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Integration of Project-based learning in secondary school commercial curriculum

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Abstract

This paper proposes the integration of project-based learning in secondary school commercial curriculum delivery following the assertion that learners of commercial subjects lack the practical skills that are imperative in the current economic difficulties that South Africa is facing. The study adopted the qualitative research methodology and was guided by the learner-centred theory pioneered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Ten commercial departmental heads from ten secondary schools in Capricorn South District were purposively sampled to provide their perspectives on the barriers hindering effective commercial curriculum delivery in secondary schools. The results show that there is a gap between theory and practice in the delivery of commercial subjects. Data were collected through interviews and document analysis, and was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study revealed lack of support for commercial educators, a gap between theory and practice, subject combination issues, language barriers, content gaps and insufficient resources. The project-based learning model is therefore proffered as an alternative model to close the gap between theory and practice in commercial subjects. The results were important in highlighting the downward trend of commercial subjects in schools and the need to revitalise the commercial stream by integrating project-based learning as an option for economic revival in the country.
Keywords: Commercial; curriculum; project-based learning; secondary schools; model

Introduction

The commercial curriculum in secondary school is designed to equip learners with skills and competencies necessary for understanding the dynamics of the market for optimal problem-solving and decision-making, with the intention of making them successful in the field of commerce and trade. This study contends that knowledge becomes obsolete if it remains theoretical, or if the practical elements of it (knowledge) are not applied in a real-world environment. This contention finds resonance with scholars such as Hoadley and Jansen (2013) as well as Pinar (2010), whose argument is rooted in the importance of aligning curriculum content with the needs of the society. The South African population needs young people to acquire practical skills that will enable them to overcome the existing economic crisis that afflicts the country. Similarly, Singh (2017) suggests that the output of commercial education should be multi-dimensional and globally competitive. However, the practical realities attest to the fact that learners and graduates of commercial subjects in higher institutions of learning lack practical skills relevant for economic revival. As a result, there is a need to improve and strengthen the delivery of the commercial curriculum in secondary schools.

Based on the assertion that the commercial curriculum should enable learners to solve real world economic problems, project-based learning is recognised as an alternative model for economic redemption and revival in the present economic climate. Project-based learning is a model that can be traced back to David Sneddon, who taught science in the 1800s (Beckett, 2006), and was later developed by William Kilpatrick, who was John Dewey's student (Beckett, 2006; Muniandy, 2000; Wolk, 1994). In project-based learning, learners construct knowledge by generating projects, enabling them to connect existing knowledge with new knowledge while creating an end product

(Kalvu, 2015). Project-based learning could be integrated into the commercial curriculum to provide learners with practical skills, allowing them to start and operate their businesses as part of a project. This could serve as an important model that can be used to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Considering that commerce emphasises the activity of buying and selling, teachers of commercial subjects should be inspired to take the lead in advancing practical (commercial) skills by allowing learners to engage in exercising businesses dry-run at school by incorporating project-based learning. The knowledge and skills required to address situations change as the economy becomes more industrialised and the society more complex. As a result, in order for learners of commercial subjects to achieve the desired objectives, the commercial curriculum has to be strengthened to become more practical.

Problem statement

Previous research has found that most South African schools are underperforming (Mashau, 2016; Modiba, 2016; Jane, 2015; Horowitz, 2014; Spaull, 2013). Despite the fact that there appears to be little to no research on the specific performance of commercial subjects in South Africa, Kruger (2018) found learners underperforming in economics in the annual national senior certificate examinations in his study on pedagogical content and knowledge. Similarly, higher education research on accounting found that the subject is facing problems related to limited resources and underdevelopment of skills (Romburgh, 2014). Furthermore, (Thaba-Nkadimene & Mmakola, 2020) reveal in their paper on "the phasing out of commercial entrepreneurship subjects" that commercial subjects are facing extinction in some schools in Limpopo province due to underperformance; thus, the literature suggests that there may be barriers to curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects; therefore, this study hopes to advance a comprehensive curriculum model aimed at effective and resource-efficient curriculum delivery.

