

REDEFINING NIGERIA CURRICULUM AND CERTIFICATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE IN THE WORLD OF WORK

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Abstract

In Nigeria today, the rate of unemployment in the world of work continues to be on the increase. The bad news is that unless something is done fast with the curriculum in our institutions, even if Nigeria becomes really globally competitive with regards to infrastructural development; the same Nigeria will become a sorry state with regards to holistic development because of her inadequacies in education practice.

The truth is that Nigeria is producing graduates in all academic disciplines. Unfortunately, however, many of these graduates have no skills that will make them self reliant if they are not fortunate to get any paid job. Related to this is the fact that many of these graduates are wielding what can best be described as “Wizard of Oz” certificates. These ‘graduates’ cannot defend the certificates they are flagging around.

This paper gives a brief history of Education in Nigeria before the advent of white missionaries. It also shows the deficiencies of our current curriculum at all stages of education in Nigeria. Important recommendations, apart from others, are that Entrepreneurial Studies should be enhanced in the curriculum at all stages of education and monitoring bodies as well as good assessment procedures should be encouraged to see that graduates at any level of education are truly qualified to be awarded such certificates of graduation.

Introduction

A Brief History of Education in Nigeria

Before the advent of the Christian missionaries which was the pre-colonial era, Nigeria prepared individuals for the world of work. There was apprenticeship, and training was done through one-on-one inculcation of appropriate skills like fishery, crafting, blacksmithing, hunting, and weaving among others. Every village had such openings and sometimes, these apprenticeship programmes were made family businesses. The development of occupational skills was in preparation for the world of work. The productive abilities manifested by the recipients of these skills became the identity for productivity and employment security. By and large, the indigenous curriculum was aimed at skills acquisition for the apprentices and

it helped them overcome unemployment, improve the economic wellbeing of the individuals who acquired such skills, and helped the development of the society.

The British, who colonized Nigeria, brought with them their own agenda. They stressed the competence in the 3 Rs – Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. These 3 Rs were important to them as they needed the products of this type of education to help them in their businesses in Nigeria. They needed interpreters, clerks, store-keepers, cooks, messengers, drivers and such. Unfortunately, since the colonial masters left, Nigeria has not progressed as expected in its functional curriculum. Instead, its curriculum has emphasized the cognitive domain more than the psychomotor domain. In *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story – 1966-2000* by the first Singaporean President, Lee Kuan Yew, he told the story about the British colonialism and the form of education they gave – educational curriculum that led people really nowhere. Yet, he reversed it all. Today, Singapore is globally known for excellence.

In Nigeria, there was another issue. Even when the curriculum was still tending very much toward the cognitive domain, many of the teachers in the Southern part of Nigeria labored at work to bring out the best in their students. They were strong and doing fine on their job. Soon after the war, however, government took over schools in order to provide rehabilitation for other ravaged schools. It could not, however, maintain it for long. This turned out to be the first step in the collapse of the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning. There were no more very strong motivations for healthy competitions that existed between mission schools and government schools. At first, the former mission teachers were happy because there was increase in salaries. But, soon after, they realized they had lost the authority of the teacher in the classroom. Parents could come directly or seek the help of the military boys to harass a teacher and blame him or her for weaknesses of their children. Teacher disenchantment entered the classrooms! And the children began to perform poorly. The response by government was to set up committees, and circulars were issued to the effect that pass bars were lowered so that more students could pass. This practice has lingered on for years even in the universities. In fact, at a point in the late 70s and early 80s, no child was to repeat a class in the primary and secondary schools. . All pupils and students must be promoted!

The final nail was the leveling out of all students from everywhere on one platform especially during the admission in Unity schools and the Universities. There were what was termed Educationally Disadvantaged States. These had different cut off marks from the other candidates.

Sometimes the nomenclature would change to Catchment Areas. All these made nonsense of the admission exercise. A candidate would be refused admission even when he or she scored 240 whilst his or her counterpart from an "Educationally Disadvantaged State" who scored 190 would be offered admission immediately. This system, thus generated, helped to produce education monsters in the classroom as well as in the lecture halls. Of course, a compromised system will end up reproducing its kind.

Many graduates at any level of education cannot defend their certificates. That means they are not really qualified. Who then certified them? How did they smuggle their way through? These are very important questions. Many teachers now collude with students to engage in examination malpractice. The researcher paid research assistants (young graduates) to camouflage as candidates for English Language and Mathematics Examination during the immediate past GCE exam. Each of them was asked to pay N1, 000 before entering the hall so as to be allowed to cheat anyhow in the examination hall without harassment. The payment was said not to be compulsory, yet all the people who refused to pay the N1, 000 were treated as criminals in the examination hall. Is it that teachers are fraudulent? Is it that they are not paid well? Is it that they lack commitment to their job? Is it that there is no monitoring exercise put in motion by the government? All these are food for thought.

