

# Designing a Futuristic Business Studies Curriculum

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a discourse on the theoretical aspects underpinning the design of the Business Studies curriculum domain. It draws on recent shifts in the business and educational environment of Malaysia, and maps out the methodology and method for expanding and revamping the core ground of the discipline. Using the pragmatic worldview stance, this study chose the exploratory sequential design mixed methods procedures. The significance of this methodology was the involvement of a theoretical lens as an overarching perspective within a design that contains both the quantitative and qualitative data. This lens provided a framework for topics of interest, methods for data collection, and outcomes or changes anticipated from the study. Within this lens of data collection method, the study used the Developmental Research Approach (DRA) to build a Business Studies curriculum prototype, and results showed DRA was a valid approach for such a purpose. The DRA consisted three phases. The first phase started by conducting a needs analysis of the stakeholders of the curriculum to argue whether the domain needs revamping. Based on the stakeholders' needs and the impact of business and educational changes, the study designed a prototype of the curriculum in the second phase. Lastly, the third phase concluded with an evaluation of the prototype curriculum by the main users..

**Keywords:** *Futuristic Business, Curriculum*

## INTRODUCTION

Business is about creating value for stakeholders and society needs business professionals who would be able to produce and supply the requirements of the society. Future business leaders need to have the skills to compete and face the challenges of global business phenomena and the situation caused by globalisation and internationalisation in the business world. The explosion of internet usage and e-commerce saw many changes in the business environment. The present dominant trend is to devote greater attention to generic skills, social skills and personality development, in order to prepare students for globalisation and internationalisation.

Recent educational reforms in Malaysia, such as the 9th Malaysian Plan (9MP) for the year 2006-2010 emphasised knowledge, innovation and values - in sum, the quality of the nation's human capital being the key determinants of Malaysia's future success as a knowledge-based economy. The 9MP was tailed closely by the 10MP for the year 2011-2015 with reference on "education system" and "raising employability". According to Pemandu (2012), the 'Performance Management and Delivery Unit' of Malaysia for overseeing the implementation and assessing the progress of the Economic Transformation Programme and the Government Transformation Programme, the two main aims of Malaysia are attracting and retaining talent and making the labour market more flexible. These two aims would be achieved by mainstreaming and broadening access to quality technical education and vocational training; upgrading the skills and capabilities of the existing workforce; enhancing the competency of tertiary graduates to prepare them for entering the labour market; and ensuring every child can succeed.

In line with the Malaysian government policies of creating economic growth for the country, there was a need to provide more emphasis on business education (Malaysian Examination Council, 1998). The Malaysian

Examination Council (MEC) is the body for drawing up the Business Studies curriculum, as well as all other form six curriculums of Malaysia. Due to the fast development and expansion in businesses, the Business Studies subject was thus introduced to form six students (equivalent to the Cambridge A-levels) since 1999. According to the Malaysian Examination Council (1998), Business Studies would enable students to continue their education at institutions of higher learning; continue their education to professional level; and enter the field of business, management and entrepreneurship. Students should also be readily equipped with the minimum skills to be an average entrepreneur (Malaysian Examination Council, 1998). The question arises as to the relevance of this 1999 curriculum for the future business environment.

Joining the market force proved difficult as many of the school leavers were found to be lacking in skills. According to the Prime Minister of Malaysia Dato' Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak (Bernama, 2010), young people found their qualifications do not match the opportunities available in the job market. The ever increasing requirement for skilful workforce and able entrepreneurs reflects the need to study the ability of schools to produce skilful small scale entrepreneurs. Dewey's ideal of "education through occupations" (Dow, 2002) reflected the need for a pragmatic curriculum. This paper discusses the theoretical aspects underpinning the design of the Business Studies curriculum.

## THE STUDY

According to Marsh and Willis (2007), a curriculum approach includes an understanding of curriculum, the process of curriculum development, a value system, and critical assumptions about the world, society and morality on which understanding and value systems rest. Posner (1998) categorised four distinct approaches to curriculum, i.e., procedural, descriptive, conceptual, and critical. The procedural approach is the Tyler's Rational-Linear Approach, which consists of a linear logic rational plan of what should happen. It states that there are four basic curriculum questions in planning a curriculum, i.e., selecting objectives, learning experiences, organising learning experiences, and evaluating. However, Marsh and Willis (2007) found that studies on teacher thinking and teacher planning revealed few teachers actually used objectives as their starting point in planning. Furthermore, if curriculum development is seen as an on-going process, it could not then be linear, posed Flowers (2007). Flowers also questioned the lack of accounting the student's interest, preferences, and abilities when using Tyler's approach of curriculum development. Therefore, other forms of approaches should be explored.

