

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL (JSS) IN NIGERIA: A WAY FORWARD FOR FUNCTIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Education has been described as the channel through which national and social development can take place. In Nigeria, to ensure that every child within the school age access education, the government in 1999 under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme. The UBE programme was to take care of education at the foundation level. It covers: Pre-Nursery Education, Primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) Education. According to the National Policy on Education (NPE), education at this level shall be free and compulsory for every child that is within school age. This paper takes look at implementing the curriculum for a functional JSS education in Nigeria. The paper x-rayed briefly the origin of JSS education in Nigeria, objectives of JSS education, JSS curriculum, curriculum implementation, curriculum implementation and functional junior secondary school. It also, looked at challenges of having a functional JSS education in Nigeria, conclusion and the way forward.

Introduction

Education is a vehicle that conveys the overall development of the society. Based on this, Ogbwu, Ukwueze and Ukoja (2017), define education as a weapon for inculcating social values and practices. For Oteh (2017), education has been recognized over the years as an instrument for national development and social change. Education can therefore, be defined as that type of training that will enable man to develop himself and his society at large. With education, it means that education is important and there is no society that can survive without education. Having realized this, the government of Nigeria has always at different times made efforts via formulation of policies and programmes that are aimed at making functional and relevant. Examples of such policies and programmes include among others the 6-3-3-4 and the Universal Basic Education (UBE). To make sure these policies and programmes address the socio-economic challenges of the people, they have constantly been reviewed to reflect changes in the global socio-economic structure and activities.

To ensure that the reviews in the Nigerian educational policies and programmes are implemented at all levels of the nation's education system, the government has fashioned out its philosophy of education as a guide. The Nigerian education philosophy according to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014:1), shall include: Education is an instrument for national development and social change; Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria; Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society; Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

This philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. Analyzing the contents of this philosophy of education it may be observed that item (4), lays emphasis on compulsory education for all without any hindrance. This shows the nation's commitment towards implementing the international protocols like the Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Realizing the burden of achieving the nation's educational philosophy, the government of Nigeria has structured education in the country as follows; Early Child Care and Development aged 0-4 years Basic Education aged 5-15years. It encompasses pre-primary 1 year, 6years of primary Education and 3 years of Junior Secondary School Education; Post Basic Education of 3 years in Senior Secondary Schools and Technical Colleges; and Tertiary Education provided in Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Universities (FRN, 2014; VII).

Looking at the structure of the Nigerian education as given above, the basic level education which includes; Pre-primary, Primary and Junior Secondary School education are the foundation upon which other levels of education are built. The focus of this paper therefore, is implementing the curriculum for a functional Junior Secondary School Education in Nigeria. The paper briefly looked at; the origin of JSS education in Nigeria, objectives of JSS education, curriculum implementation, curriculum implementation and functional JSS education, challenges, conclusion and the way forward

The Origin of Junior Secondary School Education in Nigeria

Before the Nigerian political independence, the system of education was the 6-5-2-4 (Ughamadu, 2006). What this means is that a learner in any formal education setting at that time was expected to spend six (6) years in primary school, five (5) years in secondary school, two (2) years at advance level and four (4) years at the tertiary level. This system placed emphasis on the development of only the cognitive domain of the learner and the method of learning only equipped the learners to learn facts by rote and regurgitation when needed (Offorma, 2019). An education system which can only develop the cognitive domain of the learner is not comprehensive. The system was faulty, based on the incomprehensiveness of the education system in the country at that time, the problem of human capacity among others could not be addressed. This became a challenge to the nation in its quest for nationhood and national development.

To address the challenge which was given birth to by the faulty education system, a national curriculum conference was convened in 1969. That was the very first national curriculum conference held in the country (Offorma, 2019). It was the proceedings of the 1969 conference according to Ughamadu (2006) that eventually culminated in the National Policy on Education published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 2004. Ughamadu further stated that it was in the educational policy statement of government that the 6-3-3-4 system of education was enshrined. The 6-3-3-4 system means six (6) years of primary education, three (3) years of junior secondary education, three (3) years of senior secondary education and four (4) years of tertiary education.