Theory underpinning the study

The theory employed in this study is the Learner-Centred Theory of Education (LCTE), which was developed by the Swiss-born French theorist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Serving as the conceptual foundation for the study, LCTE challenges the conventional teaching method of inundating learners with information from the start to the end. Instead, it advocates for teachers to begin instruction by exploring learners' capabilities and interests. At the core of LCTE is the idea that learners should take responsibility for their own learning, thereby fostering an interactive and participatory classroom environment. According to Rousseau, this approach transforms teachers into facilitators and organisers, allowing learners to actively engage in their education. Teachers guide learners' participation, and recognise their strengths and weaknesses to build on their values and interests. Functioning as mentors, teachers model knowledge-sharing and assist learners in generating new ideas.

Rousseau asserts that connecting new knowledge to existing understanding makes learning more meaningful. He argues that teaching should build on learners' prior knowledge, enabling them to relate new information to real-world conditions. Ignoring learners' experiences, he contends, limits thinking and hinders their ability to connect school learning with the world around them. In the context of this study, the LCTE presents a challenge to education stakeholders, particularly teachers of commercial subjects. It calls for a commitment to applying this approach, aligning with the current demand for learners to participate in their education actively.

Application of the learner-centred approach

As Weimer (2002) articulated, the essence of the learner-centred approach revolves around engaging learners as active participants in the learning process. This stands in contrast with the traditional paradigm, where learners assume a passive role, and teachers predominantly dictate the course of learning. Mayer (1998) adds that a learner-centred approach encourages learners to actively investigate, explore and solve real-world problems. He continues to assert that learners become active and engage in meaning construction within the context of their experiences and knowledge. Similarly, Kember and David (2009) argue that the learner-centred approach shifts away from traditional teaching methods and focuses on learning rather than teaching, with learners being

more active than teachers. Cheryl (2004) describes it as a method that focuses on how learners learn rather than how teachers teach

Literature review

Project-based learning

Project-based learning is a form of instruction firmly grounded in learner-centred principles (Cocco, 2006). It is built upon three core constructivist tenets: learning is contextually embedded, learners actively shape their learning journey, and objectives are attained through collaborative social interactions and the exchange of knowledge and insights. Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) similarly define project-based learning as a variant of inquiry-based learning that emphasises active learner participation and engagement in the learning process. Moreover, Boss and Larmer (2018) define it as a model that organises learning around projects, which can be described as intricate tasks that challenge learners to investigate activities and solve problems.

Alrujoh (2020) proposes that the challenges faced by learners in the design and construction of projects lead to a high level of engagement because of the aesthetic, ethical and cognitive challenges that are part of the project design. According to Mahmound and Idris (2021), the uniqueness of project-based learning is the creation of an end-product that represents the learner's new knowledge and understanding of issues. In addition, Miller and Krajcik (2021) postulate that project-based learning promotes self-regulated learning, which is necessary for learners to conceptualise knowledge in a systematic process. Again, project-based learning was further found to promote self-reliance as learners progress through the process of goal-setting, planning and organisation while also developing collaboration skills through social interactions with their peers (Bell, 2010).

Evidence of the effectiveness of project-based learning in secondary schools

In a quasi-experimental study, Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) investigated the influence of environmental science projects on students' comprehension of environmental knowledge and their attitudes towards science. The study involved 62 female grade 11 learners in Oman, with researchers randomly assigning two classes into distinct groups: an experimental group and a control group. The results indicated positive outcomes, with the experimental group exhibiting superior performance in both the science attitude survey and the environmental knowledge assessment compared to the control group.

Hernandez-Ramos and De La Paz (2009) conducted an additional experiment, where they focused on instructing grade 9 students in the United States to create a multimedia mini-documentary. This project was conducted within the context of a six-week history unit. The outcome of the study revealed compelling findings: The students who engaged in the multimedia mini-documentary project exhibited substantial and meaningful improvements in their knowledge acquisition and their aptitude for historical thinking skills. This progress surpassed the outcomes observed among students who had received conventional instructional methods.