Descriptive approach as contributed by Walker's Deliberate Approach is about what actually happens during curriculum development. Walker assumed that better curricula will result when those engaged in it understands the complexity of the process of curriculum planning. Walker emphasised the planning process and communication among planners. The approach describes what typically happens, thus identifying problematic situations and how to solve it, which Tyler's approach could not provide. The weakness of Walker's approach is his study is based on a large-scale curriculum project, consequently may not be applied to small-scale school-based curriculum. Furthermore, the approach does not provide information to people about what should happen nor what should happen after curriculum is designed (the enactment of the curriculum). The conceptual approach would not be discussed here as it concerns the levels of planning and conceptual understanding, which is not applicable for this study.

The critical approach emphasises whose interests are being served. This last approach is covered by many writers, such as Freire (1970), Pinar (1983), Eisner (1985), Doll (1993), McLaren (1993), and Slattery (1995). The critical approach summed up by Eisner's Artistic Approach / Connoisseurship Model portrays social reality as negotiated, subjective, constructed, and multiple. Eisner believed curricula should be formed by a collaborative team consisting of individuals, society and subject matter, sharing data and information pertinent to their particular areas and to deliberate so as to arrive at consensus. This model emphasises content or learning opportunities being more important in satisfying the needs of individual students and teachers more meaningfully. In short, this model is descriptive in offering a general approach that can be followed by curriculum developers and prescriptive in offering suggestions about what should happen when the approach is followed well.

Another aspect of Eisner's approach is his reference to the 'null curriculum' as those aspects of the curriculum which schools do not teach. Eisner (1985) contended that 'subjects that are now taught are part of a tradition, and traditions create expectations, they create predictability, and they sustain stability' (pg.90). Eisner criticised schools of ignoring or minimising visual, auditory and metaphoric ways of knowing. Eisner's Artistic Approach managed to incorporate Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligence theory in curriculum development and reinforces it to ensure students' abilities are taken into account. It also provides flexibility in making choices and is applicable to the intended, the enacted and the experienced curriculum (Brown, 2007).

It is not which approach is the correct approach, rather which is preferable to particular persons, for particular reasons, at particular times in the designing of a curriculum (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Flowers (2007) emphasised three basic focal points, i.e. individual, society, and subject matter, being intertwined with the study of curriculum development. Curriculum development should be aimed at meeting the needs of the individual learners, society's need for learned citizens, workers, parents, voters, etc., and focused on subject matter.

Recent trend sees education reform theories such as the Modern Growth Theory, which Kennedy (2005) called the 'new progressivism', combining different progressivism traditions to produce a curriculum that is student-centred, vocationally-oriented, and socially reconstructed in nature. Progressivism has major influence in many parts of the world, including Hong Kong. Kennedy (2005) explained there are three types of progressive approaches, i.e. child development (Kilpatrick) which states that children rather than the subject provides for the school curriculum; social efficiency (Snedden) which is about preparing workers who can contribute to the efficient and smooth running of society; and social reconstruction (Rugg) on preparing future citizens as agents of change and social justice.

The Modern Growth Theory insists students must spend time on areas that have the potential to enhance economic growth in the knowledge economy. The new human capital must not only "know" but must "know how" and able to apply this "know how" to new and different context. In other words, people need certain skills and attributes to ensure the economy is stimulated and continue to grow. They need to be creative, have problem solving skills, creative and entrepreneurial, because these are the qualities that lead to new ideas and it is ideas that to innovation and subsequently growth. This theory would be included in the design and development of the curriculum.

For this study, besides the modern growth theory, Eisner's Connoisseurship Model was chosen as the most appropriate approach in planning a futuristic curriculum that would answer the call for skilful school leavers. Future events not yet occur would need experts' opinion projections and collaboration among them to get the whole picture. Furthermore, Duetsch (2004) and Leach (2009) emphasised the need for curriculum to be based on the emerging philosophy, social, cultural and educational trends of the future. The generalisations advanced in this study from experts' views would be of an artistic nature. Its ultimate purpose is to re-educate perceptions so that the education quality can be improved and be able to add to the corpus of educational discourse.

