

Original Paper

Influence of Vignettes Constructions on Ethical Decision among Business Education Students

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Received: April 30, 2018

Accepted: May 16, 2018

Online Published: May 25, 2018

doi:10.22158/wjer.v5n2p204

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v5n2p204>

Abstract

Vignettes adoption as an experiential learning approach such provides educational experiences that could shape ethical sensitivity among learners. This study was focused at establishing the influence of vignettes construction on ethical decision-making among business education students. A sample of 20 students from a target population provided information through filling questionnaires which was then analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study adopted constructivism learning theory, the study findings indicated that simulated vignettes (94.1%) influence ethical decision making; abridge (76.5%), truncated (81.3%), anchored (94.1%) and scaffold vignettes (93.8%). The study recommended that universities and institutions training teachers should consider adoption vignettes as an instructional approach teaching subject methods; business education teachers to adopt in business education methods and other subject areas. On practice, the study recommended vignettes as an instructional tool enhance effectiveness and focus; and more studies on the extent business education teachers have adopted vignettes in the field.

Keyword

vignettes construction, ethical decision making, ethical sensitivity and business ethics

1. Introduction

Experiential learning approaches in teaching of business ethics span a wide variety of areas and formats among them is use of vignettes. According to Sims and Sauser (2011) when experiential methods like vignettes are used for enhancing learning in teaching business ethics, they generate interest, promote critical thinking and assure higher learner achievement. Adoption of vignettes shapes individual

perception significantly towards ethical decision-making. Valentine and Hollingworth (2012) argues that vignettes not only help in gaining better understanding of the business world, but as an experiential learning approach they provide educational experiences that could shape ethical sensitivity among learners. Business ethics is taught to university students studying accounting, finance, marketing and education to enable them build individual ethical sensitivity. Use of vignettes as an experiential learning approach enhances mastery of content and subject matter, which results in higher learner achievement in Business Ethics. Prem and Shirley (2011) in a study on integrating experiential learning and cases in international business asserted that teaching ethics using vignettes should particularly be structured to provide a basis for ethical development.

Vignettes provide learners with situations that depict practical ethical dilemmas similar to occurrences in business world. To ensure learners decision making is ethically developed, Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014) argued that learning business ethics among bachelor of education students using vignettes could be constructed, abridged, anchored, truncated or scaffold in structure to cover single or multiple ethical issues. Vignettes irrespective of construction entrench ethical behavior by encouraging thought processes and discussion on moral issues. Vignettes construction is formed by ethical themes with distinguishable boundaries that would influence specific decisions to be made. In support of these sentiments, Jeffries and Maeder (2004) added that different vignettes constructions provide useful focus and stimulate discussion on distinguishable themes including addressing difficult-to-explore and sensitive issues. In this study the focus was on influence of simulated, abridged, anchored, and truncated plus scaffolded vignettes on decision making among business education students.

2. Simulated Vignettes and Ethical Decision Making

One way of achieving this among bachelor of education students undertaking business studies is an exposure them to simulated vignettes. Nimmagadda and Murphy (2014), described adoption of simulated vignettes as a pedagogical approach in which real world situations from a realistic business environment is used to promote ethical sensitivity through critical thinking, problem solving, and learning. In most cases vignettes are simulations of real life, which enhance learners' engagement with the situations or story in the vignette, they need to capture situations that are authentic and that learners can relate to. However, Sims and Sauser (2011) in an article on experiences in teaching business ethics stressed that in constructing vignettes teachers should avoid extreme dilemma situations and instead focus on moderation. Simulated vignettes should therefore be close to what is considered to be happening in business life organizations or contexts without any fantasy. This study considered simulation in construction of vignettes to present things that are close to real life for learners in business ethics.

3. Abridged Vignettes and Ethical Decision Making

Vignettes should be abridged to have inherent ambiguity in its content that would make it non-directional and non-prescriptive. Pan and Sparks (2012) in a review and meta-analysis of predictors, consequence and measurement of ethical decision making asserted that use of abridged vignettes plus accompanying discussion questions play a significant role for character moulding of young business practitioners. Ideally in constructing vignettes abridging is sometimes done and scenario or dilemma details are omitted to provide room for multiple interpretations as well as exploration in learning business ethics. Shafer, Poon, and Tjosvold (2013) investigating ethical climate in a Singaporean accounting firm asserted that abridged vignettes and accompanying discussion questions stimulate learners of business ethics to make appropriate decisions similar to what they would encounter in entry-level job positions.

