

**INVESTIGATING THE RELEVANCE OF BUSINESS EDUCATION
FOR GRADE EIGHT AND NINE WITHIN THE ERITREAN
CONTEXT**

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ERITREAN CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relevance of business education for Grades Eight and Nine in the Eritrean context. The information was ascertained by researching the profile of respondents; standards of the teaching material, objectives of the learning organizations, their reflection towards business activities; and challenges that could hinder relevance of business education. The study uses both a literature review and empirical data to achieve its aim. In the literature portion, the views of educators regarding standards of objectives, teaching material, learning organizations, their reflection on the business world; the contribution and challenges of business education; the necessity of business schools and business education in the third world countries, are presented. In the empirical part of the study, the perceptions of teachers, students and concerned authorities of the standards, challenges, relevance and importance of business education, is investigated. The study was based on an illuminative method. The data was gathered by means of questionnaires and interviews. A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed to a sample of two comprehensive secondary schools in the Central Zone (Zoba Maekel) of Eritrea. The response rate was 100%. A semi-structured interview was held with six teachers and five concerned authorities, to obtain the real thoughts of teachers and to supplement the responses made in the questionnaire.

The analysis of the findings revealed that although the business education offered in Grades Eight and Nine have not been changed for a long time, it is similar to the standards of business education offered in the schools of other countries. Moreover, the study also found that the relevance of business education offered in these two schools has been obscured by the challenges arising in the teaching profession. The analysis further indicated that the benefit of business education might be improved by formulating curricula and using more effective and positive classroom management. These changes could remedy the challenges facing business education.

DECLARATION

I declare that, *Investigating the relevance of business education for Grade Eight and Nine within the Eritrean context* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Berhane Yakon Abrham

November 2003

Signed: .....

Dedicated

To my beloved wife Fekadu Ghebreyesus; my parents: Yakob Abrham, Snbetu Debas; my brothers: Kidane, Zeray, Nigussie, Keshi Bahita; and my sisters: Kudusana and Tsihiwot

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Chapter One

Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

The strategic location of Eritrea had a political implication. The colonizers were able to introduce their own curriculum into the educational system of the country. At the end of colonialism in 1991, a new educational approach was needed. This resulted in the re-arrangement of the schooling system. Two comprehensive secondary schools (CSS), alongside the existing secondary schools, were chosen to offer Business Education. The schools are Keih Bahiri (KBCSS) and Asmara Comprehensive Secondary School (ACSS). (Basic Educational Statistics, 2001/2002:2). These two comprehensive schools were expected to be a model for offering Business Education. The aim was to ascertain whether the stream is relevant or not.

The rationale for the study also originated due to the current concerns about increasing enrolment numbers in Business Education in Grade Eight at the beginning of the academic year (Basic Educational Statistics, 2001/2002:2). Grade Eight is the starting grade for secondary education in the Eritrean education system. This is the level at which the pupils are exposed to Business Education. It is believed that the two schools, namely KBCSS and ACSS, annually receive approximately 800 and 1000 applications respectively. Unfortunately the schools are only able to accept 360 pupils.

In any given classroom, the relevance of Business Education can be affected by the following factors.

- The kind of pupils the school accepts;
- Availability of regularly updated curricula and syllabi;
- The materials, human resources and academic support available;
- The teaching methodology utilized;
- The economic and political stability of the country; and

- The challenges facing the school and community.

However, due to the limited scope of the research focus, an attempt will be made to investigate the relevance of Business Education in Grade Eight and Nine by exploring the content, objectives and learning organizational principles of Business Education and teaching methodology, and the educational resources available to the school. These factors are considered vital for effective and progressive teaching for pupils in the classroom setting.

1.2 Background and context

Eritrea is a newly born northeast African nation. It gained its independence from Ethiopia through a democratic and legal Referendum, on May 24, 1993, after 30 years of armed struggle (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998). Basic Educational Statistics (2001/2002:10) mentions that Eritrea is a small country, 123,370 sq. km in size, and has an average density of 29 persons per each sq. km. It has a 1200 km coastline. It is adjacent to the Red Sea. Eritrea is bordered by the Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti. The estimated population is about 3.7 million (1994 base year estimated at three million and annual population growth at 2.7 %). Eritrea consists of nine ethnic groups (Tigrigna, Tigre, Billen, Saho, Afar, Rashaida, Kunama, Nara, and Hidarib) and the population is equally divided into Christians and Muslims (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998).

