

Original Paper

INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION OF BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated institutional collaboration and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty in Nigeria. The study was guided by two hypotheses. The population comprised 47 business educators from two public universities in Cross River State: University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). Census technique was used since the number was considered manageable. A researcher made instrument titled "Institutional Collaboration and Quality Implementation of Business Education Programme in an Era of Economic Uncertainty Questionnaire" (ICQIBEP_{EEUQ}) was used for data collection. The instrument was face and content validated by three experts, two from Business Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation units from the surveyed universities. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, a reliability estimate of .77 was achieved for the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot study. Of the 47 questionnaires administered, 95.74% representing 45 copies were retrieved and used in the analysis. Simple linear regression statistical technique was used in testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings revealed among others that collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty. Based on this, it was recommended among others that institutions of higher learning especially the universities should be encouraged to have a

strong inter-institutional synergy between and among themselves where lecturers from one university can go to another university other than theirs to teach and/or carryout collaborative research concerning any particular issue of concern. By so doing, valued experiences would have been harnessed and appropriated by those institutions who may not have the capacity of employing renowned scholars.

Keywords

Institutional collaboration, quality implementation, business education, economic, uncertainty

1. Introduction

Nigeria as a nation endowed with an overabundant supply of resources in leaps and bounds has very recently been warped in precariousness, uneasiness and indeterminacies. This is because, almost all happenings or daily occurrences that unfolds within the country in virtually all sectors of the nation suggest realities that are scummy, vague and acutely very poor to inspire any iota of belief in the country. From the volatility in the financial market, devaluation of the currency (Naira) which has, for example, seen one dollar exchange for over One Thousand Six Hundred Naira, the fuel subsidy removal with its attendant consequential negative impacts on the populace, divestment by investors both local and foreign, soaring food inflation, dilapidated roads and other infrastructures, poor ranking of the Nation Universities among the comity of nations, incessant banditry, kidnapping, farmer header clashes and indeed all forms of insecurities across States of the Federation, skyrocketing hike in the costs of living, “JAPA” syndrome which has seen prominent Nigerians fleeing the country to seek greener pastures in other parts of the world especially core professionals like medical doctors, nurses, lecturers, etcetera, frivolous changes in the macroeconomic policies, inability of the nation to meet its crude oil production quota as pegged by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), nonfunctioning of refineries in a nation that annually budget and expend billions for the servicing and turnaround maintenance of the same moribund refineries including payment of thumping salaries to its workers, police brutality, low per capita income, underemployment, unemployment, job losses. high poverty index, absence of a living wage for the civil and public servants, high level of endemic corruption, disappointments of the legislature at both Federal and State levels to rise to the occasion and enact people oriented laws and serve as the watchdog to the executive, but rather acting as an extremity of the executive, failure of the judiciary to live up to its constitutionally recognised role as the last hope of the common man and the third arm of government, comatose state of the Local Government which is the third tier of government, as well as the very nascent issue – the ‘#End Bad Governance protest’ across States of the Nation amongst other happenings that collectively brand Nigeria as a nation laden with despair and disconsolateness.

Indeed, Nigeria has experienced much more than what the mouth can explain and more than what any ink can exhaustively pen down. Such unpalatable situations can easily be christened *Economic Uncertainties*, and Tutor2u (2023) describes it as a situation in which the future economic environment

is difficult to predict as there are high degree of risk or unknowns involved. The author went further to assert that its causation may be link to a variety of factors including political instability, changes in government policies and market fluctuations which affect behavior in several ways viz. causing businesses to hold off in making investments or hiring new employees, as they are unsure about the future economic environment; making consumers more cautious about spending money, as they are uncertain about their own financial situation. On the whole, economic uncertainty has led to an increase in precautionary saving and a rise in the marginal propensity to consume. Most importantly, economic uncertainty may have led to a decrease in economic activity as people and businesses become more risk-averse.

