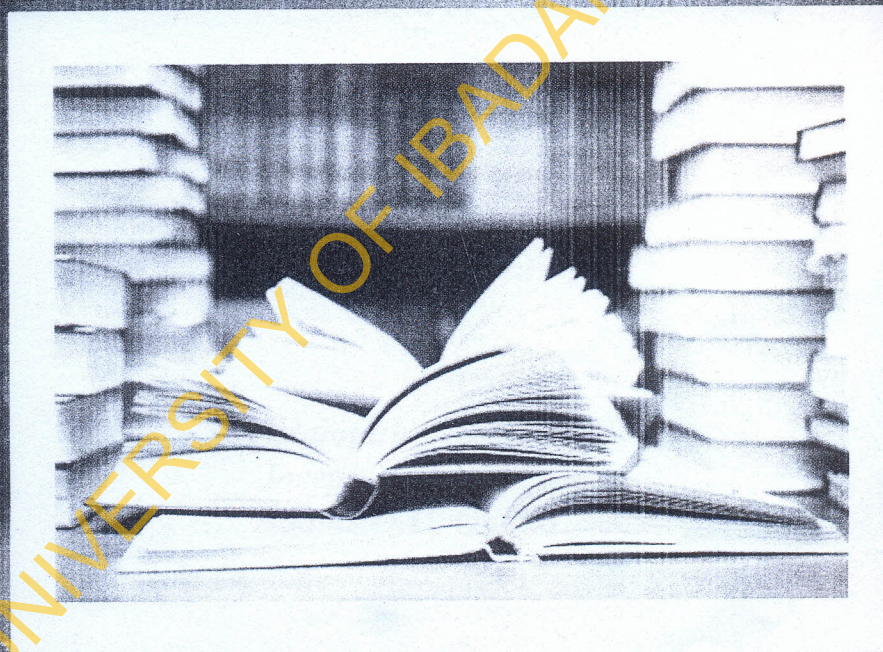


**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES  
IN  
CURRICULUM  
AND  
EVALUATION  
RESEARCH**



Edited by:

**Folajogun V. Falaye  
Joseph A. Adegbile  
Adams O. U. Onuka**

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## APPRAISAL OF RECENT TRENDS IN CURRICULUM RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

*Eugenia A. Okwilagwe*

### **Introduction**

The nations which are undergoing educational reforms make the restructuring of the prescribed school curriculum an integral part of the process. Nigeria is not left out of this process. The goals of such nations are premised on the fact that they are driven by the need to make the curriculum relevant, comprehensive and to provide quality education; so they are compelled to be in consonant with developments in other nations of the world. Since the world is consciously fast becoming a global village, not to conform with current developments elsewhere and be left behind does no country any good.

The school or formal curriculum is seen differently in terms of its scope of coverage by educationists, though in its wider meaning, it is agreed that a curriculum is a planned action of activities or experiences, that students are to be exposed to and it is under the guidance of the school, or that it encompasses the entire programme of activities teachers and students engage in (Rugg 1936; Richmond 1973; Kerr cited in Richmond 1973; Tyler 1986; Prideux 2003, cited by Talukder, Hossain, Hanif, Akther & Perveen 2011). In the view of Clinical Educational Services Analysis (CESA 2009), curriculum is used to refer to what students should know and be able to do in each content area; and it encompasses the district or school adopted progress and written plans for providing students with learning experiences that lead to expected knowledge and skills. These various views of curriculum show that it is an organised framework for learning that requires proper implementation.

The curriculum layout is structured into four main elements, that is the objectives, the content/learning experience, the methods and evaluation. The objectives give direction to what is taught and how it is to be assessed. The learning experiences according to Tyler (1986) cover development of skills in thinking, such as critical, logical and inductive thinking that can lead to problem-solving. Also, learning experiences should involve things that develop information acquisition, in terms of

principles, laws, theories, ideas, facts, terms and so on. These are to help develop students' social attitudes and interest in the subject(s). The methods should be varied, relevant and pragmatic in achieving content delivery. Methods usually include the materials to be used to present the contents meaningfully and learnably. Evaluation should be relevant to the objectives set-out and should be achievable. Curriculums or curricula are restructured in the process of modifying existing ones with new ideas, knowledge and modern issues that are borne out of daily living, research and scientific developments. As such, curriculums need to be restructured only when the need arises.