Besides choosing an appropriate approach in curriculum development, there is a need to pay heed to curriculum consonance that would happen between the educational goals, instructions and learning, or in other words, "the intended, the actualised and the experienced" (Thornton, 1985). Brown (2007) used the terms "intended, implemented and experienced" respectively. According to Thornton (1985), there is a relationship between these three terms, whereby for curriculum planning and change to be successfully carried out, it requires thorough understanding of actual curriculum practice. Firstly, the decision about what to teach is based on its perceived classroom effectiveness and must be grounded in a realistic conception of curriculum consonance. Secondly, there is dissonance in the implementation stage, with the reality of variants between every classroom processes, despite socioeconomic status, academic aptitude, the school and teacher's pedagogical career being held constant (Thornton, 1985). Lastly, what the students experienced should be as what is intended. With reference to this anticipated problem, a more 'refined processes of perceptions' of the actual present Business Studies curriculum by experts was necessary. The curriculum would be analysed and revamp based on the above underpinning theories.

## THE METHODOLOGY

Discussion of a research starts with the epistemology of research. Epistemology is about the nature of knowledge and epistemology of research is the process of obtaining the knowledge. The philosophical ideas on the epistemology of research espoused influence the methodology or practice of research. There are many views on the epistemology of research such as critical theories (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), four perspectives (positivist/post positivist, interpretive, critical, postmodern / post-structural) of Lather (1992, 2006, as cited in Merriam, 2009), grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998), and worldviews by Creswell (2009). Creswell (2009) used "worldview" in place of epistemology or paradigm, which he defined as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action". Creswell further stated that worldviews is a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds. There are four worldviews according to Creswell (2009), i.e. post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism.

To analyse the present Business Studies curriculum used by the form six students, a pragmatic worldview stance (Creswell, 2009) and the exploratory sequential design mixed methods were used. The significance of this methodology was the involvement of a theoretical lens as an overarching perspective within a design that contains

both the quantitative and qualitative data. This lens provided a framework for topics of interest, methods for data collection, and outcomes or changes anticipated from the study. Within this lens of data collection method, the study used the Developmental Research Approach (DRA) to build a Business Studies curriculum prototype. The DRA consisted three phases. The first phase consists of needs analysis of the stakeholders of the curriculum to argue whether the domain needs to be revamped. A survey was carried out on the direct users of the curriculum, which were the teachers and ex-students of the Business Studies subject. Qualitative method using a semi-structured interview protocol on the chosen purposive snowball samples were carried out to identify the strength and weaknesses of the Business Studies curriculum and its relevance to the future business environment. The protocol was drawn based on literature reviews.

Results from phase one needs analysis, together with the design principles of Akker (1999) were then used to prepare a semi-structured interview protocol for the next phase. The second phase was the design phase and used the Modified Delphi method. This phase consisted of two sub-phases. In the first sub-phase, representatives of all stakeholders (experts) of the curriculum were chosen as a sample. The panel of experts were from diverse background. According to Stitt-Gohdes & Crews (2004), higher quality findings will result when heterogeneous experts are brought together to form a panel. Multiple panel designs have been successfully used when diverse stakeholder groups were sought to provide input (Haltinner, 2008). The selection criteria for the panel of experts include those active and have at least ten years of experience in the business sector, or the education sector, or / and the curriculum sector, an ability to see issues beyond local and current circumstances, as well as willing to engage in research for a few rounds. A total of 51 experts participated in the study. This is more than the number suggested by Boonan (1979) and Akins, Tolson & Cole (2005), where they found that 10-30 experts were enough to be used. Furthermore, experts more than 30 create few additional ideas and limit the in-depth exploration of the ones (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2008). As the study covers a big industry of diverse sectors, a figure higher than 30 was decided upon by the researcher. A total of 51 stakeholders (experts) were chosen from various sectors due to the fact that the business industry covers a wide range of sectors as classified according to "Malaysia Standard Industrial Classification (MSIC) 2000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). Examples of the industries are Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical, Retail and Business, Social and Personal, Agriculture, and Manufacturing.

