Adopting Learner-Centred Pedagogy to Develop Business Studies Learners' Problem-Solving and Creative Thinking Skills in Selected Schools in South Africa

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How to cite
Gcabashe, N. B. (2024). Adopting learner-centred pedagogy to develop business studies learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills in selected schools in South Africa. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *9*(2), 31-50.

https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.24

ABSTRACT

The need for problem-solving and creative thinking skills to be taught well in business studies classrooms can never be overemphasised due to the complexity of the problems and challenges faced by businesses in the 21st-century business environment. Teachers are, therefore, required to adopt pedagogies that would enable learners to acquire problem-solving and creative thinking skills to operate effectively in the new business environment. This study investigates business studies teachers' adoption of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills. This qualitative study is positioned within the interpretive paradigm. An exploratory case study was employed as a research design. Progressive Learning Theory was adopted as the lens of the study. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to collect data from six business studies teachers who were sampled purposefully from six secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. The raw data was analysed thematically. It was found that most teachers managed to adopt learner-centred pedagogy and learning activities that promoted the acquisition of problem-solving and creative thinking skills. The study concluded that business studies teachers are now embracing learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms, and they understand the importance of teaching learners to equip them with skills that are demanded by the 21st-century business environment. Despite these findings, it is still recommended that workshops and short learning courses be offered to teachers to equip them with pedagogical skills that would help them to engrain and sustain learner-centred pedagogy in their instructional practices.

KEYWORDS

Learner-centred; business studies; learners; creative thinking; problem-solving; 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1995, the South African government has been engaged in different curriculum reforms to develop a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of the 21st-century business environment.

In the process, subjects such as business studies were introduced in South African secondary schools and positioned to equip learners with skills that would enable them to operate optimally in the 21st-century business environment. The Department of Basic Education affirmed that business studies is meant to develop knowledge, skills and values that are beneficial for learners to engage in business activities meaningfully, responsibly, and productively in the 21st century (DBE, 2011). In other words, business studies was designed to equip learners with skills that would enable them to operate effectively in the 21st-century business environment. Problem solving and creative thinking are among the skills with which business studies as a subject should equip learners. According to the Department of Basic Education (2011), business studies aims to produce learners with problem-solving skills that they will employ to solve business-related problems as both employers and employees. The subject also aims to produce learners who can use creative thinking skills to solve business-related problems, take risks and identify business opportunities (Department of Basic Education, 2011) Given the learning objectives of the subject, it can be argued that business studies is positioned to equip learners with the skills they need to operate effectively in the 21st-century business environment.

However, it is clear that South Africa has yet to fully unleash the potentialities of subjects such as business studies. The existing literature indicates that South African schools continue to produce learners who are not prepared for the 21st-century business environment (Sikhakhane et al., 2020). In other words, the aspirations of business studies are not yet achieved in South Africa. This is despite the changes that have been made to the content of business studies to tailor it to the needs of the 21st-century business environment. The changes that were made were informed by recent developments in the business environment and changes in legislation and market activities (Khoza, 2019). One would, therefore, expect business studies learners who graduate from South African secondary schools to easily adapt to the current business environment because of the supposedly responsive business studies curriculum taught in schools, but this is not the case in many instances. Scholars suggest that the teaching methods that are adopted by teachers to teach business studies do not create a learning environment that allows learners to acquire the necessary skills (Khoza, 2019; Mtshali et al., 2022; Pihie & Sani, 2009). This is despite the common notion among scholars that learner-centred pedagogy plays an important role in facilitating learning that enables learners to acquire such skills (Ho & Dimmock, 2022; Majola, 2020). Therefore, this study explores business studies teachers' implementation of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills. The study addresses the following research questions: How do business studies teachers adopt learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative

thinking skills? What learning activities do business studies teachers use to support the acquisition of problem-solving and creative thinking skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner-centred pedagogy

