

## STUDENT ATTITUDES, PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENTREPRENEURIAL CURRICULUM

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to explore the difference in junior secondary students' academic performance in Entrepreneurial Curriculum of Business Studies based on their attitudes to the subject, parental influence, and career aspirations. A sample of 290 urban and rural Junior Secondary Three (9<sup>th</sup> grade) students in secondary schools in Akwalbom State of Nigeria was surveyed. Students' academic performance in Business Studies differed significantly on the basis of attitudes and parental influence. The variable of career aspirations made no significant difference in the students' academic achievement in Business Studies. Implications for school and teachers' consideration of students' characteristics in implementation of Business Studies curriculum are suggested.*

*Keywords: Student Attitudes, Parental Influence, Career Aspirations, Academic Achievement, Entrepreneurial Curriculum*

### INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, junior secondary school curriculum provides both the academic and pre-vocational subjects. The focus of secondary education at the junior level targets the realization of the following broad goals:

*to offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles; to provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; to inspire students with a desire for self-employment and achievement of excellence; and to provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (FRN 2004:18-19).*

The above goal statements had guided the effort toward the development of new curricula for the junior secondary education by the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in the pre-vocational subjects which include Agriculture, Business Studies, Home Economics, Computer Education, Fine Arts and Music (FRN, 2004:20). The Basic Education Curriculum in Business Studies for the Junior Secondary 1-3 states that the general objectives of Business Studies in both Basic Education and Junior Secondary levels are to:

- 1) provide the orientation and basic skills with which to start an occupation for those who may not have the opportunity for further training;

- 2) provide basic skills for personal use now and in the future;
- 3) prepare students for further training in Business Studies;
- 4) relate the knowledge and skills to the national economy; and
- 5) develop basic skills in office occupation.

(Federal Ministry of Education, 2007:iv).

In sum, the above objectives aim to inculcate at the early age those worthwhile values that are required if as entrepreneur and workers in business environment are to succeed.

Business Studies is one of the structured curriculum areas geared toward achieving some specific goals of the secondary education. It is an integrated pre-vocational subject taught at the junior secondary level as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). Business Studies is a competence-based subject where each student needs to acquire and demonstrate specific competencies for example, typewriting, record-keeping, and transcribing in shorthand. Effective teaching-learning process in Business Studies therefore depends a lot on the activities that both the teachers and students put up in the class.

Business Studies provides students with a new, practical context for many of the subjects they studied at the primary school level including mathematics, science, language and social studies. It helps students to recognize the relevance of these subjects as they are applied to the world of business – for example, in helping people with their needs, challenges, and problems and in creating products and services that help to improve the quality of life (Affaires et Commerce, 2006).

The Business Studies introduced in the junior secondary school level in Nigeria provides knowledge and skills that can help students make a successful transition to post-secondary education, training programmes and the workplace. It prepares students to apply their education to the real-world challenges and experiences.

The mere articulation of pre-vocational curriculum in junior secondary schools as a means of achieving some of the specific goals identified for secondary education does not ensure the achievement of the purpose. Without the knowledge of students' academic performance in some specific areas of the pre-vocational subjects such as Business Studies, the educational process of curriculum implementation may be misdirected or incomplete. Whenever curriculum goals are implemented, there should be a careful analysis and evaluation to appraise the degree of goal attainment. Whenever and wherever there are failures to evaluate programme goals against curriculum implementation, there are dangers that goals may not be adequately addressed. Without empirical investigation of students' academic performance in Business Studies as may be differentiated by personal characteristics there exists little basis for teachers to develop appropriate instructional strategies to help students achieve the curriculum expectations as well as appropriate methods for assessing and evaluating students' learning. Teachers would have great reluctance to change the status quo of their teaching without adequate proof of need.

It was against the background of helping teachers bring enthusiasm and varied instructional and assessment approaches to the classroom, addressing different student needs and ensuring sound and meaningful learning opportunities for every learner that this study explored the role of student attitudes, parental influence and career aspirations vis-à-vis academic performance in Business Studies.