4. Anchored Vignettes and Ethical Decision Making

A number of ethical issues could be considered in decision-making situations. Odundo and Gunga (2013) posited that multiple experiential techniques provide additional benefits with anchored vignettes in learning business ethics. Anchored vignettes help in depicting experiences ranging from normal to unusual occurrences but not weird to enable learners to identify with the situations or scenario. Supporting this position, Smith and Smith (2007) asserted that anchored vignettes adoption during teaching and learning of business ethics enhance experiential learning through supplementing course content in comprehending basic knowledge and skills. Anchored vignettes as noted by Chavan (2011) in an article on attitudes towards of higher education students on experiential learning in international business are used to get views from learners, which are then scored in a scaled manner to elicit ethical discussions in class. When vignettes are anchored in hypothetical situations they become appropriate in developing ethical culture and language of the learners. Alon and Cannon (2000) have studied possible outcomes from using Internet-based experiential projects in international business classrooms and posited that anchored vignettes should be vague enough to enable learners to interpret the situation from their personal perspectives. In this way vignettes enable teachers to get views of learners during experiential learning sessions. This study used hypothetically anchored vignettes to gauge ethical sensitivity among business ethics learners at University of Nairobi.

5. Truncated Vignettes and Ethical Decision Making

Vignettes can easily be adopted to prompt ethical thinking in particular interest groups such as students studying business in the universities. Vignettes are truncated to elicit varied opinions, critical thinking and problem solving skills in decision making among learners in business ethics. Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014) work on benefits of decision-making in enhancing transformational leadership argued that truncated vignettes help practitioners to discuss ethical issues in an interesting, organized, and active way through experiential learning. Vignettes are truncated to present incomplete stories and stop at a

critical juncture from where the learner is invited to respond. These are usually assessment vignettes, used to measure learner's mastery of subject matter. Bentley (2012) noted that vignettes are truncated by having plot with at least a beginning and middle; incomplete or abridged. In studying business ethics, assessment vignettes are truncated to present events that are logical; in order enable learners to develop individual ethical sensitivity in decision making. In this study assessment vignette will be truncated used to enable business ethics learners to complete a storyline according to a set of criteria specifically defined for this purpose.

6. Scaffolding Vignettes and Ethical Decision Making

Adoption of constructivism in teaching and learning process, typical of use of vignettes will provide an ideological basis in decision-making. According to Ismail and Mohd Ghazali (2011) in an article on ideological judgments among accounting practitioners in Malaysia transfer of responsibility or scaffolding in learning business ethics provides a basis for ethical development among learners. Vignettes as an experiential learning strategy that emphasizes constructivism and greater learner involvement would easily make business professionals develop the necessary an ethical ideology. According to Clark and Graves (2005), in scaffolding during instruction, learners are allowed to propose a business ethics phenomenon for discussion and manage the teaching and learning process. They are also called instructional vignettes. Valentine and Hollingworth (2012) added that that scaffolding through use of vignettes in teaching business ethics, individuals' personal perceptions are shaped towards a positive approach to decision making. In adopting vignettes in experiential learning could involve transferring of responsibility of task to the student during instructional process to enable them make ethical decisions

7. Statement of the Problem

The construction of vignettes can influence ethical decision-making in the teaching and assessment of learners in business ethics. While the appropriate construction of vignettes is likely to enhance learners' engagement, interest and internalization of concepts in ethical decision-making, inappropriate construction of vignettes can make it difficult for learners to make ethical decisions using vignettes. Consequently developing or constructing vignettes that are aligned to the learners' level and language, relevant to their situation, fuzzy enough to elicit interest and that reflect realistic situations in important for ethical decision making in Business ethics. A number studies have investigated the link between vignette construction and quality responses in medical sciences and social work. However, studies in business ethics remain scanty in terms of academic literature, especially in Kenya. Similarly, there is a scarcity of locally constructed vignettes in business ethics being used for teaching and learning. This study was focused at establishing the influence of vignettes construction on ethical decision-making among business education students.

