



Aligning Nigeria's Educational Curriculum with National Development Goals, with Particular Reference to Sustainable Development Goals

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ABSTRACT

In general, education is recognized as a crucial tool for achieving national development objectives by playing a key role in fostering economic, social, and political progress and development. However, Nigeria's educational system is plagued by problems and difficulties that undermine its function in achieving these goals, including subpar curriculum quality, poor policy creation and execution, flawed certification, and a lack of competence. This study analyzes the present condition of Nigeria's educational curriculum, highlights areas where the curriculum doesn't align with national development goals, and offers recommendations for reform. The paper ultimately recommended, among other things, that the existing curriculum must undergo a radical and urgent reform to align with the SDGs in order to help the nation accomplish them.

Introduction

Nigeria has stated numerous development objectives in policy documents such as Vision 20:2020, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) (Eneh, 2017). The SDGs are a collection of seventeen (17) goals that are part of a worldwide accord to eradicate poverty, safeguard all that makes the Earth livable, and guarantee that everyone has peace and prosperity, now and in the future. In 2015, all UN member nations, including Nigeria, formally embraced the objectives for the years 2016–2030 in order to address the compelling empirical and scientific data indicating that the globe needs a significantly more sustainable course of action (Eneh, 2017). Nigeria first put in place institutional structures at the national and subnational levels to carry out the SDGs, followed by the implementation of a number of strategic measures between 2016 and the present, with others still in progress. (Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020).

Nevertheless, there is still cause for concern over the degree to which Nigeria has met the SDGs. In the year 2020, President Muhammad Buhari pointed out that, despite modest progress being made in the goals and indicators, there are still challenges in achieving many of the goals (Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2020). The nation still lags behind in socioeconomic development that addresses the objectives. For example, Nigeria was ranked 160th out of 165 nations assessed in the 2021 SDG index in terms of how well they met the Sustainable Development Goals (Ejiogu, Ejike, & Ohazurike, 2024). The nation's slower economic growth, persistent corruption, inequality, unfavorable demographics, epidemics, depletion of natural resources, gender inequality, unequal distribution of wealth, poverty and exclusion, unemployment, climate change, and conflicts all reflect the failure (Aguene, 2021).

The nation's inability to achieve the NDGs is attributed to a variety of causes. These include: a lack of political will on the part of politicians to effectively put the laws they create into practice; insecurity in the form of banditry, kidnapping, farmer/herder crises, cattle rustling, and other forms, which has made the safety of lives and property in Nigeria a mirage; policies that are misguided and, as a result, fail to benefit the people they are intended to serve; and corruption that has permeated all areas of society (Sophia, 2023). Among the additional causes are inadequate budget allocations to health and education, increasing poverty and youth unemployment rates, ineffective development policies and programs, noncontinuity of government programs, youth restiveness, and poor quality of education. The nation's inability to meet the prior MDGs, the COVID-19 outbreak, prolonged university strikes, and volatile oil prices are additional challenges (Ejiogu, Ejike, & Ohazurike, 2024).

As one of the elements in the nation's efforts to achieve the SDGs within the specified timeline, this research examines the alignment of a country's educational curriculum with the SDGs. The main tool Nigeria has chosen to achieve its development goals is education, a significant investment in the development of human capital that is essential to productivity and growth. Sadly, the Nigerian educational system suffers from a plethora of problems and difficulties, including poor curriculum quality, policy creation, and execution, as well as inadequate certification and a lack of skills, all of which undermine its potential to contribute to national development (Irabor & Onwudinjo, 2022). The curriculum shortcomings include the gaps between it and the national development goals in the SDGs, all of which have a detrimental impact on the country's efforts to achieve its development objectives. If education is to fulfill its role in promoting the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, these obstacles must be overcome with diligence.

The present state of the educational curriculum in Nigeria

The curriculum in Nigeria is the instrument that defines and guides the nation's educational system, yet it has several flaws and inconsistencies with the national development goals in the SDGs, which have a detrimental impact on the country's efforts to achieve its development goals. The fact that the curriculum is, in many respects, outdated and fails to take into account current socioeconomic realities at the national and international levels, in spite of multiple efforts at improvement, is one of these factors. The curriculum still follows a colonial approach in terms of content and methodology, focusing more on the doctrinal and philosophical underpinnings of the topics students study than on the practical skills that are relevant to their needs, and it is out of sync with the developmental realities of Nigeria and the rest of the world (Babalola, 2023). By emphasizing the transfer of information above the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, it limits the student's capacity to use their knowledge in real-world circumstances and stifles their creativity, innovation, and relevance to the requirements of society and the student (Mustapha, 2008).

