

## Improvisation and the Use of Community Resources in Business Studies Teaching

Burman Musa Sithole<sup>1</sup> and Mutendwahothe Walter Lumadi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Languages & Social Sciences Education, University of Botswana, Botswana  
E-mail: sitholeb@mopipi.ub.bw*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Curriculum & Instructional Studies, University of South Africa  
E-mail: Lumadmw@unisa.ac.za*

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**ABSTRACT** This study investigates the extent to which Business Studies teachers in Botswana's secondary schools improvise instructional materials by using resources from the community. Data were gathered by means of structured interviews, class observations, the analysis of teachers' teaching plans and related documents. The findings revealed that Business Studies teachers mostly rely on instructional materials supplied by the school and do not put locally available business community resources, which are abundant and can be sourced with minimum expenditure of money and energy, to maximum use. The study concluded by recommending that teachers should be more resourceful and attempt to incorporate improvisation into their schemes of work and lesson plans to foster creativity and financial independence from the school.

### INTRODUCTION

Instructional materials are print and non-print items that are designed to impart information to students in the educational process (Bradley et al. 2005). Among these items are textbooks, charts, magazines, newspapers, pictures, recordings, slides, transparencies and many more. The use of instructional materials in secondary schools has been widely researched and the findings indicate that the benefits of using them are immense. The integration of instructional materials in classroom practice is believed to bolster the quality of instruction by fostering student-centred pedagogies (Abdo and Semela 2010). Furthermore, according to Mateer et al. (2012) the use of relevant instructional media in the classroom is invaluable since it engages students, aids their retention of knowledge, motivates interest in the subject matter and helps to illustrate the relevance of many concepts taught.

Community institutions, people and businesses are a rich reservoir of instructional materials for Business Studies teachers because such materials can be sourced from local magazines, newspapers, government publications or the internet with minimum expenditure of time, energy and money. Business documents such as source documents (in Accounting), financial reports, bank withdrawal and deposit slips, con-

sumer protection pamphlets and many more can be gathered from the business community for use in collaborative classroom activities. Today, free internet teaching resources have become a very important tool to impart education. Many government and private organisations have created internet-enabled free teaching resource materials that can be accessed anywhere by both teachers and students (Borrington 2004). The use of community resources in teaching can make students appreciate the local and international relevance of what they learn in school while affording them the opportunity to apply Business Studies theory in context. This is supported by Chew (2008), who, in her study on the development of localised instructional materials in Hong Kong, came to the conclusion that teaching and learning in business education could be enhanced to a great extent by using instructional resources based on local contexts, because such resources would be more authentic and more relevant to students' needs.

Although the use of business community resources can enhance teaching and learning in the Business Studies classroom, the realisation of their full potential to motivate and engage students may be limited in that some Business Studies teachers may under-utilise them. In his study on teaching Business Studies in Botswana's junior secondary schools, Sithole (2010) discovered that out of the 28 teachers in the

sample, 19 (68%) had never used local business people as guest speakers or resource persons and 6 (21%) had never used local newspaper material and periodicals to develop case studies for use in their classes. In a similar study, Jotia and Matlale (2011) learned that Social Studies teachers in Botswana schools make insufficient use of instructional materials. They attributed this to a lack of funding by the school(s) and congested syllabi which made it difficult for them to set aside time to prepare instructional materials.

The use of the internet by teachers and students in schools in Botswana to search for relevant online business resources may be hampered by a shortage of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, particularly the internet, because internet connections are limited in the majority of schools (Boitshwarelo 2009). Another constraint is that computer laboratories in the schools are used primarily for teaching Computer Awareness and, therefore, they can usually only be accessed by teachers when there are no Computer Awareness classes running which is mostly in the afternoons (Boitshwarelo 2007).

### Research Questions

In light of the above, this study sought to examine the extent to which Business Studies teachers exploited the array of resources around them in their classroom practices. Of particular concern were the research questions:

- To what extent do Business Studies teachers use locally available instructional materials in their classrooms?
- In what ways do Business Studies teachers incorporate business community resources in their lessons?

### METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in three secondary schools using an approach which Sturman (1994) termed a multisite case study. Multisite case study methodology is applied to a number of settings or cases and the researchers involved have to spend time at each site to gather data.

Three schools which offer Business Studies at junior secondary school level were selected purposively (Wiersma 2000). The following was taken into consideration: (1) they offered Busi-

ness Studies as a subject in their curriculum, (2) they were easily accessible which minimised travelling expenses and (3) permission was granted by the school authorities to conduct the research. The participants were six Business Studies teachers selected from the three schools. Once the schools had been identified, the six teachers were selected using the guidelines of critical purposeful sampling (Patton 1990). They were also selected because: (1) the researchers used their personal judgment on their ability to answer the research questions, (2) they taught Business Studies and (3) they agreed to participate in the study.

