Abstract

The paper is essentially a re-engineering of primary school curriculum for self employment and productivity in Nigeria. The early curriculum was designed in relation to the needs of the Christian missionaries and the colonial government. This was why training in agriculture or preparation for self-employment in other areas did not constitute an integral part of the early curriculum. This thinking has misdirected the orientation of our educational system where we train job seekers and not job creators. Some mistakes were made in crafting the curriculum of our primary school in such a way that the content elements are too numerous to be exhausted within the specified periods. This raises doubt whether one teacher can effectively teach all the subjects as is presently the case considering the tender age of the pupils to assimilate all the subjects, too large a class, and content element of the curriculum laying more emphasis on cognitive development of the individual learner at the detriment of psychomotor domain. As part of re-engineering through innovative process, the study recommended a reduction of subjects to a manageable size, reintroduction of crafts for skill acquisition, employment of specialist teachers, periodic evaluation of the curriculum in relation to the needs of the society, laying more emphasis on practical work and reintroduction of moral and civics education for re-orientating our poor value system.

When we think about schooling what readily comes to our mind is the curriculum. Curriculum has been the central problem in education and the main concern of scholars and virtually all those responsible for the education of the citizenry. Curriculum issues, either in an explicit or an implicit manner, are inextricably linked to current thinking and action on educational concerns and reforms around the world (Ajibola, 2008). Experiences of educational reforms almost all over the world have shown that curriculum is at the same time a policy and a technical issue, a process and a product, involving a wide range of institutions and actors.

The Nigerian educational system has gone through various developments and changes vis-à-vis curriculum issues. The first major trend in curriculum development in Nigeria was the arrival of the Christian missions in 1842 when their education system interfered with the indigenous education system. The coming of the missionaries signaled the introduction of formal schooling into Nigeria when they established missionary schools and the teaching of the four R’s. The missionaries alone opened these schools and controlled the curriculum in Nigeria. They formulated the objectives, content and methods of teaching the subjects included in the curriculum of those schools. Basically, the schools provided instructions in the four R’s: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Religion (Fafunwa, 1969 cited in Adeyinka, 1988).

The type of education the missionaries met in Nigeria did not have any facilitating effect on the attainment of their objectives which was evangelical. Adeyinka (1988) asserted that the main objectives of the missionaries in opening these primary schools were to train teacher-catechists, lay readers and cooks, particularly to give new converts basic instructions in English language so that they could be more useful in the missionary work which was their primary assignment in Nigeria. Thus, the idea of the missionaries before 1882 was to serve their whims and caprices, and that of the colonialists who they paved way for.

Although the missionaries intended to confine their activities initially to the provision of primary education, they later established secondary schools of the grammar types in some respective
local environments. The curriculum covered English Grammar, and Composition, History, Geography, Bookkeeping, Latin and Greek Grammar, etc. Moral education which was their focus essentially influenced the curriculum and the general social life of the schools. Their curriculum which was purely academic, made them to disregard other areas such as scientific and technical/vocational education needed for the middle and high level manpower. Thus, very little attention and consideration was given to the future needs of the pupils, because they felt the type of curriculum they provided was adequate for the type of white-collar jobs that were normally available for the products of the early grammar schools. The philosophy of the missionary’s curriculum was, thus not geared towards integrating Nigerians to their environment. This was why training in agriculture or preparation for self-employment in other areas did not constitute an integral part of the early curriculum (Adeyinka, 1988).

A search for new direction in educational programme that is capable of taking us away from the doldrums of unemployment continues. Re-engineering primary school curriculum through Innovation becomes a master key that could open doors to self-employment and productivity, since primary education is the most dependable parameter for the measurement of the operational success of education at whatever level.

Primary Education

Primary education, as the name implies, is prime and so must be given the prime position. A sound primary education in the thinking of Maduewesi (2005) is a precondition not only to sound secondary and tertiary education but to continuing education. Children need a sound primary education much the same way a house needs real solid foundation in order to stand. Primary education is the gateway to whatever individuals can achieve through education. The National policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) shares the same view by describing it as the success or failure of the whole system. We need to know that efforts made at improving the quality of education at the secondary level, without first laying durable foundation at the primary level, are very likely to fail. It is like the first leg of a relay race in Athletics of which when faulty, would be difficult to correct. The quality of primary education depends on the adequacy and relevance of the curriculum. Wheeler (2000) viewed curriculum as the mechanism through which the educational system inculcates into the learner the knowledge, skills and attitudes which society has prescribed. Salami (2008) in his own way defined curriculum as a total experience with which the school deals with educating young people. It is a total environment in which education takes place including the child, the teacher, subject matter content and the physical and psychological environment. A good school curriculum, Salami emphasized, should be continuous, dynamic, innovative to reflect the value of its immediate environment.

Curriculum experts have observed with dismay that primary school curriculum is not contributing significantly to the attainment of quality education. This may be due to lack of periodic evaluation of curriculum to its adequacy and ensure its relevance in meeting societal needs and expectation. A case in point is the National primary school curriculum crafted in 1987. (Oforka 2011). By simple calculation this curriculum is thirty five years old since its production without a review. Beside the content elements are too broad to be exhausted within the specified periods.