Giving a perspective on the above situation, Çolak et al. (2020) viewed economic uncertainty broadly as a situation where future outlook of the economy is unpredictable, a situation that makes agents in the economy negatively affected because their expectations are blurred and they are not able to foresee the consequences of their decisions. While lending their voice to this concept, Guo et al. (2023), maintained that the concept of economic uncertainty is formless, thus, they define economic uncertainty as uncertainty in consumers', managers', and policymakers' minds regarding probable futures. Economic uncertainty also includes uncertainty regarding macro-phenomenon such as; Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and micro-phenomenon like a firm's growth rate, climate change and war (Baker et al., 2016; Saari et al., 2019). Apparently, the ravaging effects of economic uncertainties permeates various sectors of human lives and Grupe and Nitschke (2013) assert that economic uncertainties triggers several health-related issues such as anxiety and stress, and the COVID-19 pandemic is a classic example of the negative impact of economic uncertainty on health. In the education sector, economic uncertainty has manifested through the formulation of unclear policies and/or making policies that are not implementable (Li & Li, 2019), poor funding of education (Edet, Onabe, & Ugbe, 2017), absence of state-of-the-art instructional and infrastructural facilities for teaching and learning (Edet & Udida, 2023; Ikutal, Otum, & Edet, 2023), teaching with curriculum that struggles to produce self-reliant business education graduates, rather producing graduates that are half-baked, merely certificated without possessing the requisite skills that can make them employable or job creators (Edet, 2020) which contravenes the goals of business education. Generally, the era of economic uncertainty has plagued the education industry with profound adverse impact, and specifically countermines the fulfilment of business education aims and objectives.

Business education according to Enang and Okute (2019) is education that equips the students with skills necessary to perform particular functions in an office and also provide them with the understanding and knowledge required for conducting personal affairs in the e-world using the services of the world. Edet and Udida (2023) conceptualizes it to be a programme of instruction that prepares its learners with the functional skills, business knowledge, commercial acumen and the attitudes to operates maximally as an employee, employer as well as an entrepreneur. To fulfill these, business education students and lecturers alike requires at the minimum a stimulating teaching and learning

environment to operate. Regrettably, occurrences that plays out in an era of economic uncertainty does not easily pave way for this to occur as lecturers are almost always working in an environment that lack basic office furniture, teaching facilities like flannel boards, electronic boards, internet facilities, laptops, and other ICT facilities, they experience near perpetual absence of power supply to at least cool-off not to talk of conducting research, their working environment is unchallenging and unbecoming of an office space. The students on their parts are immersed with learning mere theories that lack alignment with the needs of the 21st century business world. Such pitiable state of affairs clearly requires collaborations among educational institutions since the many decades of educational decay seems irreclaimable and insusceptible to reform.

Institutional collaboration means the pulling together of efforts and resources among professionals who have varying and unique expertise for the purpose of gaining advantage that would have otherwise been unattainable if they were to operate independent of each other. It involves efforts of collaborating institutions or companies in a way that they both gain skills, resources and knowledge of mutual benefits. Partnership between universities and industries, for example, is becoming more prominent nowadays as it helps to close the gap between theory and practice. This alliance easily referred to as collaboration between institutions and industries is an essential path for achieving university goals. Therefore, institutional collaboration can be actualised through several ways such as; but not limited to: research activities, industrial training for students, support for development projects, and joint curriculum development (Eniola-Arigbe et al., 2022). It can also be attained through exchange programmes, guest lectures, and etcetera. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) recognized the use of collaboration by various education stakeholders as one of the mediums of improving teacher quality and achieving quality education at any educational level. The FRN further scripted in the National Policy of Education (NPE) that the effective use of strategic planning to improve the quality of education provision and service delivery will also include better coordination, collaboration and networking of activities, programmes and interventions of all tiers of government, development partners and all other stakeholders in the Nigerian education sector to eliminate overlaps and achieve sustain synergy (Onajite & Oyerinde, 2017). Consequently, Onajite and Oyerinde (2017) remarked that institutional collaboration has both official and legal backing which necessitates that all tertiary institutions should collaborate not only for teachers' improvement, but also for achieving quality education. Doing so may lead to quality implementation of business education programmes.

