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CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT FOR FUTURE RELEVANCE: AN EYE ON TOMORROW IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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There is a growing concern over the increasing number of graduates being turned out annually from Nigerian schools (secondary and tertiary) with little or no skill for sustenance. It is also worrisome that many resort to crimes, nefarious activities, civil unrest and thuggery as a ready means of survival while the labour market soars annually. This necessitates a critical examination of the secondary school curriculum, which forms the basis of tertiary education in Nigeria, with a view to determining and identifying the dream, vision and philosophy underlying it. The purpose of this paper is to fulfill that timely task by examining the prospects and challenges of the curriculum in order to determine the degree of its relevance for the future and the attainment of the millennium development goals. Employing a descriptive survey design, the paper samples a total of 500 respondents from various secondary schools. Questionnaires and documentary analysis of the National secondary School Curriculum content were employed as instruments. Statistical tools were also employed to analyze data. The results obtained showed that secondary school curriculum had a significant influence on the lifestyle and future living of youths. It also showed that the current curriculum content seems inadequate for inculcating functional and sustainable skills in students. There is therefore a need for an ardent and prompt review of this current curriculum to address the anomalies.

Keywords: School Reform, Curriculum Relevance, Curriculum Improvement, Curriculum for the Future.

INTRODUCTION

Considerable research issues arising from curriculum-based educational reform occurred from the 1990s through the millennium. Such an emerging body of scholarship is a product of the increasing concern over the growing gap between what is traditionally taught in schools and the application of the 21st-century skills. It is on record that employers noted since the early 1990s that US schools were not teaching students the

skills they must have for the 21st century workplace thereby confirming the need for a sweeping change in how we think about curriculum. This observation finds support in Marriot (2009) who opines that "to succeed in today's workplace, young people need more than basic reading and mathematics skills. Rather, need substantial content knowledge and information technology skills, advance thinking skills, flexibility to adapt to change, as well as interpersonal skills.

According to Fletcher (2009), the human society is in dire need of change especially with regards to education and corporations need to scream, write, and talk about the need to change the curriculum for future relevance. "What may be needed is a fundamental shift in how we think about the curriculum. The current thinking in the standards movement is that government should define the what-the standards- and the schools and teachers should define the how-the instruction necessary to teach those standards. The skills that business people are talking about are less content-oriented and more about process, demanding a different approach to teaching. Instruction may need to be a part of the curriculum and content standards so that we are teaching the skills students need as they advance to college and the workplace" (Fletcher, 2009: 2).

Ken Kay (2007) seems to have articulated the need for an eye on the future in curriculum development when he conjures up a sample social studies lesson to illustrate the difference between what is traditionally taught and the application of the 21st century skills. "Rather than teach a series of facts, we should approach the subject in a problem-based way, for instance, by dividing students into teams, giving each team a GPS and specifications for a city park, and then asking the students to pick the best site to place the park as well as articulate the rationale for their decision" (p. 17). This growing concern for the pursuit of curriculum for future relevance may be better explained by the emerging dominance of the *Facing the Future Curriculum Resources* which are now being used by teachers in the United States of America and more than other countries of the world. *Facing the Future Curriculum Project* invests considerable time and resources to assessing the impact of our programmes and constantly developing and updating curriculum materials based on input from educators (Programme Handbook, 2011).

Alluding to Martin Luther King, McCunnings, (2006) says, "We dream and with dreams come visions and from visions come mission." This statement is a necessity for the development of any nation in all its facets particularly the education of its youths. Curriculum generally has developed through various

paradigm shifts; from the Tylerian era through modernism and later postmodernism. Each paradigm shift has championed a course of study. For instance, with the advent of compulsory schooling in the US around 1850, curriculum became an established educational blueprint but only went through very little reform until the Eight Year Study which was conducted from 1933 to 1941, which turned out to be the most significant curriculum study ever made, as it picked holes in the rigid pattern of subjects being taught as the best way to prepare students for college and the future. Subsequently, the curriculum was greatly shaped and influenced by a handful of events in the fifties and the sixties. For instance, "in 1956, Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, and later his Taxonomies, laid out a schemata of knowledge and thinking processes which translated into a closer view of children's exceptionalities" (p. 2). The curriculum was also influenced by the launching of Sputnik 1 by the Russians on October 4, 1957, which culminated in the official opening of the "space race" and prompted America to respond immediately by strengthening its curriculum in the areas of mathematics, science, and foreign languages (Wooten and Reynolds, 1977). This shows that there has always been a concern, albeit to a limited degree, for curriculum of the future which is expected to be implemented only by a teacher of the future. The teacher of the future will be expected to be a facilitator who will model the "how" of integrating the "who", "what", "when", "where" and "why" into a coherent whole, stir up interest by presenting challenging questions requiring the use of higher order thinking skills, and be a resource person for the various groups in the classrooms, whereas the curriculum of the future will allow students to graduate with knowledge based on real-world situations/problems studied and solved (or valid attempts made to solve them) in the classroom."

