

# The Secondary School Curriculum: Content, Relevance and Adequacy

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## Abstract

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*This paper however re-affirm the relevance and adequacy of the secondary school curriculum in policy documents, but which has failed to achieve its intended objectives due to incessant failure to achieve success in turning policy document into an operating curriculum during the implementation process. The paper therefore, draws the attention of government and other stakeholders in education to address this as a matter of urgency to enhance our implementation process, if we are to achieve any success in our educational system as a nation.*

**Keywords:** Education, Curriculum, Curriculum Content, Curriculum Implementation, Secondary School

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## Introduction

It is generally believed that it is only when a nation is able to come up with a curriculum that reflect in the actual fact the peculiar problem of the society, or emergent need or problems of that society, making use of materials within the immediate environment of the learner and that of the society, that we can as a nation be talking about a curriculum that would through education solve the perennial problems of the society, such as unemployment, food shortage, insecurity, corruption and over dependence on white collar jobs by the youths.

The Nigerian society has over the years gone through series of curriculum development, the British colonialist educational system was the first encounter of Nigerians with western education. Even though the Arab has made their presence felt in the northern part of the country earlier on where Islamic education was introduced, but the kind of education they were exposed to, was to read the Quran and write in Arabic.

The British colonialist educational policies were targeted at producing "educated" Nigerians to serve the interests of the colonialists. The kind of education they were exposed to were based on 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) which they believe would provide them the kind of Nigerians that would be useful to them in the church, to serve the machinery of government, to assist in ruling the people and exploitation of the resources of the land for the benefit of Britain. Educational development were largely limited to and determined by the needs of government alone. The Nigerian independence in 1960 brought with it agitations by Nigerians for a curriculum that would be relevant and reflect the needs and problems of the Nigerian people and society. There were various attempts at this; there was the 6-5-2-3, which was a curriculum that allows

students spend 6years in the primary school, 5 in the secondary and, 2years in the higher school certificate and then 3years in the University. Then it became the 6-5-4, before we later had the 6-3-3-4 curriculum, which has been innovated upon to produce the 9-3-4 curriculum.

The first real attempt by Nigerians at developing a curriculum that is relevant to the goals, needs and aspirations of their country was in 1969, through the 1969 curriculum conference which was championed by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) which was convened in Lagos from 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September. This discourse will be carried out under the following sub-headings:

- The concept of a curriculum
- The secondary school education
- The content of the 6-3-3-4 secondary school curriculum
- The UBE secondary education curriculum (9-3-4)
- Relevance and adequacy of the secondary school curriculum
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

## The Concept of Curriculum

To Bobbit (1969), he pointed out that a curriculum refers to "the series of things which children and youths must do and experience by way of developing abilities to do things that make up the adults life". Cookeham (1980) asserts that a curriculum is "all what pupils do or learn at school from the day they are admitted until the day they leave school".

Curriculum according to Tanner and Tanner (1975) is the planned and guided learning

experiences and intended learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience, under the auspices of the school, for learner's continuous and willful growth in personal social competence.

While Dada 1999, noted that curriculum is the meeting point for the programme of teaching and learning, which is the concern of education, while the curriculum was seen as the 'what' and 'how' of any educational enterprise, what is the content or body of knowledge while how is the procedure or methodology to be adopted

It is therefore important to note the general characteristics of all the definitions pointed out which are,

- a curriculum is an educational proposal, which means that it is a plan of an educational programme which most of the time is in form of a written document.
- a curriculum contains a programme of studies, which is the syllabus which contains the lists of subjects to be learnt, what learners would do in order to acquire knowledge or develop skills and programme of guidance which is what teachers do to help learners becomes useful to themselves and the society as well programme of activities.
- a curriculum is rooted in a given society, which means that the learning programme reflects the needs of the society and also factors affecting the society should be considered in planning the curriculum.
- a curriculum is the responsibility of the school, which simply means that the school, more than other any other agent of the society contributes to the making of a curriculum and that is why the school is held responsible for the outcome of the programme. And most importantly,
- a curriculum takes into account the total environment and an all round development of the learner. Physical, psychological, social, cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of human development.