8. Theoretical Framework—Constructivism

Teaching and learning is an interactive process involving teachers and learners. Constructivism attempts to create a learning environment that allows each learner to construct meaning. A constructivist learning environment uses open-ended questions to promote extensive dialogue among learners (Odundo & Gunga, 2013). Specifically, learners use cognitive constructivism as they generate their initial answers to vignette scenario scenes and use social constructivism as they discuss answers in an attempt to find consensus or just express varied opinions. This process could enable learners to arrive at the same understanding, but this is not always the case, especially if learners just answer the questions and do not engage in discussion. Constructivism looks at the learning process of how knowledge is constructed by each learner (Dagar & Yadav, 2016). So the meaning of knowledge is not absolute, but is relative and constructed by the each individual learner.

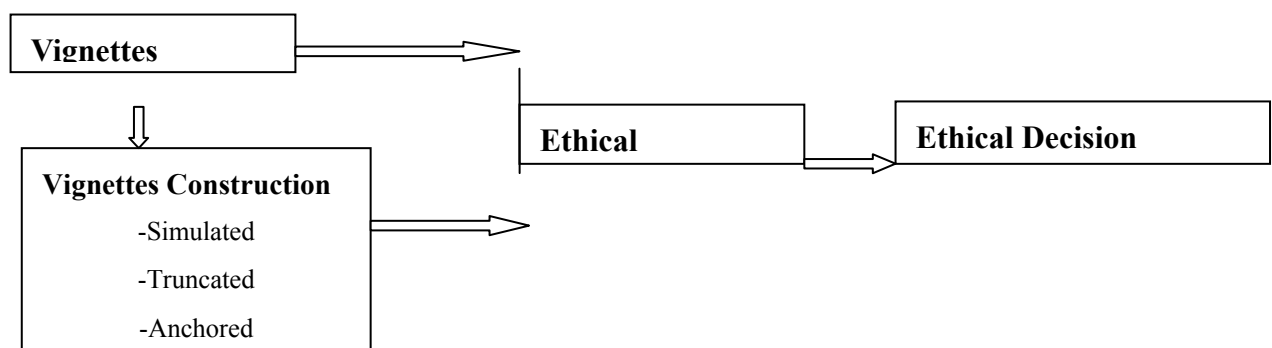


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

9. Methodology

This study was a descriptive survey targeting second year business education undergraduates at University of Nairobi. The information for this study was obtained through questionnaires filled by 20 students randomly sampled from a target population of 120. Data obtained was analyzed both quantitatively using SPSS and qualitatively through thematic approach.

10. Findings and Discussions

To gain a better understanding of the business world, experiential learning approaches such as vignettes provide educational experiences that could shape ethical behavior among business education students. In this study out of a sample of 20 students, 17 provided information that was analysed.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variables	Indicators	Frequency	Percentages
Gender	Males	9	52.9

	Females	8	47.1
Teaching	Maths & Business	8	47.1
Subject	Geography & Business	6	35.3
	Business & PE	3	17.6
High School	Boys Boarding	3	17.6
Attended	Girls Boarding	5	29.4
	Boys Day	1	5.9
	Mixed Day	6	35.3
	Mixed Boarding	2	11.8
Age	Below 20years	1	5.9
	20-25years	16	94.1
Business	Yes	8	47.1
Experience	No	9	52.9
Employment	Yes	4	23.5
	No	13	76.5

11. Gender of the Respondents

From Table 1 it's shown that both genders were well represented even though there were more males than females in the pilot. Given that sampling was randomly done the findings on gender provides a base for fairness and impartiality in discussions to follow. Secondly as noted by Valentine and Hollingworth (2012) vignettes are use in teaching business ethics to all individuals shaped their perception towards a positive approach to decision-making.

12. Teaching Subject

At University of Nairobi, students doing education are required to have two teaching subjects. In this regard students of business education must take along another teaching subject. Results in Table 1 indicates that majority of business studies are taking mathematics as second teaching subject.