### **Purpose of the Study and Significance**

The study examined junior secondary students' personal characteristic of attitudes, parental influence and career aspirations vis-à-vis academic achievement in pre-vocational subject of Business Studies. It was assumed that grasping the impact of the identified variables on the students' academic achievement in Business Studies could lead to a deeper insight into how such variables can be explored to improve the academic achievement in schools. The findings of the study would be useful to teachers as they work toward providing learning experiences that are motivating to students. The

findings would be of immense value to the school counselors as they offer career counseling, vocational guidance and occupational information to students.

It is believed that the findings of this study and the subsequent recommendation would bring to the fore the need to re-assess Business Studies as a pre-vocational subject in the Junior Secondary Schools. Such a re-assessment would have implication for students who may wish to change their perception toward Business Studies education and the teachers, their instructional strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

### Subjects

The participants in this study comprise 290(138 male and 152 female) 9<sup>th</sup> grade students drawn from 8 (4 urban and 4 rural) public secondary schools in AkwaIbom State of Nigeria. Stratified random sampling and proportional sampling techniques were used to obtain the sample for the study. All the 290 participants completed the Personal Characteristics Variables Questionnaire which composed of 10 Likert-scale items on each of the personal characteristic variables-attitudes, parental influence and career aspirations. The possible responses to the rating scale ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). However, the rating scores were reversed for negative items. The neutral score was 3, thus, the composite score for each student personal characteristic ranged between 50 (maximum) and 10 (minimum). A favourable disposition toward any variable was therefore placed between 31 and 50 while unfavourable disposition was between 10 and 30.

All the students who participated in this study offered Business Studies as one of the prevocational subjects in the junior secondary school curriculum; their age averaged 14 years.

### Hypotheses

This study tested the following null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students based on student attitudes.
2. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students based on parental influence.
3. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students based on career aspirations.

### Instrumentation

The research instruments comprised personal characteristics variables (PCV) and the Business Studies achievement test (BSAT).

#### Personal Characteristics Variables (PCV)

The personal characteristics variables questionnaire consisted of 10 Likert-scale items on each of the variables-attitudes, parental influence and career aspirations. Content validity was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty of education members. Five options were available for rating ranging from “strongly agree” (5 points) to “strongly disagree” (1 point). Pilot-testing for suitability and reliability was conducted with junior secondary students in schools not included in the sample. The Spearman-Brown split-half formula yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.69 for attitudes, 0.63 for parental influence and 0.72 for the career aspirations.

#### Business Studies Achievement Test (BSAT)

The 50-item multiple choice questions to assess the Junior Secondary students' academic achievement in Business Studies was adapted from the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination questions of the 2005/06 through 2009/10 academic sessions. Questions were selected for each component of Business Studies through the item analysis technique. Content validity was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty members in the Department of Vocational Education and

secondary school Business Studies educators. Pilot-testing for suitability and reliability was conducted with junior secondary students in schools not included in the sample. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the Business Studies achievement test was 0.84.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected with the assistance of subject masters in the schools involved in the study. Duration of 30 minutes was allowed for the completion of the personal characteristics rating scale while 60 minutes was allowed for the writing of answers to the Business Studies achievement test.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were described using means and standard deviations. The independent t-test, analysis of variance with post-hoc analysis on two-group comparison were used to establish significant differences in junior secondary students' academic achievement in Business Studies based on the personal characteristics of attitudes, parental influence and career aspirations.

## **RESULTS**

### **Student Attitudes**

Data in Table 1 indicate that there was a significant difference in the academic achievement mean scores of Junior Secondary students in Business Studies based on attitudes ( $t=2.58, p<0.05$ ). Students with positive attitude to Business Studies performed better than their counterparts whose attitude to the subject was negative (57.68 vs. 52.61).

### **Parental Influence on Students**

Data reporting junior secondary students' academic performance in Business Studies as differentiated by parental influence are in Table 2. The t-test analysis showed a significant difference in the students' academic achievement in Business Studies based on parental influence ( $t=2.83, p < 0.05$ ). The result of the data analysis showed that subjects whose parents motivate them in their studies outperformed their counterparts who perceived their parental influence as non-motivating to their studies (58.72 vs. 53.61).

### **Student Career Aspirations**

Data in Table 3 show students' mean scores in Business Studies based on career aspirations. No significant difference in Business Studies academic achievement was found among the three career aspiration groups (Table 4).

