

NIGERIAN EDUCATION CURRICULUM REFORMS AND ATTAINMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION OBJECTIVES: A PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract

The paper made an etymological incursion into the term “curriculum”. It analyzed the factors that necessitated the Nigerian curriculum reforms. It as well synthesized the “how” and the objectives of the secondary education curriculum reform. The paper articulated the philosophy that guided the curriculum reform, and a critical evaluation of the reform was demonstrated, in view of its possibility of attaining the secondary education objectives. Some recommendations were proffered.

Introduction

The term “curriculum” derives from the Latin word, *cursus*, meaning a “running course”, running on a wager; or a career. In its original Latin, it means the direction pursued; a regular progress from point to point, or method of procedure. Today, it has the connotation of “a race track” or a course that ran to reach a goal. As it pertains to education, its clarity of outline defied consensus among educational philosophers. Their attempts for definite or general definition ended up in a mere clashing of ideas between great thinkers, apparently without any definite answer or even an end in view. For Babarinde (2001), the term had been in use in the 19th century, and did not amount to more than a collection of syllabuses or subjects. This is too narrow a view, for it

appears to have failed to appreciate the all-embracing connotation of its original Latin usage. Such Latin usage etymologically covered all life activities. From this angle of thought, curriculum can be conceived as “a vehicle on which we move from cradle to the grave” (Merril, 2002).

Interpretatively, curriculum can be viewed as a total environment in which education takes place. However, it is a truism that aims of education vary with time and place, because no two communities are exactly alike in all respects. If communities differ and education should help solve problems of the society, then the systems of education and curricula of different communities should reflect the problems peculiar to those places (Ogbonnaya, 2003). For instance, the ancient Greeks regarded education as a major service of a state and an essential instrument for the training of citizens, but each city-state has its aims and method of education. Relatedly, the *onus probandi* (the underlying concern) of this paper is to inquire into the necessity and philosophy that informed Nigeria curriculum reform, and to evaluate whether such curriculum reform is a mere cosmetic change that may become counter-productive, or capable of turning things around to produce the desired result in the light of Nigeria secondary education objectives.

The Necessity of Nigerian Education Curriculum Reforms

The act of reform could be regarded as a transformation of an equilibrium or disequilibrium to a more satisfactory status of equilibrium. The term reform implies some form of change or changes in a system. Things change in the natural order of reality. It is a natural part-of-life given in dynamic orientation. This explains the philosophical theory of Heraclitus (535-475 B.C) that: *omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis* (all things change, and we change with them). Curriculum, therefore, should be reformed to take account of changes in the school order. To this end, Adeniyi (2004) synthesized that curriculum is interwoven with the social order that sustains it. This

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implies that what the society values and believes in her ideas and purposes should be in the curriculum. What then is the purpose of the curriculum than to transmit values, aspirations and ideas? Admittedly, experience has proved that these societal values, goals, ideas and aspirations change with time. Corroboratively, Offorma (2002) pointed out that if any curriculum is to be effective, such changes are to be reflected in it. The reformed curriculum would take account of the new goals for which the former method was just inappropriate. When there is dissatisfaction with an existing system, or curriculum, there is always that necessity of changes or modifications.

In the past, the Nigerian educational system was largely a colonial heritage which did not take the cultural values of the people into consideration (Anwukah, 2000). Rather, the British colonizing agents hoisted on the educational landscape ideals and pattern, which were completely alien to Nigerians, thereby compelling them to unquestioningly accept and adopt a foreign educational system. Since 1841, the process of adapting to the colonial education system has been tortuous and rigorous. Such situation, in the analysis of Nwafor and Nwogu (2006), sometimes leads to policy somersaults, contradiction and inconsistencies. As a result, it does appear as if the entire system is groping in the dark and without focus and direction.

Arguably, such inherited colonial curriculum failed to address the problem of our Nigerian-ness. It was more like jinks of puzzles that have failed to fall into their proper perspective. It only produced educated-colonized men who acquired the white man's way of life, his language, his religions and, to a great extent, his culture. Most of what he received as education did not address the problems facing the Nigerian in his everyday life. Based on the foregoing account, the disappointment of the inherited colonial curriculum necessitated Nigerian curriculum reforms. At this point, one may like to know how the inherited colonial curriculum was reformed or changed.

The “How” and the Objectives of the Secondary Education Curriculum Reforms

The movement for reforming the curricula inherited from the colonial government was not begun until several years after independence. As the awareness of the need for curricula reform solidified, a higher-gear momentum was set into motion by various governments who, one after the other, directed its educators to plan school curricula and instructional curriculum conference of 1969 (September, 8-12). In response to the growing concerns and criticisms, the curriculum reform mandate culminated in the development of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The policy document was first published in 1977 but consequently reviewed in 1981, 1998 and 2004. As was portrayed in the report of the Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2006), in 2005 another review of the policy was started and a final draft ought to be ready by early 2007. The policy document formed the hub around which all the primary, secondary and tertiary school curriculum spin.