Table 2. Gender and Teaching Subjects

	Maths & Business	Geography & Business	Business & PE	Total
Male	3	5	1	9
Female	5	0	2	7
Total	8	5	3	16

In cross tabulating gender and teaching subjects most of the participants had Maths and Business as their teaching subjects. It was interesting to note that more girls than boys are teaching mathematics. This was contrary to findings of Stedham and Beekun (2013) who argued that boys had a stronger affinity and interest towards mathematics. Secondly, cross tabulation revealed that no girls doing geography. According to Akinuoye, Akinuoye, Wan Shuib, and Mokhtar (2015) in an article on gender-based perception and appraisal of geography education in Malaysian students generally varied interest in the subject in its various forms. Interest in any subject may not much of interest as asserted by Stedham and Beekun (2013) in mathematics, but could be a factor of policy, adequacy of instructional resources and activities alongside the scope of various syllabi as well as methods of teaching have translated into constraints. Like in geography, the policy that positioned business education among the elective subjects and minimum experiential approach, could reduce interest among learners. Still on teaching subjects, few students do Physical Education and this could be attributed to the fact that it's not examinable in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

13. High School Attended

Findings in Table 1 indicate that majority of business education students attended mixed day secondary schools. Specifically, 35.3% attended mixed day schools and this can be attributed to Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) policy. Through FDSE as noted by Wagithunu, Muthee, and Thinguri (2014), the government pays equivalence of what should be charged in day secondary schools to all students in Kenya. Therefore as indicated in Table 1, many parents due to economic hardship would prefer day secondary schools. Secondly, emergency of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) has led into establishment of many day secondary schools to help in enhancing transition from primary schools (Chetambve & Sakwa, 2013). In Table 1, it's shown that there was only one student who went to day school for boy and none for girls. This is an indication of parental choice in which parents prefer that they girls go boarding schools compared to boy if they can afford (Oyier, Odundo, Obat, Ganira, & Akondo, 2015). This is further confirmed by the fact that 29.4% of the student went to girls' boarding schools which six out of eight girls who participated in the study.

14. Age of Respondents

Age at which individuals join university depends mainly on when one started schooling. In their work on parental choice on primary education Oyier et al. (2015) noted that its parents who decides when their children start schooling. Secondly, given the fact that age is a determinant of when to join school, individuals at every level of education are mostly likely of same age group. As indicated in Table 3, most of the business education students belong to the same age-group, a confirmation that they started schooling nearly at the same time

15. Business Experience, Internship and Employment

According to findings in Table 1, 47.1% of students have business experience while 52.9% do not. Likewise only 23.5% had been in some form of employment. First on business experience, it is worth to note that entrepreneurial ability could be inborn, from family background, or circumstantial. According to Dane and Sonenshein (2014), previous research has produced contradictory results on whether and how experience relates to ethical decision making in the workplace. This makes it difficult to build an argument around experience and its connection to ethical decision making.

Table 4. Gender, Business Experience and Internship

	Business Experience			Employment/Internship		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Male	6	3	9	3	6	9
Female	1	6	7	1	7	8
Total	7	9	16	4	13	17

Cross tabulation of gender and business as shown in Table 4 indicates that more males than females are already doing business. The same can also be seen in internship where male students either been employed or has internship. In general very few students have been employed or undergone internship. This may suggest that there are limited opportunities in Kenya for students to work or get internship placements or limited exposure to business people. In the case of students of Education, teaching practice is scheduled after the 3rd year; hence that is when most of them get an opportunity to work within the profession as trainee teachers in Schools.

16. Simulated Vignettes

Simulations of real life in form of vignettes enhance learners' engagement with the situations in an authentic way. In this study the respondents were give their rating on the ability of simulated vignettes to provide scenarios that enhance ethical sensitivity and results presented in.

Table 5. Response on Simulated Vignettes

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	13	76.5
Agree	3	17.6
Uncertain	1	5.9
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	17	100.0

According to Table 5, 76.5% of business education students strongly agreed while 17.6% agreed that simulated vignettes provide scenarios that enhance ethical sensitivity. These findings are in tandem Nimmagadda and Murphy (2014) assertion that as a pedagogical approach simulated vignettes adoption promotes ethical sensitivity through critical thinking. In bringing real world situation in a realistic business environment inside the class, simulated vignettes promote experiential learning through problem solving. However, Table 5 also indicates that Table 5 one student was uncertain. In cross tabulation of the data it was revealed that the uncertain student was male. This suggests a gender influence perception on the use of simulated vignettes in providing scenarios that enhance ethical sensitivity. To enhance influence of simulated vignettes in providing scenarios that enhance ethical sensitivity as suggested by Sims and Sauser (2011) in constructing them extreme dilemma situations should be avoided by focusing on moderation.

17. Abridged Vignettes

Abridged vignettes have inherent ambiguity in its content that would make it non-directional and non-prescriptive. In this study business education students were asked if abridged vignettes are significant in developing ethical sensitivity and the results posted in Table 6.