Hsu, van Dyke, Chen and Smith (2015) also carried out a quasi-experiment with grade 8 learners in the United States, where they explored the construction of science knowledge and argumentation skills in a graph-oriented computer-assisted project-based learning environment. The findings were significantly positive in favour of the experiment.

Other studies have shown a positive impact of project-based learning. Alrujoh (2020) indicated an increased interest in learning scientific and technological subjects when project-based learning is applied. Similarly, Boss and Larmer (2018) found project-based learning to bring joy and engagement amongst the learners. They further indicated that it enables learners to effectively combine theory and practice, which is what is needed in the context of commercial subjects. The findings about the effectiveness of project-based learning in other subjects, therefore, suggest that it can also be effective in commercial subjects as they share some characteristics with the subject where it was seen to be working. It was further found to be bringing joy and engagement in learners, which is imperative in the attainment of learning outcomes.

Implementation of project-based learning in secondary school commercial subjects

Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) argue that project-based learning does not necessitate a great investment of time and resources compared to traditional instructional methods during delivery and execution. In fact, they contend that it can be effectively implemented with fewer resources within the school environment. However, they acknowledge that challenges related to social class disparities, academic capabilities and gender differences can impact the successful implementation of project-based learning, as highlighted by Crossouard (2014). Building on this perspective, Crossouard (2014) further asserts that educators require ongoing professional development to adeptly manage the disparities that can arise during the delivery and execution of project-based learning.

The effectiveness of project-based learning hinges on teachers' capacity to provide robust support, guidance and motivation to learners throughout the process (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan & Chinn, 2007). Successful monitoring and support contribute to learners' achievement and cognitive growth (Bell, 2010:41). The level of support from school management teams and colleagues is crucial for the successful delivery and implementation of project-based learning (Erstad, 2002). Lam, Cheng and Choy (2010) assert that teacher motivation to implement project-based learning is heightened when they receive support from their schools. All stakeholders must therefore play a role to support commercial teachers and learners in integrating project-based learning in the commercial curriculum.

Some research studies suggest that project-based learning is most effective when implemented in a two-phase approach. In the initial phase, learners acquire content knowledge in the classroom, enabling them to independently design projects in the second phase (Drain, 2010; Good & Jarvenin, 2007). The first phase aims to develop their content knowledge, procedures, and concepts, while the second phase encourages innovation and creativity in their projects. Teachers play a pivotal role in identifying appropriate assessments aligned with the project's unique features and creating teachable moments throughout the project process (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). The assertion then suggests that project-based learning does not replace teachers in the classroom. Teachers will always remain important with their pedagogical content knowledge. Projects will only help to enhance learners' comprehension of content and enable them to attain skills that will allow them to solve real-world problems.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is the qualitative approach, which was selected due to its capacity to engage directly with participants, capturing and interpreting their personal experiences using their own words. Furthermore, the method is adept at uncovering participants' emotions and experiences in a comprehensive manner. The qualitative approach is particularly fitting in this study as it allows the study to be conducted within the natural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research involves collecting first-hand information from participants and is well-suited for this study's objectives (Cohen, 2004). By adopting inductive rather than deductive reasoning, this methodology facilitates the identification of emerging ideas, insights and sentiments within the collected data, leading to the identification of patterns (Creswell, 2013). The data of this study were sourced from individuals holding positions as heads of commercial departments in secondary schools.

This study employed phenomenological design to guide its execution and data collection process. A research design serves as a strategic blueprint outlining the researcher's investigative approach. It encapsulates the procedural trajectory of the study (Mouton, 2010). This encompasses aspects such as the temporal scope, the participants encompassed, and the contextual framework within which data will be gathered and organised. The primary objective of developing a research plan is to establish a roadmap for collecting evidence aimed at addressing the research query. As articulated by McMillan and Schumacher (2014), the central objective is to uphold the integrity and dependability of the outcomes.