### Secondary Education in Nigeria

Secondary school education is that type of education received after primary education and before the tertiary level of education. The broad goals of secondary education are to prepare the individual for;

- (a) Useful living within the society, and
- (b) Higher education.

And in specific terms, it is believed that secondary education shall

- (a) Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education at a higher level, irrespective of sex, social. Status, religious or ethnic background.
- (b) Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.
- (c) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades.
- (d) Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage.
- (e) Inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence.
- (f) Foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
- (g) 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.
- (h) Provide technical knowledge and vocational and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (NPE, 2013).

It is in realization of these objectives that the secondary education has been broken down into two stages, which are, the junior secondary school stage, and the senior secondary school stage which shall be of 3 years duration each.

### The Content of the 6-3-3-4 Secondary School Curriculum

In discussing the content of the Secondary school curriculum, we shall be looking at it from the perspective of the junior and senior secondary school curriculum.

The junior secondary school, it is believed shall be both pre-vocational and academic, teaching basic subjects that will enable the students acquire further knowledge and skills. The subjects are divided into groups which are A B and C for both the junior and senior secondary schools, for the GROUP A which is referred to as the CORE SUBJECTS, we have:

- i.) English Language
- ii.) Mathematics
- iii.) A major Nigerian language
- iv.) One of biology, chemistry, physics or health science
- iv.) One of literature-in-english, history, geography or religious studies
- vi.) A vocational subject.(NPE, 2004)

Today in the Secondary school curriculum, what we have as the CORE SUBJECTS are:

- i.) Mathematics
- ii.) English
- iii.) Civics Education, and
- iv.) Any Trade / Entrepreneurial Subject

**GROUPB:** Vocational Electives

(i) Agriculture (ii) Applied Electricity (iii) Auto-mechanics (iv) Book-Keeping and Accounting (v) Building Construction (vi) Commerce (vii) Computer Education (viii) Electronics (ix) Clothing and Textiles (x) Food and Nutrition (xi) Home Management (xii) Metal Work (xiii) Technical Drawing (xiv) Woodwork (xv) Shorthand (xvi) Typewriting (xvii) Fine art (xviii) Music.

**NOTE:** Emphasis on subjects in group **B** it is said shall be on practice.

**GROUPC:** Non Vocational Electives

(i) Biology (ii) Chemistry (iii) Physics (iv) Further Mathematics (v) French (vi) Health Education (vii) Physical Education (viii) Literature-in-English (ix) History (x) Geography (xi) Bible Knowledge (xii) Islamic Studies (xiii) Arabic (xiv) Government (v) Economics (xvi) any Nigeria language that has orthography and literature etc.

In realization of the secondary education objectives is why, it is only students who complete the junior secondary school that would be streamed into the,

- i.) Senior secondary school
- ii.) Technical college
- iii.) An out-of-school vocational training centers, and
- iv.) An apprenticeship scheme

This will be according to academic and vocational abilities of each child; the streaming will be based on the result of tests to determine academic ability and vocational interest of the learners, so as to be able to achieve a transition ratio of 50:50.

Every student therefore shall take all six (6) Core subjects in group A and a minimum of one and a maximum of two (2) subjects from the list of elective subjects in group **B** and **C**, to give a minimum of

seven (7) and a maximum of eight (8) subjects. And in any case, one of the three (3) elective subjects may be dropped in the last year of senior secondary school course (NPE, 2013).

It is on this basis that the 6-3-3-4 curriculum was regarded as a masterpiece, because it is set out to help solve a lot of problems in the Nigerian society that would help put a stop to the bookish nature of the curriculum inherited from the colonial masters and come up with the kind of curriculum that would help people come out school with skills, and that would enable them to be useful to themselves and the society at large, and also help address the problems of unemployment as well other emergent societal problems. However there are gaps between the expected and the status quo as reflected in the following.