The results of the post-hoc test of two-group comparison in Table 5 added credence to the non-significant differences in the students' academic achievement in Business Studies indicated by the data in Table 4. Data in Table 5 show that there were no significant differences between the academic achievements mean scores of students in any of the comparative groups. Hence, hypothesis 3 is upheld.

## **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **Student Attitudes and Academic Achievement in Business Studies**

The significant difference in the academic mean scores in Business Studies between students with positive and those with negative attitude to the subject is supported by the contention that the differences in patterns of interest potentially are crucial for understanding differences in cognition and performance. Individuals' interests play strong roles in their choices of which activities to pursue, both in and out of school (Renninger, 1998; Schiefele, 1999). The following factors have been suggested as being central to differences in interest and activity performances as well as academic performance of children: attainment value (Eccles, 1987), intrinsic value (Meece, Wigfield and Eccles, 1998), and utility value (Harter, 1998).

In this study, it could be assumed that the students who performed significantly better in the Business Studies Achievement Test found values in learning the subject while their counterparts with negative attitude to Business Studies might not have experienced same. Children's and adults' valuing of different activities relates strongly to their choice of whether or not to continue to pursue the activity. Such choice to participate in an activity likely will increase one's performance; choosing not to do the activity will decrease performance (Meece, Wigfield, and Eccles, 1998).

Students with negative attitude being associated with weak performance in this study might have resulted from the assumption that Business Studies is strongly related to feminine jobs (Jersild, Brook, and Brook, 1978). According to Ruble and Martins (1998) children develop more positive competence-related beliefs and values for activities they believe are appropriate for their gender, and thus engage more in such activities. The acceptance of such a notion might have impacted students being either favourably or negatively disposed toward Business Studies.

### **Parental Influence on Students and Academic Performance in Business Studies**

In this study, students who perceived their parental influence as motivating to academic work outperformed their counterparts who perceived their parental influence as non-motivating. A possible explanation for the finding is that motivation is crucial to cognition and performance because motivation directs individuals' behavior. Extensive evidence exists that motivation is a crucial element in students' success and learning. More specifically, motivation influences individuals' choice of which activities to do, level of engagement in them, and the degree of persistence (Wigfield, Battle, Keller, and Eccles 2000; Akey, 2006). The finding of this study in respect to students' academic performance in Business Studies vis-à-vis parental influence could also be attributed to Thorndike's Law of Effect. According to Chauhan (2001) the principle of law of effect is that learning is strengthened when accompanied by pleasant or satisfying feeling but that learning is weakened when associated with no reinforcement. Students' motivation in academic activities should always be promoted through explicit rewards and encouragement.

Gender stereotypes also influence parents having different achievement – related experiences for male and female children. According to Wigfield, Battle, Keller and Eccles (2000) gender stereotypes influence a number of mediating factors including the importance parents attach to children acquiring skills in different areas and encouragement of involvement in different activities. These mediators might have played on the students' own sense of competence and their interest in Business Studies hence, the finding in this study.

### **Student Career Aspirations and Academic Achievement in Business Studies**

Although there were no significant differences in the academic achievement mean scores in Business Studies among the three categories of the career aspirations (professional, academic and vocational), subjects who opted for vocational jobs had the highest mean score of 58.00, followed by professional choice group with a mean score of 56.56, while the academic choice group came last with a mean score of 55.65. This finding is supported by Udonwa (2008) whose study found no significant difference in junior secondary students' mean scores in the prevocational subject of Home Economics based on career aspirations.

The non-significant difference in the academic achievement mean scores in Business Studies among the three categories of subjects could be a reflection of the Career Aspirations Scale (CAS), students' age and sample size. The CAS made a description of the characteristics of each career options instead of specificity of the career status. Hence, the subjects might have made their career aspirations choice perfunctorily. The age of the subjects might have also contributed to their completion of the career aspirations scale in perfunctory manner. Regarding the sample size, the distribution of the subjects on the basis of their responses had the least percentage of vocational aspiration students (11.03%) as against the professional and academic choice groups of 56.01% and 32.96% respectively. The outcome of the data analysis resulting in the highest performance mean score for the vocational career choice group might be due to chance.

