

# Curriculum Development in Nigeria; Historical Perspectives

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Doi: 10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n1p73

## Abstract

*The paper adopts descriptive and historical design in exploring the curriculum development in Nigeria. Three eras of historical epoch was adopted for the analysis. They are informal of traditional curriculum, missionary period, era of colonial intervention, and post colonial period. Innovation that took place within each of the historical period were highlighted. Forces, events, and institutions that shaped the school curriculum were lucidly brought into focus. This undoubtedly provides insight towards formulation of future policies and determining future directions.*

**Key Words:** Curriculum, Innovation, Ordinance, Conference, Policy

## 1. Introduction

Curriculum is a dynamic intellectual and social enterprise. The dynamic nature of human societies justifies regular innovations. Nigeria state is a creation of British colonial policy and missionaries efforts culminated in modern school system. The system of African training system was dismantled as Western education was embraced in Nigeria. Curriculum development in Nigeria will be explained under three historical dispensations. They are the Informal or Traditional Curriculum, Missionary Era, Period of Colonial Intervention, and Post-Colonial Era.

## 2. Informal Curriculum

Before the coming of colonial masters, Africans had their own unique way of training not only the young ones, but also the adults. The most interesting aspect of it was that, the education was not an end or for mere certification without assurance of being employed, their educational enterprise was effective and goal oriented. It met the immediate needs of the individuals and the society at large.

We can justifiably establish the fact that, before colonialism in Nigeria, Africans underwent training. In a sense they were educated, albeit not in western sense. There was training going on, and if education is to inspire competence, develop skills, acquisition of knowledge, etc African training system before colonial adventures performed no less tasks. Consequent upon the existence of the training system was the coexistence of curriculum. This curriculum operated before colonialism in Africa is termed informal curriculum "Just as education is 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.

According to Ehindero (1986), the following are the purposes of pre-colonial education and functions of its curriculum.

- a. total development of the child-intellect, physical and moral
- b. introduction of the child to the community and inculcating in him respect for elders and others in position of authority
- c. acquisition of specific vocational skills and training to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour;
- d. developing and nurturing a strong sense of belonging, the 'we feelings and encouraging the individual to participate actively in family and community affairs';
- e. development, understanding, appreciation and promotion of the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Though 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:

- a. Physical Training – They embarked on acrobatic display, drumming, dance, wrestling etc. Their psychomotor domain was well taken care of and open to the wider society.
- b. Intellectual Training: Intellectual activities include counting, story-telling, proverbs, poetry, legends, local and ancestral history, story-relays, riddles, moonlight story-telling, etc.
- c. Vocational Training: Functionalism was the guiding principle of African education. The curriculum was justifiably tailored towards achieving and mastering specific tasks. These include:
- d. Agricultural training such as farming, hunting, fishing, animal rearing, etc
- e. Trades and crafts such as weaving, carving, carpentry, building, barbering, hair plaiting, palm wine tapping and selling, dancing and acrobatics.
- f. Character Training such as respect for elders, table manners, toilet manners, greetings, community participation and promotion of cultural heritage.

### 3. The Missionary Era

It is to the credit of Christian Missionary that Western Education was introduced into Nigeria in the seventeenth century. Specifically, as early as 1843, the Methodist Mission established the first school in Badagry under the leadership of Mr. and Mrs. De Craft. The school was named "Nursery of the Infant Church" (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 evangelization and Christianization of the heathen 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 missionaries 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 evangelization of African was zealously pursued by missionaries' organizations such as the CMS, Wesleyan, the Catholic Mission, Baptist and the Church of Scotland. Their activities were clearly stated by Fafunwa (1974) as follows:

The early mission's schools were similar in content and method to the Quranic Schools which preceded them. Role learning predominated and the teacher taught practically everything from one textbook. The Bible . . . was the master textbook, and every subject no matter how remote, had to be connected in some way with the holy writ. The main purpose of education in the early stages was to teach Christianity with a

view to converting all those who came within the four walls of the mission house. All Christian denominations, Methodist, C.M.S, Baptist, Catholics, Presbyterian, Quo-Ibo and other religion. . . .

They realized that, proper evangelization of Africans will require basic knowledge of how to read and write. The urgent needs of the Africans proficiency in the reading of the bibles, and dire needs of lettered Africans who would serve as Catechists, interpreters, etc were motivating and sustaining factors.