In section 5 of the National Policy on Education document the board goals of secondary education are meant to prepare the individuals for:

- a) useful living within the society, and
- b) higher education.

In specific terms, eight objectives for secondary education were articulated to (FRN, 2004:18 – 19):

- 1) provide all primary leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- 2) offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- 3) provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-personal grades;
- 4) develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world’s cultural heritage;

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- 5) inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence;
- 6) foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unites us in our diversity;
- 7) raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- 8) provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

A close examination of the *supra* stated objectives implies that a vocational and general education curriculum is designed to equip the youth, with basic cognitive and social skills needed for peaceful living in the society. Social skills are known to constitute the front wheels of work success, as Ntino and Usoro (2006) argued in their research study. The objectives further reveal that general and vocational education curriculum (through mathematics, applied science and introductory technology) is designed to lay the foundation for technical literacy in the Nigerian youth. Analytically, the objectives of secondary education sustain the ingredients that are to be used to meet the manpower needs of the Nigerian society. It has a high potentiality of increasing the options available to each student.

It serves as a motivating force in enhancing all types of learning. For instance, successful baking of cake involves some knowledge of materials and methods of baking (cognitive) as well as the production of a cake (psychomotor) that meets acceptable standards in the food industry (affective domain). There are really four types of skills in producing a cake: cognitive, psychomotor, perceptual and affective. This must have been the idea that informed Ntino and Usoro (2006) to adjudge that the end of secondary education curriculum reform is occupationally oriented.

It aims at producing an economic man within his environment. An economic man, as Esu (2005) maintained, is a man who possesses productivity skills, and needs education for work and for what work involves. Suffice it here to state that the ‘how’ and the end of secondary education curriculum reform in Nigeria is to meet the common needs of the youth, for competence as a person and a citizen. The curriculum is reformed to enable the students develop those values, skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation needed by a learner, to enter and make progress in employment on a useful productive basis. In point of fact, the objectives of Nigerian secondary education curriculum reform are expected to meet its test of rationality, and to this end it is anchored on some philosophical base.

The Philosophy that Guided the Secondary Education Curriculum Reform

During the National Curriculum Conference, Nigerian educational theorists opted for the educational philosophy of pragmatism. It is a functional education with ideologies of child-centredness, soft pedagogy, problem-centred or community-centred curriculum integration, and methods which emphasize discovery and problem-solving skills. Supportingly, Enoh (2002) adulated in his research study that apart from the aims and values which underlay the philosophy of Nigerian educational practice, and which are open to multiple interpretations, curricula and methodological prescriptions are predominantly of pragmatic ideology. Pragmatic curriculum is structured in such a way that, the learner is democratically allowed to explore his universe of experience, as well as to learn by doing and discovery. With such aims it is not difficult to understand why the Nigerian educands will have to be exposed to using their hands in making, repairing and assembling things; or why they should be taught science, technical and vocational education as “a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work” (FRN, 2004:30).

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Since the overall intention of technical education, as highlighted in the National Policy document, is to impart vocational skills at sub-professional grades, the application of such skills where necessary, will enable the recipients become self-reliant, and also understand the increasing complexity of other people's technology. In other words the influence of pragmatic philosophy of education on Nigerian curriculum, will equip Nigerian youth to know how to manipulate the machines of others, and, by so doing, the Nigerian child will acquire new ways (skills) for solving his problems. What clearly stands out as the denominator of the influence of pragmatic philosophy of education on the Nigerian secondary education curriculum reform is skill acquisition with the stress on methods, which encourages learners-activity, particularly at the physical level of making, repairing and assembling things. This is inclusive among the "educational activities to be centered on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment" (FRN, 2004:9). Indeed, the logical outcome is true of the increasing flavour for a practical curriculum, which in any case makes possible the adoption of practical methods.

It was because of this desire for functional education based on pragmatic educational philosophy that the National Policy on Education in 1977 ushered in the 6-3-3-4 system of education into Nigeria. The new system split secondary education into a junior secondary school (JSS) of three-year course; and senior secondary school (SSS) course of three years. This is a major reform agenda or the reform epicentre with regard to secondary education curriculum and management in Nigeria. It created the possibility of vocational courses being taught both in JSS and SSS.

What is more, Agbaosa (2007) observed that Nigerian secondary education will no longer be of the British society, which is essentially after the grammar school pattern, an outcome of the liberal arts tradition, inherited from the Roman era. The grammar schools have from time maintained consciously or otherwise the idealist view and orientation to knowledge and learning. Such view and orientation has consistently posited that knowledge should be sought solely for its

intrinsic value of developing *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a sound body) that liberates the man for higher human ideals. Plato (427-347 B.C.), the father of idealism, is the advocate of the philosophy of knowledge *qua* knowledge, that is knowledge for its own sake.