Learner-centred pedagogy is seen by many scholars as a pedagogy that supports meaningful learning among learners. This is because learner-centred pedagogy advocates for the active involvement of learners in learning and recognises learners' prior knowledge and skills as influential factors for meaningful learning (Du Plessis, 2020). This suggests that learner-centred pedagogy allows learners to be actively involved in the learning process. Bada and Olusegun (2015) observed that learner-centred pedagogy gives learners an opportunity to shape their learning by contributing meaningfully to knowledge construction and meaning making. In business studies classrooms, learner-centred pedagogy can play a valuable role since learners are afforded the opportunity to engage in debates and discussions with the teacher and their peers (Whalen, 2019). Learners' engagement with peers and how they respond to topics discussed and debated in class influence learning (Majola, 2020). From this, it is clear that the learning activities that foster learners' involvement in the learning process positively influence learners' learning. You (2019) confirmed that learner-centred pedagogy facilitates subject mastery, long-term retention and deep understanding of the content taught. This is because learner-centred pedagogy encourages learners to discover knowledge on their own. When business studies teachers create an environment where learners are free to discover knowledge on their own, learners become immersed in learning, and it is not easy to forget what one has discovered on one's own.

Learner-centred pedagogy also allows teachers to adopt a variety of learner-centred teaching methods that put learners at the centre of learning activities. Learner-centred teaching methods such as discussions, brainstorming, flipped learning, case-based and field-trip teaching methods are among the teaching methods that are recommended for teaching business studies. Ahmad (2021) explains that the discussion teaching method can be used to create a learning environment that promotes interaction among learners. The creation of a learning environment that fosters engagement among learners is important for them to develop problem-solving and creative thinking skills. Kim and Tawfik (2021) argue that effective problem-solving occurs when individuals engage in the problem-solving process collaboratively, as this allows for the sharing of ideas. When the discussion teaching method is adopted, business studies learners can use the interactions and engagements to solve real business problems assigned to them by the teacher (Khalid et al., 2018).

Furthermore, teachers can also adopt a brainstorming teaching method to create a learning environment that supports learner-centred teaching and facilitates the acquisition of problem-solving and creative thinking skills. A brainstorming teaching method emphasises the generation of novel ideas and solutions by learners through an intensive and active thinking

process (Linsenmeyer, 2021). Kimotho (2016) concurs that a brainstorming teaching method provokes learners to apply their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. This is because this method promotes exploration, analysis and problem solving (Briggs, 2019). From this, it can be suggested that business studies learners can benefit from the use of a brainstorming teaching method in instructional practices.

The existing literature also identifies flipped learning as a learner-centred teaching method that can promote learners' acquisition of skills (Flores et al., 2016; Morris & Chapman, 2019; Nguyen & Dao, 2019). Dorji and Dorji (2022) define flipped learning as a blended approach to disseminate information to learners using synchronous and asynchronous means of communication. When implementing flipped learning, teachers design learning materials and disseminate them to learners through online and offline methods to allow them to have access to the learning materials before the actual classroom instruction. McCrea (2016) contends that the flipped learning teaching method inverts classroom activities by having the activities that were traditionally done in the classroom completed at home, while the activities that were traditionally done at home are completed in the classroom. When adopting this method, teachers may create videos and audio recordings to deliver the content for learners to watch and listen to at home. Teachers can then use the class time for learners to engage in hands-on activities, such as oral presentations, debates and classroom discussions. Flipped learning requires in-class learning activities to be carefully designed to allow learners to be actively involved in learning activities (Gerber & Eybers, 2021).

The case-based teaching method is a common teaching method that is adopted when teaching business studies. The case-based teaching method presents the learners with realistic, complex and contextually rich situations, often involving a dilemma, conflict or problem that one or more characters in the case must negotiate (Beckisheva et al, 2015). Adopting this method of teaching in business studies can help to expose learners to real business problems because case studies reflect real scenarios that happen in the business environment for which learners are being prepared. Luo et al. (2018) assert that the case-based teaching method creates an environment for learners to solve real business problems taking place outside the classroom. Rong and Choi (2019) commend the case-based teaching method for its ability to prepare learners for what they will encounter in their future professions by exposing them to similar scenarios that provide vicarious participation in professional realities.