Data were gathered using structured interviews, class observations and analyses of teachers' teaching plans. The use of triangulation or multiple data collection methods (Sturman 1994) was meant to enhance the credibility and conformability of data collected (Ellsberg and Heise 2005) by bringing together different sources of information to conform to one interpretation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

Six teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 and T6) drawn from three schools (School A, School B and School C) participated in the study. All six teachers in the sample held teaching qualifications—five held diplomas in education and 1 held a postgraduate certificate in education. All the teachers, with the exception of one, held degrees in business-related fields with specialisation in fields such as Economics, Marketing, Commerce and Accounting. Their teaching experience ranged from to 21 years. Table 1 summarises the profile of the participants in the study:

The majority of respondents in the sample were experienced teachers and the mean length of teaching service for the sample was 14 years. It is assumed that the responses the teachers gave relating to the pedagogy of Business Studies were a result of their experience in teaching the subject.

### Teacher Preparation of Instructional Materials

At the onset, the researchers sought information on the availability of teaching resources and the adequacy of learning support systems

**Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents**

<i>School</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Subject specialization</i>	<i>Teaching experience</i>
<i>School A</i>	T 1	F	Diploma in Secondary Education BCom (Accounting)	Commerce, Accounting and Office Procedures	12 years
	T 2	M	Diploma in Secondary Education BCom	Accounting and Business Studies	6 years
<i>School B</i>	T 3	F	BCom (Marketing)	Business Studies	4 years
	T 4	M	Diploma in Education, Dip Acc & Fin.	Commerce, Accounting and Office Procedures	4 years
<i>School C</i>	T 5	M	BSc (Econ). Graduate Certificate in Education	Business Studies, Economics	21 years
	T 6	M	Diploma in Education, BCom + Ed, MBA	Accounting, Economics and Business Studies	9 years

for the effective delivery of Business Studies. The teachers' responses indicated that instructional materials were generally unavailable which was attributed to the inability of schools to allocate funds for purchasing such materials:

**T1:** "There are few audio visual aids for Business Studies unless created by the teacher. We sometimes fail to do this due to lack of financial resources".

**T2:** "Because of lack of funds, it is difficult to acquire teaching aids. We sometimes depend on the Computer Awareness lab for things like projectors".

**T3:** "There are almost no instructional materials available to assist in the teaching of Business Studies".

**T5:** "I manage to get most of the materials I need. Some aids I prepare myself".

What should be borne in mind is that the lack or non-use of appropriate instructional materials in class deprives students of opportunities to participate actively in the teaching-learning process. It also lessens their opportunities to concretise the learning process and make learning permanent and transferable (Uyangor and Ece 2010). Since Business Studies is a "living" subject which is in touch with the real world, the use of instructional materials can make the learning of the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject more meaningful, while at the same time affording students opportunities to experience the mechanisms of businesses and to relate their business knowledge and skills to real life situations.

Teachers' responses on how often they prepare low-cost instructional materials were then

sought. The general pattern that emerged was that teachers do want to prepare instructional materials but are usually hampered by failure by schools to allocate adequate financial resources for the procurement of teaching aids. One teacher indicated that he was too busy to make time for preparing teaching materials. Below are some of their responses:

**T1:** "I always prepare instructional materials for students. Some materials we collect from the Supplies Officer and for most of the material we use the Business Studies vote to buy the teaching resources".

**T2:** "I prepare teaching aids if the materials needed are available".

**T3:** "It is difficult to prepare the instructional materials due to time factor and other commitments like attending workshops, meetings, remedial lessons, etc".

**T6:** "I don't always prepare instructional materials. The availability of these resources in the schools determines what I can prepare at any moment in time".

What emerged from the interview data above is that teachers realise the value of using instructional media in class and they do have the desire to prepare such materials. However, the provision of teaching-learning materials is mostly hampered by limited financial resources which teachers expect schools to make available to them. Since the teachers expect of schools to make instructional resources available to them, there was little or no attempt on their part to create appropriate teaching-learning materials from low-cost, locally available materials. Situations like these call for improvisation. Resource-



**T3:** "I have never used business magazines".

**T4:** "I use them to cut pictures to make work cards".

**T6:** "...to get cuttings on types and forms of advertising".

Business magazines like *The Economist*, *Time Magazine* and many others cover business and world events and have business sections which are obvious sources of information of interest to business teachers and learners. The evidence gathered suggests that business teachers are not fully realising the benefits of business magazines as forms of primary and authentic teaching resources.

Although government departments and quasi-government entities offer excellent teaching resources at no cost, only two teachers indicated during the interviews that they made use of these resources at times. T1 said that she used government publications to teach subject matter concerning the laws and regulations of business organisations while T5 relied on them for sourcing macroeconomic statistics and evidence in the form of national income statistics which was seen in his resource file. None of the teachers though used materials from government publications in the lessons observed. Government publications which are issued periodically by local government departments, government ministries and parastatals can play a significant role in research and education (Ajidahun 2006). Business Studies teachers can design contextualised teaching and learning activities by sourcing invaluable teaching materials from government and quasi-government publications when covering topics such as central banking, consumer protection, the government in business, international trade, social costs and benefits and many more.