- i.) Uncooperative attitudes of parents who feel their wards should not go to any other school apart from progressing academically to secondary school, even when they do not have the ability for such.
- ii.) Non-chalant attitude on the part of learners
- iii.) Unseriousness on the parts of government, (in preparation and provision of equipments)
- vi.) Overloading of the curriculum and curriculum contents, e.g as many as four or five languages are taught. English language, one major Nigerian language, mother tongue, French (second official language) and Arabic (a language of religion)
- v.) Dearth of teachers and teaching materials
- vi.) Poor funding and lack of proper supervision on the part of the supervision department of the ministry of education. (Both state and the federal)
- vii.) The strain on teachers, learners and material resources in the school due to over population
- viii.) Teachers were not trained to operate the equipments procured for the implementation of that curriculum, and so many of those machines were not touched until they become obsolete.
- ix.) Gaps between the curriculum of different levels of education and the global demands.

Therefore, it is on the basis of innovation of the 6-3-3-4 curriculum, to take care and address the emergent needs and other societal problems that demands curriculum attention such as the infusion of several subjects such as, climate change, over-population, HIV/AIDS pandemic, unemployment as

well security challenges etc, and to make Nigerian educational curriculum functional is why the innovation has invariably given birth to the UBE and the new secondary school curriculum to take care of the gaps and deficiencies of the 6-3-3-4 curriculum. The curriculum is therefore broadened to a 9 year Universal Basic Education curriculum, FGN (2006). Also, the new curriculum demands that candidates must offer five compulsory cross-cutting subjects which include English Language, general mathematics, computer studies/ICT and one trade/entrepreneurship subject to be selected from the lists of 34 approved trade/entrepreneur subjects. In addition, four (4) distinct fields of studies such as science and mathematics (physics, chemistry, biology, and further-mathematics) among others could be added to the earlier five selected, Obioma (2011), in Izuagba (2012).

#### **The UBE Secondary Education Curriculum (9-3-4)**

The objectives of Upper Basic Education are to:

- a. provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and educational advancement;
- b. develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and the performance of their civic responsibilities.
- c. inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour; and
- d. inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background.

And so, today the junior secondary curriculum is as follows:

1. English studies
2. One Nigerian Language
3. Mathematics
4. Basic Science and Technology
  - Basic science
  - basic Technology
  - Information Technology
  - Physical and Health education
5. Religion and National Values
  - Christian religious studies
  - Islamic studies
  - Social studies
  - Civic Education
  - Security Education
6. Pre-vocational Studies

-Home-Economics

-Agriculture

7. French Language
8. Cultural and Creative Arts
9. Business Studies
10. Arabic (optional)

It was however recommended that for effective teaching and learning at this level of education, the teacher-student ratio shall be 1:35. Also,

-Continuous assessment and school examination shall be on a ration of 40:60, and shall be used as basis for advancement from one class to another in both public and private schools.

-There shall be a smooth transition from the junior to the senior secondary school without any examination. Each state and the FCT shall make adequate arrangement for smooth transition based on prescribed benchmark.

-Also, on successful completion of 10- year of formal schooling, a student shall sit for the basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and/o Junior Arabic and Islamic Studies Certificate Examination.

-State Governments and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) administration shall issue the Basic Education Certificate and/or Junior Arabic and Islamic Certificate.

-There shall be efforts towards achieving equitable access to educational opportunities for all Nigerians in all parts of the country.

-State Government and FCT shall ensure the integration of formal basic education curriculum into Q'uanic and Islamiya schools, and Special Needs schools.

-Special efforts shall be made by all tiers of government and appropriate agencies and parents to:

- i. Encourage the education of the girl-child, and
- ii. Discourage boy-child drop-out syndrome in affected areas.