Field trips are another effective learner-centred teaching method in teaching business. Field trips are also known as excursions or business visits. During field trips, learners get a chance to get first-hand information and experience in learning activities (Estawul et al., 2016). Teachers can use business visits to expose learners to real business settings for them to see, feel and experience how various businesses operate. Estawul et al. (2016) add that business visits help learners to concretise what they learn in their classrooms. Cheng and Tsai (2019) further asserted that field trips enable learners to engage in authentic and experiential learning. This means that field trips allow learners to encounter first-hand the activities that they learn about

in the theory in their classrooms. Sithole (2018) summarises it succinctly by saying that field trips help learners experience theory in practice.

Problem-solving skills

Problem-solving skills have been identified as crucial skills for individuals to survive in the 21st-century business environment. As a result, many education systems continue to prioritise equipping young people with problem-solving skills for them to be relevant in the workplace. Gunawan et al. (2020) support this view by suggesting that the development of problem-solving skills is a key focus of 21st-century educational goals. The business studies curriculum aims to nurture learners' problem-solving skills to enable them to resolve complex and sophisticated real-world problems after their studies (Freyn et al., 2021). It is clear from this that it is well recognised that today's businesses face complicated and sophisticated problems, hence learners should be equipped with problem-solving skills. Individuals with such skills can obtain appropriate information that will help them arrive at a sound solution to a problem (Rahman, 2019). Their analytical skills and ability to gather relevant information, assist them in finding proper solutions to problems.

Pearcy et al. (2019) suggest that teachers should expose learners to ill-structured, messy and untidy situations to develop problem-solving skills. Mustofa and Hidayah (2020) maintain that teachers should not limit learners by teaching them factual knowledge only but should also expose them to ill-structured problems to nurture their problem-solving skills. Put differently, ill-designed and practical business-related problems should be included in business studies to stimulate active thinking among learners and encourage the solution of real and practical business-related problems. Shah (2020) argues that participation in generating solutions to a specific problem can only happen in a classroom that adopts a learner-centred pedagogy. For the adoption of unstructured real-world problems to be successful, teachers should ensure that they create learner-centred learning environments. This will enable learners to fully participate in the problem-solving process and develop their problem-solving skills.

Creative thinking skills

Creative thinking skills are essential for the 21st-century business environment (Winarso & Haqq, 2020) because individuals operating in different businesses need to be able to find original solutions to the convoluted problems of the 21st century. Teachers, therefore, have to nurture learners' creative thinking skills. Creative thinking entails that learners use their imagination to generate new ideas and questions and evaluate their own and their peers' ideas. The ability to think creatively is even more important for business studies learners because it allows them to come up with novel business ideas in a complex business environment (Ndlela et al., 2020). It is, therefore, crucial that business studies teachers adopt learning activities that nurture learners' creative thinking skills. As Listiana and Bahri (2019) put it, teachers should enhance learners' creative thinking skills by adopting practical learning activities that would require them to apply their creativity.

The existing literature suggests that learner-centred pedagogy promotes creative thinking among learners (Machado et al., 2019; Shah, 2020). This is because the learner-centred pedagogy creates an environment that affords learners opportunities to explore, imagine and develop innovative ideas (Blackmore & O'Mara, 2022). In short, adopting the learner-centred pedagogy may help to develop learners' creative thinking skills because it encourages them to act out, imagine and come up with inventive ideas. For example, in solving a real business problem as a group, learners may be encouraged to develop creative thinking skills because they will be able to suggest practical solutions to the problem, explore the proposed solutions and evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions they are proposing.

