leaders. Students in today’s world are “shaped by their environment, which is media rich. It is electronic and digital, a communication medium improving instant gratification.” Students today are given various labels- Digital children, millennials, Neo-millennials or 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Through consistent “exposure to a variety of digital media, they are engaged, motivated and learn by the use of digital media technologies. They are adept in the use of digital media and seemingly wired to use these tools.” Students construct content, develop and evaluate processes. They also manage their learning based on moral and ethical approach; given opportunities to the broader use of multiple learning styles and application of multiple intelligences. Therefore, feedback is coming from multiple sources such as self, peer and lecturer (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012; Dede, 2010; Binkley et al., 2012).

### *2.1 Understanding 21st Century Skills in Education*

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, “new educational programs emerged out of American reform efforts. One of such example was coined ‘progressive education’. The philosophies were rooted in the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel.” John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator, “was a progressive education advocate who claimed that school systems should mirror lifestyle and that schooling should be a constant transformation of daily life with the student at its centre.” (Progressive Education, 2008). Accordingly, Dewey opined that “education and curriculum should change as society changes.” According to Dewey (1899) “in the School and Society, democracy has to be born anew every generation and education is its midwife. But he also felt the education system should also go beyond teaching just the basics of the core academic subjects and that schools should teach students how to be problem-solvers by helping students learn how to think rather than memorize.” Dewey (1899) also maintained that “schools should help students

learn to live and work cooperatively with others. He wrote, in a complex society, the ability to understand and sympathize with the operations and lot of others is a condition of common purpose which only education can procure.”

A call for “an educational shift due to changes in society and its workforce is not a new discussion and has intensified in the past two decades. In 1990, the commission on the skills of the America workforce released its first report on America’s choice. High skills or low wages, they threatened that if the unified states wanted to continue to compete in that market (of low-skill, low-wage work), it could look forward to continued decline in wages and very long working hours” (NCEE, 2006). If we wanted “to continue to compete in an international market, we would need to adopt internationally benchmarked standards for education in order to address these needs” (NCEE, 1990).

What Work Requires of Schools, published in 1991 not long after this report, was an attempt by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the US Department of Labor to lay out their recommendations for addressing our evolving workplace. SCANS’s (1991) main focus “was on the indisputable fact that, more than half of our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job.” The commission (1991) “spent a year speaking with business owners and employers, managers and officials and they have found that if these new workers are to enjoy a productive and life satisfied, they must have a new set of competencies and foundation skills. They also found that the high-performance standards of today’s most competitive companies must become the standard for the vast majority and the nation’s schools must be transformed into high-performance organizations in their own right.”

As the standard of education deteriorates, intellectuals like Thomas Friedman (2005) claim that the entry of countries like India and China into the world of work has made it feasible for enterprises to hire several of the job positions that their locals with college degrees still could have performed decade ago. He also clarifies why he now thinks the world is "flat." Now that “third world countries can more easily participate in the world economy, the days of the United States as a super power are quickly disappearing and with it could go the middle class” (Friedman, 2005).

We are now “tasked with eliciting change in this new environment and are forced to face the facts that the NCEE (2006) now most recently reports, American students and young adults place anywhere from the middle to the bottom in all three comparative studies of achievement in mathematics, science and general literacy in the advanced industrial nations.” A broad consensus has been reached as a result of these and other unpleasant data “that our education and workforce development systems are failing to adequately prepare all students and workers with the essential skills - 21<sup>st</sup> century skills - necessary for success in a global economy” (PCS, 2008).

## *2.2 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Goals and Objectives*

There are four types of abilities that can be used to group the overarching aims of information literacy. This is a set of qualities that degree holders of the twenty-first century ought to undertake in order to be productive citizens and stay competitive as workers on the global industry. These are the competencies that all students, including those studying business, should be mastering in universities and colleges. These array of skills according to Gwertz (2008) include the following:

**Life and Career Skills:**

- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Social and Cross-cultural skills
- Productivity and Accountability
- Leadership and Responsibility
- Learning and Innovation Skills:
- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical thinking and Problem Solving
- Communication and Collaboration Skills”

**Information, Media and Technology Skills:**

- Media Literacy
- Information Literacy
- Information and Communication Technology Literacy.