-Federal, states, FCT and local Governments shall develop appropriate strategies and programmes to provide basic Education for children of peculiar circumstances (such as children of pastoral nomads, hunters, migrants, fisher folks, orphans, children in apprenticeship, etc) who are unable to benefit from Basic Education within the conventional educational system. Etc.

However, Government is expected to provide the following educational services for the basic education levels:

-School Libraries

- School health Services
- Guidance and Counseling
- Educational Resources Centers
- Laboratories and Workshops

-Government is encouraged to provide school meal deriving from the Home Grown School Feeding and health Programme in order to ensure healthy development of the child and encourage retention in school.

Then, is the Post-Basic Education and Career Development. The post-Basic and Career Development (PBECD) is the education children receive after a successful completion of ten years of Basic education and passing the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and junior Arabic and Islamic studies Certificate Examination (JAISCE). It includes: (i) senior secondary education, (ii) higher school; and (iii) continuing education given in vocational enterprise institutions (VEIs) to either Basic Education graduates who are not proceeding to senior secondary schools, or senior secondary graduates that are not proceeding to the tertiary level, as a means of preparing them for the world of work, wealth creation and entrepreneurship. The objectives of Post-Basic Education and Career Development (PBECD) are to:

- a. provide holders of the basic Certificate and Junior Arabic and Islamic studies Certificate with opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of gender, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- b. offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, disposition, opportunities and future roles;
- c. provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- d. provide entrepreneurial, technical and vocational job-specific skills for self reliance, and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
- e. develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
- f. inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
- g. foster patriotism, national unity and security education with emphasis on the common ties in spite of our diversity; and
- h. raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think independently

and rationally, respect the views and feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour.

Senior Secondary Education:

The curriculum for Senior Secondary Education however, shall consist of the following field of studies:

1. Science and mathematics
2. Technology
3. Humanities
4. Business Studies

The subject offerings at the Senior Secondary School level (i.e. Post basic Education curriculum) are:

1. Compulsory Cross-Cutting Subjects:
  - i. English Language
  - ii. General Mathematics
  - iii. Trade/Entrepreneurship Subject
  - iv. Civic Education
2. Fields of Studies

Science and Mathematics:

- i. Biology
- ii. Chemistry
- iii. Physics
- iv. Further Mathematics
- v. Health Education
- vi. Agriculture
- vii. Physical Education
- viii. Computer Studies

Technology:

- i. Technical drawing
- ii. General Metal Work
- iii. Basic Electricity
- iv. Electronics
- v. Auto Mechanics
- vi. Building Construction
- vii. Woodwork
- viii. Home Management
- ix. Food and Nutrition

Humanities:

- i. Christian Religious Studies
- ii. Islamic Studies
- iii. Visual Arts
- iv. Music
- v. History
- vi. Geography
- vii. Government
- viii. Economics
- ix. Literature-in English
- x. French
- xi. Arabic
- xii. Any Nigerian Language-that has curriculum

**Business Studies:**

- i. Stores Management
- ii. Accounting
- iii. Commerce
- iv. Office Practice
- v. Insurance

**Trade/Entrepreneurship Subjects:**

The 34 entrepreneurship/trade subjects included are; Auto-body repair and spraying painting, Auto electrical Work, Auto Mechanical Work, Auto Parts Merchandising, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, Welding and Fabrication Engineering Craft Practice, Electrical Installation and maintenance work, Radio, TV and Electronic Servicing, Block laying, Brick Laying and Concrete Work, Painting and Decorating, Plumbing and Pipefitting, Machine Woodworking, Carpentry and Joinery, Furniture Making, Upholstery, Catering Craft Practice, Garment Making, Clothing and Textile, Dyeing and Bleaching, Printing Craft Practice, Cosmetology, Photography, Mining, Tourism, Leather Goods Manufacturing and Repair, Stenography, Data Processing, Store Keeping, Book Keeping, GSM Maintenance and Repairs, Animal Husbandry, Fishery, Marketing, Salesmanship . It is thought that the new UBE curriculum will take care of the GAP and inadequacies and also be a total departure from the 6-3-3-4 curriculum and bridge the gaps believed existed.

