Reforming the Curriculum for Sustainability in Nigeria:
An Overview of Emergent Issues

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Abstract: There have been a handful of curriculum reforms in Nigeria since the colonial days. Such reforms have been informed by various concerns, developments, experiences and needs, all of which were regarded as good rationale or justifications for such reforms. Yet the Nigerian education system has not attained a desirable and enviable state. The purpose of this paper was to analyze the various forms of curriculum reforms that have been introduced in the Nigerian system of education. The paper established a theoretical foundation for its subject by discussing various evaluation questions that normally inform curriculum reforms. The paper also discussed reform typologies and strategies with a view to situating various curriculum reforms in Nigeria in a proper theoretical context. For a meaningful analysis, the paper classified the discussion into four different eras in Nigeria namely pre-colonial, colonial, pre-independence and modern era and highlights the specific educational reforms experienced by Nigeria, in each of these eras. Employing a combination of historical and philosophical methods, the paper analysed the factors militating against sustainable curriculum reforms in Nigeria and offers guidelines and practical recommendations for sustainable curriculum reforms for the Nigerian educational system.

Key Words: Reform, Curriculum Sustainability, Curriculum Innovation, Curriculum and Instruction, Change Typologies and Strategies.

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Introduction

The state of the curricula at every level of the Education System in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Indeed, there has been persistent criticism of the relevance of the entire Education System. As Olaniyan (2006) observed, the cry has been for innovation and change, social and economic relevance, scientific and technological orientation, just as it has been commented in the aspect of glorious ideas in curriculum development. At present, the yardstick is the quality of the outcome of the entire Education System; i.e., the students, and this is used as a parameter for measuring the effectiveness of the curriculum. The teachers, the pedagogy, the subject matter and the entire education system need serious overhauling. As observed by Alele-Williams (2004), cited in Olaniyan (2006) the curriculum appears irrelevant to mainly teenagers and especially to girls, whose attraction of the city life outweighs the future hope of good Education.

These limitations of curriculum offering must be addressed at least to reduce unemployment amongst youths and others. The quest to make the citizenry especially youths employable, and self-reliant, has led to the enactment of various reforms in the Nigerian Education System.

The Concept of Reform

The Chambers Dictionary of New Edition explains 'Reforms' as the attempt made to transform, restore, rebuild, redress, amend and bring a better life especially of an institution or, a system in order to suit the individual and the society.

Reforms are then predicated upon the need for orientation and repositioning of an existing status quo in order to attain an effective and efficient state (Ajayi, 2005). Reform implies making or becoming better. It indicates improvement or progress over what has been in use (Obasa, 2006). It involves positive change from any aspect of the society which will ultimately

affect life. Reform has always been taking place, otherwise no one would have heard of phases like the Stone Age, Industrial Age, Revolutionary Age, Technological period, etc. In essence, reform is not static and comes up in response to various needs in the society. Curriculum reform therefore connotes improvement in the educational system.

Evaluation Questions for Curriculum Reforms

Curriculum reform is synonymous with curriculum improvement which itself is related to curriculum innovation. It is hardly ever conceivable in the educational parlance that there can be curriculum reform without curriculum evaluation. In this context, evaluation is conceived as "a process or cluster of processes that people perform in order to gather and interpret data to decide whether to accept, change, or eliminate something in the curriculum in general or in an educational text book in particular" (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2007,p.33). It is obvious from the various questions that constitute the sense of direction in evaluation that curriculum reform is counting upon curriculum evaluation. According to Talmage (1985, p. 5), there are five types of such questions that educators could consider in evaluating curricula as discussed below.

One, the question of intrinsic value. The primary concern of this question is to assess the degree of goodness or appropriateness of the curriculum. This question deals with the curriculum as it is planned and also with the finished curriculum as it is implemented.   Ornstein and Hunkins (2007, p. 332) illustrate this question with a situation where a school is:

> dealing with a new language arts curriculum; and therefore seeks to know whether the curriculum incorporates the best thinking to date on what is known about the content of language arts, the arrangement of that content, and the presentation of that content and whether 'specialists in linguistics, composition, grammar, and communication give the curriculum planned high marks.

