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The Role of Nigeria's Curriculum in National Transformation: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of Nigeria's curriculum in driving national transformation so much needed by Nigerians to drive away the reigning poverty, disease, lack of social infrastructure, corruption and the like that threaten the existence of the country. It emphasizes the curriculum and conceptual changes, as well as the curriculum reforms in Nigeria that aim for national transformation through digital integration, the promotion of national values, entrepreneurship education, technical and vocational training, and the reinforcement of teacher training programs and curriculum modernization. The paper also elucidates the curriculum challenges to national transformation including: political and socioeconomic barriers to curriculum implementation, mismatch between education and labor market needs, inadequate funding, poor implementation and teacher training deficiencies, curriculum overcrowding and outdated and rigid curriculum content. It finally recommends among other things that Nigeria government should periodically review the curriculum to integrate into it the global best practices.

1. Introduction

As demonstrated by the desire for change in all regions of Nigeria, Nigerians clearly want change that will revolutionize the nation and set a course for its long-term development. The expanding need for change, which can be best addressed through education using a well-designed, developed, and implemented curriculum that is able to guide and define the educational system as well as the people who are being raised in the society, is fueled by a variety of causes, including poverty, disease, a lack of social infrastructure, and corruption. The function of the Nigerian curriculum in bringing about national change, along with the associated difficulties and opportunities, are examined in this paper.

Education is generally accepted as a fundamental instrument for national development, and curriculum plays a pivotal role in shaping the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for societal progress. A good education has the potential of securing socio-economic progress, improving income distribution and eradicating poverty by generating new employment opportunities. It also promotes social values by eliminating class discrimination, gender bias and promoting equality and justice; and, profoundly makes individuals understand themselves and the world. As a transformation tool, education creates in man, a desire for change; makes people adopt positive changes in their lives; produces talented leaders who bring about positive changes in the life of their subjects; helps develop democratic attitudes and values toward a better life; serves as an instrument for transmission of cultures; and, fosters national integration (Sulaiman, 2021). Education also provides necessary training in skills and occupations and thus, produces the needed competent personnel for maintaining the different specialized jobs in modern industrial, business, educational and research establishments (Rangaswam, 2022).

Curriculum enables education to play its proper role as an instrument of social transformation by directing education, defining its quality and defining the individuals to be raised in the society. The role of the curriculum in transforming a society is therefore substantial and apparent in a number of ways. The curriculum helps in identifying and attaining the educational goals and objectives; fixing limits of teaching and learning; developing in children, the democratic values like liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, respect for dignity of the individual and group living; development of citizenship; development of character; satisfaction of needs and providing criteria of suitable teachers. The curriculum also reflects trends in education and changes in philosophy, enables teachers to choose appropriate teaching methods, aids the student in gaining knowledge, and fosters the student's personality. In addition, the curriculum is thought to play a key role in fostering innovations and discoveries at higher educational levels (Shahid, n. d.).

2. Conceptual Clarification

A proper understanding of this article is based on two key words, transformation and curriculum, which require some explanation. The curriculum is the collection of learning experiences necessary to achieve transformation, which is the realignment of current structures to create a different state for the benefit of a person, company, or country. The two ideas are emphasized below.

2.1. Transformation

Transformation refers to a significant reordering which challenges existing structures to produce something novel. A "change" in mindset (Daszko and Sheinberg, 2017) is the creation and transformation of an entirely new form, function, or structure, as well as the invention of something novel that has never before existed and could not have been predicted from the past. Nasiru in Yusuf, Bello, Ajidagba, and Obafemi (2016) defines transformation as a comprehensive shift from one set of circumstances to another, a complete break from the old order to a new one. With its own unique relationships and features, it entails an active process of knowledge creation and dissemination, a process of learning and acceptance, a creative process of discovering new dimensions with all of its implications, and the painful process of reconceptualizing, reformulating, and integrating the variables involved in the new assembly (Vora, 2015). As a result, transformation may be described as the knowledge-based reorganization of current structures to achieve the desired outcome.

Certain forms of change occur on a personal, organizational, and national level. A person undergoes a personal transformation when they find new meaning in their life, events, numbers, and interactions between people, and when they use this newfound understanding in all aspects of their relationships with others (Daszko and Sheinberg, 2017). When an organization is unable to continue operating as before and requires a radical reorganization across all aspects of its existence in order to survive, it undergoes an organizational change as a strategic reaction. A nation's institutions, laws, and regulatory structures will inevitably undergo a national transformation when faced with specific strategic and moral circumstances that put its development and existence at risk (Esterhuysen, 2003), which is the subject of this work.

2.3 Curriculum

Curriculum is the heart of education, the specific content and structures that guide what students will learn, how they will learn it, and why it matters. It is the instrument through which societal values are translated by the educational institutions into tangible and memorable attestation. It is the means by which educational institutions instill in students the values, behaviors, attitudes, and skills that are acceptable in society (Ugwuanyi, 2024). But the word curriculum has taken on several distinct meanings, which Su (2012) has categorized as follows: a collection of objectives (goals or objectives); a course of study or course content (content plus goals); plans (content plus goals plus teaching methods); a document (content plus goals plus methods plus assessment); and experiences (content plus goals plus methods plus assessment plus extracurricular activities and learning environment plus hidden curriculum plus cultures).