Although several researchers (Mabaso, 2020; Majola, 2020; Meintjes et al., 2015) have studied different teaching methods that are employed by business studies teachers in their pedagogical practices, little research has focused on business studies teachers' implementation of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills. For example, Majola (2020) conducted a study that identified, analysed and recommended different learner-centred teaching methods that can be adopted by business studies teachers in their classrooms. Meintjes et al. (2015) also conducted a study that explored the teaching of problem-solving skills in business studies in secondary schools in South Africa. They concluded that practical exposure to a business-simulated set-up enhances learners' acquisition of problem-solving skills. A study by Mabaso (2020) investigated business studies teachers' pedagogical practices to develop learners' skills for the 21st-century workplace and revealed various challenges for teachers, including poor implementation of learner-centred pedagogy due to overcrowded classrooms. This study makes a unique contribution because it investigates business studies teachers' implementation of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills in the 21st-century learning environment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Progressive Learning Theory

This study is underpinned by John Dewey's Progressive Learning Theory because it explores the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy in classrooms. The proponents of the Progressive Learning Theory believe that effective learning occurs in a context that is characterised by learner involvement in learning activities. Williams (2017) asserts that the Progressive Learning Theory advocates for a learner-centred learning environment where learners actively engage in knowledge construction with their peers. In other words, business studies classrooms that are characterised by learner-centredness should feature learning activities that support learners' active involvement in learning activities and knowledge construction. Progressive Learning theorists perceive a classroom as a social entity where learners can engage in learning activities together, as a community (Williams, 2017). This suggests that the Progressive Learning Theory promotes the idea of collaborative learning among learners. In business studies classrooms, collaboration is even more important, because it is envisaged that these learners would operate

effectively in the 21st-century business environment to solve sophisticated and complex business problems collaboratively.

To ensure that learners are equipped with skills that are relevant to society's needs, the Progressive Learning Theory suggests that classrooms be representative of real-life situations (Gutek, 2014). This means that business studies learners should engage in learning activities that would expose them to real-life situations, such as solving real business problems. Dewey believes that humans learn better through a "hands-on" approach, which involves providing direct practical experiences to learners (Theuri et al., 2020). Hence, business studies teachers should create a conducive learning environment to encourage learners to engage in problem solving and creative thinking.

The Progressive Learning Theory was deemed suitable for this study because its tenets are in line with learner-centred pedagogy. The principles that guide learning environments that subscribe to the Progressive Learning Theory link directly with the main aim of this study. The Progressive Learning Theory is guided by three principles, namely the necessity of stimulating learners' interest to learn, learners' involvement during the teaching and learning process, and the creation of learning activities that enhance learners' creative and problem-solving skills (Moyo & Namphande, 2022). These principles mean that teachers should design learning activities that would arouse learners' interest in learning, and once interested, they would be more likely to participate in the learning activities and, for business studies learners, their problem-solving and creative thinking skills may be nurtured.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Adopting a purely qualitative approach assisted the researcher to understand and describe the phenomenon being investigated by capturing and communicating the views and experiences of the participants in their own words (Hancock et al., 2001). The use of the qualitative approach also made it possible to explore the phenomenon under investigation in its natural setting. Business studies teachers were interviewed and observed in their natural settings. Furthermore, the interpretive paradigm was employed, which helped the researcher to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of the participants. An exploratory case study research design was also adopted for this study. This enabled the participants to recount their views on and experiences of implementing the learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

The convenience sampling technique was used to select six secondary schools located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. From each school, one business studies teacher was selected purposively to participate in the study. Teachers were selected on the basis that they taught business studies in the sampled schools and that all the sampled teachers were qualified to teach business studies in the Further Education and Training phase. Employing a purposive sampling technique helped to select experienced teachers. Creswell et al. (2011)

emphasised that purposive sampling helps a researcher to identify and select individuals who are knowledgeable about and experienced in the phenomenon under investigation.

Table 1.

