



THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN CURRICULUM AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Curriculum, which is the bedrock of formal education, has gone through stages of growth in Nigeria. It passed from the traditional to the colonial era and to the present-day post-colonial era. This paper explores the development of the curriculum vis-a-vis the right to education provided in international treaties and applicable in the nation. The paper recommends for a comprehensive review of the curriculum that will update its contents to satisfy the requirements of the right to education, as provided by law.

Keyword: Curriculum, Formal Education, Traditional Education

Introduction

Curriculum is a dynamic intellectual and social enterprise that is used to attain planned and desired results. It is a series of planned instruction that is coordinated and articulated in a manner designed to result in the achievement by students of specific knowledge and skills and the application of this knowledge. It involves the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives. Human rights, on the other hand, are moral principles or norms that describe certain standards of human behavior that are regularly protected as legal rights in national and international law. The right to education emanates from these legal rights with a view to ensure access to quality schools and to an education that is directed towards the full development of the human personality. The best way to achieve this right lies in having a plan and focus set out by a nation or state as its guide to acquiring qualitative education.

It is agreeable that an enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic (Omolewa & Sarunmi, 2002). Self-government is enjoyed more when citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is, therefore, imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education is provided for all its citizens. This necessitates the preparation of a foolproof curriculum at all levels bearing in mind the rights of citizens.

The nature of Nigeria has made the development of its curriculum come under four historical dispensations. They are the Informal or Traditional Curriculum, Missionary Era, the Period of Colonial Intervention and Post-Colonial Era.

The Right to Education

Human rights are moral principles or norms that describe certain standards of human behaviour, that are regularly protected as legal rights in national and international law. They are commonly understood as inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being and are inherent in all human beings regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal. They are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone. They require empathy and the rule of law and impose an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others.

All human rights are indivisible, whether they are civil and political rights, such as the right to life, social security and education, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates the advancement of the others. Likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others. The right to education ensures access to quality schools and to an education that is directed towards the full development of the human personality. The curriculum, on the other hand, is the articulated goals aimed to be achieved by the student in the whole school

process. Therefore, it can be said to be a roadmap to the attainment of the individual's right to education in that it is planned in such a way to provide the individual with his universal right to education. This paper views six priority human rights principles that are fundamental to guaranteeing the right to education and are of particular relevance to the improvement of education, which is the basic role of the curriculum.

Individual Rights: Every individual child must have equal access to quality education adapted to meet his or her needs.

Aims of Education: The aims of education must be directed toward the development of each child's personality and full potential, preparing children to participate in society and to do work that is rewarding and reasonably remunerative and to continue learning throughout life.

Dignity: Schools must respect the inherent dignity of every child creating an environment of respect and tolerance in the classroom, preventing practices and disciplinary policies that cause harm or humiliation to children and promoting self-confidence and self-expression.

Equity: There must be the equitable distribution of resources in education across communities according to need.

Non-Discrimination: The government must ensure that the human right to education "will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language,

religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

Participation: Students, parents and communities have the right to participate in decisions that affect their schools and the right to education.

The desire for a national policy on education encompassing the fundamental needs necessitated the revision of the National Policy on Education in 1981 (Atoyebi, n.d). The Philosophy of Nigerian education was, therefore, carved to cover the building of:

- 1) A free and democratic society;
- 2) A just and egalitarian society;
- 3) A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- 4) A great and dynamic economy;
- 5) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The right to education is protected by the following International Laws and specifically adopted by various countries in their local laws (Oyeleke & Akinyeye, 2013).

- i. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
 - a) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...

- b) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups...

- ii. Articles 13 & 14 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
- iii. Articles 28,29 & 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- iv. Article 5 of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- v. Articles 10 & 14 of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- vi. Article 12 of American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man

The Informal Curriculum

Before the coming of colonial masters, Africans had their own unique way of training not only the young, but also adults. Interestingly, the education was effective and goal-oriented, as it was designed to meet the immediate needs of the individuals and the society at large.

It is justifiably established that, before colonialism in Nigeria, Africans underwent trainings on trades, skills and living in a community itself (Fafunwa, 1974). In a sense, they were educated, although not in the western sense. There was training going on, and if education is to inspire competence, develop skills, acquire of knowledge, etc African training system before colonial adventures performed no fewer tasks. Consequent upon the existence of the training system was the coexistence of its curriculum (Oyeleke & Akinyeye, 2013). This curriculum operated before colonialism in Africa is termed the informal curriculum "Just as education is as old as Man himself in Africa", the curriculum is such old.