It is obvious from this illustration that the question of intrinsic value is primarily concerned with whether the degree of suitability of a curriculum content, structure, organization and mode of delivery are in keeping with the philosophical foundations and ideological bases of such a curriculum. The relevance of such an evaluation question to reforms lies in its potential to stimulate or propel a curriculum change.

Two, the question of instrumental value which is normally stated as 'what is the curriculum good for and who is its intended audience?" According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2007, p. 333), educators "deal with the first part of this query by attempting to link up the curriculum planned with the goals, and objecting whether what is planned in the programme is going to address the goals and objectives stated". This explains why such an evaluation is made by such evaluators through an examination of the finished document. This question is also concerned with whether what is planned in the curriculum will be attained, or to what extent, and by which students. In sum, this question concerns who the curriculum serves, as well as the quality of students' experiences. Questions such as these are capable of stimulating curriculum reform.

Three, the question of comparative value which becomes necessary in the face of possible new programmes normally informs such questions as: Is this new programme better than the one it is supposed to replace? In the education parlance, innovations are introduced and new programmes floated when people confirm the inadequacy of the existing one. However, some of those involved in the effort calculated at bringing about reforms compare different programmes with different goals and different orientations. This explains why it is regarded as technically wrong to compare a programme that stresses skill training with one that stresses contemporary issues of the world. In such a situation where the two programmes involved are of different judgments or decisions, the comparative value is normally a function of the values people hold as educators. In a situation where the programme being suggested for implementation is of the same type as the

existing one. Programmes may be assessed in terms of their "ease of delivery, cost, demand on resources, role in the existing school organization and responsiveness to expectations of the community" (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2007, p. 333).

Four, the question of idealization value is concerned with how to make the programme the best possible. With regard to this question, educators are "concerned with taking their information on how the programme is working and asking themselves if there are alternative ways to make the programme even better to heighten students' achievement or to involve students more fully in their own learning" The relevance of these questions to curriculum reform lies in the fact that educators are expected to continually think of appropriate ways of refining, fine-tuning and advancing the quality of a programme in terms of content, material, methods, and others in a way that enables students to benefit maximally from a programme (Jaeger, 1976).

Five, the question of decision value which is a product of the above enumerated four evaluation questions constitutes the sources of evidence that is expected to be documented in a manner that can decide whether to retain, modify or discard the new programme. The question of decision value revolves around the need for the evaluator to consider the implication of the decision or decision made which themselves "need to be assessed as the curriculum is delivered in the school classrooms" (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2007, p. 334).

These five evaluation questions fulfill the role of both guidelines and guide light for the evaluation and ultimately provide the rationale for curriculum reforms. It is these questions that provide the curriculum evaluator with data from which believable inferences are made for further action. Such an action normally takes the form of curriculum reforms.

Reform Typologies

There cannot be a sustainable curriculum without a good understanding of the reformation process. That explains why individuals involved in responsibilities revolving around curriculum innovation and implementation are expected to understand the nature of change or reform. This is of paramount importance due to the fact that a poor understanding of the complexities of change or reform among such curriculum workers normally culminate in resistance, lack of cooperation or nonchalant attitude to the curriculum reforms being introduced. That explains why Bennis (1966) identifies some typologies of change or reform. They include planned reform in which those involved have equal power and function in a prescribed fashion; coercion reform, which is characterized by one group determining the goals by intentionally excluding others from participating; as well as interaction reform which is characterized by mutual goal setting and a fairly equal power distribution among groups. These also are what is tagged natural or random reform which is the opposite of planned reform.