Participants' biographic information

Participants	Gender	Age Group	Highest Qualification	Teaching experience
Silo	Male	30-40	Bed Honours	9 years
Mahlengi	Female	30-40	Bachelor of Education	7 years
Jika	Male	40-50	Bed Honours	10 years
Owethu	Female	30-40	PGCE	15 years
Amahle	Female	50-60	Diploma	28 years
Zolani	Female	40-50	Bachelor of Education	20 years

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. All six teachers participated in interviews that lasted between 40 and 45 minutes each. Adopting semi-structured interviews to collect data helped the researcher to ask probing questions, which assisted in gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Non-participatory classroom observations were also used to collect data. One business studies lesson per teacher was observed. Each observation lasted for 50 to 60 minutes, and the observation tool developed by the researcher was used to record activities that transpired during lesson observations. Adopting an observation tool helped the researcher to focus during data collection. Data collected through the interviews was analysed thematically, while data gathered through classroom observations was analysed qualitatively.

To enhance the credibility of the gathered data, member checking was implemented. Involving the participants in this manner aimed to mitigate potential biases in the collected information (Madill & Sullivan, 2018) and ensure accuracy in the final research report (Motulsky, 2021).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution where the study was conducted. The researcher also applied for permission to conduct the study from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE) and from the gatekeepers of the respective schools where the study was conducted. The researcher ensured all the standards of ethics were maintained during and after the study. The participants were informed about the study, for them to make an informed decision on whether to participate or not. The participants were also informed about their rights before engaging in the study, including the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. The researcher ensured that the identities of the participants were protected throughout the study. To ensure the protection of the identities of the participants, the researcher used pseudonyms to report the findings. The following pseudonyms were used: *Mahlengi, Silo, Jika, Owethu, Zolani and Amahle* and all the pseudonyms were created by the researcher and cannot be linked to any participant.

FINDINGS

The following themes emerged from the data analysis: learner-centred pedagogy, teaching methods adopted by teachers, and learning activities to nurture learners' skills. These themes are used to present the findings of the study.

Learner-centred pedagogy

During the interviews, it transpired that all the participants understood learner-centred pedagogy. They provided different definitions of learner-centred pedagogy.

Mahlengi said:

> *"Learner-centred pedagogy is about focusing on the learner, meaning as a teacher, you need to give learners space to be free in the class. Like, they do activities independently without you as a teacher interfering".*

> Silo, in turn, viewed learner-centred pedagogy as a learning environment where learners make their own choices, and the teacher supports them:

> *"For me, learner-centred pedagogy is where we allow learners to make their choices with regard to learning activities. As a teacher, you allow learners space to act out, assist one another, make mistakes and as a teacher, you only help them to see mistakes and correct those mistakes with them".*

Jika said:

> *"As far as I know, learner-centred pedagogy is about the teaching that puts learners at the centre. Learners actively engage in learning activities and myself as a teacher, I guide them as they complete activities. So, a teacher can do that through asking questions maybe or facilitating the discussion in the classroom to allow learners to freely participate in the lesson".*

> From the participants' sentiments, it could be deduced that all the teachers perceived learner-centred pedagogy as a teaching and learning environment that should put learners at the centre of the learning activities. The teachers' assertions above are significant because they show that business studies teachers understand learner-centred pedagogy. In other words, teachers now understand that learners should have an active role to play in their learning. It is unlike before when teachers used to believe that all classroom activities should be centred around the teacher.

Teaching methods adopted by teachers

The participants reflected on the teaching methods they adopted in their classrooms when teaching business studies to ensure that learners are involved in learning activities. It became clear that teachers adopted a variety of teaching methods in their classrooms.

For example, Mahlengi stated:

> *"I normally use a case-based teaching method, where I get recent real business scenarios from the internet. I then use the projector and the laptop to show learners what is happening in the real business world and as I explain the contents of the lesson, I always relate it to the real business scenario to help them understand. I also use the scenarios to*

give them a chance to solve the problem facing the business by suggesting solutions either individually, in pairs or in groups".

When implementing a case-based teaching method, Mahlengi prompts learners to suggest solutions to real business problems. By doing this, she puts learners in a position to act as businesspeople who are engaged in resolving real business problems individually and collectively. Such exercises may expose learners to a problem-solving process and this may enhance their problem-solving skills.