Table 6. Response on Abridged Vignettes

	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	7	41.2
Agree	6	35.3
Uncertain	4	23.5
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	17	100.0

From Table 6, it is indicated that 41.2% and 35.3% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that abridged vignettes are significant in developing ethical sensitivity. This is concurrence with Pan and Sparks (2012) assertion that use of abridged vignettes plus accompanying discussion questions play a significant role character moulding of young business practitioner. However, in it is shown in Table 6 that 23.5% of business education students were uncertain that abridged vignettes are significant in developing ethical sensitivity. This is an indication that abridged vignettes are could be a challenge to the learners compared to simulated construction. Cross tabulating these responses with gender of business education students as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7. Response on Abridged Vignettes with Gender

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Total
Male	4	2	3	9
Female	3	3	1	7
Total	7	5	4	16

Table 7 indicates that males were more uncertain compared to females. Males are however more uncertain than females in their responses to the effectiveness of abridged vignettes in developing ethical decision-making. Stedham and Beekun (2013) report some systematic differences in how individuals rank vignettes by age, education and gender. The differences do not appear to be big enough to reject the assumption that the domain levels represented in each vignette are understood in the same way by all respondents irrespective of their country of residence or other socio-demographic variables. Therefore our focus is on response consistency. As argued by Donleavy (2007), that there is no gender influence on ethical decision making, these findings did not delve on.

18. Truncated Vignettes

Vignettes are truncated to present incomplete stories and stop at a critical juncture from where the learner is invited to respond. This makes truncated vignettes to be used measuring learner's mastery of subject matter. In this study business education students were asked if truncated vignette enhance ethical decisions making from storyline and the response posted in Table 8.

Table 8. Response on Truncated Vignettes

	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	11	64.7
Agree	3	17.6
Uncertain	1	5.9
Disagree	1	5.9
Strongly Disagree	1	5.9
Total	17	100.0

Table 8 indicates that 64.7% of business education students strongly agreed and 17.6% agreed that truncated vignettes enhance ethical decision making from storyline. This represented 82.3% of the respondents agree. These results echoed Effelsberg, Solga and Gurt (2014) opinion that truncated vignettes elicit varied opinions, critical thinking and problem solving skills in decision making among learners in business ethics. Even though 17.7% students were either uncertain or disagreed it is clear from the results that truncated vignettes help practitioners to discuss ethical issues in an interesting,

organized, and active way through experiential learning. This can be achieved by presenting events that are logical in truncated vignettes to enable learners to develop individual ethical sensitivity in decision making. Ideally, truncated vignettes can easily be adopted to prompt ethical thinking in particular interest group apart from students studying business in the universities.

19. Anchored Vignettes

Anchored vignettes help in depicting experiences ranging from normal to unusual occurrences but not weird to enable learners to identify with the situations or scenario. In experiential learning anchored vignettes are adopted to help learners to comprehend supplementing course content. In this study business education students were asked to acknowledge if anchored vignettes are good in getting ethical views of learners and the results posted in Table 9.

Table 9. Response on Anchored Vignettes

	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	10	58.8
Agree	6	35.3
Uncertain	0	0
Disagree	1	5.9
Strongly Disagrees	0	0
Total	17	100.0

Findings in Table 9, indicates that 58.8% strongly agreed and 35.3% agreed anchored vignettes are good in getting ethical views of learners. With 94.1% approval, these results are in tandem with Chavan (2011) assertion that when vignettes are anchored in hypothetical situations they become appropriate in developing ethical culture and language of the learners. It is also in agreement with Alon and Cannon (2000) position that anchored vignettes are vague enough to enable learners to interpret the situation from personal perspectives. This encourages self-esteem because people believe that they have more control over their situation when responding to hypothetical vignettes, than they do when responding to real or simulated vignettes.

20. Scaffolding Vignettes

Scaffolding during instruction, learners are allowed to propose a business ethics phenomenon for discussion and manage the teaching and learning process. Business education students were asked if scaffolding allow learners to propose ethical decision making views and results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Response on Scaffold Vignettes

	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Agree	11	68.8
Agree	4	25.0
Uncertain	0	0
Disagree	1	6.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	16	100.0

From Table 10, it is shown that 68.8% strongly agreed and 25.0% agreed that scaffolding allow learners to propose ethical decision making views. This is 93.7% approval which confirms that scaffolding in learning business ethics provides a basis for ethical development among learners (Ismail & Mohd Ghazali, 2011). It is also an indication that adoption of scaffold vignettes will provide an ideological basis for ethical decision making from a constructivist point of view. As noted by Valentine and Hollingworth (2012) finding of this study confirms that individuals' personal perceptions are shaped towards a positive approach to decision making through scaffolding in teaching business ethics.

