

# Activity Based Learning: A Successful Model for Business Education

**Agatha Samson**

*Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi  
Faculty of Technology Education  
Department of Vocation and Technology Education  
E-mail: axxymine@yahoo.com*

## ABSTRACT

*Activity-based learning model is a cognitive-learning model which is considered a “constructivist” learning theory, especially; a learner “constructs” his own small version of knowledge from past knowledge and/or current experiences and interacting with data or information. The work is on activity based learning as a successful model for business education. The aim is to identify the problems in teaching business education in relation to practical aspect. It shall further appraise activity based learning (ABL) and its purpose, the need for quality business education and the ABL in teaching business education, the factors militating against integration of ABL among other. This study reveals that activity based learning is one of the best ways of learning and teaching especially in business education since it is built on the rationale that students learn best when they do or are involved in action.*

**Keywords:** *Activity Based Learning, Model, Business Education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Business education requires practices and solutions for real-world problems and for the development of modern technological societies as much as more than any other field (Santosh, 2012). According to Santosh (2012), business education is the application of skills and knowledge acquired by business education graduates which are comparable to the skills and knowledge possessed by business professionals. This can be possible by providing good learning situations and environment, where knowledge can be acquired, organized, and applied, thus, Activity- based learning is a vital consideration for business educators. Activity-based learning is the transfer of learning to the real-world applicability, which is the main concern in the teaching philosophy of Business Education. Today advanced technology has received keen attention in the field of Business Education. The integration of technology and activity-based learning provide students with an environment to interact within different ways and settings.

Activity-based learning (ABL) describes the engagement of pedagogical models to business education teaching. It is a model which claims that learning should be based on doing some hands-on experiments and activities. The notion of activity-based learning emerges in the common perception that business education students are active learners rather than passive recipients of information. If a student is provided the opportunity to participate actively and provided an optimum learning environment, then the learning becomes lively, concrete and permanent (Herrington and Oliver, 2000). Activity-based learning model is a cognitive-learning model which is considered a “constructivist” learning

theory; especially a learner “constructs” his own small version of knowledge from past knowledge and/or current experiences and interacting with data or information. He or she actively seeks new information, and is actively engaged in the process in the ways he/she gains, assimilates, and utilizes knowledge. The facilitator engages learners in outlining real-world problems in the first place instead of starting with a classification of problem-solving methods. Integrating ABL elements is thus a promising way to enhance students’ learning experiences particularly in business education (Kent and Barut, 2003).

Activity-based learning (ABL) is a successful teaching model in the field of medicine, engineering and science, and it has recently found its way to business education (Jonassen, (2000). This approach provides a way to integrate learning within students’ knowledge, and expose them to a variety of activities that help them learn how to learn. Because of high degree of interaction in ABL, essential instructor skills involve; facilitating, motivating, enabling and coaching rather than simply presenting facts and figures didactically. This study focuses on Activity-based learning because it is one of the best ways of learning and teaching, especially in Business Education (Stößlein, 2009). Activity-based learning is assumed to be built on the rationale that students learn best when they do or are involved in action. Learning is then structured into ‘activities’ that will facilitate what has to be learned. This approach is specifically and closely related to “Discovery Based Learning” and “Inquiry Based Learning”, all of which are linked to methodology in outcome Based Education”.

### **Problems in Teaching Business Education**

Activity-based learning (ABL) is not a completely new teaching style because it can be traced back at least as far as Socrates and Humboldt. However, it has been rediscovered by progressive educators such as John Dewey (Stößlein, 2009). For a long time, it seemed that universities neglected to think about this process of learning, since it is a highly active process in which students are convinced to speak, read, write, involve in activities and think deeply (Dodge, 1998). The traditional way (lecture) of attending classes is characterised by low level comprehension that goes from the ear to the writing (hand) and leaves the mind untouched (Kent and Barut, 2003). In contrast, the success of ABL is to make students feel responsible for their learning and to support their own individual development (Stößlein and Kanet, 2008).