Similarly formal education in Nigeria since its inception in 1842 has passed through various paradigm shifts with various visions and goals. In the Nigerian context, a quick reflection shows that during the Colonial era, 1842 – 1960 the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) formed the basis for the curriculum of primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. At that

time, the curriculum of secondary schools was quite narrow, emphasizing only the cognitive domain to the neglect of other domains. This scenario continued until the advent of Nigeria's Civil War (1966 – 1969). The post-civil war and era had its curriculum based on the 3Rs (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation) as goals and mission objectives and all the curricular activities were tailored towards the realization of such goals. From the 1970s came the Universal Primary Education (UPE) era with mass literacy as its focus. The curriculum for this era was based on providing every child of school age in Nigeria with reading, writing and mathematical skills.

The year 1982 witnessed the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education which consisted of six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education. The curriculum here was broad based and had life skills, dignity of labour, emphasis on practical skills, technical skills, values and culture embedded in it. However, the 6-3-3-4 system of education was adjudged to have failed irrespective of the curricular scene. This failure was probably a fall-out of government's unpreparedness and inability to provide the resources (material and non-material) to enhance the successful implementation of the curriculum. At present, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) has taken the centre stage in the Nigeria educational system. This requires a free and compulsory educational package for all school age children and adults in the society. The curriculum should also be reviewed to accommodate the objectives and mission of the government. There currently seem to be indications suggesting an imminent shift towards a 6-5-4 system which, for sometime in Nigeria, was the educational orientation.

Notwithstanding all the movements forward and backward over curricular issues in Nigerian schools the number of graduates turned out annually from these schools especially at the secondary level, with little or no skill for sustenance, has become worrisome. The vision of the future in Nigerian secondary schools is therefore impaired and we hardly think beyond what we know in the present. Furthermore, it leaves the society with a vague image of the future full of fearful

spectators, ranging from terrorism of various forms including kidnapping, armed robbery, various forms of violence and even tyrannical control of our genetic destinies.

In the view of Pinnar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995), the understanding of curriculum is making the curriculum to regulate social life towards the attainment of social goals. In a similar token, Brendt (2005) opines that knowledge is as dynamic as social changes in a society and education should stay afloat to transform these changes. It becomes imperative that if education should stay afloat to transform these changes, then the curriculum should provide an avenue for the realization of the anticipated goals. In an ideal setting, the curriculum is regarded as a guide to all the educational practices. It dictates the tone and direction to which education in the society must tilt. This makes it necessary for curriculum to incorporate not only an adequate knowledge of the society in the present but also of the future. Thus, Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) as quoted by Eplan (2005) states that “man is made wise not by his recollections of the past but by the responsibility he assumes for its future”. He went further to say that man can and indeed need to assume responsibility for the future as this is the essence of education. This explains the need for curriculum planners to think and plan for tomorrow. Secondary school students must be educated wisely to cope with the future in a way that fundamentally differs from the past. This involves developing a curriculum dedicated to preparing the young to deal with circumstances that reflect Nigeria's current needs, desires and aspirations.