The stakeholders (experts in their own respective fields) were chosen using purposive snowball sampling method and consisted of business professionals, who is directly involved in the business community; educators, such as form six Business Studies teachers who teaches Business Studies, lecturers from the Business and Management faculties, and Economics and Accountancy faculties who are the receivers of form six school leavers; non-governmental bodies (NGOs); religious leaders, such as were used by the education ministry in the Malaysian education reformation (ASLI-CPPS, 2012); and policy makers and implementers of the curricula. Stakeholders would be able to give constructive criticism of the curriculum and the needs of the future business environment. Educational criticism is to improve the educational process (Pinar, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008). As Eisner (1998) puts it, 'effective criticism functions as the midwife to perception. It helps it come into being, then later refines it and helps it to become more acute'. The stakeholders provided data on the kind of future businesses to come and what they perceived of knowledge, skills and values needed from school leavers in the business environment. The data collected was used to build Prototype I of Future Business Curriculum Model and a questionnaire for use in the second sub-phase of the design phase.

In this sub-phase, the second round of the modified Delphi was carried out on selected experts from the pool of stakeholders in the first sub-phase. Experts' consensus must be achieved in this round to ensure validity of the questionnaire and prototype. The experts validated the prototype and items in the questionnaire. With the results from second sub-phase, a refined questionnaire and Prototype II were built. These were used in the third phase, which is the evaluation phase.

In the third phase, an evaluation of the prototype curriculum by Business Studies teachers throughout the whole of Malaysia was conducted with questionnaire as the tool. The curriculum could not be tested of its effectiveness for reasons such it has not been accepted by the Education Ministry nor launched nationwide. Thus, the practical method to overcome this hurdle is to use the evaluation phase as a reality check phase, to ensure the curriculum was accepted by the users. Random samples of the population of teachers teaching Business Studies curriculum from all over Malaysia were used as respondents. The sample consisted of 432 teachers from all states in Malaysia.

## THE FINDINGS

The results of the interviews in the needs analysis phase showed teachers were unhappy with the wide and very

in-depth coverage of the syllabus and lack of emphasis on practical work. There were no formal written skills and values in the curriculum, giving rise to teachers' own initiatives and interpretations of what should be taught to students. The ex-students were of the opinion that the curriculum should give more emphasis on communication, leadership and problem solving skills. They wanted practical work to be incorporated into the syllabus too.

In the design phase, the first of the modified Delphi rounds produced among stakeholders of the type of curriculum wanted. Among the demands of stakeholders for the a future curriculum are that school leavers need to be competent in communication and leadership skills, had gone through some form of practical work, and with values such as integrity, honesty, hardworking, creative and positive thinking. These demands were combined to produce Prototype I of the Business Studies curriculum. Prototype I consisted of content, skills and values for a Business Studies curriculum.

Prototype I was then used in the second round of the Delphi on experts chosen from the stakeholders. Very high consensus was achieved for most of the items in the Prototype I. Only a very few items has low consensus and thus were discarded. Prototype II was built from Prototype I, and consists of content (business and the environment, management function, business function, and entrepreneurship), 58 types of skills (grouped under basic skill, thinking skill, necessary personal qualities, management of resources, interpersonal skill, information, understanding the systems and technological know-how) and 21 values (such as hardworking, integrity, punctual, responsible, and so forth) to be incorporated into the curriculum of Business Studies.

Prototype II was then evaluated by 432 Business Studies teachers from all over Malaysia. The prototype was accepted and validated by the teachers, and thus become the Futuristic Business Studies Curriculum for Secondary Schools. The DRA has proven to be a valid approach to use for designing and building a curriculum.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provided a robust, reliable and valid framework to build a futuristic curriculum that is acceptable by all stakeholders of the Business Studies curriculum. The curriculum is looked upon by stakeholders as able to produce knowledgeable, skilled and high principled school leavers as demanded by the business community and institutions of higher learning for the future.

This study shows that curriculum developers (of MEC or of any other countries) can consider the Developmental Research Approach as an approach that is valid and reliable to build a good curriculum. DRA showed that it could assist in identifying problems of a curriculum, design and build a new curriculum.

The curriculum incorporates content, skills and values that would produce future students with the knowledge, skills and values as needed by society to conduct business in a proper ethical manner. It would produce students of quality and with competitive edge in the business sector. This in turn will bring about a better standard of living for the society of Malaysia.

A futuristic curriculum well received by the teachers across the nation would be a curriculum that is going to be workable and satisfying for both teachers and students.

Further research is suggested to test the theories and DRA method used to design a curriculum to ensure the result of the study is applicable in other countries and across curriculum.

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