The highest performance mean score of the students who aspire for vocational career could further be accounted for as a factor of the utility value of the Business Studies as a pre-vocational subject. Business Studies curriculum in the junior secondary schools aims to provide practical skills for those who wish to move directly into the workplace at the sub-professional grades (FRN, 2004). This assumption is corroborated by Hancock and Betts (2002) as well as Meece (1991). According to Hancock and Betts (2002) meaningful and challenging learning environments have been linked to both engagement and perceived competence. When students are authentically engaged in meaningful, quality work, the likelihood increases that they will learn something new and remember what they learned. Also, students enjoy learning more and learn better when what they are studying is of personal interest and relates to their lives (Meece, 1991). Business activity affects the daily lives of everybody as they work, spend, invest, travel and play. It influences jobs incomes and opportunities for personal enterprise. Eventually, all students will encounter the world of business, whether they work in urban or rural areas.

The non-significant differences in the academic achievement mean scores in Business Studies among the students in the three different career aspirations group could also be attributed to the cognitive developmental theory. The theory assumes that children incorporate salient career knowledge gained from social interaction into existing mental schemas about self, prompting the reorganization of thinking over time about gender, career choice and related aspiration to accommodate new data. These different self-schemas in turn can impact specific aspects of cognitive development in different achievement areas (Trice, McClellan and Hughes, 1992). Career-differentiated self-schema can drive choices of activities, indirectly affecting cognitive development. Hence, the use of career aspiration domains (professional, academic and vocational) and Business Studies to differentiate academic achievement among students may not produce any significant difference as each career domain has its own cognitive base which might not be totally offered in the Business Studies curriculum.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Junior secondary students' academic achievement in Business Studies appears to be different in respect of student attitudes to the subject, and parental influence except on basis of student career aspirations. It is therefore recommended that teachers should provide purposeful and meaningful classroom instruction keeping in mind that students come from different value orientation backgrounds. Hence, they should be treated as individuals within the context of individual differences in affective and cognitive development. Schools should re-orientate parents on the importance of creating favourable socio-psychological atmosphere at home for the children, providing them with educative materials and creating supportive relations with them. The Parent-Teacher Association meetings should serve as a platform for such enlightenment. Parents should be made to be interested in school activities. They should be regularly informed of their children's academic progress in school through the continuous assessment performances and the end-of-term examination results.

Effective guidance and counseling services unit should be established in secondary schools with qualified guidance-counselors to help students handle social, psychological, occupational and academic challenges meaningfully. Such services would enable the students to concentrate on studies with hope and confidence. Business Studies as a vocational subject with entrepreneurship orientation advocates learning through practice. Hence, it is recommended that schools offering the subject should have well-equipped resource centre with the necessary facilities for hands-on learning.

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**Table 1: t-test analysis of academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students by attitudes (N=290)**

Attitude	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Positive	218	57.68	14.35	2.58*
Negative	72	52.61	14.51	

\*p < 0.05 df = 288

**Table 2: t-test analysis of academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students by parental influence (N=290)**

Parental Influence	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Motivating	130	58.72	12.93	2.83*
Non-Motivating	160	53.61	15.93	

\*p < 0.05df = 288.

**Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students by career aspirations (N=290)**

Career Aspirations	N	Mean	SD
Professional	163	56.56	14.36
Academic	95	55.65	15.48
Vocational	32	58.00	12.66
Total	290	56.42	14.53

**Table 4: Summary analysis of variance of academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students by career aspirations (N=290)**

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between groups	138.943	2	69.471	0.33 <sup>ns</sup>
Within groups	60881.733	287	212.131	
Total	61020.676	289		

n.s = not significant

**Table 5: Scheffe post-hoc test of two-group comparison of academic achievement in Business Studies of junior secondary students by career aspirations (N=290)**

Career Aspiration	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Professional and Academic	163 and 95	56.56 and 55.65	14.36 and 15.48	0.47 <sup>ns</sup>
Professional and Vocational	163 and 32	56.56 and 58.00	14.36 and 12.66	
Academic and Vocational	95 and 32	55.65 and 58.00	15.48 and 12.66	0.58 <sup>ns</sup>
Professional and Academic	163 and 95	56.56 and 55.65	14.36 and 15.48	0.86 <sup>ns</sup>
Professional and Vocational	163 and 32	56.56 and 58.00	14.36 and 12.66	

n.s = not significant