According to Hayes (2004), such future curricula must equip secondary school youths with the skills for engaging in the analyses of the future, exploring the range and nature of choices available to them and above all assisting them in taking meaningful decisions. This becomes imperative in the society today as the country is faced with a variety of social ills like unemployment, social unrest, youth restiveness, violence, high rate of crimes, hooliganism and the antecedent poverty that arise there from. It is common knowledge in the educational parlance that the aim of education is to prepare the youths for a better future

in line with the realities of their society and the world in general. Eplan (2005) corroborates this when he affirms that in the face of the most difficult reality of time which is a long range and profound uncertainty of the future, there is an urgent need to make existential decisions for ourselves and our children despite these uncertainties. It therefore behoves the educationists, curricularists, other stakeholders and government policy makers to ensure that education truly prepares the youths for meaningful and constructive future through which education can be made a tool per excellence for national development as stated in National Policy for Education (2004:2).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Many school leavers in Nigeria today are no longer acquiring the competencies necessary for self-reliance as entrenched in the National Policy on Education (2004). To be precise, the school no longer prepares the youths for a life of work after graduation from schools. It is against this background that this study examines the extent to which the content of the national secondary school curriculum is embedded with the concept of a more functional and realistic curriculum that actually prepares youths for a truly realistic future, in a manner capable of making them function well in the face of the future challenges.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study is aimed at examining the extent to which the curriculum content of secondary education in Nigeria prepares the youths for meaningful living in the future. Specifically the study seeks to:

- Examine the challenges and problems inherent in the current secondary school curriculum
- Ascertain the extent to which the curriculum provides opportunities to the youths for better living.
- Determine the relevance of the curriculum for sustainable development in the country
- Identify the emergent issues that may arise from such transformation of the curriculum content.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the challenges and problems inherent in the present secondary school curriculum?
2. Does the present curriculum provide adequate opportunities for a better living?
3. Is the present curriculum relevant for future national development and sustainability?
4. What are the issues that may arise from the new curriculum?

METHODOLOGY

The survey method design was used and the entire secondary schools in Lagos State served as population for the study. Using the simple random sampling technique, five out of the six existing education districts in the state were selected. Two secondary schools were also randomly selected from each of the education districts to make a total of ten schools. Forty respondents comprising 20 students and 20 teachers were sampled from each school while 20 officials of the State Ministry of Education were sampled from each district to make a total of five hundred (500) respondents from across the five zones. A twenty item three-point scaled questions with the options or "agreed", "disagreed" and "uncertain", served as the instruments for the study. The questionnaire comprised two sections, namely: Section A: Biodata and Section B: The test items. The content of the questionnaire was faced validated by curriculum experts from the University of Lagos. A test-retest reliability estimate of 0.9 ascertained the reliability of the instrument. Furthermore, simple frequencies and percentile were used for analysis of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research question 1 sought to examine the challenges and the problems inherent in the present secondary school curriculum. From the analysis of the secondary school curriculum, it was gathered that the content lacks skills, developmental activities etc, which are capable of ensuring youths empowerment to enhancing productivity and better living. Moreover, the curriculum lacks the practicality required for sustainable development of the youths, hence, the perennial recurrence of the same set of social problems;

unemployment, poverty, child labour, violence, etc. That has plagued not only secondary school graduates today but also those of higher institutions.

Research question 2 attempted to ascertain the adequacy of the present curriculum in providing for better living among the youths.

Table 1
Adequacy of the Present Curriculum in Providing Better Living for the Youths

Item Category	A	D	U	Total
A. The curriculum content of the secondary schools is quite inadequate	483 (96.5)	5 (1.0)	12 (2.5)	500 (100)
B. The curriculum provides adequate opportunities for self development of the school leavers	478 (95.5)	7 (1.5)	15 (3.0)	500 (100)
C. To ameliorate the situation there is urgent need to review the curriculum to enhance	468 (93.5)	7 (1.5)	25 (5.0)	500 (100)
D. The present curriculum is directed mainly towards preparing the students for higher institution	447 (89.5)	48 (9.5)	5 (1.0)	500 (100)

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents (teachers, students and officials) are of the opinion that the curriculum is grossly inadequate in content and there is no sufficient provision of such opportunities (like skills acquisition, developmental activities etc) for secondary school leavers. A review of the responses to the item categories A–D above revealed that, 483, (96.5%), 478 (95.5%), 468 (93.5%) and 447 (89.5%) respondents respectively supported the assertion and were very critical of the curriculum content in that regard while 5 (1.0%), 7 (1.5%) and 48 (9.5) of the respondents were of the opinion that the curriculum is adequate as it is. Only a few respondents 12 (2.5%), 15 (3.0%) 25 (5.0%) and 5 (1.0%) were uncertain and showed no concern. The high percentage of the respondents who agreed to the inadequacy of the present curriculum is worrisome and calls for urgent transformation. Thus Adegoke (2003) and Igwe (2006) assert that there is need for transformation of the curriculum in such a way that it would enhance the

acquisition of life skills and thus promote special transformation. Furthermore, the present curriculum has become a routine as it is monofaceted and directed mainly towards preparing the students for higher institution with the assumption that all secondary school graduates will eventually be in higher institutions.