Amahle mentioned that she usually adopts a discussion method and a problem-based teaching method in her business studies classrooms. She stated:

"To ensure learners' participation in my class, I normally use discussion teaching method, and problem-based teaching method. I first introduce the lesson and then show learners a business-related problem on a data projector and allow them to discuss the problem either in pairs or as the whole class. After that, they suggest solutions through doing oral presentations in the class".

Similarly, Jika mentioned that he adopts a problem-based teaching method and a discussion method in his business studies classroom to involve learners in the lesson and nurture their problem-solving and creative thinking skills:

"You know, I use discussions to encourage learners to talk with their peers, especially when solving business-related problems. There are chapters that you cannot teach without using business-related problems, so I get business-related problems in the form of case studies from the internet and bring them to class, ask them to discuss and come up with solutions. As they discuss, their problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills get to be developed because for them to suggest solutions to the problem, they need to think creatively and share the solutions with the rest of the class".

Essentially, Jika implements almost three teaching methods in his classroom when teaching business studies. He blends the discussion method with a problem-based teaching method and a case-based teaching method. Being able to blend the three teaching methods may be attributed to the flexibility that comes with implementing learner-centred pedagogy when teaching business studies. Judging from Jika's account, one may assume that he implements these three methods seamlessly, and without affecting the rhythm of his lesson. Having such flexibility in adopting various teaching methods in one lesson cannot easily be found in teacher-centred pedagogy because normally, in that pedagogy, the lesson is rigidly structured with the teacher being the centre of all activities in the lesson.

Furthermore, Owethu mentioned that she sometimes adopts the elements of flipped learning in her classrooms in addition to the discussion method and the case-based teaching method:

"I normally use the discussion method and the case-based teaching method in my classes. Since the start of Covid-19 until now, I sometimes give learners pre-recorded lessons from YouTube so they can look at it before coming to class. When they get to class, we use

class time to clarify some of the misunderstandings, or I answer their questions if they need clarity on certain things. I also ask them sometimes to do presentations on what they have learnt".

From the excerpt above, it is clear that Owethu has adopted some aspects of the flipped learning teaching method in her business studies classrooms. This is encouraging because adopting flipped learning in teaching and learning not only encourages learners to be involved in the learning process in the classroom but also beyond the classroom. In other words, this teaching method enables learners to take responsibility for their learning by watching educational videos and listening to recordings made available to them by the teacher. As Owethu mentioned, exposure to the content before the actual class time enables learners to actively participate in learning activities during class time. This is because they are familiar with what is taught in the class, having encountered the learning materials beforehand.

Under this theme, it emerged that business studies teachers mainly implement case-based, problem-based teaching, discussion and flipped learning methods in their classrooms to promote learner involvement in learning and the acquisition of creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

Interestingly, during classroom observations, most teachers adopted some teaching methods that were not prevalent during the interviews. One of the teaching methods that stood out during classroom observations is the question-and-answer teaching method. Apart from the four teaching methods the participants mentioned during interviews, most teachers adopted the question-and-answer teaching method in their lessons and learner involvement in the lesson was still visible. However, in some classrooms, learner involvement was limited to learners responding to questions asked by the teacher. This kind of involvement may not be deemed as effective learner involvement that can nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. This is because some learners did not get enough time to engage in creative thinking or problem solving, as some teachers were more interested in hearing answers from those learners who were able to think quickly, raise their hands and provide answers.

Despite the shortcomings of the question-and-answer method that were observed in some lessons, there were teachers such as Silo and Zolani who implemented the question-and-answer method in an interesting manner. Silo blended the question-and-answer method with problem-based learning and the discussion method in his classroom. He adopted the question-and-answer method to prompt discussion and problem-solving. This seemed to be working for Silo because all learners in different groups were able to talk while the teacher was going around, facilitating the discussion by asking them questions. Zolani, on the other hand, adopted the question-and-answer teaching method during the lesson introduction. This helped her to gauge learners' prior knowledge about the topic she was about to teach. She could also correct some of the misconceptions that learners had. As he was clarifying some of the learners' misconceptions, Zolani adopted a more teacher-centred approach, but as she progressed with the lesson, she adopted a discussion teaching method.