The 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) stipulated that one of its goals was to achieve self-reliant education. This is a bold attempt. However, the goal failed because the curriculum planned was never geared toward actualization of this lofty goal. This is because educating for self reliance is learning that must be directed towards developing in the learners, skills, competencies and attributes that will equip them to be innovative, creative and to successfully manage personal and community works for world of work. The recent restructuring of the school programme by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to ensure basic education of the learner's self reliance is still doubtful. The truth is that education in Nigeria is not yet yielding the desired result of sustainable human development necessary for the survival of man because of poor implementation of an otherwise good curriculum. The Nigeria education seems to dwell so much on certification of students at all levels of education. Regrettably, some of these certificates are empty and useless for the holders as these certificates cannot get them their desired job. Sometimes, even when they manage to smuggle themselves into these jobs, they cannot defend their claims of being qualified for such jobs. Suffice it to say that it appears the Nigerian education is witnessing a steady decline even with her numerous policy formation and

reformation since many of her graduates who should contribute to nation building are found to be unemployable because of corruption in practice.. Some of them who are employed are found to be unproductive in the world of work. It is not unusual in Nigeria, to find many graduates of Crop Science, for instance, who are occupying environment with abounding and underutilized arable land roaming the streets as unemployed. Some graduates of Animal Science lack the skills and drive to employ self by keeping livestock even at the barest scale. All these may be the reason behind the lamentation from the Nigeria Association of Petroleum Explorationists (NAPE) that Nigerian graduates lack the skills required in the oil and gas industry, which actually accounts for about 90% of the nation's revenue base. The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) also complained that the products of the Nigeria education system were not meeting the needs of its members (Saturday Sun, 2007). This could make them irrelevant and idle in the midst of abounding opportunities available in the world of work. In their idleness, they contribute nothing but social vices and insecurity to the development of the present and future societies (Eneh and Owo, 2009; Eneh, 2007). But complaint is a poor response to an identifiable problem. Expertise is based on training and experience. The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) ought to contribute to training either prior to graduation or after graduation to enhance manpower development.

The national development of any country of the world mainly depends on her educational programmes. The educational programmes in Nigeria have become worrisome because millions of graduates are being produced from both secondary schools and tertiary institutions with many of them remaining unemployed for years. Some of them have been labeled unemployable. According to the National Bureau of Statistics Quarters 3 as reported by Raphael (2017), Nigeria recorded its highest ever aggregate unemployment rate rising from 14% in the fourth quarter of 2016 to 18.8%. The monumental increase occurred despite the fact that all tiers of government as well as the organized private sector (OPS) generated additional 1.2 million jobs, which put the estimated labour population at 85.1% for the same period. The indices also revealed that the number of people within the labour force that were unemployed or underemployed increased drastically from 13.6 million and 17.7 million in the second quarter to 18.8 million in the third quarter. Analysis of these figures show that the percentage of women within the labour force (aged 15-64) who were willing, able and actively seeking for job but unemployed was 21.2% while the percentage for men was 16.5%. Thus, total number of unemployed and underemployed put together increased from 37.2% in the previous quarter to 40% in the third quarter. In view of these

unemployment reports, efforts have been made by the Federal Government through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) by establishing the scheme Sure-P in 2012 under the past administration of President Goodluck Ebere Jonathan and N-power programme under the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in an attempt to alleviate the scourge of unemployment among Nigeria youths.

However, it seems that though government efforts are palliative, they have failed to actualize the expected objectives of promoting self-reliance for the teeming population of Nigeria youths that are unemployed or underemployed. It thus seems that these graduates lack the skills that would have enabled them to be self reliant as well as contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation.. As a result of this, many Nigeria students are losing hope in our education. Some have dropped out of school and turned to street traders, porters, barrow pushers, motor park touts, and even commercial motor cycle or tricycle transporters (Atubi and Ali, 2009). Many of them have recently turned to what is called “Yahoo Yahoo boys.” The question then is: what is the place of Nigeria curriculum in making her youths self reliant after schooling?