Table 2 shows respondents' view on the relevance of the secondary school curriculum as stated in research question 3.

Table 2
Relevance of the Secondary School Curriculum for Sustainable Development

Item Category	A	D	U	Total
A. Curriculum plays an importance role in the sustainability of Nigeria Economy	455 (91.0)	18 (3.6)	27 (5.4)	500 (100)
B. The reality as faced in Lagos state shows that the secondary school curriculum today is inadequate	427 (85.5)	45 (9.0)	28 (5.5)	500 (100)
C. The secondary school curriculum does not provide for a meaningful future for secondary school leavers	420 (84)	52 (10.5)	28 (5.5)	500 (100)
D. The school curriculum is quite relevant to the secondary school graduates	332 (66.4)	60 (12.0)	108 (21.6)	500 (100)
E. There is urgent need for a realistic curriculum for transformation that will guarantee self empowerment and social development	330 (66.0)	105 (21.0)	65 (13.0)	500 (100)

Research question 3 tried to determine the relevance of the secondary school curriculum for sustainable development in Nigeria. A good majority of the respondents were of the view that curriculum plays a great role in the sustainability and development of the Nigeria economy. A review of the responses to the item categories A–E above revealed that, 455 (91.0%), 427 (85.5%), 420 (84%), 332 (66.4%) and 330 (66.0%) respondents were in the affirmative while 18 (3.5%) and 45 (9.0%), 52 (10.5%), 60 (12.0%) and 105 (21.0%) disagreed. On the other hand, 27 (5.4%), 28

(5.5%) 108 (21.6%) and 65 (13.0%) respondents were uncertain. This could be as a result of ignorance and non-challant attitude to national issues. The reality as faced in Lagos state which is the area of study and indeed the nation at large shows that the secondary school curriculum today has not only become inadequate but does not seem to ensure a successful future for the school graduates and the society in general.

Research question 4 tried to identify the emergent issues that may arise from the anticipated change in the curriculum. The respondents pointed out the following as some of the issues that require attention for the success of the future curriculum. These include: the provision of in-service training for the practicing teachers to prepare them to effectively tackle the challenges posed by the future curriculum.

This training could take different dimensions – seminars, workshops (long and short), conferences and other forms of short training. This is very crucial for effective implementation of the curriculum because teachers as implementers can make or mar any curriculum no matter how sophisticated it may be. Similarly, there may be the need to review the curriculum packages of pre-service teachers in the colleges and faculties of education in line with the transformed secondary school curriculum. A re-orientation of the stakeholders in education (parents, teachers, learners, educationists, etc) is also identified as an area of concern. Other important issues identified includes, provision of facilities for teaching/learning provision of infrastructure, provision of teaching aids, laboratories and workshop for practical experiences vis-a-vis wood works, etc. suffice it to say that all these have heavy cost implications. The government has to increase her budgetary allocation to accommodate all these expenses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has attempted a critical examination of the prospects and challenges of the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria, alongside the dream, vision, and philosophy underlying it, with a view to determining the degree of its relevance to the future and the

millennium development goals. The study revealed that the secondary school curriculum has significant influence on the lifestyle and future living of the youths. The results showed that there is no adequate curricular provision for functional and sustainable living skills. It is therefore evident from the study that there is need to review the content of the National Secondary School curriculum to embrace the social realities of our time and the distance future such that adequate social transformation, national development and socio-economic wellbeing of the individuals particularly secondary school leavers and others who attain higher education. Based on the analysis of the results and other findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- That an ardent and urgent review of the secondary school curriculum content be carried out.
- That such review be made to reflect the true realities of the society such that the gap between the school world and the society is removed.
- That the review be made to effect the inclusion of life skills and other practical skills in the curriculum.
- That the review be such that caters for the future of secondary school leavers and ensures adequate empowerment, improved socio-economic life for the individuals and national development.
- That such a review as will be carried out should draw on appreciable experiences from various educational settings that have stood the test of time.

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