A further significant issue with using the Nigerian curriculum as a tool for achieving the SDGs is the poor connection between industry demands and education, which has resulted in graduate unemployment and underemployment. According to Aboluwodi (2017), the curriculum places little emphasis on technical and vocational training and pays little attention to current events in society, resulting in graduates who are unprepared for the workforce. Functional education requires a connection between educational institutions and industry so that businesses may refer their major challenges to education and research institutions, which in turn may develop curricula to aid in addressing those challenges, create novel approaches, or seek new research advancements that will raise the quality of life and boost competitiveness in various industries. However, in Nigeria today, such a connection does not exist (Babalola, 2023).

Additionally, the Nigerian curriculum fails to adequately address the areas of skill development, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which further undermines its capacity to help achieve the SDGs. The nation's educational system is based mostly on the development of theoretical skills rather than practical or technical ones, which has had an impact on societal and individual progress. The stated objective of giving graduates of TVE institutions employable skills is not even met by the Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) program, which is specifically intended to impart vocational skills to its students. As for the critical thinking skills (CTS) necessary for individuals to confidently form their own opinions and attitudes, Nigerian schools do not teach them (OkwaraKalu, Uwazurike & Agulanna, n. d). Despite the fact that relevant methods promote critical thinking, teachers continue to employ traditional rote learning approaches, which do not help pupils develop skills.

Furthermore, the execution of curriculum changes makes these commendable aims and endeavors appear suspicious and illusory or legendary, even though Nigeria recognizes that curriculum is a dynamic notion with change inherent in its structure, theory, and practice, and like other societies, it implements curriculum reforms on a regular basis to reflect internal and external changes (Ubong & Obomanu, n. d). There are three ways in which the ineffective execution of reform measures is evident: the intended policy is not implemented in the first place; attempts at implementation the policy fall short of completion or achieve a minimum critical mass so as to have an impact; and the policy is implemented but with no intended effect. The decline in the federal government of Nigeria's (FGN) budgetary allocation to education, the lack of policies for implementing educational reforms, the insufficient provision of infrastructure, the poor formulation of the majority of education policies, and the frequent changes in educational policies and programs are among the challenges and constraints to the effective implementation of educational policies and reforms in Nigeria (Ibara, 2008).

alignment gaps with national development objectives

The educational curriculum in Nigeria has to be in line with the SDGs in order for it to be a vital instrument in achieving them. Nonetheless, a close examination of the curriculum reveals shortcomings in a number of areas, including those pertaining to economic development and employment creation. The majority of Nigeria's population of over 200 million people, with an average age of 17.5, lacks the skills necessary to thrive in today's labor market and make a significant contribution to economic growth and development. The cause of this is that the nation's education system and curriculum do not provide students with marketable skills, resulting in a gap between the skills of graduates and the needs of the workforce. The problem of unemployment in Nigeria is made worse by the fact that graduates lack the contemporary industry skills or competencies necessary to compete for the jobs that are available, for which employers need a diverse skill set to remain competitive (Orji, 2024).

The field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which has several connections to education, is another gap. The ICT helps institutions perform their tasks and operations, including record keeping, research, teaching applications, presentations, financial analysis, exam results management, communication, supervision, teaching-learning activities, and overall school management. Sadly, the application of ICT in teaching and learning in Nigeria is still far from positive due to a number of challenges faced by teachers and students, including the fact that most instructors continue to use the "chalk and talk" method of instruction rather than using ICT, the lack of ICT resources used in the teaching and learning process in schools, and the fact that the majority of teachers lack the ICT skills necessary for teaching and learning (Orji & Chibuzo, 2024).

Additionally, entrepreneurship courses that seek to equip students with the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills necessary to identify and seize opportunities, start and run businesses, and become job creators also have a gap in their application. The topic has been incorporated into the curriculum of Nigerian universities for more than ten years and is now taught as a comprehensive subject in Nigerian secondary schools. Due to issues like low financing, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of entrepreneurship teachers, an overreliance on foreign products, and a laissez-faire approach among students, the implementation of entrepreneurship studies in Nigeria is still flawed. Other difficulties include a lack of policy implementation caused by a lack of government dedication and genuine enthusiasm for educational progress, inadequate orientation and awareness among students in tertiary institutions for the proper mindset and sufficient participation in entrepreneurship activities, and negative input from previous self-employed graduates (Akpan, 2021).

Another deficiency in curriculum alignment with the National Development The area of social cohesion and civic duty are where goals are seen. In the face of its already deteriorating core values, such as respect for elders, honesty and accountability, cooperation, industry, discipline, self-confidence, and moral courage, which are severely compromised in political contexts, Nigeria is currently plagued by many social vices (Shuaibu, Shaibu & Obaje, 2022). The nation acknowledges the vital role that civic education plays in fostering civic responsibility and unity among its citizens in order to promote national development. As a result, the topic has been included into the curriculum of higher education institutions, from the lower grades to the early years. However, the implementation of civic education in Nigeria is lacking, as evidenced by the lack of shared values like political tolerance, respect for the rule of law, and trust in democratic institutions (Alozie, 2019).