Learning activities to nurture learners' skills

During the interviews, teachers were asked to recount the learning activities they adopted in their classrooms to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. It emerged from the participants' responses that they exposed learners to various learning activities to nurture their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Zolani narrated how she nurtures learners' problem-solving thinking skills:

"*Actually, we start in Grade 10, where I teach them different problem-solving techniques such as nominal group technique, brainstorming, SCAMPER, etc. Then in Grade 12, I normally make use of case studies where I present business-related problems to them and ask them to solve the real business problem. To ensure that they develop problem-solving skills, I normally ask them to use problem-solving techniques that we learn about in class*".

From this, it can be inferred that Zolani teaches learners to follow particular problem-solving techniques when engaging in problem-solving. This prompts learners to solve business-related problems systematically, following a certain problem-solving technique. This would not only nurture learners' problem-solving skills but also expose them to how business-related problems are solved in the real business world.

Silo, in turn, provided a practical example of how he nurtures learners' problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills:

"*I display the business problem on a data projector and tell learners to come up with solutions and I draw a force-field analysis on the board and ask them to provide the pros and cons of the proposed solution to a problem*".

It is clear from Silo's utterances that he allows learners to engage in a problem-solving process by encouraging them to come up with solutions to business-related problems and evaluate their feasibility by engaging in a force-field analysis. However, it seems that Silo still plays an active role as a teacher in controlling the classroom, because he indicated that he develops the force-field analysis on the board and asks learners to provide the pros and cons of the suggested solutions to the problem. One may deem Silo's role in the problem-solving process as one where the teacher directs and controls the learning activities.

It also appeared from the interviews that some participants do not limit learning activities that have the potential to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills in the classroom, they also give learners activities to do outside the classroom.

Owethu recounted how she develops learners' skills through learning activities that happen outside the classroom:

"*I give them research activities where they will go use their cellphones, laptops or interview knowledgeable people to get solutions to business-related problems. After completing the assessment, they come back to class and share that with their peers through oral presentation. I then allow other learners to ask questions to the presenter. Through such activities, they develop problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills*".

It appears from Owethu's account that she encourages learners to consult different sources to get knowledge on the solutions to real business problems. This does not only equip learners with problem-solving skills, but it also teaches them that to get sound solutions to a problem, one needs to conduct research. Furthermore, Owethu indicated that she encourages learners to share the proposed solutions to the business problem with their peers through oral presentations.

In summary, various learning activities are adopted by teachers to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. From the teachers' accounts, it is evident that they adopted different learning activities to nurture learners' problem-solving and creative thinking skills. Some teachers expose learners to learning activities that prompt them to solve business-related problems systematically, while others expose them to activities that require them to engage in problem-solving and creative thinking even beyond the classroom.

DISCUSSION

This study intended to explore business studies teachers' implementation of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The findings revealed that most teachers who participated in the study understood and implemented learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms. This finding is contrary to the finding of the study that was conducted by Mtshali et al. (2022), which found that business studies teachers implement teaching approaches that do not promote learner-centredness. Most teachers who participated in the current study adopted teaching methods that promoted learner involvement in their classrooms. This is in line with the Progressive Learning Theory that advocates for teachers to implement learner-centred pedagogy to allow learners' active participation in learning activities (Williams, 2017). It emerged from this study that adopting learner-centred pedagogy allowed business studies teachers to put learners at the centre of learning activities that took place in the classrooms. Du Plessis (2020) asserts that creating a learning environment that enables learners to be actively involved in the learning process helps to recognise learners' prior knowledge, and skills that are influential to their learning process. Furthermore, adopting the learner-centred pedagogy alters the role of the teacher from being a source of knowledge to that of being a guide, coach and facilitator of learners' learning (Sakata et al., 2022).