On the use of educational visits as a teaching method, four teachers said that they made use of it and two said that they had never taken students on field trips. The use of field trips by teachers in Schools A and B could not be verified. In School C the researchers were shown photographs of teachers and students on an educational trip including follow up write-ups on the trip that students were required to compile. Reasons for embarking or not embarking on field trips were varied:

**T3:** "Sometimes I take students to the local Post office but at times fail due to lack of support from the school management".

**T4:** "It is difficult to go on field trips. It is expensive!"

**T5:** "We took students to Morupule Power Station. Students really enjoyed the experience".

**T6:** "We visited Morupule Power Station. When I was teaching in Lobatse I took students to Botswana Meat Corporation".

Although the use of educational visits as teaching method is seemingly not widespread, it was noted that some teachers provide their students with curriculum enrichment activities and events such as field trips. The teachers' use of this methodology is commendable because educational visits are a viable method of extending the traditional classroom environment to outdoors and enabling learners to observe business settings first-hand, thus making learning more interesting and enjoyable (Myers and Jones 2004). They also provide opportunities for learners to gain experience in field research and to learn through active participation. Additionally, when students are given a focus and have hands-on involvement in the field trip experience they tend to benefit at a higher skills level. This pedagogic approach provides a way for students to feel more connected to their communities through tours of local business enterprises and national government facilities. This may help to promote the long-term value of lifelong civic engagement with whatever communities in which the learners may become involved.

Another pattern that emerged from the data was that guest speakers are the least frequently used despite the educational benefits that they can bring to the classroom such as the communication of the latest information on the business world and information that is subject-specific which may not be readily available in textbooks (Borrington 2004). Teachers need to be aware that collaboration between students and others outside the school community is essential for effective learning (Evelith and Baker-Evelith 2009) and for this reason guest speakers can be effective pedagogical tools in the business education classroom. Snizek (2005) argues that guest speakers can build linkages between teachers and the practitioners in industry and commerce, improve school-community relations, provide professional role models for students and enhance student learning to a great extent. Research in accounting education by Metrejean

et al. (2002) revealed that guest-speaker events enrich the education of students by providing a platform by means of which they are able to obtain first-hand knowledge about the working environment of practising business personnel, and students are able to gain authentic career-specific learning situations that provide a powerful basis for deeper learning about current concepts, perspectives and practices in business education (Murphy 2012).

The second least used community resources are web-based materials from educational and company websites. Planning in all schemes of work observed did not include any internet resources. During the interviews four teachers said that they had never used materials from government and educational websites while 2 indicated that they used such materials at times and that they found teaching material on websites such as [www.bized.co.uk](http://www.bized.co.uk) and [www.times100.co.uk](http://www.times100.co.uk) particularly useful. The most commonly cited reason for not using internet resources were the inadequacy of equipment in the Business Studies laboratories:

**T1:** "We do not have any internet facility in our lab".

**T2:** "Our Business Studies Laboratory is not sufficiently equipped with the necessary facilities for computer technology".

**T3:** "There is only one computer laboratory in the school and sometimes it is not available for Business Studies students when they want to use it. I think the computers in the school need to be increased so that there is the opportunity to have some Business Studies lessons using the internet".

**T6:** "Due to lack of internet facilities in the school I never use resources from the internet. I however use the internet to source materials to prepare my own teaching notes".

What emerged here is that schools do have computer laboratories but they are reserved mostly for teaching the subject Computer Awareness which is compulsory in government schools. Business Studies laboratories in the schools lack ICT and multimedia equipment. The non-availability of internet connections means that teachers cannot use various web-based resources such as online business simulations and games, databases and blogs. They can also not

do online investigations in class or access a collection of websites as part of their reading and research assignments.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Business Studies teachers in general over-rely on school-supplied instructional materials and do not put locally available business community resources which are abundant and can be sourced with minimum expenditure of money, time and energy to maximum use. It also emerged that newspapers are the most frequently used business community resources. Teachers who made use of community resources indicated that they used newspapers to extract pictorial, statistical and financial data for use in case studies. Some teachers use business magazines in the same way as newspapers, though infrequently. Guest speakers are the least used community resource while web-based materials from educational and company websites are the second least used community resources. It was also evident that the employment of educational visits is not widespread. There was irrefutable evidence in one school that field trips are sometimes used. Although some teachers claimed that they took the students to local business units of interest at times which could not be verified from the available evidence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It was observed that Business Studies teachers are not optimally using resources that are locally available to enhance teaching and student learning. It is common knowledge that most commercially-produced instructional materials for teaching are usually scarce to obtain and if available, they are usually expensive to buy. It is for these reasons that business teachers are urged to explore the environments around their schools (urban, suburban or rural) for instructional materials instead of relying on schools to provide instructional materials. The non-availability of funds should not be used as an excuse for not producing instructional materials for Business Studies. Forward-thinking teachers should incorporate improvisation into their schemes of work and lesson plans to foster creativity and financial independence from the school. Business teachers are urged to be cre-

ative and resourceful in planning and selecting instructional materials. They should reach out for locally available materials and improvise whenever the need arises. The business community is awash with teaching resources. They should know that the use of instructional resources in teaching leads to the active participation of learners and this will, in turn, increase motivation while also minimising abstraction associated with business education learning and instruction.

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