In the submission of Okafor (2006), the idealist curriculum places highest emphasis on those studies whose content consists basically of “ideas” or things of the mind. On the other hand, it does not eliminate physical training and science subjects; it rather de-emphasizes and underrates them. That the learning in liberal arts should be devoid of vocational goals, is something befitting only for slaves and bonded men. It is only the Gentry that should be pre-occupied with pursuit of knowledge, and creative pleasure. In the contention of Paul Hirst in his “knowledge and the curriculum”, as quoted in Aghaosa (2007), “forms” or “ideas” of knowledge perhaps best illustrates the liberal arts conception of knowledge, which evolved from the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*. The *Trivium* consists of grammar, rhetoric and dialectics. The *Quadrivium* comprises music, law, astronomy and geometry. It is this inherited tradition of the grammar schools in Nigerian secondary education that the new National Policy on Education sought to correct in its curriculum reform. The policy amongst other things, recommended the infusion of science and Technology learning in the curricula of secondary education (JSSS and SSS) to make learning relevant to the socio-economic needs of Nigerians. The extent to which the vision of curriculum reform is being realized, within the context of the objectives of secondary education in Nigeria is highly speculative. Thus, the need for some critical evaluation.

Critical Evaluation of the Attainment of Secondary Education Objectives within the Context of the Curriculum Reform

There are strong indications, as attested by Obanya (2003), that the “ghost” of the liberal Arts Tradition (albeit in a distorted manner) still haunts the Nigerian education system and society as a whole. In the

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first perspective, even though secondary schools' curricula acknowledge the vital role of technological and vocational learning, only very scanty provisions are made for them. In another perspective, even most of the liberal Arts subjects in the schools' curricula are not adequately taught the way they should be. Emphasis on teaching presently, is concentrated on theoretical aspects of these subjects. Science subjects that should imbue students with the scientific attitudes of observation and discoveries are still taught in many secondary schools only theoretically; little or no practical aspect is carried out. The resultant effect of this is that school-leavers have no relevant marketable skills in the Nigerian economy, which remains largely unexploited. As a follow up, the attainment of secondary education objectives within the context of such ineffective curriculum will ever be an illusive practice.

In the World Education News and Reviews (2002) cursory survey of most secondary schools reveals lack of the basic introductory technology workshops and tools. Where there are machineries, they are rusting away as they remain out of use. This scenario is common in many Nigerian secondary schools. Most of the wood-working machines imported in the early 1980's are all in a state of disrepair. Farms for the teaching of practical agriculture are not there in most schools. So also are Home Economics' Kitchens, Fine and Applied Arts' studios. These subjects are at the core of some of the basic skills required by the Nigerian secondary school-leavers. In this type of development, the students have not been provided with what it takes for them to acquire the envisioned skills for employment. Such situation presents the reform agenda and its concomitant objectives as an ideological chiche and political jingles in the National Policy on Education document.

In the ethical theory of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), man becomes a bricklayer only by laying bricks (*Faber fabricando fit*). The objectives of secondary education may not be realized within the context of such curriculum, where the educators and the educands are left at the middle of the oasis of incomplete ends and unmeaningful

experience. The situation of dishonesty has reached a critical level and Nwabuisi (2008:32) concluded that “where everybody seems to rob and cheat everybody else, no system of value can hold for long”. This dishonest tendency in some Nigerians may explain why the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 programme was sacrificed on foreign exchange, masterminded by some dishonest Nigerian contractors. Buttressing the above, Akinpelu in Abiogu (2006) alleged that most of the machines from Austria, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia are not only outdated but cannot be used in rural areas, nor in the cities because of the epileptic nature of Nigerian electricity. On the other hand, some of the equipment sent are far beyond the technological skill of the Nigerian technicians, who ought to manipulate, maintain, and teach the students. To add salt to injury, in some of the schools, much of the equipment have been vandalized, with principals and teachers as partners in crime. With regard to the effective dishonesty and unpatriotism of some Nigerians, the vocational and technical dream of secondary education seems to have no prospect of being realized in the context of its curriculum reform.