Redefining Nigeria’s Curriculum in Education

Curriculum is the anchorage of educational values and a tool for achieving results that would benefit any country in the world. It is a programme of education designed for certain group of learners within a time frame to achieve the intended behavioural outcomes (Alade, 2005). Thus, curriculum is the frame work of organized learning experience that is carried out at school. The Nigerian curriculum has been criticized for being over ambitious, resulting in over load and insufficiently attuned to the needs of the labour market particularly in pre-vocational and vocational/technical courses. Ajibola (2008) asserted that the problem of the Nigerian economy is based on her curriculum. He reveals that the challenges of incoherence in policy formulation, selection and organization of content; implementation and evaluation are not properly defined in line with the Nigerian needs. By and large, it then calls for redefining the Nigerian curriculum at all levels of education. Thus, redefining the Nigerian curriculum is a form of educational reformation to meet up with the 21st Century economy. There is the need, for instance, to integrate the acquisition of different types of entrepreneurial skills in the Nigerian secondary and tertiary education systems.

The issue with the Nigerian curriculum is th curriculum which has re-integrated existing technical and vocational methods of acquiring skills is not being properly implemented. In the contemporary economy, many graduates

are in the street searching for job. Some have stayed at home for many years without meaningful job. In fact, those who did not really see the four walls of a university, but who have the entrepreneurship skills and have established their own private businesses are now employing the so called graduates with so many certificates.

All in all, the burning need to encourage skill acquisition development through the process of entrepreneurship education cannot be overemphasised. Entrepreneurship education is a carefully planned process of learning for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills for self reliance (Nsofor, Umeh, Ahmed and Idris, 2014). They further asserted that it is an instrument that empowers the youths to be in control of their future. It makes them have more opportunities to exercise creative freedom and it boosts their self esteem and gives them greater sense of control over their lives. Every successful entrepreneur is characterized by hard work; self confidence; profit-oriented approach; has the capacity to cope with failure; demonstrates initiative; sets his own standards; is always goal oriented; possesses reliability and integrity. Basically, entrepreneurship entails building of skills in negotiation; building of leadership skills; development of new products; creative and innovative thinking; and exposure to technological innovation Entrepreneurial skills should be encouraged at all levels of education with high practical oriented approach. The industrialized nations of the world achieved their greatness through systematic plans and activities as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship education.

At all levels of the educational system, training in vocational skills should be integrated into the school curriculum as a core subject that every learner must pass. Such skills include: interior decoration, fashion designing and tailoring, catering, horticulture, computer and mobile phone repairs, brick laying, bakery, blacksmithing, plumbing, event planning, carpentry and furniture making, fish farming, modeling, driving, laundry, fabric and dyeing, hat and bead making, snail farming, art and painting, dancing and choreography, ICT, comedy and entertainment among others. Training given in these skills has the potential of making any graduate from any level of education attained to be self reliant. The acquisition of such skills will make an individual own his or her own small scale enterprises (SMEs) and as a result, contribute to the nation's economy by boosting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Nigeria government showed her realization of the importance of these skills for the world of work by her introduction of the entrepreneurial skills into the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) scheme in March 2012. The aim could be to curb or reduce the high rate of unemployment in the country. But, one year of training in these

entrepreneurial skills during the National Youth Service year may not be enough for these graduates to meaningfully acquire the skills. The reason is that even the informal training undergone at the traditional programme for acquisition of skills mentioned earlier took a minimum of three years apprenticeship across states in Nigeria. There is no doubt that there is the need for Nigerian government to respond fast and positively towards proper implementation of our curriculum. It may not just be a matter of cut and nail by integrating entrepreneurial education in the curriculum. The NERDC school curriculum has done the needful but implementation is the problem. Universities and polytechnics have accepted entrepreneurial education in their standards. Let it be well implemented.

Conclusion

The importance of skill acquisition through entrepreneurship education for self reliance has been recognized as a panacea for unemployment among Nigerian youth. The proper implementation of the Nigeria curriculum becomes necessary for building creative and knowledge-intensive economy and society at large. The truth is that the Nigeria education should no-longer see certification as the only means of indicating that one is ready for the world of work. Employability and self reliance should be evidenced in what level of skills one can demonstrate.

Recommendations

Education authorities should ensure that the current curriculum which integrates entrepreneurial education as a compulsory option at all levels of educational system in Nigeria is properly implemented.

The Nigerian government should not only insist on entrepreneurial studies in the curriculum, but should create in each school of the federation and at all levels of education, a standard entrepreneurial center.

Monitoring bodies (from the government) as well as good assessment procedures should be in place to see that graduates at any level of education are truly qualified to be awarded such certificates of graduation.

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