Ivowi (1999) and Adeniyi (2000) were of the view that primary education curriculum is over loaded in terms of content. They wondered whether teachers can conveniently teach all the subjects that are contained in the curriculum. Apart from the congestion, a situation where one teacher handles all the subjects at this level is also worrisome.

Oforka (2011) observed that the curriculum does not indicate the entry behaviour (pre-requisite) which should relate with the topic and determine the performance objectives (expected learning outcome) to be achieved. Mba (2002) equally noted that there are lapses in certain aspects of the curriculum. Some performance objectives for instance are stated ambiguously and therefore do not capture the three domains of learning. Such objectives are equally not stated in behavioral terms. Ibrahim (2008) remarked that method of conducting continuous assessment was not specified in the curriculum. Besides formative and summative evaluation are not highlighted. Emphasis is more on
theory than practical work. All these are lapses which do not give primary education the need to prepare the children adequately for self-reliance in this competitive world.

Concept of Curriculum

Curriculum means different things to different people, probably because of its Latin origin. In Latin “Currus” means “running” while “currere” may be interpreted as “running a course”. Thus, the term curriculum according to Eya (2006) referred to the course (or programme) of studies which pupils have to run in a school or institution to complete that academic programme. As a race track, it has starting and end points. Curriculum according to Akudolu in Eya (2006) is the ground students cover in their race to acquire knowledge. It refers to all that students do through which they learn from the day they enter school to the day they leave school. But Akudolu belongs to the school of thought that holds the view that Education is the acquisition of worthwhile knowledge and since curriculum is the instrument used for the transmission of knowledge, the definition of curriculum has to be limited to what is worthwhile whether it is knowledge, attitude or skill.

However, what is worthwhile today may not be the same tomorrow because we live in a dynamic world characterized by change. In almost all areas of human endeavour, there is need for change. The history of man’s existence on earth is a story of his endeavour to improve on his former status and processes of doing things. In his sociology, politics and economy the story is the same, hence it is said that nothing is constant except change. (Nnadi, 2010)

Education is supposed to be a problem solving instrument for the society and since society’s problems change over time so must education change as well. On the other hand curriculum as perceived by Eze (2006) is the instrument whereby the educational system strives to attain its goals and when there is a perceived need to restructure the educational system, the curriculum as a matter of exigency must change, this is the link between curriculum and re-engineering through innovation.

Re-engineering Curriculum through Innovation

Innovation is a vital process of healthy existence of any educational system. It often comes as a result of dissatisfaction, stagnation, monotony, seeking a solution to problems or as a step towards attaining a set standard.

Wehmeier (2000) defined innovation as bringing in new methods and ideas or making changes in a given situation. Ogu (2001) saw innovation as a deliberate introduction of something new as a way of solving individual or group problems, or a way of accomplishing goals. To him, innovation is deliberate and does not happen accidentally. Innovation in relation to curriculum means introduction of novelty into the curriculum. As a result, the curriculum contents, objectives, learning experiences, methodology and instructional materials are subject to change when they are obsolete or have outlived their importance. When the curriculum content are no longer addressing any of the societal issues, they have to be changed with the ones that have direct effect in treating the social needs and problems.

Innovation in any aspect or component of curriculum should be introduced not as an end but as a means of solving some identified problems. Thus an innovation ought to be purposeful if it must be worthwhile. According to Mkpa, (1987), the desire to innovate may be associated with a number of purposes such as the need to cope with pressure from social change, the need to make use of research findings geared towards improved teaching and learning, the need to explore opportunities with potentials for improved education, and the need for education that is more relevant to the contemporary situation in the nation. This last one is most apt to this study.

Curriculum Innovation an Imperative for Functional Education and Productivity

If it is dangerous not to educate a man, it is rather more dangerous to educate a man that cannot be meaningfully engaged in the world of work. Poor educational foundation and ineffective institutions in Nigeria have left the nation in the state of low productivity. The nation’s youth unemployment and underemployment is shooting up the sky, the federal government of Nigeria
acknowledged that about 80% of Nigerian youths are unemployed and 10% underemployed (Daily Trust, 2008). The then Education minister, Sam Egwu, in this day (2009) lamented that the poor quality of graduates the nation’s universities churn out every year is worrisome and therefore needs to be addressed.

This to some reasonable extent can be attributed to the provision of a particular form of academic education that has generated unrealistic employment expectations for clerical and white collar jobs. What Nigeria needs today are no longer youths, graduates or school leavers to fill up vacant posts in offices but educated people who are innovative, enterprising and who can be productively self employed. Primary school as the first point of entry in a formal school system must foster a spirit of innovation in the pupils and inculcate in them the desire to try out, experiment, create and engage in one’s own productive activity. Subjects taught in primary school should not always emphasise on cognitive development of the individual learner alone but span across other two domains of affective and psychomotor. There should be a way of relating theoretical knowledge to practical skills and this demands the place of crafts, weaving, artistic design, hand kerchief knitting, moulding drawing, drama, fine and applies arts etc. In the years gone by crafts/ handwork were allotted a place in the school time table. During this period, the pupils were brought outside under the supervision of their teachers. The boys were engaged in basket making and weaving while the girls took up knitting and design works. In examinations crafts were graded and scores assigned accordingly. This fostered the spirit of commitment and competition as each tried to out do each other.