Furthermore, it was found that most business studies teachers implemented learner-centred teaching methods such as problem-based teaching methods in their classrooms. By adopting a problem-based teaching method, teachers managed to expose learners to ill-structured and business-related problems. Pearcy et al. (2019) concur that teachers should expose learners to messy, ill-structured and untidy problems in their pedagogical practices. In addition to this, the study found that teachers adopt the discussion method in their classrooms. It appeared from the teachers' responses that the use of discussion methods in business studies classrooms creates a learning environment that enables learners to solve business-related problems individually and with their peers. This finding correlates with the view of Ahmad

(2021), who found that adopting a discussion teaching method creates an environment that promotes interaction among learners, which subsequently enables them to engage in learning activities with the potential to nurture their problem-solving and creative thinking skills. The study found that a discussion method allows teachers to expose learners to learning activities such as solving real business problems with their peers. In other words, a discussion method enables learners to share ideas and solutions with their peers as they attempt to resolve the business problem presented to them by the teacher. This finding corroborates the finding of the study that was conducted by Khalid et al. (2018), which found that adopting a discussion method in teaching gives learners an opportunity to interact with their peers and share ideas in relation to the topic under discussion.

This study further revealed that business studies teachers implemented a case-based teaching method in their classrooms to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The teachers indicated that adopting a case-based teaching method enabled them to expose learners to real scenarios that happen in the real business world. This finding is in line with the study that was conducted by Luo et al. (2018), which concluded that a case-based teaching method exposes learners to business scenarios from outside the classroom. In their study, Mahdi et al. (2020) found that a case-based teaching method enhances learners' creative thinking skills and enables them to analyse and solve real problems. It further emerged from the teachers' commentaries that they also integrate technology to support the implementation of case-based teaching. They mentioned that they use the internet to access case studies that would reflect the real business cases that learners need to solve. This finding suggests that teachers do not only rely on the case studies that are contained in the prescribed business studies textbooks but getting case studies from the internet enables them to expose learners to various real business scenarios. Having access to different case studies may enhance learners' abilities to critically analyse, and solve real business problems (Ameta et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION and LIMITATIONS

This study sought to explore business studies teachers' implementation of learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. It was concluded that teachers seem to be embracing the learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms. This was evident in the findings of this study, which reported that business studies teachers understood and implemented learner-centred pedagogy in their classrooms, to try and nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. It was also found that teachers try to adopt learning activities that promote learners' involvement in learning activities and thus nurture their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Despite these findings, which may be viewed as positive for the teaching of business studies, classroom observations showed that some teachers still revert to teacher-centred pedagogy in their classrooms. This study contributed immensely to the body of knowledge about the pedagogical practices in the field of business education. Despite its notable contribution to business education, it is important to highlight

that this study has some limitations that can be addressed in follow-up studies in the area. Firstly, this study had a limited number of participants, which makes it difficult for its findings to be generalised to all business studies teachers in South Africa. Secondly, this study only focused on teachers who teach business studies; teachers who teach other subjects may implement learner-centred pedagogy to nurture learners' creative and problem-solving skills differently.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that business studies curriculum specialists organise capacity-building workshops at the circuit or district levels, where teachers are continuously trained on implementing learner-centred pedagogy in their business studies pedagogical practices. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Department of Basic Education should work with teacher training institutions to provide short learning programmes that would equip in-service teachers with the skills to adopt learner-centred teaching methods to help learners acquire the skills needed for the 21st-century business environment.

Future research could focus on exploring how business studies teachers implement learner-centred pedagogy in technology-enhanced classrooms, to nurture learners' creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, a qualitative study that includes learners as participants should be conducted in future to ascertain learners' perceptions of how business studies teachers implement learner-centred pedagogy to nurture their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Finally, a quantitative study on the topic covered in this study could be conducted in future, so that the findings can be generalised to the broader population of business studies teachers.

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