In Nigeria, students are accustomed to being taught in often-overcrowded classrooms in a more authoritarian teaching style (lecture), which makes student questioning and lively discussions rare and sometimes impossible. As a result, students learnt and acquired knowledge and skills through observation, recalling, memorisation, imitation and replication. This is in contrast-even diametrical – to education in North America and Western Europe, which is traditionally based on a teaching style which fosters independent research, critical thinking, and participation and discussion in class (Stößlein, 2009). Thus, the biggest challenge for us is how to bridge the gap from previous cultural notions and expectations of Nigerian Education with an ABL approach which is students centred attributed to learners participation.

### **Activity Based Learning in Business Education**

Activity Based learning (ABL) in Business Education will enable students to understand product and customer profitability and the pattern of services distribution, the cost of business processes, and how to improve them. ABL is not often used unlike many business techniques, research shows that 80 percent of companies that have employed activity-based techniques students found them to be successful. Learning is biochemical activity in the brain; a relatively permanent change in behaviour; information processing; awakening, remembering and recalling; social negotiation (Jonassen, 2000). ABL can be defined as an institutional arrangement in which learners are concurrently exposed to both work and learning environments (Jarred and Jefsoutine, 2006). ABL literally is an attempt to expand the walls of classroom to include the community as a learning resource. It therefore, extends the frontiers of the classroom to the work-world (National centre on secondary education and training (NCSET, 2005). ABL affords learners ample opportunities to learn a variety of skills that guarantee synergistic relationship between the school and the world-of-work.

It is an attempt to narrow the gap existing between theory and practice thereby, making meaningful learning possible (Okon, 2011). Many students can benefit from learning Business Education through activities- oriented approach that reduces the reliance on textbooks, lectures, knowledge of vocabulary, and pencil-and-paper tests (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 1994). This kind of approach seeks to promote learning by providing students with experiences that allow them to discover and experiment with business. Through discovery and inquiry, teachers involve students in creating and expanding their knowledge and understanding about the content area being studied (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 1995).

### **The Need for Quality Business Education and ABL**

Business Education departments have come under attack in recent years for the poor job of not providing relevant training and skills for their students. There is growing corporate demand for pedagogical techniques that focus on the immediate problems rather than on lofty theories or even case studies, as a result of the changes in the way business organizations function, universities and colleges of education; department of business education are subject to pressures from a number of stakeholder groups, including employers, advisory boards, accrediting bodies, alumni, legislators, and students. As institutions of higher education are perceived to exist for the public good, they are increasingly held accountable for the quality of outputs produced. The business organizations have been increasingly trying to cope with the changing demands of the environment looking for managerial expertise with required skills. The discussion has moved away from determining the appropriate balance of content, which is rooted in traditional functional areas, to a determination of effective methods for developing softer and modern technological skills, self-directed learning, and a holistic understanding of the internal and external environment of organizations. Traditional functional curricular approaches often do not address these issues. Hence, business education curricula will gradually shift from functionally fragmented to convergent and coherent, with a focus on developing specific competencies. The redesigned curricula must cut across traditional boundaries to develop and reinforce the appropriate bundles of technical knowledge as well as social and organizational skills (Lee, 2007).

Ugochukwu (2013) observes that ABL exposes students to practical work experience in which they apply classroom learning to real work. Exploring students to state-of-the-art practices, technology and career options, improving scholastic student work place motivation and post-secondary career prospects. Helping students understand work place expectations and make better decisions and plans. Allows students to observe the work world so as to develop work place skills and to earn work terminology, work environment, business and industry protocol, by targeting experiences to a student's programme of study. To the Employer, ABL offers a source of skilled and motivated future employees, increase student retention; provide opportunity for individualized instruction, keeping academic and occupational circular up-to-date through regular integration between school and industry. The local community benefits from ABL by way of enhancing the awareness of local employment opportunities, improved indigenous/local development and ensures cooperation and understanding between educational institutions and industries and provides informed component and productive future work force. Other importance or need for ABL, according to Ugochukwu (2013), include:

- 1) Exposing students to wide range of career opportunities for exploration.
- 2) Helping students to understand work place expectations-skills habit and knowledge.
- 3) Putting classroom theory into practice.
- 4) Entrepreneurship development in students
- 5) Keeping academic and occupational curricula in tune with contemporary demands of the work world.