Sampling, as elucidated by Preissle (2010), encompasses the process of choosing a smaller subset from a larger group with the explicit

aim of accurately representing the entire group by means of the procedures applied to the chosen smaller subset. Additionally, as delineated by Rosnow (2014), sampling entails the procedure of selecting a portion of a larger population. The study included one participant from each of the ten sampled secondary schools in Capricorn South District. One commercial departmental head volunteered from each school to take part in the study. The schools were purposively selected. The study further employed a multifaceted approach to data collection, incorporating document analysis, documentary evidence and participant interviews. The data were gathered through an amalgamation of these methods. During the interviews, the researcher employed a field recorder to capture and preserve the conversations. The use of open-ended questions for in-depth answers is one advantage of using interviews (Creswell, 2013). Since they were anonymous, participants were free to provide answers without fear.

The study adopted Creswell's (2013) data analysis model as its analytical framework. All collected data underwent a process that involved transcription, sorting, typing and digital archiving. Subsequent to these steps, the gathered findings were subjected to a meticulous analysis, where prevalent patterns and recurring trends were discerned and elucidated, culminating in the formation of thematic elements. The thematic analysis technique followed a structured process. The data, extracted verbatim, was initially transcribed using a Microsoft Word processor. Subsequently, a comprehensive review of the interview transcripts was undertaken, and the data was systematically coded in terms of pre-established themes that emerged from the research inquiries. These coded segments were then subjected to interpretative analysis, resulting in an in-depth discussion. After collating all the analysed data, sub-themes were compiled, which, in turn, coalesced into overarching themes aligned with each objective. The resultant themes formed the bedrock of the study's findings, which were subsequently presented.

Ethical considerations

Ethics is inherently intertwined with principles and morality, encompassing matters of what is morally right and wrong (Babbie, 2015). Consequently, it is imperative that every facet of a research endeavour undergoes meticulous scrutiny to identify and rectify any potential breaches of ethical principles. This concern was diligently addressed in the current study. Prior to commencing the research, the research proposal underwent scrutiny by the ethics committee at the University of Limpopo. Furthermore, consultation and permission were sought from the Limpopo Department of Education. The study also recognised the following ethical considerations: (a) informed consent, (b) the beneficence principle, (c) the justice principle, (d) confidentiality and anonymity, and (e) discontinuance.

Results

This section delves into the findings extracted from the data. During the interviews, the researchers utilised a recording device to capture conversations, which were later transcribed for the purpose of analysis. The ensuing section presents and examines the transcribed outcomes, offering descriptions and insights based on the participants' quotes. By conducting the interviews, the researchers gained valuable insights from the (commerce) departmental heads regarding their beliefs and obstacles encountered in delivering the commercial curriculum in secondary schools. The interviews also facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing conditions within the study area. Furthermore, the chapter delves into notable quotes extracted from emerging themes and their respective sub-themes.

Theme 1: Lack of practical experience (the gap between theory and practice)

The commercial stream is designed to equip learners with skills and competencies related to business, economics and accounting, with the intention of preparing them for success in these fields. This study suggests that knowledge becomes obsolete if it remains theoretical and is not applied in real-world scenarios. The assertion is also reflected by Hoadley and Jansen (2013) and Pinar (2010), who emphasise the importance of aligning curriculum content with the needs of society. Our conviction is that South Africa needs people with practical skills to overcome its economic predicaments. Similarly, Singh (2017) suggests that the output of commercial education should be multidimensional and be fully and

globally competitive. However, it has been observed that learners and graduates of commercial subjects lack practical knowledge.

In interviews with departmental heads, it was revealed that learners often hold the perception that opportunities for advancement in life are limited within the realm of commerce. The participants emphasised that the absence of practical experiences that would allow learners to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired contributes to this disadvantageous perception. They highlighted that in order to address this issue and change this perception, it is essential to move beyond overreliance on academic qualifications alone.

According to Participant 1, effective curriculum delivery of commercial subjects in secondary schools is dependent on teachers ensuring that learners fully understand commerce and how it applies in the real world through practice.

The following are some of the expressions from departmental heads regarding the gap between theory and practice in the commercial curriculum.

(P1): "The practical experience of business will lead to an increase in performance and an understanding of economics and management sciences in the Get Band and also in the three commercial subjects in the FET phase."

(P2): "Learners need to be exposed to real-life business if they are going to fully understand the theory that is taught to them in business studies, economics, and accounting. They need to see in practise what they are taught in theory."