In a broad perspective, Kulsoom et al. (2023) defined quality implementation as the process of putting into action the plans and strategies developed during quality planning and quality assurance activities. They scholars explained that quality implementation involves ensuring that the quality standards and procedures established are followed throughout the entire process of product or service development. This means that quality implementation is an integral part of the quality management process, which includes continuous improvement of processes and procedures to ensure that products and services are of consistent quality. Specifically, quality implementation as it relates to this study refers to adequate

execution of generally accepted business education plans, programmes, procedures, policies and strategies in a way that its aims, objectives, goals, mission and vision are fully actualized. To attain such lofty height, the right quality and mix of the lecturers, the quality and sufficiency of facilities, instructional resources, admission process and quality of products churn out should constitute aspects whose quality are not compromised. Yet, the reality on ground in most Nigerian universities are saddening and that caught the attention of the researchers in this study to delve into investigating how academic institutions particularly the universities can collaborate in the areas of lecturers and students exchange programmes in an era of economic uncertainties.

Lecturers' exchange programme according to NIMARLA Arts and Science College (2022) is a collaborative activity of two educational institutions, united under a Memorandum of Understanding, exchanging the services of their selected faculties for a short period. The programme presents a unique opportunity for interaction and creates better bonding among the institutions. According to them, this programme is a powerful recruitment and retention tool. For the International Society of Environmental Relationship and Sustainability (ISERS, 2022), lecturers exchange programme is an undertaking that provide participants with opportunity to teach or conduct research for one semester, one week or one month at an overseas university. During such period, faculty members would benefit from exposure to culturally varied and diverse faculty make-up, with an opportunity to exchange ideas and observe a variety of styles. The organization added that three schemes defines the nature of their lecturers' exchange programme viz. research, teaching and guest lecture. On their part, Amity International Business School (2017) informed that the incidence of faculty-staff exchange programmes, both international and inter institutional, is one-way higher education institutions can ascertain and sustain quality education. In their words, these programmes are mutual, inter-institutional arrangements through which the proficiency and services of one institution's lecturers are exchanged with the other institution for time-limited periods. Furthermore, the primary aim of an academic exchange program is to provide the opportunity for the exchanged personnel to serve as "employees" of the host institution; to encourage professional development through the stimulus of a different setting; and for the host organization to benefit from the knowledge and skills of the exchanged personnel. It equally assists in transformative internationalization of the university. This can be of immense benefits to Nigerian universities especially in an era of economic uncertainty where universities are constantly lamenting of poor funding and lecturers are not just complaining of being grossly underpaid, but hordes of them are exiting the academic sector to other seemingly lucrative sectors where improve conditions of service abounds.

Aptly said, numerous benefits accrue from engaging in lecturers' exchange programme. Some of which include; revitalization of course content at the school to reflect the latest trends; invigoration of school faculty by the addition of new colleagues directly involved in similar practice arena; creation of new opportunities for future school-agency collaboration on research, special projects and practical; as well as the acquisition or update of practice experience which can inform faculty teaching and research

(Amity International Business School, 2017). NIMARLA Arts and Science College (2022), added that this programme is advantageous in many ways; primarily, it provides a novel teaching-learning experience to the students and lecturers involved. Essentially, some scholars reasoned that when contemplating lecturers' exchange programme, the following are some of the key aspects to consider: identifying potential partners and what exchange members could contribute. More so, when establishing the programme, attention should be focused on; documentation, legal issues, how to support the exchange programme, titles for appointment, duration of the appointment as well as the performance expectations.

Students exchange programme on the other hand is a programme in which students from secondary school (high school) or higher education like the university study abroad at one of their institution's partner institutions (Wikipedia, 2024). Student exchange programme may involve international travel, but does not necessarily require the student to study outside their home country. If the nature of the exchange programme is foreign, it will afford participating students with an opportunity to study in another country and thus experience a different environment. These programmes avail ample opportunities that may not be available in the participant's home country, such as learning about the history and culture of other countries and meeting new friends to enrich their personal development. International exchange programmes are also effective as it challenges students to develop a global perspective.