Fafunwa (1974) listed the following as the goals of Traditional African education in Nigeria;

- i. to develop the child's latent physical skill
- ii. To develop character
- iii. To inculcate in the child respect for elders and those in position of authority
- iv. To develop intellectual skills
- v. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour
- vi. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs

- vii. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Hence, it covers the rights attributed to man at that time of growth with due moral guidance. Ehindero (1994) thought the curriculum was not documented. There were clear aims, goals and objectives. Every member of the society went through the training. Learning experience centered on the following aspects of life. Physical Training, Intellectual Training, Vocational Training, Agricultural training, Trades and crafts, as well as Character Training. At least, that ensures that members of the society are acquiring education in a way that satisfies the desired right to education

The Missionary Era

The Christian Missionary introduced Western Education into Nigeria in the seventeenth century. Specifically, as early as 1843, the Methodist Mission established the first school in Badagry (Fafunwa, 1974). The objective of the education as was introduced by the missionaries influenced the type of curriculum operated. The primary intention of the missionaries was the evangelization and Christianization of Africans. Sarunmi and Omolewa (2002) described the schools as "Child of circumstances". Fafunwa (1974) noted that "the school was incidental" and "if Christianity could have been implanted in Nigeria without the use of school, most missionary groups would have tried to do so". Nevertheless, the missionaries must be given the credit of introducing Western Education in Nigeria

no matter how imperfect it was. The task of the evangelization of Africa was zealously pursued by missionary organizations, such as the CMS, Wesleyans, the Catholic Mission, Baptists and the Church of Scotland. They realized that proper the evangelization of Africans would require basic knowledge of how to read and write. The urgent needs of the Africans' proficiency in the reading of the bible and the dire needs of lettered Africans who would serve as Catechists, interpreters, etc. were motivating and sustaining factors.

This conception determined the structure of the school and its curriculum. The curriculum contents for elementary schools were predominantly Bible reading, Catechism, the story of Jesus, hymns, prayers, sewing for girls and farming for boys. There was no common curriculum among the seemingly competing missions. Each mission and indeed each school within a mission followed its own devices, which were solely teacher-dependent. Nevertheless, the basics of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and, of course, Religion formed the core of the Curriculum. This would have satisfied the simple right to read and write and consequently understand the mission of the education givers.

During the missionary era, grammar schools were established in response to local demands and their curriculum was purely under the control of missionaries. Subjects offered include English Grammar and Composition, Latin and Greek Grammar, History, Geography, Hebrew, Logic, Geometry, Chemistry, Physiology, Drawing, Rhetoric, etc. Pupils were awarded certificates by

College of Preceptors, London. This body influenced the nature of the curriculum in this period and, as an examination body, prescribed subjects constituted areas where Certificated.

Fafunwa (1974) highlighted some of the imperfections associated with the system to include

lack of a common syllabus, standard textbooks, regular school hours; lack of adequate supervision of schools—buildings, teachers, pupils, etc; lack of control in the examination system; lack of uniformity in the condition of service of teachers and lack of adequate financial support and control.

Apart from the problems highlighted above, the education was restricted to the South. There was the problem of acceptability of formal school in the North, where earlier before this period, the people had embraced Islamic religion. Moreover, the education did not meet the needs of Africans in terms of vocational opportunity, career enhancement and intellectual development. This certainly did not give them the universally recognized right to quality education adapted to meet his or her needs.

The Colonial Era

After the abolition of slave trade, white merchants were stimulated to look inward to Africa with legitimate trade. So, the period between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the phenomena of the scramble for Africa by imperial powers. This period also coincided with the Industrial

Revolution in Europe. Hence, colonial powers engaged in trading activities in Africa to source for raw materials to develop their home industries. After about five decades of sole control of schools by the missionaries, the colonial interest began to be noticeable in 1882 when an Education Ordinance was put in place to serve as a regulatory tool for schools in British West African Colonies – Gold coast, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Lagos.

In 1886, Lagos was separated from Gold Coast, which led to the promulgation of the first Education Ordinance in Nigeria. In 1887, the Education Ordinance was put in place to provide regulatory roles for educational practices, with limited impact on the curriculum. Nevertheless, there was substantial improvement on the school subjects over the missionary era, though school subjects were heavily tailored towards the British system to such an extent that Fafunwa (1974) described the products of such school as Africans in colour but British in outlook and intellect. Subjects such as scripture, Greek, Latin, Reading, Writing, English, History, Music, Mathematics, Philosophy and Recitation were introduced.

Probably, the reports of Phelps-Stokes Commission inspired noticeable development in Nigeria and indeed the whole Africa during the colonial Era. The committee observed the imbalance inherent in educational practices in Sub-Sahara Africa and come out with some profound recommendations. This inspired colonial government to appoint an Advisory Committee on

Nature Education in November 1923. The committee was to advise the secretary of state for the colonies on Education matters (Okafor, 1996).