The final definition, which views curriculum as experiences, is clearly more inclusive and consistent with both contemporary educational trends and the viewpoint expressed in this article. One illustration of this definition is that of Kelly (2004:8), who views the curriculum as the sum total of the student's experiences brought about by the provision made. This definition recognizes the unavoidable discrepancy between theory and practice by including both the intended and the actual learning events. Because educators are partially accountable for these implicit types of learning as well, it also includes all of the learning that occurs in schools, whether it is the result of explicit planning and intention or a byproduct of planning and/or practice (hidden curriculum). Furthermore, as the ideas of the hidden and the actual (received) curriculum show, it is hard to exclude the unintentional consequences of teacher behavior from the concept, therefore the definition also includes the informal curriculum as well as the formal or official one (Kelly, 2004).

3. Nigeria Curriculum and National Transformation

Education is seen by Nigeria as the most important tool for national development via a curriculum that is well-planned, well-developed, and well-implemented, and to that end, the curriculum has changed from the colonial era to the present. During this extended period, the curriculum has undergone several changes that are necessary for the nation's transition, including, but not limited to, the following:

3.1 Digital Integration and Curriculum Modernization

Recognizing the significance of digital technologies, Nigerian educational decision-makers have taken steps to completely integrate ICT into the educational system, as seen by the federal government's National Implementation Guidelines for ICT in Education. The policy's goal is to provide education that is inclusive, empowering, enriching, and accessible to everyone, as well as to address the nation's human capital investment in order to achieve and advance sustainable development. Despite the policy's completeness and good intentions, Nigeria continues to lag behind in ICT education because of a number of difficulties (Irele, n. d.).

3.2 Improving Teacher Training Programs

In the National Policy on Education (2013), the Federal Government of Nigeria has stated that all categories of instructors will be trained. In order to prepare teachers for the efficient performance of their responsibilities in recognition of the critical roles of providing quality education at all levels, the teacher education programs have been structured to include information and communication technology (ICT) training in all teacher education institutions (Awujah, 2014). However, there are several obstacles to investing in education in Nigeria, such as inadequate implementation of national education funding policies, subsidy payments, debt servicing, corruption, security issues, a decline in national income, and revenue losses (Ogunode, Attah, & Ebute, 2024).

3.3 Technical and Vocational Education

Nigeria has also indicated its commitment to Technical and Vocational Education in the National Policy on Education (2013) with consequent promotion of the culture of productivity. According to Adeoye, Mahmud, Ehindero, Ajape, Yahaya & Jolaoye (2023), the existing curriculum acknowledges the importance of vocational and technical education by offering options for students to pursue practical skills and vocational training alongside academic subjects. Unfortunately, the development and application of TVE in Nigeria is still largely bedeviled by numerous problems including lack of employable skills among graduates of TVE institutions, low societal recognition and the like.

3.4 Education on Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship education strives to impart the knowledge and learning experiences that help students acquire the skills necessary to launch a business enterprise. The Nigerian government has mandated that all of its higher education institutions offer an entrepreneurship education course in the hopes that students would learn entrepreneurial skills that will allow them start their own businesses rather than spend a long time unemployed after graduation. However, the Entrepreneurship Education has not provided many of its students with the managerial skills necessary to start and run successful contemporary enterprises (Iroldoro, Ayodele, & Jimoh, 2015).

3.5 National Values Education

In 2012, national values education was established as a mandatory subject at the primary, secondary, and higher levels of elementary education. It comprises the formerly independent disciplines of Religious Studies (Christian Religious Studies and Islamic Studies), Civic Education, Social Studies, and Security Education, and it promotes the necessary abilities, knowledge, and patterns of emotional reaction and modes of perception for peaceful coexistence. Education in religious and national values helps to meet the values and expectations included in the goals of Nigerian education, as stated in the National Policy on Education, as well as to improve the country's political climate and pass along the society's positive moral behavior from one generation to the next (Yusuf, Bello, Ajidagba & Obafemi, 2016).

4. Nigeria's Transformation Curriculum Challenges

However, the Nigerian educational system is hampered in its ability to carry out its function of national change by a number of issues, the most pressing of which may be the curriculum's current condition (Ugwuanyi, 2024). The curriculum, which serves as the intellect of education as a tool for national change, is plagued by a variety of issues pertaining to its content, nature, funding, and delivery. The following are a few of the difficulties facing the curriculum.