This, according to Ornstein and Hunkins (2007) is the type of reform that occurs with no apparent goal setting on the part of the participants. Often natural change is what occurs in schools. Curricula are "adjusted or modified and implemented not as a result of careful analysis but as a response to unanticipated events" (p. 307). An instance of this is demands by legislatures or pressure groups that certain programmes be implemented as such demands are inconsistent and based on whim or rhetoric (p.307).   The diverse nature of reform typologies logically requires diverse strategies, which may be explained in the following section.

Reform Strategies

Chin (1967) seems to have drawn some inspiration from Bennis (1966) when he discusses three types of reform strategies one year after the appearance of Bennis' in work.   One of the types of strategies identified by him is

empirical rational strategies which emphasize the importance of appreciating the need for reform as well as having the competence to implement it. Another type of strategies addressed by Bennis is normative re-educative strategies which are grounded in the assumption that humans will change if they are made to realize the need to modify their values, attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills. The third types of strategies are called power strategies. These require that individuals comply with the wishes of their senior colleagues. Ornstein and Hunkins (2007, p. 3007), however, maintain that "although outright strategies of coercion are rarely used in schools, it is not uncommon for those in power to "coerce" people into compliance by offering material and symbolic rewards in exchange for accepting new programmes".

Approaches to Curriculum Reform

The most meaningful and comprehensive analysis of the various approaches to curriculum reforms is that offered by McNeil (2000). He investigates the reform process by using complexity as the organizer thereby identifying five different approaches: substitution, alteration, perturbations, restructuring and value-orientation.

Substitution is an alteration in which one element may be substituted for another. This is the most common approach to curriculum reform. Alteration is the practice of introducing into existing materials and programmes new contents, items, materials, or procedures that are just insignificant or minor and can therefore be embraced readily.

Perturbations are reforms that could at first disrupt a program but can later be adjusted to stabilize by the curricula leader. When a school principal adjusts class schedules it affects the time allowed for teaching a particular subject. This is one common example of perturbation.

Restructuring, it occurs when reforms culminate in the modification of the entire schooling system as is the case where new concepts of teaching such

as team teaching or differentiated staffing arrangement are introduced. Value orientation approach fundamentally affects the participation curriculum orientations.   This occurs when curriculum reforms are pursued by redirecting the perceptions of participants or curriculum implementers. One major peculiarity of this approach is that "if teachers do not adjust their value domain, any changes enacted are most likely going to be short-lived. (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2007, p. 308).

In their guidelines for changes and innovation in the secondary school curriculum, Levime et al. (1985) opine that for curriculum reforms to be successfully implemented five guidelines should be followed. Such guidelines are of direct relevance to curriculum reforms in Nigeria and are therefore discussed at length. One, reforms designed to improve student achievement must be technically sound. The implication of this is that reforms should be grounded in research about what works and what does not work, as opposed to whatever dressings for improvement happen to be popular today or tomorrow.

Two, successful reforms require change in the structure of a traditional school. The implication of this is that there should be major modification of the way students and teachers are assigned to classes and operate in the school setting.

Three, reforms must be manageable and feasible for the average teacher. The implication of this is that reform objectives must be both realistic and attainable.   For, implementation of successful reform efforts must be organic rather than bureaucratic. The implication of this is that curriculum reform implementation must permit some deviation from the original plan. This is flexibility as against rigidity implementation.

Five, a curriculum reform should not be one that is all-embracing or all-encompassing.   This means that a reform effort must avoid the "do something, do anything" syndrome. There should be a definite curriculum

plan that will enable the curriculum reformer to focus his efforts, time and money on content and activities that are sound, rational and well grounded.

Some Curriculum Reforms in Nigeria

This can be categorized into four stages of socio-political development. This includes,

- Pre-colonial era;
- Colonial era;
- Early Independence era; and
- The Modem era.

Pre-Colonial Era: It was a period of indigenous education and the policy was based on traditional educational activities, such as farming, weaving, hunting, fishing, and pot making to mention a few. The curriculum activities of this era were primitive and localized. According to Babalola (2008, p. 12), "unemployment was not an issue at this period because education was tied to vocations while the main guiding principle for education was functionalism".   According to Ajeyalemi, Babalola, "the methodology of teaching was based on practical activities as well as observation through the apprenticeship system" (p.12).