This narrow conception determined the structure of the school and its curriculum. The curriculum 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 was solely teacher dependent. Nevertheless, basics of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic and of course Religion formed the core of the Curriculum.

During the missionary era, even though the established grammar school were established in response to local demands, their curriculum was purely under the control of missionaries. Subjects offered include English Grammer and Composition, Latin and greek Grammer, History, Geography, Hebrew, Logic, Geometry, Chemistry, Physiology, Drawing, Rhetoric, etc. Pupils were awardd certificate by College of Preceptors by College of Preceptors, London. This body influenced the nature of the curriculum in this period. As an examination body, prescribed subjects constituted areas where were certificated.

It is to the credit of the missionaries that various missions set up “management boards to help regulate the curriculum, teachers’ salaries and conduct”. Other milestone achievements by the missionaries include:

Introduction of vocational education, notably the Topo Industrial school for Delinquent near Badagry. It was established by the Roman Catholic Mission in 1876; character training in conforming with the dictate of the Holy writ; evolution of white colar job, especially teachers, Catechist, etc; translation of Bible into local languages such as Igbo, Yoruba, Efik and Nupe.

Fafunwa (1974) highlighted some of the imperfections associated with the system as follows; lack of common syllabus, standard textbooks, regular school hours; lack of adequate supervision of schools – buildings, teachers, pupils, etc; lack of control in examination system; lack of uniformity in the condition of service of teachers, and lack of adequate financial support and control.

Aside the problems highlighted above, the education was restricted to the South. There was problem of acceptability of formal school in the North, who were earlier before this period, have embraced Islamic religion. Moreover, the education did not meet the needs of Africans in terms of vocational opportunity, career enhancement and intellectual development.

#### **4. Colonial Intervention Era**

The abolition of slave trade stimulated the white merchants to look inward to Africa with legitimate trade. The period between late eighteenth and early nineteenth century witnessed a phenomenal scramble for African among 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 missionaries sole control of school, the colonial interest began to be noticeable in 1882 when an Education Ordinance was put in place which was to serve as regulatory tools for schools in British West African Countries – Gold coast, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Lagos colony.

In 1886, Lagos was separated from Gold Coast. This led to the promulgation of the first Education Ordinance in Nigeria. In 1887, Education Ordinance was put in place to provide regulatory roles for educational practices, with limited impact on the curriculum. 1887 Education Ordinance Act made provision for “Assisted School” and “Non- assisted Schools”. “Assisted schools were given grants by the colonial government base on certain criteria such as the quality of the school results and ‘favourable inspection reports’.

Nevertheless, there was substantial improvement on the school subjects over the missionary era, though school subjects were heavily tailored towards British system. So much that Fafunwa (1974) described the products of such school as Africans in colour but British in outlook and intellects. 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 colonial Era. The committee observed 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.

Examination bodies such as the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), London Matriculation Examination Boards, and College of Preceptors of London inspired some sort of curriculum changes. Schools naturally prepared students for subjects being examined by these bodies. University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate was responsible for the conduct of examination for the grammar schools and London Matriculation Boards focused much on the private students and Teacher Training Colleges such as St. Andrew College, Oyo established in 1896, Wesley College, Ibadan opened in 1905, the Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar opened in 1946. While the curriculum of the grammar schools was purely academic, 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 these 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 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 programme and introduced New Primary School Syllabus which include 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.

## 5. Post Colonial Era

The period after Nigeria Political Independence marked a change in the course of Education System and curriculum development in Nigeria. There was a phenomenal increase in schools and school enrolment. This is partly due to free educational programme introduced in Western and Eastern

regions. Apart from Free Education factor, the educated class enjoyed certain privileges that have put them on high pedestal in social status. Education eventually becomes 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, Ashby Commission was put in place. The report of the committee stimulated establishment of some higher institutions in Nigeria.

The emergent of African scholars lend 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 British visible domination both in content and outlook. Eventually, the first National Conference on Curriculum took place in Nov. 1969 at the National Assembly Hall, Lagos.