**Twenty-First-Century Themes:**

- “Global Awareness
- Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurship Literacy
- Environmental Literacy
- Health Literacy
- Civic Literacy.

**3. Concept of Business Education**

For several individuals, business education has multiple meanings. Agwumezie (1999) sees “business education as a program in education that prepares students for entry into and advancement of jobs within the business.” Aliyu (1999) opines that “it is a program one needs to be proud of if properly designed, adequately prepared and religiously harmonized.” Aliyu, further affirms “that business education is an educational program which involves acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies which makes the recipient/beneficiary proficient. It is an umbrella under which all business programs take a shield, such as marketing, secretarial studies and accounting.” According Igboke (2000), business education “is a dynamic field of study geared towards preparing youths and adults for and about business. It is a preparation for a career in business when instruction is designed to prepare youths and adults for actual practice in the world of business. On the other hand, education about business involves preparation of youths and adults for intelligent and effective consumption of economic goods and services offered to society in our free enterprise economy.”

Business education “is a type of education that assists individual to acquire skills, which they can apply to solve problems in business and office occupations” (Ogunmayi citing Okoro, 2015). Educating students concerning principles, ideas, and procedures of commerce is part of business education. According to Ezeani (2012), business education is “the preparation for career in business when instruction is designed to prepare youths and adults for actual practice in the world of business. Business education typically prepares students for an occupation in business or business related field or a teaching career in academics.” (Dhaka in Chundusu & Jwampe, 2017). Esene (2012) in (Chundusu & Jwampe, 2017) defines business

education “as education for and about business or training in relevant skills in office occupation.” Listed below are the objectives of business education:

- To provide opportunity for practice job preparation or vocation studies for students in order to make them render effect and efficient services in office, distributive and service occupation.
- To prepare students, based on interests and aptitudes with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to enter into a business occupation, advance and profit in it
- To provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the business and economic system of the nation so as to enable them participate actively as producers and consumers of goods and services.
- To develop in students the basic awareness of the contribution which business and office employees make to the nation's economy.
- To develop and improve the personal qualities and attitudes of students as required in personal and employment situations.
- To serve as a guide for individual students for suitable placement in business and office employment.
- To enable students have career consciousness and economic understanding of the free enterprise system.

#### **4. Implication of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education on the Teaching of Business Education**

The digital economy has brought tremendous change in terms of the nature of knowledge and skills required of business education students necessary for their survival in the twenty-first century work places; as the educational landscape of the era are undergoing constant flux. The same cannot be said about career training in the 20th century. And as a result of this practical terms, educational needs have changed. Nonetheless, literacy has continued to be the means by which people acquire fundamental insights in both periods. However, the reality brought by 21<sup>st</sup> century demands that business education programs equip the recipients of its instructions “with the ability to go beyond learning core knowledge and concepts to using and applying them within the socio-cultural context of their societies. In other words, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has caused a major shift in the teaching and learning of business education courses in the institutions of learning. Global education all over the world want their students to be able to think critically and creatively, solve complex problems, make evidence-based decisions, and work collaboratively.” These are some of the challenges the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning goals has launched on business education which they would need to urgently respond to if they would genuinely serve the noble objective of preparing their students for the “world of work which is the core mission of business education program.” Moreover, how to completely integrate 21st century competencies and expectations that are focused on instructing, studying, and evaluation but are still connected with the evolving global curriculum goals is the main challenge that nations throughout the globe are currently experiencing.

#### **5. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Required of Business Education Graduates**

The abilities and competences that are typically regarded as 21st century talents are diverse yet have similar characteristics. The skills, aptitudes, and cognitive styles that have been acknowledged as essential for success in 21st-century culture and the business make up 21st century prowess. It is indeed a part of a broader global trend emphasizing the abilities students need to learn in order to succeed and be independent in a quickly evolving virtual

era. The mastery of abilities like analytical thought, cognitive flexibility, and team spirit is the foundation of meaningful learning, that is linked to these kind of competencies. These abilities are distinct from conventional cognitive credentials in that they do not heavily rely upon pedagogical knowledge.