4.1 Rigid and Outdated Curriculum Content

The curriculum in Nigeria is outdated and inflexible in terms of material. Its curriculum and teaching strategies are outdated and unable to provide students with the 21st century skills they need, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship (Ugwuanyi, 2024). Furthermore, the curriculum does not meet the current needs and expectations of society (Gummi, & Yahaya, 2024). The colonial era, when the curriculum was created primarily to educate state officials and gave little consideration to the demands and expectations of the populace, is partly to blame for the issue of curriculum obsolescence (Aboluwodi, 2017). Despite the National Policy on Education, which was developed in 1977 with the goal of preserving the postcolonial educational system into the twenty-first century (Adekunle & Meroyi, 2023), this issue may still be seen in the curriculum. By neglecting to meet the requirements of different learners, the old and irrelevant curriculum suppresses student creativity, saps their excitement for learning, and maintains inequities. The instructors are also burdened with the responsibility of providing material that may not be appropriate for the requirements and interests of their pupils (Ugwuanyi, 2024).

4.2 Overcrowding in the Curriculum

Overcrowding the Nigerian curriculum with an excessive number of topics, which leaves little room for in-depth learning and command of fundamental concepts, is another obstacle to its national transformation role. Additionally, the curriculum is constantly growing and becoming overloaded as a result of the addition and integration of new materials (Ukpong & Udoh, 2012). As a result, pupils resort to rote learning, which undermines their capacity for critical thought and problem-solving (Ugwuanyi, 2024). Additionally, finishing the curriculum in the allotted time is a challenge. In addition, classrooms are packed, which makes the teaching profession stressful and impairs students' ability to focus (Ihebom & Uko, 2020).

4.3 Inadequate Implementation and Lack of Teacher Training

The curriculum and its accompanying changes are further hampered by subpar teacher preparation. The quality and number of teachers produced have consistently fallen short of national needs and expectations over the years (Ukpong & Udoh, 2012). Due to a lack of digital literacy, insufficient infrastructure, and limited access to technology resources, the current teachers are unable to effectively integrate technology into classrooms (Gummi, &

Yahaya, 2024; Irele, n. d). Additionally, they are unable to deal with an ever-increasing variety of subject matter, skills, techniques, and machinery and equipment for which they are ill-prepared (Ukpong & Udoh, 2012).

4. 4 Insufficient Funding

Since the start of the current political regime in 1999, Nigeria has consistently allocated only between 4 and 10 percent of its budget to education annually, which is far less than the 26 percent recommended by UNESCO (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020; Ihebom & Uko, 2020). The chronic underfunding of Nigeria's education sector has a detrimental impact on curriculum creation, the supply of educational infrastructure, and the well-being and pay of teachers. Inadequate teacher wages, non-promotion of teachers, and nonpayment of teachers' promotion arrears, particularly at the elementary school level, have all contributed to the lack of instructional resources that are essential for a successful teaching and learning process (Ugochukwu & Adelina, 2022; Adamu & Adebisi, 2023).

4.5 Mismatch Between Education and Labor Market Needs

The fact that there is a gap between the skills of graduates and the demands of the labor market is another major problem with the Nigeria curriculum as a tool for national transformation. Since the existing curriculum is not grounded in current social events and does not place enough emphasis on technical and vocational training, it generates graduates who lack the necessary skills for the workforce (Aboluwodi, 2017). Generally speaking, the Nigerian curriculum is perceived to be inadequate in scope and ineffective at meeting citizens' expectations for an education that fosters national development and self-reliance. Its graduates are, for the most part, unable to meet the expected roles that society expects of them (Adekunle & Meroyi, 2023).

4. 6 Obstacles in the Political and Socioeconomic Arena

By slowing down the creation and implementation of the curriculum, political instability, inconsistent policies, and geographical inequalities in educational prospects restrict its potential contribution to national change. There are many ways in which the Nigerian educational system and curriculum are highly politicized, including the following: frequent changes to the curriculum made by politicians for political rather than technical reasons (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020); some governors constructing schools in locations with no students to enroll; the abandonment of educational projects and a poor political and policy environment (Ihebom. & Uko, 2020); and the occasional alteration of admission and employment procedures by some political allegiances (Ugochukwu & Adelina, 2022). The curriculum's failure to incorporate the elements of traditional education, despite its crucial role in maintaining and advancing Nigerians since the beginning of time due to its illiteracy and inadequate documentation (Adekunle & Meroyi, 2023), is another barrier.

6. Conclusion

In light of the aforementioned discussion, it may be concluded that a well-developed and well-implemented curriculum can play a significant role in improving Nigeria's economic, political, and social standing. This, however, necessitates the presence of a government with sufficient political desire to undertake the necessary changes to the current curriculum, remove its outdated, rigid, irrelevant, and excessive content, and address the problem of misalignment between the needs of the labor market and education by introducing and reinforcing the appropriate material. It also calls for leadership that can overcome the political and socioeconomic obstacles to curriculum reform and implementation by providing sufficient funding and training, as well as retraining an adequate and efficient teaching workforce at all levels of education.

7. Recommendations

In light of the topics covered thus far, the following recommendations are now being made:

1. The curriculum should be regularly assessed by the Nigerian government in order to include the best practices from across the world.
2. In order to ensure the proper implementation of the curriculum and the achievement of the desired national transformation, the government should provide sufficient funding for education in areas such as infrastructure, enhancing teaching capacity, and other related fields.
3. Teacher training programs should emphasize novel teaching strategies.
4. To improve curriculum development and implementation, public-private partnerships should be strengthened.

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