With the advent of the missionaries in Nigeria, the Europeans introduced the western education which is still in practice with some modifications of the curriculum.

Colonial Era: This period covered 1841-1960.The major aims of education during the colonial era were to produce abundant semi-skilled labour. The curriculum content was summarized as the Bible and the Plough (Fafunwa 1974).

The curriculum focused mainly on religion (morals), reading, writing and arithmetic. This curriculum type was strictly guided by the various

denominations up till the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1945, some reforms, mainly of the restructuring type, were made in the entire curriculum. Through Phelps Stokes Commission and Sir Eric Ashby Commissions, a number of remarkable modifications were made in the education system. For instance, more school subjects were introduced to expand the curriculum content and make some reasonable emphasis on the quality and standard. In this regard, there were both the substitution and alteration approaches to curriculum reform. It was a period when the 3-3 system of education was in practice and more teachers were trained to suit the changes of the curricula. However, this period fell short of the overall interest of the Nigerian people. As a result, the Nigerian nationalists and the British government had a divergent view on what the policies and the entire curriculum of schools should be.

Before the establishment of Yaba Higher College in 1943, "the Colonial heads of government departments in Nigeria provided a type of post-secondary education in the form of departmental training programmes to some categories of Nigerian workers" (Babalola, 2008a, p. 12). The Railway Training School, opened in Lagos in 1901 for training African staff in mechanical engineering and as engine drivers was the first of such departmental training programmes.

Babalola further observes that "other higher education programmes established between 1908 and 1938 were to address specific technical skills needed by the colonial government in the area of survey, marine, as well as post and telegraphs" (p.12). Of the period between 1901 and 1922, Phelps stoke, Commission on Education in Tropical Africa recommended to the Colonial Government to bring together two or more training schools to form an institution of Higher Learning to meet the needs of Africa (Babalola). The outcome of this recommendation was the merger by the Colonial Government in 1932, of the training school in Yaba and Zaria to become Yaba Higher College, which was formally opened in 1934. Consequently, the college expanded its programme to include agriculture, engineering, surveying and teacher education, while the departments of Forestry and

Veterinary Science were only added later. However, Kanu (2006) observes that the curriculum of Yaba Higher College satisfied the needs of the government but fell short of satisfying the higher education aspirations of Nigerian who, according to Babalola (2008b, p. 13) "continued to agitate for the establishment of a "relevant institution".

This agitation probably culminated in the establishment of the University College in 1948.   Again, Kanu (2006) observes that "contrary to the expectation of Nigerians that the development of higher education in the country would meet the aspirations of the people, the University College Ibadan restricted student intake and majority of aspiring candidates could not gain admission into the institution" (p.13).   That explains why the government, in an attempt to meet the social aspirations for Higher Education in Nigeria, in 1952 approved the Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology to partner with some professional bodies in the United Kingdom.   The aim was to provide all forms of higher education of non-university character, by offering courses in teacher training, engineering, architecture, estate management, social work, secretarial work as well as Higher School Certificate courses in all academic fields (Babalola, 2008a, p. 14). Notable among the educational reforms recorded during this period, as summarized by Ashby commission, were:

1. establishment of the University of Nigeria;
2. widening of the curriculum of the University College, Ibadan and developing it into a full university;
3. provision for wide diversity and greater flexibility in university education;
4. introduction of engineering, medicine, low, commerce, agriculture and other courses of similar nature, into the university curriculum; and
5. making the two Nigerian universities independent of each other with each conferring its own degrees.

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that with the exception of perturbation, all the various approaches to educational reforms were experienced during the colonial era in Nigeria.

