

# COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHING USING SIMULATION EXERCISES

Evidence of the University of Cape Coast

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## **Abstract**

Tertiary institutions exist to train manpower to solve local, national, and international problems. Products from such institutions should not be a problem to countries as in the case of some Sub-Saharan African countries including Ghana which has a high level of graduate unemployment. Among the causes of the problem is the nature of teaching or the syllabus or the programs students pursue while in such institutions. The paper discusses one of the teaching strategies used to make a course relevant for a program and for the working world. In this course, students are introduced to practice-oriented learning through simulation exercises. The project activities specifically seek to assess the students' understanding of business formation; examine students' understanding of sustainability, creativity and innovation of business ideas; assess their understanding of the functional areas of business including marketing & sales, finance, human resource management, operations, and accounting, among others. Feedback from students who have participated indicates the exercise gave much more exposure and meaning to the concepts they learned in class. In this exercise, students build teams, develop a product, learn to set up a business, and design organogram, business vision, mission, and core values. The exercise empowers students to learn by doing. It accords students the opportunity to review their own knowledge and skills with respect to the concepts they have learned in the course. More than 3000 students have participated in this project since its inception in the academic year 2013/2014. It is estimated that 1000 students will participate in this project in the academic year 2017/2018.

**KEYWORDS:** Competency-based teaching, simulation exercises, University of Cape Coast

## **Background**

A recent discussion and the impasse between academia and industry are whether academia adequately prepares graduates for the workplace. There is often the belief that the high level of graduate unemployment is due to the unsuitable training at universities and similar institutions (Dai et al, 2008). Furthermore, several explanations have been provided for the nature of universities' teaching and learning and the stature of students churned out every year. These issues range from the nature of the programs offered by these institutions including the areas of specialisations, andragogical issues, and program duration. A common conversation in employers' circles is that organisations often have to spend additional money to train graduates in order to bring them to the level suitable to carry out the operations of the company. A research report submitted to the International Growth Center by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research in 2013, found a misalignment between tertiary

education training and labor market needs. The mismatches uncovered included the ability of graduates to analyse situations and propose solutions, leadership and innovation, technical skills, and the graduates' inability to take responsibility for own actions and inactions (Bawakyillenuo et al., 2013). There is also the question of their entrepreneurial and enterprise creation abilities since a number of them end up without jobs. Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest youth and graduate unemployment rates in the world with about 11 %.

The aim of the project, therefore, was to revamp the syllabus and methods of teaching to suit current trends in business education. The idea was to tailor the syllabus of the business course fundamentals to reflect three key areas of today's business education and training including entrepreneurship, enterprise development, and intrapreneurship. This course was appropriate for the *Business and Entrepreneurship Simulation Training* (BEST) because the syllabus is carefully designed to expose students to every aspect of business. The rest of the paper explains the processes involved in this simulation exercise (a.k.a. BEST Fair).

### **Planning the Project (The BEST Fair)**

Early in the first semester, students are informed of the BEST Fair in the second semester. They are asked to look for partners to start a company. Due to a large number of students per course (250 students per course), they are expected to have between six to ten members in their team. This constitutes their entire company and each member is asked to play a role as the Chief Executive Officer, the Deputy, Marketing Officer, Company Finance Officer, Director of Human Resource, and the Director of Operations among others. The students are mainly asked to go into start-ups by developing a new product or process to fill a need in the market.

During the formation of the teams, the emphasis is placed on diversity regarding program of study, sex, place of origin, and previous school attended. The aim is to ensure that people do not join teams just because they have friends on that team. The learning part at this stage involves students negotiating to get members into their teams, selecting or accepting specific roles. They learn to resolve their conflicts so that no one runs to the teaching staff to resolve such differences.

As part of the process, the students plan meetings and take minutes of these meetings. Such meetings are used to brainstorm business ideas and subsequently the venture and its product. The emphasis is often on the innovation of new products rather than just following conventional business operations.

### **Implementing the BEST Fair**

The idea behind the fair is to impress upon students the entrepreneurial mindset. Using their teams, students decide on the legal form of business to undertake (sole proprietorship, partnership or a limited liability company). With of chosen form, the students will then simulate its operation. If a team selects a limited liability company, they will need to provide a certificate of incorporation and other relevant registration documents.

As part of their activities and in preparation for the fair, students have to do the following:

- a. Decide on the product(s)
- b. Choose a name for the business
- c. State its vision, mission, and core values
- d. Design a company logo
- e. Provide details of the company such as; the location of the headquarters, number of employees, sector the company operates in, and products offered by the firm
- f. Define the units of the company and the role and position of each team member;
- g. Draw their organogram etc.

On the part of the teaching team, we meet to decide on how to grade the fair and also recruit and orient judges for assessing the businesses on the day of the fair. We also agree on the possible awards for deserving groups.

### **The BEST Fair**

On the day of the trade fair, students install their booth at the grounds. A booth should have a number of items including:

- a. A description and sample of the product. This should be an innovative good or service created by the team.
- b. The address and location of the business including telephone numbers, email, website, social media.
- c. The management team / directors of the various units of the business. They should demonstrate this by presenting their business cards.
- d. Samples of the documents authorizing the operation of the business in Ghana.
- e. Name tags, price lists, give-away, business cards, videos (if necessary), printed materials, posters, and a tool box (office equipment).

The fair normally lasts two hours; the assessors go to all booths and listen to the students explaining their business concepts. On the average, each booth is assessed by three judges selected to appraise the businesses.

### **Key Success Factor**

The large number of students (around 1,000) makes the event grand and real. Since 2015, the event has been planned as part of the University of Cape Coast Association of Business Students' Week. The event has also been successful because the students are often self-motivated. There are always over 200 people participating in the trade fair.

It is also imperative that students are awarded marks for this task. There should always be a project assistant (teaching assistant) to support the students wherever necessary. Departmental support in terms of the printing of students' banners prior to the day of the trade fair is crucial for the success of the project.

### Challenges

First is the venue for the trade fair. The program is perceived much more as an informal program by the university and so access to an appropriate venue is often a challenge. Due to lack of funding, students need to pay for the cost of printing their posters and other necessary items required for the exhibition during the trade fair.

### Project Implications

Among the many reasons why some teachers in public tertiary universities do not practice such innovative competency-based teaching approach is the large size of classes. In this project, the large class size added a professional touch to the trade fairs. Scenes during our fair days are not inferior to any corporate gathering. The company simulation exercise is one of the projects that is able to sustain students' attention for the entire period. Students also enjoy the event because it is an opportunity for them to act out the roles of respective perceived prestigious positions in the corporate world.

Students learn to build teams, develop a product, learn to set up a business, participate in the trade fair, and draft organogram, business vision, mission and core values. The project empowers students to learn by doing. It accords students the opportunity to review their own knowledge and skills concerning the concepts they have learned in the course.

For the past five years, students from different programs who have participated in this activity have testified to the lessons and experiences they have gathered from it. More than 3000 students have participated in this project since its inception in the academic year 2013/2014. 1000 students are participating in this project during the academic year 2017/2018.

### Future Plan

In the future, we aim at opening up the event to all students in the University of Cape Coast and the Cape Coast Technical University. The fair in 2018 would include speed networking events. There would be four awards including the *Most Innovative Idea*, *Most Feasible Start-up*, *Green and Sustainable Idea*, and *Best Coordinated Team*.

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**Appendices**

Figures 10, 11, 12, and 13 show images of scenes from previous trade fairs.



*Figure 11: Trade Fair*



Figure 12: Trade Fair



Figure 13: Trade Fair



Figure 14: Trade Fair