That Nigeria submitted to 6-3-3-4 education programme in 1977, but now proposing the 9-3-4 programme is an admission of earlier failure of the former programme. Such shift announces the funeral of the 6-3-3-4 programme, because its full implementation ran counter-productive and hit the rock of disappointment, which is normal for any other Nigerian programmes. Other factors affecting the realization of Nigerian secondary education objectives according to UNESCO (2002) include: improper funding of the basic education sector, improper manpower to facilitate government policies on education, and improper supervision and monitoring. In Nigeria, Kenya, Congo, Zimbabwe and other third world and second world countries, like India, it is a clear picture to find students sitting on classroom floors, because of insufficient desks and chairs. There are inadequate classrooms to cater for the student enrolment in schools. The existing infrastructures, like buildings, are in dilapidating and decaying stage with leaking roofs. The manageable classrooms are

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overcrowded with students without adequate ventilation, leading to suffocating environment. There are toilets without water. There are inadequate teachers and staff for the schools, and the few employed teachers evade classes due to poor motivation from the government. What is more, Nigerian education sector is ranked 4th by the Nigeria Corruption Index (NCI) and the Independent Advocacy Project (IAP), anti-corruption groups, in their April 2007 research report. It is, therefore, self-evident truth that corruption has become *fait accompli* (a usual thing or a known fact) in Nigerian education sector. Ideally, for the nation's curriculum reform drive to achieve secondary education objectives in an unconducive environment, is antithetical or a romantic supposition.

During the curriculum conference, Nigerian educationists adopted the educational philosophy of pragmatism. Though it is a functional education with emphasis on discovery and problem-solving skills, it has many limitations and negative aspects. The most important among them are its metaphysical shortcomings. Its view that the overt phenomena are the embodiment of all reality with which man should concern himself, leaves much to be desired. This is because the experiential reality is only a fraction and not the whole reality. To absolutely deny or consciously ignore an ultimate end for man and to assign him the same fate with the phenomena of experiences, is contrary to man's true dignity. In the domain of education, the pragmatist epistemology is too limited. John Dewey (1859-1952) has characterized instrumentalism as "a behaviourist theory of thinking". This in essence is the limitation of pragmatist epistemology because thinking and knowing cannot be fully explained merely by behaviourism. The traditional role of reason and other ramifications must also come into play. The problem-solving method should not be regarded as the only good method applicable to all learning situations. When it is used, it must not be open-ended. There must be adequate guidance and direction provided by the teacher, to make it more meaningful. All said and done, the philosophy of pragmatism has made

immense contributions, which must not be ignored, nor swept under the rug.

Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing philosophical evaluation of Nigerian curriculum reforms and attainment of secondary education objectives, the following recommendations are made:

1. In order to realize the vocational and technical objectives of the secondary schools' curricula, the government is to train enough vocational technical teachers and instructors that can install and utilize this technology to teach the interested learner. The training of the teachers and instructors could be achieved through partnership and collaboration with the international community and donor agencies.
2. Government should foster an enabling environment through some legal enactments to safeguard the issue of looting and the tragedy of colossal waste of the school equipment, which negates students' achievement.
3. The curriculum reform, which gave rise to the new education system, was packaged at a time when the nation was economically buoyant, while the implementation of the reform component fell into the period, when the economy had taken a downward trend. As a matter of fact, the government cannot carry the school burden alone. Thus, there is need for education stakeholders, philanthropists and other school agencies to come to the aid of the new school system, which is in a comatose state.
4. Sustained emphasis is to be made both by the government and employers, as regards education for skill acquisition, which concerns the whole man in his whole environment, rather than emphasis on education for "degrees" and certificates," which begins and ends with the intellect. Such emphasis on education for skill acquisition will assuage the 'ghost' of the Liberal Arts

Tradition, which haunts the new Nigerian education system and society as a whole.

5. Nigeria should not know less that all acquired capacities are very easily lost, when the out-of-school environment does not complement that of the schools. This is why Japan pursues a policy that is very practical. She has industrial training schools where products of the school system are recruited to learn practical skills first hand. In other words, it is this out-of-formal school training that guarantees real growth or imagination. Japan knows that the school is a place of intellectual learning and little else. Thus, Nigeria can pursue such policy as well.
6. Enough fund is required in secondary education system for the provision of infrastructures and instructional materials. The availability of facilities, such as ideal library with internet and satellite television programmes, would occupy the students, and they would hardly have time for any mischief, since the library door opens to close the prison door.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to establish and evaluate the necessity of Nigerian education curriculum reforms, and the prospect of attaining the secondary education objectives in the context of such reforms. The paper maintained that the curriculum inherited from the colonial rule produced people who thought that the primary function of formal education is to move from subsistence life to white-collar occupation.

This *inter alia* constituted the thought for curriculum reforms that would restore in its beneficiaries the spirit of initiatives, better human relationship, effective citizenship, national unity and consciousness, and self and economic efficiency. The reform further intends making its recipients engage themselves in a technical job, and getting their hands dirty in the process of making a living and contributing to the welfare of the state. Such curriculum is designed to make a large proportion of school-leavers self-employed. Regrettably

the method of its implementation has been a calvary experience. The effort being made to realize the secondary education objectives within the context of the reform agenda is analogously a clumsy abortion, committed in the theatre of the absurd.

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