Methods for Integrating Curriculum with National Development Objectives

In order to bring Nigeria's curriculum into line with National Development Goals, a number of measures must be considered. Periodic or intermittent curriculum review and reform, which would give the curriculum the strength, dynamism, and vibrancy necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, may be the most significant of these strategies. The nature of the curriculum is that it is always evolving in terms of its theory, content, and application, requiring ongoing change to take into account both internal and external developments. The main goal of curriculum reform measures is to reorganize the educational process in terms of its objectives, content, resources, techniques, and other curriculum inputs, either all at once or some of them, in order to improve education. It's a strategy for enhancing the curriculum, instructors, infrastructure, and equipment in order to improve the schooling process. They give the curriculum the strength, dynamism, and vitality necessary to tackle the problems of sustainable community development. To meet the Sustainable Development Goals and respond to changing national and worldwide priorities, Nigeria must regularly evaluate its curriculum (Ubong, & Obomanu, n. d.).

In addition, in order to align the educational curriculum with Sustainable Development Goals, Nigeria needs to improve its Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, which is in desperate need of alignment with international benchmarks, as well as its Internet and Communication Technology (ICT) education, which is still in its infancy in the Nigerian educational system (Agbetuyi, 2012). STEM education provides training in science and mathematics; basic mathematics and science literacy for everyday living; basic skills, attitude to prepare us for technological developments and helps stimulate and enhances creativity. However, it has been made weaker by things like a shortage of STEM instructors, inadequate funding for ICT infrastructure, a lack of essential social infrastructure, and bad ICT policies. The integration of ICT, on the other hand, leads to significant changes in the learning process but is hampered by factors such as low levels of computer literacy among teachers and students, a lack of qualified ICT staff, subpar ICT infrastructure, and a lack of funding (Akubugwo, 2022).

The development of industry-academia collaboration is another essential approach to curriculum alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to close the current gap between the knowledge graduates have and the needs of the industry in the nation, which has restricted the employability of the nation's graduates, it is essential to create collaboration between educational institutions and industries. Up to this point, the Federal Government of Nigeria's attempts to provide graduates of secondary and higher education who are prepared for the workforce and industry have fallen short of expectations (Ikeoji & Agbidi, 2015). The curriculum can offer crucial basic training that produces high-quality graduates, bring together representatives from labor, business, and industry to create a shared vocabulary, integrate technicians in training and frontline workers into the communication process, and enable graduating students to establish a connection between school and work thanks to effective collaboration and partnership between educational institutions and industries (Onajite, n. d.).

Another approach to better align the curriculum in Nigeria with the Sustainable Development Goals is to enhance Competency-Based Learning. It is becoming more and more essential for students to have a diverse set of talents and knowledge, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, that will enable them to thrive in today's fast-paced and competitive labor market as technology continues to improve and globalization continues to transform it. As a result, Nigeria must transition from a subject-based curriculum that relies on rote memorization to competency-based education (CBE), which equips students with the knowledge and abilities necessary for professional success. The CBE bridges the gap between what students learn and the skills needed in the workplace, enabling them to study at their own speed. Additionally, it offers learners a variety of ways to attain competency mastery and the chance to show mastery of each competency before moving on to the next level or step (Gulled, 2023).

The critical necessity for policy implementation and financing is one of the measures for bringing Nigeria's curriculum in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. This is because reforms aimed at aligning the curriculum with the Sustainable Development Goals include curriculum emancipation for all stakeholders, research investment and engagement, the adoption of African pedagogies in response to unemployment, changes in technology, practical pedagogy responding to unemployment, student support, and corresponding changes in the politics of language, teaching, and learning (Mendy & Madiope, 2020). For all of these, it is necessary for the Nigerian government and well-intentioned citizens to contribute enough money to back the reform. Now that the curriculum is constantly changing to reflect changes in the world and within the nation, this funding necessity is more obvious (AdemuAwuja, 2014). The government of Nigeria must increase its budget allocation to education since it is one of the few nations that has not yet reached the United Nations (UNESCO) target of allocating 26% of its budgetary allocation to education.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Nigeria's curriculum needs to be strategically aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals in order for the country to reach them. Such alignment will ensure that the curriculum is dynamic, industry-responsive, and skill-focused, giving students the skills they need to make a valuable contribution to the advancement of the nation. The following suggestions should, nevertheless, be taken into account:

1. To enable the nation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the current curriculum must be urgently and passionately reformed to align with them.
2. The government must work with the private sector to significantly increase its investment in education in order to ensure the curriculum and related reforms are implemented effectively.
3. To address the issue of discrepancy between education and market demand, there must be improved collaboration between the nation's educational institutions and businesses.
4. priority should be placed on learning entrepreneurial, technical, and thinking skills, as well as problem-solving techniques, that are essential for individual and national independence and progress.

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