Worthily, the term "exchange" means that a partner institution accepts a student, but does not necessarily mean that the students have to find a counterpart from the other institution with whom to exchange. Notably, the popularity of student exchanges came to the fore after World War II (Wikipedia, 2024), and it was intended to increase the participants' understanding and tolerance of other cultures, as well as improving their language skills and broadening their social horizons. Student exchanges also increased further after the end of the Cold War. Students of study abroad programmes often aim to develop a global perspective and cultural understanding by challenging their comfort zones and immersing themselves in a different culture. Studies have shown that students' desire to study abroad has increased, and research suggests that students choose programmes because of location, costs, available resources and heritage.

Basically, there are two types of students' exchange programmes namely; Short-Term Exchange Programme (STEP) and Long-Term Exchange Programme (LTEP). STEP focuses on home-stays, language skills, community service, or cultural activities. High school and university students can apply for the programme through various government or non-governmental organizations that organize the programme. A short-term exchange lasts from one week to three months and does not require the student to study in any particular school or institution. The students are exposed to an intensive programme that increases their understanding of other cultures, communities, and languages. Long-term exchange, on the other hand is one which lasts six to ten months or up to one full year.

Factually, Wikipedia (2024) reports that as at 2017, Nigeria was ranked eighth among the top ten countries sending students abroad for tertiary education exchange programme. But in 2024, neither did the ranking by Fleck (2024), who referenced the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ranking of top eight countries with most students abroad rank Nigeria amongst the first eight countries that send students for exchange programme, nor did the report of WorldAtlas (2024) that ranked the top ten countries with most students undertaking exchange programme put Nigeria among the first ten countries. And it seems while other countries of the world are pushing their citizens to partner other developed countries in an educational alliance that will better their lots in the present and in the foreseeable future, Nigeria is becoming remote in manner towards this aspect. Concernedly, if countries like China, India, Germany, South Korea, Vietnam, and France who are considered as technological heavyweights and advanced savvy could indulge in institutional collaborations, what could have hex Nigerian government and their universities from going into institutional collaborations with top ranked universities in the world especially in this era of economic uncertainty? Certainly, there is a compelling need to drum the relevance of institutional collaborations through lecturers and students exchange programmes into the ears of the government and management of Nigerian Universities for possible adoption. Should this be considered foolproof, can lecturers and students exchange programmes palliate the poor state of Nigerian universities in this era of economic uncertainty? The quest to answering this toughie justifies why the researchers decided to undertake this study.

2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate institutional collaboration and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty in Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined collaboration through:

- 1) Lecturers exchange programme and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.
- 2) Students exchange programme and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

3. Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- 1) Collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme does not significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty
- 2) Collaboration through students' exchange programme does not significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a predictive correlational research design. Particularly, the study focused on collaboration through lecturers and students exchange programmes. Two hypotheses guided the study. The study area was Cross River State which is one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria. 47 business educators from two public universities in Cross River State: University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS) constituted the population, and census technique was used since the number was considered manageable. This is shown in Table 1.

A researcher made instrument titled “Institutional Collaboration and Quality Implementation of Business Education Programme in an Era of Economic Uncertainty Questionnaire” (ICQIBEPUEUQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was face and content validated by three experts, two from Business Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation units from the surveyed universities. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, a reliability estimate of .77 was achieved for the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot study. Of the 47 questionnaires administered, 95.74% representing 45 copies were retrieved and used in the analysis. Simple linear regression statistical technique was used in testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The instrument was administered personally by the researchers and retrieved after completion. This was done after relevant information about the problem being researched was explained to the respondents. A coding key was designed to code all responses.