(P8): "Some learners take or enroll in commerce because they want to further their careers in commerce. They also take the stream because they want to establish their own businesses in the future and have the need to acquire knowledge as to how to go about doing so through studying commercial subjects. It will be very important if they get practical experience as part of their education in secondary school."

According to the participants' responses, there is a gap between theory and practice in commercial subjects in secondary schools. Based on the findings and the literature, and applying the learner-centred theory of education using the project-based approach that guided the study, it is clear that the gap between theory and practice is a barrier to the effective and efficient curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects. Practical work using project-based learning would help teachers to drive their points when teaching. It would also help learners comprehend some concepts which would otherwise be difficult to understand if they are just delivered in theory. It is, therefore, critical to ensure that practical education in the context of commercial subjects is provided for effective curriculum delivery.

In support of integrating theory with practicals as proposed in this study, the project-based learning theory is used as a guiding framework. A study by Barak and Asad (2012) indicated an increased interest in learning scientific and technological subjects among fifteen-year-old girls in Israel when theory is integrated with practice. Similarly, Lou, Liu, Shih and Tseng (2011) found project-based learning to bring joy and engagement in their experiment with high school learners in Taiwan. They further indicated that it enables learners to effectively combine theory and practice, which is what is needed in the context of effective and efficient curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects.

Theme 2: Subject combination and incomplete commercial subjects

Effective curriculum delivery of commercial subjects in secondary schools can only be successful if the curriculum is offered in its entirety. This means that learners must take up all business commercial and management subjects, such as business studies, economics and accounting. Sephoto (2018) emphasises the importance of subject alignment in increasing the understanding of curriculum content and the delivery of an effective curriculum. He also claims that a lack of alignment has a negative impact on the learners, potentially impairing their comprehension of commercial subject content in the context of this study.

Some of the sampled schools in Capricorn South District do not offer all the commercial subjects; instead, they focus on only

one or two and combine them with science or general subjects.

The departmental heads shared their thoughts on subject combinations and incomplete commercial subjects at their schools.

(P4) expressed his views by saying "*the commercial stream is treated like the general stream; we do not have complete commercial subjects at the school."*

When the subjects are incomplete, it is understood that the commercial stream is insufficient. The following statements by other departmental heads attest to this.

(P7): "*It is difficult for learners to fully comprehend commerce when they do not study all the commercial subjects that the commercial curriculum has to offer. All three subjects need to be studied for learners to fully acquire the skills needed to run their own businesses. All of the subjects are important, and they all serve a different role."*

(P2) followed up the statement with this one: "*All the commercial subjects are important and need to be studied together for learners to fully understand commerce and run their own businesses successfully. It defeats the purpose to have one without the other."*

In terms of the above assertions, it appears that lack of commercial subject alignment and incomplete commercial subjects is a barrier to curriculum delivery in secondary schools as this has the potential to impair learners' comprehension of commercial subject content. It is, therefore, imperative that all commercial subjects must be aligned and complete for effective and efficient curriculum delivery.

Theme 3: Content gap

The participants indicated a content gap on the side of learners from the GET phase transitioning into FET, claiming that learners in grades 8 and 9 do not cover enough content. This was due to the time allocated to the subjects in the GET phase. They also stated that accounting is frequently overlooked by teachers who do not have a background in the subject.

Significant issues that impede the delivery of commercial subjects in secondary schools are as follows:

(P9): "*We are aware of how important EMS is as part of the commercial subjects in secondary schools, but sometimes the subjects are given to teachers without accounting backgrounds, and they tend to neglect the accounting part of EMS, leading to gaps."*

Regarding EMS, a lack of content coverage in the GET phase appears to be a barrier to delivering subjects like accounting in the FET phase. Learners appear to come into contact with accounting only during the FET phase when they are in grade 10. This viewpoint clarifies why accounting is underperforming as a subject and why it is being phased out in some schools. Given that learners are only introduced to accounting in grade 10, they are assumed to not receive a solid foundation in the GET phase. In terms of the commercial stream, the departmental heads confirmed that EMS is not prioritised in grades 8 and 9 in secondary schools.