The introduction of crafts in the school time table was meant to teach the pupils skills acquisition to prepare them for the world of tomorrow. However, the gradual decline of hand work/craft started with monetizing these crafts by way of accepting money in place of baskets, brooms, hand kerchief and other artistic works, and money finally took over craft. Apart from re-introduction of crafts as part of the innovative process, the education of these children at this level of their formative stage can be tailored to entrepreneurial studies. Entrepreneurship education at this point can take the form of teaching the pupils, how to make soap, detergents, confectionaries, pomade etc. This may not require on account of their age complicated skills but the fundamentals bearing in mind their maturational level. Entrepreneurship education is a clear manifestation of effective manipulation of human intelligence as demonstrated in creative performance, bringing out the best in individual.

Hythi and O’Gorman (2004) maintained that entrepreneurship education provides technological training and innovative skills which has the potentials of assisting individuals to set up small scale business out fits. Dwerryhouse (2007) described entrepreneurship education as an experiential learning, that is, learning to interpret experience, skills and knowledge, to get prepared to start with a new venture.

There is need for carefully examining the areas of primary education curriculum where entrepreneurship education can be infused to encourage and harness the skills and potentialities of these children while they are young, in order to promote employment opportunities when they grow up. When this foundation is firmly laid we shall in the future be harvesting from the educational system where a large proportion of school leavers and graduates are self employed.

There is need to employ specialist teachers in primary schools to teach, a scenario where one teacher handles all the subjects is no more relevant to the demand of the contemporary age. Primary school curriculum should be reviewed within an interval of every five years to create opportunity for infusion of new ideas, concept, methodology and instructional material. By this way the learner will be provided with enriching ideas and learning opportunities that will equip him/her to stand the challenge of tomorrow.

Curriculum Innovation as a Panacea for our Poor value System

In Nigeria today, corruption, kidnapping, bombing, prostitution, drug peddling, child trafficking and other forms of social vices are the order of the day. People are now inclined more to
the acquisition of wealth, power and influence with total disregard for justice, fair play and morality. The trials the nation is passing through today are products of this decadence that has enslaved the conscience of our people over the years.

The perpetrators of this act of man’s inhumanity to man may have forgotten that no prospective investor will ever dream of investing in a state where lives and property are not guaranteed. The implication of frequent bomb explosion under the guise of religion or whatever reason is sending a dangerous signal with obvious economic crisis. It is stating the obvious that as things are now in Borno State and some other states in the north, many industries and business outfits are closing down for fear of the activities of the Boko Haram group, with its attendant consequences of disengaging their work force. This situation is likened to a proverbial saying – that, while people are crying for the man rat bit to death, lizard was busy sharpening his own teeth for more casualties. This simply means that while the nation is saddled with graduate unemployment, those who are already engaged are being disengaged on ground of crisis borne out of poor value system. As Boko Haram group is busy wreaking its havoc in the north, the South East is under the mercy of kidnappers while in the Niger Delta the militants are blowing of the oil installations and holding people hostage. All for the sake of acquisition of wealth, power and influence.

If we are prepared to tackle these monsters head long, we are bound to see them as a war that must be fought successfully from the grassroots. In any society, the education system must perform positive and dynamic roles in sustaining and improving the society. It is interesting to note that preparation for useful living has been identified as one of the broad aims of education (Baikie 2002). The primary education needs innovation in areas of moral and civic education to teach the pupils ingredients capable of equipping them with the skills, understanding, attitudes, habits and appreciation that can contribute in achieving value education. It should be noted that positive attitude and values can only be effectively acquired through deliberate planned school curriculum.

The innovative agenda of primary school curriculum should be tailored in the direction of value education which should be seen as a means of transmitting into the younger ones of Nigerian society good norms, values and virtues. In this way the outlook of the citizens become more global and increase their commitment to the society in which they belong. The act of patriotism ie love for one’s country will make them think less of what they will get from the country but more importantly what the country can positively get from them. This will reduce the spate of vandalism and more so encourage industrialists to invest within which is capable of generating employment opportunities for our graduates.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the findings of this study implied that those lapses associated with primary school curriculum constitute the problems of primary school for laying a solid foundation where other levels of education should anchor. Utilization of the strategies enumerated in this study will promote the relevance of primary school in the war against unemployment in Nigeria.

Recommendations
- Crafts/handwork should be reintroduced in primary school curriculum
- Moral instruction and Civics education should be re-introduced and to be handled by specialists in this field
- There is need for government to initiate action towards re-examination of the current primary school curriculum with a view to expunging any aspect that is not so important.
- Government should consider adopting the idea of subject teacher in the primary schools, whereby a teacher teaches only the subject or subjects of his specialization to more than one class.
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