The succession of colonial systems (Turkey, Egypt, Italy), the British Military Administrative system, the long war for independence and the recent border dispute with neighboring Ethiopia, has affected the economic, political, social and educational development of the country (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998).

Formal education in Eritrea was introduced during the Italian colonial periods (1897-1941). During this time Eritrea emerged as a distinctive territory (Ghebregziabher, 2002: 4). From 1891- 1942, Eritrea was an Italian colony. Eritreans were allowed to attend school up to Grade Four to gain some knowledge in order to assist the Italians with interpreting and with communication tasks. The curriculum basically followed

the curriculum of schools in Italy (Gottesman, 1998: 76). The purpose of the colonial educational system was to broadcast propaganda. At the beginning, some grammar schools were built and the curriculum was mainly geared towards training elite Eritreans who worked in the administration of the country in different fields (Gottesman, 1998: 76).

With the defeat of Italy in 1941, the Great Powers (France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom) decided that Great Britain would govern Eritrea as a protectorate (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998). This was the era during which the foundations of the educational programs were promoted to its progressive state. For instance, the number of schools doubled, textbooks were provided, native teachers were recruited to teach in Tigringna and Arabic, and a teacher training college was established (Ghebregziabher, 2002: 5).

On December 2 1950, the United Nations passed a resolution that formally federated Eritrea to Ethiopia. In September 1952, Ethiopia replaced the British governance (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998). Since the take-over, Eritrea has made little change to the purely Italian curriculum. However in 1962, the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Silasie, issued order No 27, declaring that “ the federal period is hereby terminated” and brought Eritrea under complete Ethiopian domination (Government of Eritrea 1993, cited in Gottesman, 1998).

Eritrea passed from British Military administration to the federal arrangement with better educational facilities than those existing in Ethiopia (Gottenman, 1998: 80). But the Eritrean educational system was restructured to reflect the Ethiopian values and serve the needs of colonial administration - a strategy that threatened the Eritrean existence. This was an era in which the educational development was characterized by a decline in standards. As a consequence, most Eritrean children were denied access to elementary schooling. Fessehazion (2001: 8) elaborated,

Unfortunately due to the political unrest, the promising future in the Eritrean educational system was curtailed when Ethiopia, in 1962, made unprecedented moves to annex Eritrea into its territory. Since then, the Ethiopian curriculum was put into operation.

The basic substance of the Ethiopian curriculum in the early 1960s and late 1980s was strongly influenced by the American curricula. Most of the curriculum materials and teaching strategies were adopted from that country. Without any substantial change, the impact of American curricula continued throughout these years. Business Education was also influenced by American systems and is still employed at all levels of education (Fessehazion, 2001: 8).

A new chapter in Eritrea's educational system started in 1991 when Eritrea emerged as a sovereign independent state. From July 22-24, 1991, a historic conference on economic policy options for Eritrea was conducted. According to Tesfagiorgis (1998:7), it was believed constructive to reform the Ethiopian curriculum. Five educational goals were deduced from the conference:

- Eradicate illiteracy from Eritrea so that by the year 2005 every Eritrean adult will be able to read, write and do basic arithmetic;
- Achieve free, compulsory, universal primary education by the year 2000;
- Produce skilled manpower with a balanced mix of general and technical/vocational education;
- Establish and run a system of higher education with a mission to produce highly skilled manpower, establish a center for basic and applied research, thus making an impact throughout the country; and
- Promote Eritrean national unity by fostering a sense of equality among the country's diverse nationalities and in so doing, develop a sense of Eritrean culture.

However, since independence, education has become one of the top priorities of the Government of Eritrea, with the objective of "Producing a population equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for self-reliance and modern economy" (Ministry of Education, 1991: cited in Fessehazion, 2001). In order to achieve this, the government is working with a vision of 'education for all' and the objectives contained in the plan will be accepted by 2015. The following table depicts the current school system.