**Relevance and Adequacy of Secondary School Curriculum**

The secondary school curriculum is relevant and adequate for that level of education for which it has been designed for, taking into consideration the number of subjects that learners are exposed to in the junior secondary school which provided them with various options of furthering their education at the secondary school level, and also to be streamed into;

- i) The senior secondary school
- ii) The technical college
- iii) An out of school vocational training centre, and
- iv) An apprenticeship scheme.

In the 6-3-3-4 as well, the Post Basic Education and career Development was also meant to take care of the categories of learners who might not be able to proceed academically to the senior secondary schools as well as students who cannot proceed to higher education after their secondary education, for them to acquire a job-specific skills, entrepreneurial skills, technical, agriculture,

commerce and economic development. It is believed that every learner will continue at their own pace and according to their ability, which means it is not everyone that would continue academically, transition will be according to academic ability of an individual learner with peculiar skills. This, it is believed would produced students that would be coming out of schools, not necessarily looking for white collar jobs, but with skills (technical & entrepreneurial) that would make them functional not only to themselves but also to the society at large.

With all of these therefore, we can say that the secondary school curriculum is relevant, it is adequate, but it is always at the level of implementation that we have faltered as a nation. These are very good policies that existed only on the paper but were never implemented, just like the issue of branching that never see the light of the day, the teacher student ratio that was put at 1-35 was never achieved in any school, due to influx of learners with less facilities to cater for them, the post basic education and career development never existed to take care of such exigencies, and because of this, the objectives were never achieved. As a nation, we always fail to consider our peculiar societal needs in the implementation of these policies and curriculum, and this is reason why we are always running into crisis as a nation as far as curriculum implementation is concerned which has really impacted our educational system negatively. We have had series of curriculum changes and innovations in policies and documentation over the years, but our educational practice over the years remain the same.

**Conclusion**

Nigeria, it is believed has everything it takes to make its educational system one of the best sorts after in the world. It has a large population and abundant human resources to take its educational system to the highest level, there are people of ingenuity and resourcefulness to make her educational system ranked amongst the best in the world. Unfortunately the country is grouped among those countries that are yet to get it as far as their educational system is concerned. These are unconnected with the inability to effectively implement our policies as far as education is concerned. The challenge of curriculum implementation can only best be addressed through a qualitative leadership who value the educational system of the country. Our educational system today is faced with serious shortcomings, these challenges needs drastic reforms that would bring in an effective

and efficient curriculum implementation system, reforms that would produced the best in curriculum implementation in the Nigerian educational systems.

### Recommendations

Some ways and means that could assist in coming up with an effective and efficient curriculum implementation, and many more are suggested below;

- i.) There should be adequate preparation on the part of government towards proper and efficient implementation of a curriculum.
- ii.) Teachers to implement whatever curriculum we are coming up with as a nation should be adequate, in quality and quantity and be adequately trained.
- iii.) Relevant and up-to-date materials and equipment should be produced and procured in adequate quantity to effectively implement the curriculum.
- iv.) Other problems of the society that might hinder effective curriculum implementation, such as epileptic power supply should be taking care off.
- v.) teachers must not only acquire new skills, already acquired skills must continuously be upgraded. Training and retraining of teachers should also be emphasized, to keep them abreast of innovations and changes in the curriculum and curriculum implementation.
- vi.) Employment of new and qualified teaching personnel should be worked on by the government.
- vii.) Spaces in terms of classrooms and workshops should be provided to take care of population explosion so that the objective of 1-35 teacher-student ratio can be achieved for effective teaching and learning in our secondary schools.
- viii) There should be a system that is dynamic and continually upgrading itself to competently address emerging challenges.
- ix) The government through the ministry of education should re-visit the idea of post-basic education and career development (PBECD) and do everything within their means to make it work, so that the objective can be achieved.

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