The conference was well attended as the participants were not limited to educationist alone. A wide spectrum of people was invited. As noted by Fafunwa (1978) "The conference comprised organizations such as, religious bodies, teachers' association, other professionals (medical, legal, engineering), and University teachers and administrators, as well as ministries officials, 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 Chief Federal Adviser on Education, Babafunwa (1974) wrote that the conference was not "for educationist 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 under the chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebó. The seminar 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. Emphasis was placed on Science, Pre-Vocational and Performance based learning. Marinho (2009) observed that the "initiatives were designed to contextualize learning, relate everyday experiences to the classroom, and raise the awareness of traditional African sensibilities among students". The curriculum package also took into consideration the multilingual nature of Nigerian societies by prescribing local language or mother tongue as means of instruction for the first three years at primary school level. However, the implementation of this provision like many components of the policy was greatly doubtful.

The curriculum subjects as stipulated in the policy are;

#### *Core Subjects*

English, French, Mathematics, Language of environment and Nigerian Language other than that of the environment, Integrated Science, Social studies and Citizenship Education, Introductory Technology

#### *Pre-Vocational Elective*

Agriculture, Business Studies, Home-Economics, Local crafts, Computer Education, Fine Arts, and Music.

### *Non-Prevocational Electives*

Religious knowledge, Physical and Health Education, Arabic

At senior secondary schools, students are provided opportunities to study the following subjects:

### *Core Subjects*

(i) English (ii) Mathematics (iii) A major Nigeria Language (iv) One of biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science (v) One of Literature-in-English, History, Geography or Religious Studies (vi) A vocational subject.

### *Vocational Electives*

Agriculture, Applied Electricity, Auto-Mechanics, Book-Keeping & Accounting, Building Construction, Commerce, Computer Education, Electronics, Clothing and Textiles, Food & Nutrition, Home Management, Mental work, Technical Drawing, Woodwork, Shorthand, Typewriting, Fine Art, Music, etc.

### *Non-Vocational Electives*

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

In 1981, the policy was revised, "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 Educational Research and Development Council. According to Omolewa and Sarunmi (2002), The Curriculum Development Centre of the council performs the following functions through workshops, conference and seminars.

Development of curriculum content, development of instructional material, organization of teacher education programmes, operation of pilot projects in schools, disseminations of research findings and report, collection of information for comparative curriculum studies.

In 1976, universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was launched by Obasanjo regime. The basic tenets of the UPE were mandatory six years free education for all primary school age Nigerians. 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 massive influx of pupils hitherto financially incapacitated into schools. To cope with this phenomenal increase, 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.

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 Jomtien declaration was a global affair, it has local appeals. 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.

Marinho (2009) states the following as the curriculum focus of UBE scheme;

- Introduce new pedagogical methods in order to elicit high cognitive process in students, including student-centered learning.
- Consolidate cross-cutting themes in order to condense curriculum content and scope.
- Make the curricular more flexible and adaptable to disenfranchised groups.

- Include indigenous knowledge concepts across various disciplines.
- Strengthen school;-to-work linkages, including the introduction of entrepreneurial skills.
- Raise the awareness about diversity, tolerance, ethic and civic responsibility.
- 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 innovation border on classroom size 20 pupils to a teacher and an 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 area of monitoring and maintenance of minimum standards. The introduction of Universal Basic Education, though launched in 1999, reflected in the 2004 edition of the policy. The freed, compulsory education was extended beyond primary school to secondary school. 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 instance a substantial overhauling of the subjects. Part of these phenomenal changes is the introduction of Civics as a separate subject in both primary and junior secondary schools.

In conclusion, the subsequent edition of the NPE clearly stated the country philosophy of education. In the earliest editions, in most cases there were a lot of confusion as to distinction between the country’s national goals and the underlying philosophy of Nigeria education.

The National goals, the philosophy of Education and the country educational goals according to the policy statement stated below:

### **National Goals**

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

### **Philosophy of Education**

- Education is an instrument for national development, and as such the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideals are all aspects of education.
- Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual’s sake and for the general development of the society.
- Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability.
- There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria.

Whether these Philosophies of Education are well articulated is subject to critical assessment of experts and planners.

### **National Educational Goals**

- The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- The inculcation of the types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society.
- The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around and

- The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

## 6. Conclusion

Several factors or forces have shaped curriculum in Nigeria. They border on religious inclination, political consideration, economy, culture, internal and external influence. Innovation is a continuous exercise. It expected that curriculum planners and theorist will constantly respond to require innovation as the need arises in Nigeria.

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