Level	Grade	Age
Pre-school	I, II	5-6
Elementary School	1-5	7-11
Middle School	6-7	12-13
Secondary School	8-11	14-17

Source: Eritrean Basic Education Statistics, 1999/2000: 11

The basic education, from grade 1-7, is compulsory for every citizen.

The Eritrean educational system offers:

- a school- based examination, held at each school to decide the promotion of the pupils from one grade to another, and
- the National examination, provided for all pupils at the end of Junior Secondary school (Grade 7) and Secondary School (Grade 11). In the Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination (ESECE) three Business Education courses are given at the national level. These courses are Economics, Bookkeeping Education and Commercial Mathematics.

The research was conducted at the two comprehensive secondary schools found in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. These are Keih Bahiri and Asmara comprehensive secondary schools. In the academic year of 2002/2003, according to the information given by the principals - there are eight sections for Grade Eight in both schools and seven sections at KBCSS and six sections at ACSS for Grade Nine that offer Business Education. These two governmental schools serve male and female pupils. It is common to have an average of 60 to 70 pupils in a class.

KB CSS						ACSS					
Grade 8			Grade 9			Grade 8			Grade 9		
M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
218	262	480	200	220	420	248	208	456	270	190	360

Source: the schools registrar of KBCSS and ACSS for the scholastic year 2002/2003.

1.3 The state of Business Education in Eritrea

In Eritrea, Business Education is offered from Grade Eight at two comprehensive secondary schools. The subject is offered as an integrated as well as a separate stream in the commercial fields. Courses such as Economics, Bookkeeping, General Business, Commercial Mathematics, and Typing are offered. The subject matter of this stream is to prepare pupils for further education at universities or colleges. Those who are unable to join university or college are trained to become professional bookkeepers, entrepreneurs, or clerks.

Pupils in the commercial streams at the comprehensive secondary schools have equal opportunities with other stream pupils (such as natural science, art science, agriculture, technical, etc.) to join the commercial stream at Asmara Commercial College and the University of Asmara. This is because the University of Asmara Educational Testing Center (UAETC) assigns all pupils according to the Grand Point Average (GPA) they obtained in the ESECE examination.

Compared to the other streams, Business Education at the comprehensive level has not been given much emphasis. The Business Education curriculum is not fully developed. It has to be reformed to reflect the present business activities in the real business world. In Eritrea there is a dire shortage of textbooks and teaching support materials relating to Business Education.

1.4 Rationale of the study

Over the years, Business Education has been undergoing constant and relentless change worldwide. Fullan and Hargraves (1997: 36) mentions that the fundamental aim of education is to prepare young people for life in a society, and societies throughout the world are constantly changing and developing. In addition, demands for greater accountability, global competition, and concern about standards have all contributed to the increasing interest in evaluating the Business Education curriculum in secondary schools (Leathwood and Phillips, 2000).

The major reason for examining the critical change in curriculum development is to ensure that the needs of the society will be met in terms of what people must know in order to cope with their home and work lives. Assuming that most, if not all the major requirements (curriculum/syllabus, textbooks, etc.) of society are identified, and assuming that the resultant specifications of objectives reflect these needs. It should then, be ensured that the curriculum taught in the school is relevant to the needs of the persons entering the society at various levels.

At government level there is a renewed call for sound researched evidence to reform educational policy. The President of the State of Eritrea, His Excellency President Isaias Afeworki, emphasized in a recent interview that the Eritrean curriculum has not achieved as expected (Shaebia staff, October 15, 2002). Based upon this, therefore, a growing interest in Business Education curriculum evaluation in secondary schools can be seen as one response to this scenario.

On the basis of the researcher's strong interest in business management skills and business activities, the historical background of Eritrea, and the continuous change in education, the researcher decided to investigate the relevance of Business Education for Grade Eight and Nine as it relates to Eritrea.

1.5 Significance of the study

It is believed that no other study has been done in Eritrea specifically concerned with investigating the relevance of Business Education in Grades Eight and Nine. It is hoped that this research can make a positive contribution to the establishment of a praiseworthy business perspective, which is likely to favour a viable development by evaluating the existing Business Education curriculum in the lower secondary schools.