Obviously, from the foregoing, it is evident that the new system (6-3-3-4) gave birth to what is known today as the Junior Secondary School (JSS). The JSS according to FRN (2014:12) is the education which a child receives immediately after primary school education. It is a transitional stage of education between the primary and the senior secondary education. This therefore, means that any child in Nigeria who does not pass through the JSS level of education cannot proceed to the senior secondary level. JSS level is a component of the basic education and therefore falls within the foundational level of education in Nigeria. It is like a building block where higher learning can stand. It is also, necessary to note that

learners at this stage are within the age bracket of 11-15 years old, which is the stage Piaget in Nwachukwu (1999), described in his cognitive development theory as the formal operational. In other words children at this age can engage in abstract thinking and abstract operations with symbols can be carried out mentally. So far it can be deduced that the Junior secondary education is very important and there are some objectives that have been set out for this level of education.

Objectives of Junior Secondary School (JSS) in Nigeria

Objectives of junior secondary school are the compass that directs all the teaching and learning activities at this level of education. According to FRN (2014:12), the objectives of JSS education are ; Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship and educational advancement; Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and the performance of their civic responsibilities; Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour; and Inspire national consciousness and harmonious coexistence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background. To achieve these objectives, there is the need to have a well detailed planned and designed curriculum for this level of education.

Junior Secondary School Curriculum

The JSS curriculum provides a platform upon which the activities and programme of the junior secondary education are anchored. The structural content of the JSS curriculum according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014:13), is as follows; 1. English Studies, 2. One Nigerian Language, 3. Mathematics, 4. Basic Science and Technology (Basic Science, Basic Technology Information Technology, Physical and Health Education), 5. Religion and National Values (Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Civic Education, Security Education), 6. Pre-Vocational Studies (Home Economics, Agricultural), 7. French Language, 8. Cultural and Creative Arts, 9. Business Studies, 10. Arabic (optional). A brief analysis of this curriculum shows that it is comprehensive. Its comprehensiveness can be from the fact that the content addresses the three (3) domains of human's learning. The curriculum was also designed taking into cognizance some emergent societal issues like; unemployment, insecurity among others. However, it is imperative to observe at this point that the purpose of this document may not be achieved if the contents are not implemented. In other words, the curriculum will remain a document if its contents are not implemented by the relevant agencies (school) and for the level it has been planned and designed.

Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum is a document that contains the policy statement of government on education. It is also the channel through which education can pass from one person (teacher) to another (learner) and one generation to another. Some curriculum experts have also given their views on what they think that a curriculum should be. For example, Offorma (2016), defines curriculum as the planned learning experiences offered to the learner in school. According to Ogele, Ishiwu and Nwokenna (2020), curriculum is the compass that gives direction and focus to the education of the learner. From the definitions of curriculum given above, there is no doubt that curriculum is meant for the total, complete, systematic and comprehensive development of the learner for the good of the society. Therefore, the curriculum will remain a document until the content is applied or implemented.

Implementing the curriculum means making the content of the curriculum real or practical. Curriculum implementation is the trying out stage of the curriculum planned (2019). According to Obih and Dorgu (2018), curriculum implementation is the weaving together of

subject matter and method to produce desired learning activities which lead to the relevant learning outcomes. The importance of curriculum implementation has shown that a curriculum that is not implemented amount to waste of time, energy and resources on the part of the planners. It also be said that any curriculum development process that does not recognize the implementation stage can be likened to a drama in which its decisive scene is missing. It is the level of implementation of the curriculum that determines the functionality or otherwise of any education programme or system.

Curriculum Implementation and Functional JSS Education

It is when a planned and designed curriculum has been implemented that education in a given society or nation can be said to be functional. Functional education according to Adah and Okorn (2012) is that type of education which is geared towards providing students with knowledge, creative and innovative skills and opportunity for self-reliance. It must be that type of education that allows and encourage learners upon graduation from school to put into practice what they have learnt. Functional education brings about economic growth and advancement of the society. A functional education must be such that trains learners within the context of the labour market demands and social needs.