Post-Independence Era (1960-1980): A major educational feature of the Post-Independence era was the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, the outcome of which was the enactment of the 1977 National Policy on Education, which restructured the curriculum and made it more practical, functional and relevant (Ajeyalemi, 2008). According to Babalola (2008a), the conference attracted the presence of stakeholders including market women and farmers all contributed to reexamining Nigerian Education, condemning the purely academic nature of the curriculum and recommended reforms for functionalism and national relevance. It is remarkable to note that since the enactment of the National Policy on Education, "major curriculum development activities were driven by both the need to implement the national policy and global consciousness" (p.14). Ajeyalemi (Babalola, 2008, p. 14) summarizes the National Policy as tending to promote training for skills acquisition; productivity and empowerment; globalization and international competition "The national policy also included training in terms of equality of gender and educational opportunities; leadership and good governance; cultural and religious integration, knowledge and applications of Information and Communications Technology (ICT); entrepreneurship, and uniformity of standards and quality".

Another major educational development of the post-independence era was the emergence in 1975 of Nigeria second generation universities, a total of seven universities in all. Such new universities were intended to cater for the educational needs of the 12 new states created by the Gowon Administration in 1970. The same period also witnessed the introduction of the concepts of basic studies and Interim Joint Admission Board (IJMB) to increase northern quota in university education. Another major educational development of this era was that university reforms were guided by political debates surrounding the international trend in education. The period also

witnessed the approval by the Federal Government of Operational License to private universities.

We can summarize this era as a period of crisis which affected the entire educational sector. The inherent problems of curriculum of this era, according to Igwe (2000), were the following:

1. The bias towards literary and academic subjects.
2. Many teachers were academically and professionally unqualified.
3. The curriculum was mainly British in outlook.
4. The curriculum was irrelevant to the needs of individuals and society.
5. The curriculum fell short of contents and modem techniques.
6. Gross imbalance existed in the entire school curriculum.
7. Lack of relevant textbooks and uniformity in the education practices in the different parts of Nigeria.

However, a series of workshops, conferences and commissions were constituted by the government to look into these problems and suggest curricular improvement. The period between 1966 and 1979 witnessed the incursion of the military and contributions towards curriculum reforms. One of the remarkable steps was the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which led to the 6-3-3-4 educational system in Nigeria.

The Modern Era: This era can be described as era driven by millennium exigencies due to the global consciousness about science, information and communication technology.

Governments all over the world are doing a lot to involve all their citizenry in quality and compulsory education that can empower them for social transformation. The crucial summit of the Heads of States of the United Nations and Commonwealth of Nations seems to talk more on individual needs through education, This, of course, is another pointer to Nigeria to look into what goes into her educational programmes through curriculum reforms that can sustain the global competition in this 21st Century.

Nigeria re-launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in 1999, since then, the country has been fine-tuning her education system.

This is in keeping with the agreements reached at such global summits as the World Conference on Education for All   (Jomtien, 1990), UNESCO World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal in 2000 and the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York. While the Dakar Summit reviewed the Education For All goals that were earlier articulated at Jomtien, 1990, the New York summit articulated and adopted the Millennium Development Goals.

The agreements urge the government and the institutions to design, plan and implement educational programmes that can achieve the following:

a) training programmes and skill acquisition;
b) productivity and empowerment;
c) globalization and international competition;
d) gender and equality;
e) leadership and good governance;
f) cultural and Religious integration;
g) information and Communications Technology (ICT);
h) entrepreneurship; and
i) uniformity of standard and quality.

The entire curriculum content and context require a systematic and sequential approach. In this context, one may ask "How do we achieve this type of curriculum reform that can sustain our educational system?"

Implications of Curriculum Reform to Educational System

We live in a world where everything changes with time. The focus of any new education system is to ensure that students who graduate from the system can read, write and have the requisite technical knowledge and other skills to either enter the Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, etc. or become employable or self employed.