### **Factors Militating Against Integration of ABL**

Ugochukwu (2013) identifies that most of the factors militate against integration of ABL include minimum standard curriculum, little emphasis placed on ABL by Nigeria National Policy on Education, and presently only SIWES fieldtrips, excursion and practicum (teaching fraction) are recommended by NCCE. Industries and employers of labour and all those who have interest in educational industries are scarcely well informed on their role in Business Education curriculum implementation, Industries and business departments of tertiary institutions are not fully aware of attendant benefits of ABL to the world of work, also educational institutions are poorly funded to cope with cost of engaging in ABL Programmes. Some institutions and instructors lack requisite orientations for effective harness of ABL. Lack of seriousness of work-site supervisors and neglect attitude of school-based supervisors and poor collaborative relationship between work world and schools. Low level awareness of the need to synergize business instructors, local community and industry are also a contributing factor, finally Business students/instructors' poor access to relevant ABL programme windows.

### **Implementation of ABL in Business Education**

Implementing ABL as an "innovative" teaching approach is only successful when the specific infra-structure and student situation are considered. Thus, a modified teaching strategy must be carefully developed; taking the following into consideration:

1. The key principles for the ABL teaching approach.
2. Chief activities nurturing and fostering ABL experiences, and
3. How ABL impacts the effectiveness of the course.

It is important, therefore, at the beginning of the course, in the introductory lecture, to stress that students do not need to repeat things learned word-for-word. Thus expressed our vision that students involve in “investigations”, starting an independent inquiry into a topic of interest in a self-directed manner. Consequently, facilitating, motivating, enabling and coaching are the key skill-set of the instructor (facilitator) rather than just lectures.

Essentially, a learner constructs his own microcosms of knowledge from past knowledge and/or current experiences and interacting with data. He or she actively seeks new information, and is actively engaged in the process in the ways he/she gains, assimilates, and utilizes knowledge. The facilitator engages learners in outlining real-world problems in the first place instead of starting with a classification of problem-solving methods. Implementing ABL elements is thus a promising way to enhance students’ learning experiences. When employing an Activities-Based Learning approach, teachers offer students a variety of active educational experiences structured according to a learning cycle. This cycle consists of an instructional sequence that includes engagement, exploration, development, and extension (Guillaume, Yopp R. and Yopp H., 2009). Stöbblein (2009) determines some stages of good practice in implementation of ABL in education to include:

***Planning and adjusting the course:*** Prepare lecture notes with translated key words, distributing them some days before the session starts, encourage negotiating aspects of the curriculum with students where it is feasible to do so, build course on explicitly interdisciplinary material-in the selection of texts and readings, provide students with a platform to speak and present in English, and move rapidly to a wide range of techniques to generate interest. Use an approach that fosters students ‘total development, that is to say, cite histories of famous business men and women who cater for individual needs in mixed-ability groups to ensure that every student is given the opportunity to participate in every aspect of the learning programme, build course on interactive collaborative projects both in and outside the classroom, coach students with real-world, capitalize on students’ publications plans and give them an opportunity to customize their learning to their own development plans.

***Coaching in class:*** Practice reading and interpreting misleading business case study. Create a scholarly community among participants, to empathize and to connect students need to feel part of a supportive group with shared interests. Facilitate students’ development of a sense of commitment to their learning programs. Convince participants of the advantages of doing calculations, writing notes during sessions, formulating questions, and exploring problems on their own, reinforce learning experiences by using state-of-the-art business programs, let student group sex plain content to each other in their mother tongue foster competitive situations with group exercises (for instance, quizzes). Speak slowly, limit colloquial speech, and repeat essential content, practice critical-reading exercises, let relevant information identify and key arguments synthesized by being passionate about work, serve as a role model, and invite students to submit their own “live” problems for course discussion and personal action.