Table 1. Population Distribution of the Study

Institution	Number of business educators
University of Calabar	32
University of Cross River State	15
Total	47

4. Results

Hypothesis one

Collaboration through lecturers’ exchange programme does not significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

Test for significant was done using simple linear regression at .05 alpha level. A summary of the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Collaboration Through Lecturers' Exchange Programme and Quality Implementation of Business Education Programme in an Era of Economic Uncertainty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.185 ^a	.034	.032		6.764	
Source of variation		SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Regression		615.399	1	615.399	13.451	.000 ^b
Residual		17431.823	43	45.753		
Total		18047.222	44			

*P<.05; df = 43.

From Table 2, the correlation between collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty was .185. This implied that as collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme improves, so would quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty. From the correlation coefficient, an R square of .034 was obtained, this indicate that about 3.4% of total variation in quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty is accounted for by collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme. The F- ratio of 13.451 is greater than the critical value of 4.12 with 1 and 43 degree of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

Hypothesis two

Collaboration through students' exchange programme does not significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

Test for significant was done using simple linear regression at .05 alpha level. A summary of the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Result of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Collaboration through Students' Exchange programme and Quality Implementation of Business Education Programme in an Era of Economic Uncertainty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.296 ^a	.046	.041		6.873.	
Source of variation		SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Regression		954.147	1	954.147	20.91	.000 ^b
Residual		17093.075	43	45.632		
Total		18047.222	44			

*P<.05; df = 43.

From Table 3, the correlation between collaboration through students' exchange programme and quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty was .296. This implied that as collaboration through students' exchange programme improves, so would quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty. From the correlation coefficient, an R square of .046 was obtained, this indicate that about 4.6% of total variation in quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty is accounted for by collaboration through students' exchange programme. The F- ratio of 20.91 is greater than the critical value of 4.12 with 1 and 43 degree of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that collaboration through students' exchange programme significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty.

5. Discussion of Findings

Finding concerning hypothesis one indicates that collaboration through lecturers' exchange programme significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty. This finding supports the averment of Onajite and Oyerinde (2017) that institutional collaboration has both official and legal backing which necessitates that all tertiary institutions should collaborate not only for teachers' improvement, but also for achieving quality education, as embarking on it may lead to quality implementation of business education programmes. Also, the finding backs Eniola-Arigbe et al. (2022) for providing the basis that institutional collaboration can be actualised through several ways such as; but not limited to: research activities, support for development projects,

and joint curriculum development. This finding enounce a soothing path not just for the university who will approve of the lecturers' exchange programme, but also for Nigeria as a nation because it will benefit by way of having high level manpower trained by educators who have interacted with their peers at the international level.

Finding regarding hypothesis two reveals that collaboration through students' exchange programme significantly predict quality implementation of business education programme in an era of economic uncertainty. This finding agrees with Wikipedia (2024) that students involved in exchange programmes often aim to develop a global perspective and cultural understanding by challenging their comfort zones and immersing themselves in a different culture. This finding thus point out that in universities where business education programme is mounted which has poor state of facilities, dysfunctional equipment, dilapidated infrastructures and teaching and learning is stultified, there is a dire need for the students to embark on exchange programmes that will see them mingle and have interactive study sessions with other students in an academically charged environment.

6. Conclusion

It is no longer news that business education programme is mounted in many Nigerian universities nowadays, what seems to constitute news and a source of concern is the fact that in this era of economic uncertainty where education is grossly underfunded, thus impacting on the provision of the requisite resources for teaching and learning and the recruitment of qualified lecturers in the right mix, the quality of business education programme presently run leaves much to be desired. To close the identified gaps, encouraging lecturers and students to periodically embark on exchange programmes may be not just the alleviant, but the catholicon.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Management of universities should be encouraged to have a strong inter-institutional synergy between and among themselves where lecturers can go to other institutions to teach and carryout collaborative research concerning any particular issue.
- 2) Management of universities should identify worthy institutions with cherished objectives, mission and vision and sign Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with them for their students to be going for exchange programmes.

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