P2: "We usually just allocate anyone to go and teach EMS in grades 8 and 9 and our commercial teachers in grades 10 to 12. Sometimes, it is because we are trying to minimise the workload for our commercial teachers, as they are few in the school."

P10: "When we are doing our allocations, priority is given to grades 10 to 12, and grade 8 and 9 subjects are just allocated to those who have fewer periods after the allocation of the FET phase subjects."

When it comes to EMS in grades 8 and 9, time constraints are also thought to be an issue, according to two participants.

P3: "EMS is key to a nation's building up to all the commercial subjects like business studies, economics, and accounting; it requires more time than what is given in order for learners to get the foundation of commercial subjects".

P5: "The two hours per week allocated to EMS per week are clearly not enough, and this also speaks to how commercial subjects are not supported and prioritised by the system."

The general perception is that economic and management sciences subjects are very important because they provide the foundation for commercial subjects in secondary schools. However, most participants expressed concern that there are content gaps in the GET phase due to time constraints and a shortage of commercial educators, and thus a barrier for curriculum delivery of commercial subjects in secondary schools.

The interviews further revealed that some of the learners tend to shift from the science stream to the commercial stream even in grade 12. As a result, the admission of learners from other streams to commerce also forms part of the content gaps because they lack the foundation laid in grades 10 and 11.

P1: "The issue of learners having the allowance to change subjects in grades 12 and 11 also contributes to the content gaps we see in learners."

The impression from the findings is that foundation is critical in commercial subjects, that foundation is found in the economic and management sciences which is done in the GET phase as per the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2021). However, there seems to be some gaps as the subject which is supposed to build a foundation to the commercial subjects like accounting, business studies and economics in the FET phase is allocated only two hours per week, which departmental heads in the commercial stream claim is not enough. This lack thereof then creates barriers to the curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects. Moreover, learners who change their subjects in grade 12 and 11 were also found to be the ones who lacked a significant amount of foundation, and that this compromised their comprehension of commercial content in grade 11 and 12. It can then be interpreted that teachers of commercial subjects tend to have a problem when delivering the commercial curriculum to learners who do not have a foundation in commercial subjects.

Inadequate pedagogical content knowledge

In addition to the content gaps by learners, findings from the interviews further revealed inadequate pedagogical content knowledge by teachers as a barrier to the delivery of the secondary school commercial curriculum. Mosvold and Hoover (2017) argue that teachers must have a specific kind of knowledge to teach commercial subjects because of their complexity. Similarly, Pitjeng-Mosabala and Rollnick (2018) assert that teachers need to know the subject content they are assigned to teach. This will enable them to choose an adequate teaching pedagogy. However, it was found that some of the teachers assigned to teach economic and management sciences in the GET phase only know business studies and economics and have no knowledge of accounting. In some extreme cases, EMS is allocated to teachers who do not have any commercial background because of a shortage of commercial teachers in some schools.

The inadequate pedagogical content knowledge compromises the effective and efficient curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects. Similarly, Marrison (2013) reveals that the lack of conceptual knowledge of the subject and pedagogical difficulties among teachers are the underlying causes of the limitations on the virtue of teaching and learning, which manifests in the poor delivery of commercial subjects in secondary schools. In the schools in which the study was conducted, pointers indicate inadequate pedagogical content knowledge, especially with regard to the accounting part in economic and management sciences.

Discussion

While qualitative research does not aim to test a hypothesis, it proved valuable in delving into an area that warranted more profound comprehension. Through the analysis of qualitative data, it became evident that a learner-centred approach is imperative to revitalise the commercial curriculum in secondary schools. Kember and David (2009) argue that the learner-centred approach shifts away from traditional teaching methods and focuses on learning rather than teaching, with learners being more active than teachers, it is our conviction that it can be done using project-based learning, Alrujoh (2020) indicated an increased interest in learning scientific and technological subjects among learners when project-based learning is applied. Similarly, Boss and Larmer (2018) found project-

based learning to bring joy and engagement to learners. Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri (2014) further argue that project-based learning does not necessitate a great investment of time and resources compared to traditional instructional methods during delivery and execution.