1.6 Scope of the study

The purpose of this study was to derive empirical evidence relating to the relevance of Business Education in comprehensive secondary schools. To achieve this goal,

questionnaires and interviews were carried out to seek the views of teachers and pupils from two comprehensive schools and concerned representatives from MOE.

The study area was restricted to two comprehensive secondary schools, because in Eritrea the commercial subjects are limited to these two comprehensive schools. Thus, it might not be an indication of the situation of the whole nation.

1.7 Aims of the study

The aim of the study is to evaluate the relevance of the existing Business Education given in Grades Eight and Nine. It is hoped that, upon completion of this study, the following aims will be achieved. These will include:

1. Evaluation of the concepts of business in relation to the course objectives, content, and learning organization;
2. Ascertaining the relevance of Business Education within the Eritrean business context;
3. Identification of the availability of educational resources for Business Education for the teaching-learning process.
4. Identification and recommendation for the main challenges of Business Education.

1.8 Research questions

The primary research question is: “Is Business Education offered by the CSSs relevant in terms of its objectives, contents, and does it contribute to creating learning organizations?” Upon completion of the study it is hoped that the following secondary research questions will be answered.

1. Do Business Education objectives; syllabi and learning organizational principles in the secondary schools especially in Grade Eight and Nine enable pupils to master certain skills?
2. Is the program meeting the demands of the Eritreans and enabling them to earn a living in business activities?

3. Is the Ministry of Education preparing enough educational resources for Business Education for the teaching-learning process?
4. What are the main challenges that could hinder the relevance of Business Education?

1.9 Definitions of terms

Key concepts in this study are: relevance; secondary school; pupil; teacher; objective of Business Education; career education; learning organization for Business Education; curriculum/syllabi; Business Education; school leaver; Eritrea.

For the purpose of clarity, the following definitions are given for terms frequently used:

Secondary school: Secondary schools are educational institutions where skills, attitudes, and knowledge are gained, from Grade Eight through to Grade Twelve.

Relevance of curriculum: Relevance is explained as follows: “that the curriculum corresponds to an existing need in a society” (Lewy, 1984: 51).

Business Education: This term refers to the systematic development and cultivation of the mind and other natural powers of a person through teaching and learning business subjects. It aims, not only to develop knowledge and skills, but also to shape attitudes in a positive direction.

Curriculum or syllabi: This term is often used to describe both a program for a given subject matter and for a given grade. Furthermore, it could be a program for a given subject matter for the entire study cycle or a whole program of different subjects for the entire cycle or even a whole range of cycles.

Career education: An all-inclusive concept ranging from elementary to professional training and that involves preparing all people for a successful and rewarding life.

1.10 Ethics of the study

Codes of Ethics exist to safeguard or protect people's identities. Thus, from the beginning of the research, great care was taken to address ethical issues. Some of the issues addressed earlier included gaining permission to conduct the research, ensuring the rights of the participants and briefing them about the overall objectives of the study.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality must be assured in order to safeguard against unwanted exposure. All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity (Denizen and Lincoln 2000: 139). All informants were briefed about the objectives of the study, the reason for the study and how they were selected. In order to protect the interviewees, their confidentiality and anonymity was ensured. In addition, permission to take notes and record interviews was sought. The recorded and transcribed interviews were stored safely and were only available to the researcher. Two informants who asked to see the transcribed information were given access and all information was treated with great sensitivity.

Accuracy: Accuracy ensures that data is accurate. Fabrication, fraudulent materials, omissions, and contrivances are non-scientific and unethical (Denizen and Lincoln 2000: 140).

1.11 Limitations of the study

- It is important to acknowledge that the mixed methodology approach to this study may have inherent limitations.
- The study area is restricted to two comprehensive secondary schools. Thus it might not be an indication of the situation of the whole nation.
- Another serious but unavoidable limitation of this study was that two interviewees were unable to participate. One interviewee refused while the other was transferred to a job out of the country.
- Access to the curriculum documents could be regarded as a limitation.