– Curricular reforms enhance the development of education at all levels. (Primary, Secondary and Tertiary)
– Reforms facilitate the art of teaching and learning.
– Curriculum reforms help in promoting relevance, self-reliance, good morals etc, in the Education System.
– Curriculum reforms should promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and society.
– Curriculum reform Prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Scope of Curriculum Reform:

Curriculum reform involves the following:

o Curriculum design and content (standards of knowledge, curriculum balance).
o Pedagogical methodologies and instructional programmes (teaching and learning).
o Textbooks and instructional resources (Teaching learning materials).
o Assessment Frameworks and procedures (standards and qualifications).
o Structures, constraints and options for progression(academic, vocational routes).

Factors Militating against the Sustainability of Curriculum Reforms

A lot of factors have accounted for the failure of our educational reforms. It is unfortunate to note that those in the forefront of educational reforms have not heeded or taken seriously such important suggestions. Educational reforms in the past decades ignored, or took little or no account of the African people's representation of the educated, ideal citizen which is the main outcome of the education and knowledge systems. These systems include structures and processes of storing and transmitting knowledge, skills and values deemed necessary for the purposes of cultural survival and continuity (Bakalevu, 2003).

Schaefer (1990) observed that while reformers generally begin with a great sense of optimism about what can be accomplished, the track record of achieving lasting educational change is poor. Other factors militating against the sustainability of reforms in Nigeria include:

- Faulty or unrealistic goals from the onset.
- Inadequate planning for implementation.
- Lack of adequate political will to implement reforms including, gross under-funding of programmes; constant programme somersault; and abandonment of existing programmes.
- Inadequate experience or expertise of reform implementers (teachers, other practitioners)
- Corruption.

Sustainability of Curriculum Reforms

To ensure sustainability of curriculum reforms in Nigeria, the following should seriously be considered:

- Selecting an appropriate unit of change that provides insight into how the overall system operates.

- Reform efforts become more successful when adaptation to local conditions takes precedence over replication of prior successes elsewhere.This adaptation forms the basis of the value added by researchers.
- Reform efforts conducted by researchers-schools partnerships are more likely to be sustained when there is prior assessment of school system and community readiness for change. Sustainability also requires that incremental changes alternate with periods of reflection, consolidation and buy-in by all partners. These include parents and the wider community. This is a stepwise strategy that promotes buy-in from sceptics and establishes a culture of continuous improvements.
- The momentum of reform needs to be maintained by continuous dialogue and form active assessment between periods of innovation and consolidation of gains, impact analysis, and identification of further needs.
- The role of intermediaries, often researchers who interact with multiple components of the school system and community is critical to tracing the leakages that aid or inhibit the success and sustainability of reform, and engage researchers in the conditions of school life.
- Scaling a model out to more diverse populations of students, teachers and schools is as important to sustainability and continuous improvement as scaling up to larger numbers of participants similar in characteristics to those in the initial efforts. Scaling out is likely to identify weak implementation areas.
- The Nigerian Educational Structure needs to be flexible to cope with the changing needs of our modem society. The philosophy of every educational programme must be channeled towards the present day reality. In essence, the curriculum should lay more emphasis on practical skills and technical training.
- The capacity building should be mapped out. This is to make sure that adequate numbers of quality teachers are trained and that relevant materials (books, equipment etc) designed to suit the programme meant for the reforms.

- The methodology of teaching should be considered very essential. Emphasis should be on problem-solving and critical thinking approach.   There should be constant review of data related to classroom encounter.
- The Evaluation procedure should be more critical of teacher and job satisfaction. It entails a critical appraisal of what goes on inside and outside the classroom. By so doing, an intervention measure must be provided at all levels of education.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the various curriculum reforms experienced in Nigeria since the inception of the country, with specific illustrations from various areas. The article grounded its analysis in a theoretical framework and contemporary scholarship of curriculum and instruction. The paper also addressed the factors that are capable of militating against sustainable curriculum reforms and offered specific guidelines and practical recommendations for effective introduction and implementation of reforms in education system in Nigeria.

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