They contend that it can be effectively implemented with fewer resources within the school environment. However, by employing qualitative techniques such as interviews and document analysis, the researchers obtained an in-depth insight into the obstacles obstructing the delivery of the commercial curriculum in secondary schools. According to the participants' responses, there is a gap between theory and practice in commercial subjects in secondary schools. On the contrary, Singh (2017) suggests that the output of commercial education should be multidimensional and fully and globally competitive. findings from the interviews further revealed inadequate pedagogical content knowledge by teachers as a barrier to delivering the secondary school commercial curriculum. Mosvold and Hoover (2017) argue that teachers must have specific knowledge to teach commercial subjects because of their complexity. Similarly, Pitjeng-Mosabala and Rollnick (2018) assert that teachers need to know the subject content they are assigned to teach. Subject alignment was also an issue as some schools had incomplete commercial subjects in the FET phase while other schools combined them with general subjects. Sephoto (2018) emphasises the importance of subject alignment in increasing the understanding of curriculum content and the delivery of an effective curriculum.

Based on the findings presented above, there is a need to improve and strengthen secondary school commercial curriculum delivery. It is clear that a credible intervention model is required, one that will improve the delivery of secondary school commercial subjects so that they are relevant to the economic needs. Commercial education should offer the type of training whose goal is to prepare learners to enter entrepreneurship. The traditional commercial curriculum in secondary schools is too theoretical and thus has become irrelevant. It is suggested that theory alone cannot achieve commercial curriculum objectives. Also, schools should play a role in providing learners with skills that will help them survive the harsh economic conditions; thus, there is an urgent need to overhaul and supplement the existing commercial curriculum in commercial subjects in order to meet the demands of the economy by introducing a practical model that bridges the gap between theory and practice in the commercial curriculum.