In 1925, the committee produced “The memorandum on Education Policy in British Tropical

Africa”. Part of the Memorandum stressed that:

Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, (within the colonies). . . . This includes the fostering and the educational use of African arts and culture. It also stressed that Education should be a complete one that should include primary education, secondary education of different types, technical and vocational schools and institutions, some of which may hereafter reach University rank for such subjects at teacher-education, medicine and agriculture, adult education (Fafunwa, 1974)

According to Fafunwa (1974), the curriculum of the grammar schools was purely academic, while the Teacher Training schools’ curriculum combined pedagogical training with academics. The existing grammar schools, such as C.M. S. Grammar School, Methodist Boys High school and Kings College, naturally admitted into the school curriculum new subjects introduced by the examination bodies. In March 1952, an indigenous examination body was created for the British West African countries. Grammar schools were naturally inclined to teach subjects being examined by West African

Examinations Council (WAEC). Till date, WAEC exercises enormous control over the depth and structure of the school curriculum at secondary school level. Students are compelled to go through the curriculum content designed and prescribed by the WAEC syllabus. Regional governments of Eastern and Western regions through various committee inspired curriculum changes in the school. In 1955, Western region launched its Free Primary Education program and introduced New Primary School Syllabus, which included Character development, Literacy and Manual Skills. In 1957, Secondary Modern Schools were introduced and a detailed syllabus was introduced in 1958. In 1959, Eastern region revised its secondary school curriculum in English, History and Geography, while the primary school curriculum for the first school leaving certificate was revised. Hence, setting the road to fulfilling the aims of educational right to be directed toward the development of each child's personality and full potential, preparing children to participate in society and to do work that is rewarding and reasonably remunerative and to continue learning throughout life.

The Post-Colonial Era

After Nigeria's independence, a mark of change in the course of education system and curriculum development came. There was a phenomenal increase in schools and school enrolment. This is partly due to free educational program introduced in Western and Eastern regions. Apart from the Free Education factor, the educated class enjoyed certain privileges that had put them on a

high pedestal in social status. Education eventually became an avenue for obtaining greater influence, affluence and access to political power in Nigeria.

In order to cater for the future needs of increasing prospective school enrolment, the Ashby Commission was put in place. The report of the committee stimulated establishment of some higher institutions in Nigeria.

The emerging African scholars lent a voice to the curriculum development after the independence. Some of their contributions were remote, while some were visible and direct. The colonial education system was severely criticized because of its visible British domination both in content and outlook. Eventually, the first National Conference on Curriculum took place in November 1969 at the National Assembly Hall, Lagos.

The conference was well attended as the participants came among the educationists and from a wide spectrum of people. As noted by Fafunwa (1974), "the conference comprised organizations such as, religious bodies, teachers' association, other professionals (medical, legal, engineering), and University teachers and administrators, as well as officials of Ministries, Youth Club Organizations, businessmen and representatives from the governments".

Quoting from the forward of the Conference publication written by Dr. J. S. Cookey, who was then the Chief Federal Adviser on Education, Fafunwa (1974) wrote that the conference was not

“for educationists alone; it was necessary also to hear the views of the masses of people who are directly engaged in teaching of other educational activities, for they surely have a say in any decision to be taken about the structure and content of Nigerian education”.

Subsequent to the 1969 conference, a seminar was organized on “a National Policy of Education” in 1973. It was attended by various bodies, such as Conference of Teacher Training Colleges, Nigerian Union of Teachers, Primary School Administrators, Officials, State and Federal Ministries of Education, UNESCO Team, etc. The outcome of the seminar was the modification of the 1969 conference papers and the adoption of National Policy on Education.

In the policy, the 6-3-3-4 system of education was adopted to be practiced in Nigeria. The objectives of each level of education, such as the pre-primary, primary, junior and senior secondary schools and tertiary institutions, are clearly stated in the National policy on Education. Ehindero (1986) observed that the policy marked the end of 135 years of colonial domination and influences on our curriculum. It gives a Nigerian and indeed an African touch to our educational system”. The 6-3-3-4 system became operational in 1983. The new curriculum was diversified in nature. It placed emphasis on Science, Pre-Vocational and Performance based learning. The curriculum package also took into consideration the multilingual nature of Nigerian societies by prescribing a local language or mother tongue as a means of

instruction for the first three years at the primary school level. However, the implementation of this provision like many components of the policy was greatly doubtful (Fafunwa 1974).

The curriculum subjects, as stipulated in the policy, include English, French, Mathematics, Language of environment and Nigerian Language other than that of the environment, Integrated Science, Social studies and Citizenship Education, Introductory Technology. Agriculture, Business Studies, Home-Economics, Local crafts, Computer Education, Fine Arts, and Music were Pre-Vocational Elective subjects. Other subjects as Religious knowledge, Physical and Health Education, Arabic were Non-Prevocational Elective subjects.