***Evaluating and Assessing:*** Collect feedback on an ongoing basis (for example, survey, focus groups, teaching assistants). Illustrate the benefits of ABL with empirical studies and communicate course achievements to Faculty and Deans.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The learning cycle begins with the engagement phase, whereby teachers use real-life activities, problems, and questions to motivate students to learn about the topic and to assess their prior knowledge. Students explore the content and phenomena by manipulating materials and start to address the presented questions. During the exploration phase, students formulate new ideas and questions to be developed in the subsequent phases. For example, teachers can ask students to explore how the household appliances work, identify their components, and formulate hypotheses about how to fix them. In the development phase, students add to their understanding by gathering more information and making conclusions about the concepts, phenomena, and questions previously generated. For example, students can use the Internet to learn more about a software or package and to draw conclusions about how they work.

In the final stage, students extend their learning by applying it to new and different situations as well as to their own experiences. For example, students can hypothesize about how other machines and household/office appliances that they use work. Educators help students move through the learning cycle by asking them to think about questions, helping them find solutions, providing additional activities that further students' learning, and aiding them in summarizing and evaluating their learning. Based on the findings of this study, the following are highlighted as workable propositions.

- 1) National policy on Education should be revised to reflect flexibility in world work standard of Business Education.
- 2) Business teachers should be encourage to undertake professional courses bordering on ABL experiences.
- 3) Business teachers in secondary schools should be encouraged to be professionally upgraded.
- 4) In-house workshops, talk shows or conferences and seminars on ABL should be organized regularly for business teachers.
- 5) The business industry should be encourage to appreciate the ABL benefits and therefore be willing to collaborate with educational institutions.
- 6) School-based ABL supervisors should be properly paid for their services while supervising students on ABL placement.
- 7) ABL placement officers/coordinators should be very knowledgeable and experienced in various ABL experiences.
- 8) School-Based Coordinators and officers should be well equipped with access to e-library resources.
- 9) School-based ABL supervisors found wanting in the discharge of their duties should be sanctioned appropriately.

## REFERENCES

- Dodge, B.** (1998). *Active Learning on the Web*. <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/ActiveLearning.html>
- Guillaume, A. M., Yopp, R. H. and Yopp, H. K.** (2009). Accessible science. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 17(7), 67-85.
- Herrington, J. and Oliver, R.** (2000). An instructional design framework for authentic learning environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 48 (3), 23–48.
- Jarred, R. and Jefsoutine, M.** (2006). Reflection on Using Online Contact for Work-Base Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education* 5 (1), 17-27.
- Jonassen, D.** (2000), “Toward a Design Theory of Problem Solving.” *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 48(4), 63–85.
- Kent, J. and Barut M.** (2003). Problem-based learning for production and Operations management. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 1(1), 99-118.
- Lee, K.** (2007). Online collaborative case study learning. *Journal o College Reading and Learning*, 37 (2), 82–100
- Mastropieri, M. A. and Scruggs, T. E.** (1994). Text versus hands-on science curriculum: Implications for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15(2),
- National Centre on Secondary Education and Training (NCSET)** (2005): *Work-Based Learning Programme*. Retrieved from [www.scorecardforkskills.com](http://www.scorecardforkskills.com) on 21/10/2011.
- Okon, U. E.** (2011). *Work-Based Learning initiatives*. Paper presented at Step-B World Bank-assisted TVET Teachers *Up skilling* workshop held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka from 23rd October–4th November, 2011 p.72-85.
- Santosh, N. R.** (2012). Activity based learning an effective model for business schools. *Journal of Commerce*, 4 (91), 17-22.
- Stöblein, M. and Kanet, J. J.** (2008). Developing Undergraduate Student Research Experiences in Operations Management. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, 6 (2), 495
- Stöblein, M.** (2009) *Activity-based Learning Experiences in Quantitative Research Methodology for (Time-Constrained) Young Scholars-Course Design and Effectiveness* a paper presented At POMS 20th Annual conference Orlando, Florida, USA.
- Ugwochukwu, P. N.** (2013). Appraisal of Work Based experience of technical and Vocational (teacher) education and training TVTET programme in Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science*, 4(5) 137-146