Therefore, since the Nigerian society has established the JSS level of education with the aim of meeting the needs, goals and aspiration of the society, that demands that education at this level must be functional. A functional Junior Secondary education is that type of education which will achieve the aim for which it has been established after the society must have deployed all the necessary and available resources (human and material). Nigeria as a nation needs a junior secondary education that is functional now than ever before. The reason is that the JSS students are still very young in thinking and therefore may not be aware of the future implication of the actions they take today. As a result of this, some of these students upon graduation from the JSS can be lured into such crimes as; kidnapping, drug abuse, prostitution, human trafficking banditry, armed robbery, internet fraud, political thuggery among others by some criminals in the society. This has as a matter of fact underscored the importance of having a functional education especially at this level. This education should aim at equipping the students with such skills that can make them to be engaged in one productive venture or the other after graduation. They can acquire such skills as carpentry, shoe making, computer application, among others as it is obvious that not all of them that successfully completed their junior secondary school education would be able to go further. So being idle after graduating from the JSS will make none sense of the objectives Junior Secondary School education in Nigeria and also make these little and promising children useful tools in the hands of the enemy of our country.

Challenges of Implementing a Functional Junior Secondary School (JSS) Education

Some of the challenges of implementing a functional JSS education are;

Lack of adequate funding: The government at different times has demonstrated lack of political will in funding education generally in Nigeria. Certainly, the successful implementation of any programme is largely dependent on the availability of funds to support it. According to Samuel (2019), there is a decline in the allocation to education in Nigeria at the federal level from 11.13% in 1999 to 7.0% in 2001. So, the JSS education cannot be functional when there is not enough funds to implement the programme.

Lack of compliance to the teacher-student ratio: The government via the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014:13), recommended that for effective teaching and learning at the JSS level, the teacher-student ratio shall be 1:35. However, due to the fact that education at this level is free and compulsory, as declared by government, the number of enrolment in schools has continued to increase without a corresponding increase in the number of teachers recruited and classroom blocks built.

Lack of competent and qualified teachers: In any educational system the teacher is very important. This is because the responsibility of interpretation and implementation of the curriculum rest squarely on the teacher. However, there is lack of competent and qualified teachers in the school system to run the schools. This may be as a result of the process of recruitment which has in the recent times been hijacked by political actors within the political space. This, actually, has seriously affected negatively the achievement of a functional JSS education.

Inadequate supply of instructional materials: Instructional materials are needed for the proper implementation of the curriculum at any level of education. Instructional materials according to Ossai, Eze, Chineke and Uwakwe (2020), can be concrete or non-concrete materials which teachers use to bring life to learning, stimulate learners and promote teaching and learning. Instructional materials include; visual or audio-visual aids, audio which make teaching and learning easier. So, when the instructional materials are not available or adequately provided, achieving a functional JSS education will be elusive.

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT): ICT is now a global phenomenon. There is no aspect of human life that does not need ICT for proper functioning. Interestingly, there are teachers today who do not possess ICT skills. This has affected the functionality of JSS education in Nigeria. Teachers sometimes pass on to pupils information that are obsolete due to lack of ICT skills and also lack of access to internet and ICT gadgets. When information given to the pupils is obsolete, the authenticity, significance, validity and relevance of the information will be questioned

Conclusion

The Junior Secondary School is the education a child obtains before proceeding to the Senior Secondary level of education in Nigeria. The JSS level of education is very important because it is part of the foundational stage of education in this country. This has made it necessary to look at how the curriculum implementation can bring about a functional JSS education in Nigeria. The factors impeding the achievement of a functional Junior Secondary education such as; lack of adequate funding, lack of compliance to teacher-ratio, lack of competent and qualified teachers among others were X-rayed and way forward was suggested.

The way forward

In the face of all these challenges to achieving a functional JSS education, the following way forward were suggested;

1. Government should make adequate budget provision for education at all level.
2. There should also be a total compliance to the teacher- student ratio (1:35) as recommended by the government.
3. Government and all the major stakeholders should as a matter of fact provide schools with adequate instructional materials especially the Junior secondary schools.
4. Teachers should be trained on how to use the Information, Communication and Technology to enhance their teaching skills.

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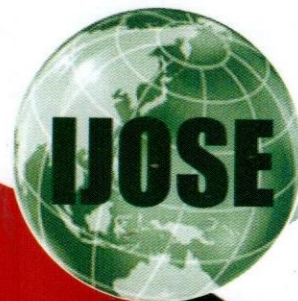
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