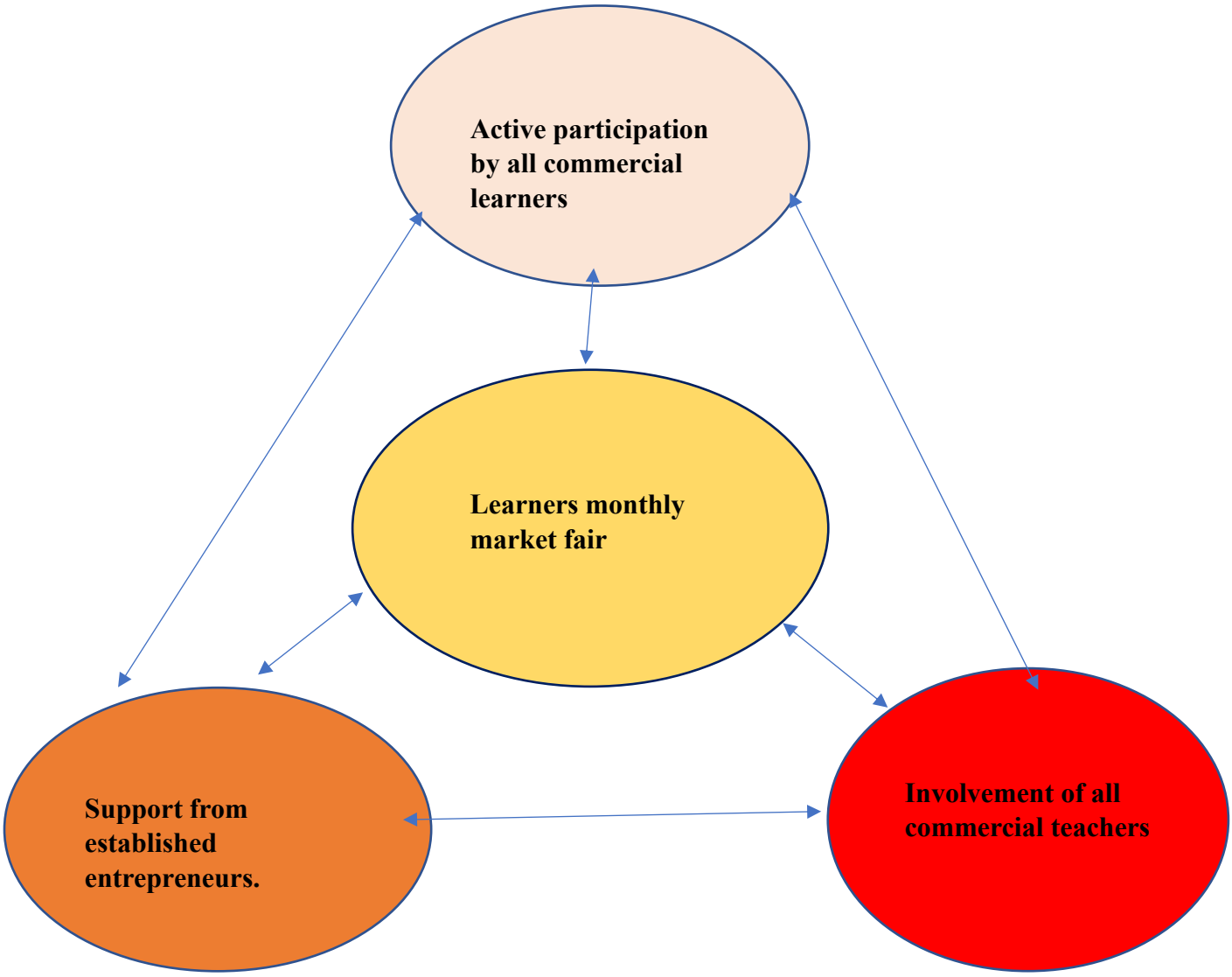
Conclusion

The relationship between theory and practice is one of two distinct disciplines with varying degrees of quality. However, it is critical to integrate what is learned through theory in commercial subjects with practical work. So, project-based learning should be applied as part of an instructional strategy to implement a learner-centred theory of education in delivering secondary school commercial subjects, implying that interventions must place learners at the centre. Including practical skills in the commercial curriculum may improve their performance and eliminate their chances of unemployment and poverty after matric. The commercial curriculum in schools should play a significant role in ensuring that learners understand how to start and run their own businesses. As a result, and in collaboration with key stakeholders, project-based learning must be integrated into the secondary school commercial curriculum to provide the much-needed practical work to supplement the theory already provided by the current curriculum in commercial subjects. The theoretical content is there, but much work remains to produce entrepreneurs who will build sustainable businesses that will create jobs for the people. The successful implementation of the model will require the cooperation of all stakeholders.

Recommendations

Recommended model for curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects

This study proposes a credible intervention model to improve secondary school commercial curriculum delivery. The model will be based on the learner-centered theory of education, which will be supplemented by project-based learning. The following model can be used in conjunction with teachers' traditional methods of delivering theoretical content to bridge the gap between theory and practice in commercial subjects.



Intervention Model to improve curriculum delivery of secondary school commercial subjects.

The commercial curriculum should be transformed to include practical skills for learners. Allowing them to start and operate their own businesses as part of the project can be an important model to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Each school should have a monthly market fair where commercial learners operate their own stalls and trade in the school yard. Local businesses should also make more of an effort to contribute to commercial curriculum delivery and to collaborate closely with schools that offer commercial subjects. Monthly projects in the form of market fairs will provide learners with the practical skills and knowledge they need to start and run their own businesses.

Given that commerce emphasises the activity of buying and selling, educators of commercial subjects should assist learners in becoming self-sufficient entrepreneurs. During the school day, the environment in which commercial learners find themselves must support the messages conveyed by the commercial curriculum. As a result, schools should take the lead in advancing practical commercial skills by allowing learners to practice running businesses at school. When teaching subjects such as accounting, business studies and economics, practical skills should be incorporated. Delivering continuous education through the intervention

model may also help to improve the academic performance of learners of commercial subjects.

The knowledge and skills required to deal with situations change as the economy becomes more industrialised and society becomes more complex. As a result, in order for commercial learners to acquire the desired capabilities, the commercial curriculum must be strengthened to become more practical-oriented.

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