Exchanges and occupations play a diminishing part as Global markets shift from a technological to a demand model. E-learning in essence, together with typical hard talents and command of special areas of expertise, are in great value. Business education graduates therefore, need “skills that involve interaction, collaboration and managing others which are increasingly on a high demand. Skills that enable people to be flexible and adaptable in different roles or in different endeavours, those that involve processing information and managing people more than manipulating equipment in an office or industry are in greater demand. These skills are also referred to as ‘applied skills’ or ‘soft skills’, including personal, interpersonal or learning-based skills, such as life skills (problem-solving behaviours), people skills and social skills.” According to Santos (2017), 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills required of graduates can be described in terms of:

- Critical thinking skills;
- Collaboration skills;
- Communication skills;
- Creativity and innovation skills;
- Self-direction skills;
- Global connections;
- Local connection; and
- Using technology as tool for learning.

However, over time, these skills have been categorized as follows:

- Learning and innovation skills: Critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation;
- Digital literacy skills: Information literacy, media literacy, information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy; and
- Career and life skills: Flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural interaction, productivity and accountability.

Several of these abilities are essential components of an advanced education, that business education could perhaps, aspire to.

## **6. Incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in Business Education program in Nigeria**

The capacity of many players in business education to integrate 21st century skills into their practices will determine the direction of business education in Nigeria. Modern techniques are nothing unique. The major challenge facing countries of the world particularly Nigeria “is how to implement 21<sup>st</sup> century skills agenda that focuses on teaching, learning and assessment that is aligned with changing educational goals.” What is required to include a 21st century skills focus in business education programs, one would ask? In order to assist students' classroom instruction, congruence is actually required, where the plan's content,

assessments, and methodology are tightly linked. What business education students are expected to learn or know (such as curriculum learning objectives) “is reflected by the kinds of task that indicate whether students have attained the learning objectives (assessment), which in turn, reflects the classroom activities and strategies (pedagogy) that reinforce the learning objectives and prepare students for assessments. When the components are misaligned, learning can be comprised. When the components in the system are misaligned, changes in one component (e.g. curriculum reform) yield few improvements in the student learning if the other parts of the system, such as assessment and pedagogy are not similarly adjusted. This may result in having the outcome fall substantially short of what was intended.”

The pedagogy involves “creating, working with others, analyzing, and presenting and sharing both the learning and the learned knowledge or wisdom, including to peers and mentors as well as teachers. This contrasts with more of traditional learning methodology that involves learning by rote and regurgitating information/ knowledge back to the lecturer for a grade. The skills are geared towards students and workers to foster engagement, seeking forging and facilitating connections to knowledge, ideas peers, instructors and wider audiences, presenting etc. The classification or grouping has been undertaken to encourage and promote pedagogies that facilitate deeper learning through both traditional instruction as well as active learning, project-based learning, problem based learning and others.”

## **7. Conclusion**

The pace of change in society is accelerating. Change can be viewed as the embrace of an invention, with the principal target being to enhance results via changing methods. As a result, the visible shifts and the wider world are forcing a reassessment or reform in contemporary higher education institutions' instructional methods. The society in the “twenty-first-century is increasingly diverse, globalized, and complex and media-saturated. In today's world of technology, the old business education program with its lecturer-centered approach, passive learning, time based, textbook driven, fragmented curriculum, low expectations from the student/learner does not seem to cater to the learning needs of twenty first century students. Learning is more collaborative and in partnership with the lecturer and the students than the traditional way with the lecturer/teacher as the primary decision marker for the students.” The implication of 21<sup>st</sup> century on business education program consists of changing the way in which we teach the students to think. It consists of learning technology, and learning how to use technology to learn. Twenty-first-century learning in business education should consist of teaching students how to think critically, communicate effectively, make evidence-based decision and proffer solution to problem via innovative thinking.

## *Recommendation*

The recommendations below are based on the important concerns described above:

1. Concerted efforts should be made by all stakeholders of business education program “to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills into business education” curriculum in the higher institutions of learning everywhere in the world.
2. 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in business education should consist of teaching students how to think critically, communicate effectively, make evidence-based decision and proffer solution to problem via innovative and creative thinking.

3. The “study encourages the continuation of additional analysis and meaningful research in the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in business education curriculum” if business education graduates relevance in workplace would be guaranteed.
4. All stakeholders of business education should be part of the reform of business education program for maximum buy-in and participation to ensure compliance in all institutions where business education program is offered.
5. Lastly, if what “business education students are to learn needs to go rote,” there is need therefore, for concomitant shift in business educator’s pedagogy to match.

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