21. Conclusion

Experiential learning approaches such as vignettes provide educational experiences that could shape ethical behavior among business education students. Vignettes adoption enables learners to gain a better understanding of the business world. Ideally, various constructions of vignettes would shape individual perception towards a positive approach to ethical decision-making. At the University of Nairobi, students doing education are required to have two teaching subjects and from this study most of the participants will graduate as Mathematics and Business Education teachers. Contrary to belief that boys had a stronger affinity and interest towards mathematics, it was interesting to note that more girls are teaching mathematics. Further, it was revealed that girls were not taking geography, which could be attributed to varied interest and is factor of policy, adequacy of instructional resources.

In Kenya, education policy positions business education among the elective subjects and minimum experiential approach could reduce interest among learners. Focus on high schools attended by business education students, the fact that majority were from mixed day institutions has several interpretations. One key interpretation is that most parents could not afford boarding secondary schools and took advantage of FDSE policy. Mixed day secondary schools are considered local and attending them gave learners limited exposure to the world beyond village vicinity. Second interpretation is success in implementation government policy on increasing transition rate from primary to secondary education through establishment of more day secondary education and of course FDSE.

Interestingly very few students had business experience or have been in attachment or employed

making it difficult to have general conclusion on their entrepreneurial ability and influence on ethical decision-making. However, it is worth noting that entrepreneurial ability could be inborn, from family background, or circumstantial and would significantly influence ethical decision-making among business education students. However, the fact that more males had business experience, have been attached or employed, it is evidence that there are limited opportunities in Kenya for students to work or get internship placements or limited exposure to business people.

When experiential methods like vignettes are used for enhancing learning in teaching business ethics; they generate interest, promote critical thinking and an assurance of higher learner achievement. Vignettes, especially through simulation enhance ethical sensitivity through engagement with the situations in an authentic way. In bringing real world situations in a realistic business environment inside the class, simulated vignettes promote experiential learning through problem solving. However, when constructing simulated vignettes extreme dilemma situations should be avoided by focusing on moderation as a way of promoting ethical decision-making. In addition inherent nature of abridged vignettes as far content is concerned makes them non-directional and non-prescriptive, but is significant in developing ethical sensitivity. The study revealed that abridged vignettes could be a challenge to the learners compared to simulated construction, which is more common especially among male students. However, this difference does not appear to be big enough to reject the assumption that the domain levels represented in each vignette are understood in the same way by all respondents irrespective of their country of origin or residence or other socio-demographic variables.

Truncated vignettes present incomplete stories, which make them useful in measuring learner's mastery of subject matter. This is significant in eliciting varied opinions, critical thinking and problem solving skills in decision making among learners in business ethics. This will further help practitioners to discuss ethical issues in an interesting, organized, and active way through experiential learning. Further, presenting events that are logical enable learners to develop individual ethical sensitivity in decision-making when truncated vignettes are adopted in teaching business ethics. The same applies when anchored vignettes are used even though they help in depicting experiences ranging from normal to unusual occurrences. Hypothetical nature of anchored vignettes makes them appropriate in developing ethical literacy and language of the learners plus interpreting situations from personal perspectives. This encourages self-esteem because people believe that they have more control over their situation when responding to hypothetical vignettes, than they do when responding to real or simulated vignettes. This can be enhanced further through scaffolding which enables discussion on ethical business phenomenon leading to appropriate decision making. Finally, adoption of scaffolding vignettes provides an ideological basis for ethical decision making from a constructivist point of view.

22. Recommendations

On policy, the study recommends that universities and institutions training teachers should consider adoption vignettes as an instructional approach in business education methods and other subject areas.

On practice, the study recommended that as Kenya adopts a competency based learning, vignettes as an instructional tool would greatly enhance teachers' effectiveness and ability to focus on acquisition of practical skills, communication skills and accommodation of learners with different abilities and interests. Finally, further research on the extent business education teachers have adopted vignettes in the field.

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