At senior secondary schools, students are provided opportunities to study the following subjects: English, Mathematics, a major Nigeria Language, one of Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science, one of Literature-in-English, History, Geography or Religious Studies, a vocational subject such as Agriculture, Applied Electricity, Auto-Mechanics, Book-Keeping & Accounting, Building Construction, Commerce, Computer Education, Electronics, Clothing and Textiles, Food & Nutrition, Home Management, Metal work, Technical Drawing, Woodwork, Shorthand, Typewriting, Fine Art, Music, etc. Non-Vocational Electives included Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Further mathematics, Health Education, Literature-in-English, History, Geography, Bible-Knowledge, Islamic Studies, Arabic,

Government, Economics, any Nigerian Language that is orthography and literature, etc.

According to Omolewa and Sarunmi (2002), in 1981, the policy was revised and students were encouraged to study technical education. To ensure efficiency and implementation of the policy statement, various bodies were established. Among them are: Nigeria Educational Research Council, Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre, National Language Centre, Nigeria Development Council

In 1988, the body was fused by Decree 53 of 1988 and was renamed the Educational Research and Development Council. The Curriculum Development Centre of the council performed the functions of development of curriculum content, the development of instructional material, the organization of teacher education programs, the operation of pilot projects in schools, the dissemination of research findings and report and the collection of information for comparative curriculum studies through workshops, conferences and seminars.

In 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was launched with the basic tenets of a mandatory six years free education for all primary school age children. This was accompanied by certain reforms targeted towards ensuring Nigerian students attaining numeracy and literacy skills and that they are adequately prepared to become productive members of their communities. The free education introduced culminated into a massive influx of pupils hitherto financially incapacitated

into schools. To cope with this phenomenal increase, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) was established to train manpower to teach in various primary schools across the country. NTI provided in-service training for the existing teachers and also embarked on provision of teaching materials in form of textbooks, training manual and general revision of curriculum content (Omolewa and Sarunmi, 2002).

In 1999, Universal Basic Education (UBE) was introduced in response to Declaration on Education for All as recommended by Jomtien Conference of 1990. Even though the Jomtien Declaration was a global affair, it had local appeal. In Nigeria, the main focus of the UBE was free, compulsory education for the first nine years of primary and junior secondary schools. The inauguration of UBE ushered in 9-3-4 curriculum in Nigeria with the following focus;

- a. Introduce new pedagogical methods to elicit high cognitive process in students, including student-centered learning.
- b. Consolidate cross-cutting themes in order to condense curriculum content and scope.
- c. Make the curricular more flexible and adaptable to disenfranchised groups.
- d. Include indigenous knowledge concepts across various disciplines.
- e. Strengthen school;-to-work linkages, including the introduction of entrepreneurial skills.

- f. Raise the awareness about diversity, tolerance, ethic and civic responsibility.
- g. Raise awareness about emerging issues such as HIV/AIDs, environmental preservation, family life, sexuality and gender issues.

To keep pace “with the dynamics of social change and the demand on education”, another edition of the policy was published in 2004. According to the policy booklet, the fourth edition was “necessitated by some policy innovations and changes”. Some of the innovations border on a classroom size of 20 pupils to a teacher and a helper in Pre-primary schools, 35-40 pupils in a class in primary and secondary schools and 20 pupils for practical work in technical and vocational colleges.

Another core area of the policy innovation is the monitoring and maintenance of minimum standards. The introduction of Universal Basic Education, though launched in 1999, reflected the 2004 edition of the policy. Free and compulsory education was extended beyond primary schools to secondary schools. Subsequent to this organizational and structural innovation, there were content and pedagogical innovations in the curriculum. Some major subjects, especially at Junior Secondary School, went through some restructuring and in some instances a substantial overhauling of the subjects. Part of these phenomenal changes is the introduction of Civic Education as a separate subject in schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, several factors or forces have shaped the curriculum in Nigeria. They border on religious inclination, political consideration, economy, culture, internal and external influence. Alongside the shaping of the curriculum is the growth of the right to education worldwide in all ramifications.

Recommendations

From the foregoing discussions, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Curriculum planners should design it in such a way that the tenets of the policy are achievable practically in the country, bearing in mind the nature of the country.
- ii. Efforts should be increased by policy makers to see that the marks set by the national policy are attained in both public and private schools to ensure that the desired right to education to be achieved by ensuring that the requirements of the policy are met to achieve the required universal status
- iii. Curriculum designers should attempt a comprehensive review that will update the curriculum contents with the required right to education, as provided by the international laws and adopted by the national laws. The curriculum should at least be able to answer that it reflects the national goals and philosophy on education as well as the national educational goals.

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