### **Methods of Curriculum Restructuring**

Curriculum review and curriculum updating are two methods frequently used to restructure the prescribed curriculum. These two terms are often misunderstood by many, experts inclusive and so they tend to see them as synonymous with one another. Curriculum review is a process that involves a complete overhaul of an existing curriculum or curriculums, and it is done with the primary aim of making it relevant to the needs of a people. It is a more rigorous process that is informed by exhaustive empirical evidence necessitating the change. The review must align with the philosophy of the nation desiring a change and its policy of education. It must, also, align with the objectives of the school subject(s) that is/are being reviewed. This is why Tyler (1986) described it as a 'total reconstruction' process. Curriculum updating is a systematic process of introducing new information, ideas, content and materials into an existing curriculum(s) for currency. The update may, however, involve only a small aspect of the curriculum or some moderate extent.

### **Rationale for Curriculum Review**

A curriculum review is guided by the following factors though not exhaustive:

- (i) when there is a change in societal development and modernity such that there are new ways of thinking.
- (ii) when there are changes in values, attitudes and philosophy of a people, especially when these new views need to be passed on to the younger generation.
- (iii) when there are rapid technological changes such that the old technology can no longer sustain the people, for instance, the advent of the micro-computers, and the information super high way.
- (iv) when a country is driven by reforms.



### **Rationale for Curriculum Updating**

With respect to curriculum updating, the rationale for change includes:

- (i) changes in education objectives.
- (ii) changes in ideas or ways of thinking.
- (iii) changes in attitudes and ways of doing things e.g. strategies and methods of teaching.
- (iv) societal relevance or inability of curriculum to meet the social needs of the people by solving their problems.

### **Trends in Recent Curriculum Review**

Prior to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) reform, and not until very recently, many school curriculums both at the primary and secondary school levels had assumed a static state. The last time, many of the senior secondary school subjects curricula like, Biology, Geography and Chemistry to mention but a few, were reviewed, as evident in the front covers of these curriculums, was in the eighties (e.g. Chemistry Curriculum 1985). With the introduction of education reform in 1999, the primary and junior secondary school curriculums unlike their senior secondary school counterparts have undergone several stages of review and updating especially as witnessed between 2002 and 2003, and during the tenure of the former Minister of Education, Dr. (Mrs.) Oby Ezekwesili. Between this period and now, the UBE core subjects curricula were restructured in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007 and recently in 2011.

The earlier years mentioned witnessed the introduction or infusion of new and topical societal issues in the content and activities section in the lower and middle Basic Social Studies, Mathematics, English, Basic Science curricula and so on. These new areas covered development in Environmental education, Health (HIV & AIDs), Drugs use and Substances abuse, Gender issues, Population and family education among others. The most recent, saw the introduction of new subjects entirely such as Data Processing, GSM handsets maintenance, Tourism, Keyboarding, and Photography. What these processes indicate apart from the 2002 situation, are signs of curriculum updating rather than that of reviews as the materials infused were done on a small-to-moderate scale depending on how each subject curriculum was amenable to these new ideas. The impression these processes have created is that they are driven more by 'fire-brigade' approaches than by sound practices.

The infusion of materials in the implemented UBE curriculum understandably is borne out of the need to actualize the laudable objectives of the UBE programme—that of producing quality students

who can transit to higher levels of education in the country and to make those who cannot, to be self-reliant in their chosen vocations and be able to contribute to societal development at their own level. However, in the views of Obanya (2002), curriculum updating by the introduction of 'more and more' topics is usually engineered by pressure from external forces and the need to be comprehensive. Besides, such incessant updating of the curricula sometimes has generated negative rather than positive impact on the education system.

### **Effects of Curriculum Restructuring on Actualisation of UBE Programme and Nigerian Education**

There is no doubt that when a curriculum is updated or reviewed it is with the intent that positive gains would emanate from it. For this singular reason, policy makers make or enact policies that are expected to be obeyed irrespective of their workability, or whether they are relevant in time and space, or if they meet the needs of the society or not. Ironically too, proper annual evaluation of the implemented curriculum, instruction and students' achievement in these curricula at national level are not exhaustively conducted and reported to determine their areas of strengths or weaknesses or gauge the level of education performance in the country before embarking on an update of the curricula. This ought not to be. What has, however, been observed are negative effects that may lead to delays in the time set for the actualisation of the attainment of the MDGs as implemented through the UBE programme and a truncation of the implementation process and the very objectives that were set out to be achieved. Such negative effects are observable in areas such as:

- (i) curriculum overload;
- (ii) subject teachers' incompetence;
- (iii) confusion in students' learning;
- (iv) constant revision of textbooks or dearth in relevant books;
- (v) development of apathy;
- (vi) wastages of resources;
- (vii) increased school drop-out and failure rates among others; and
- (viii) poor production of curriculum documents.

#### *1. Curriculum Overload*

This is a situation where students are forced to learn more contents or subject matter whether they are relevant or not but simply because they are in the curriculum. According to Obanya (2002) curriculum overload results when all that needs to be done is to emphasize 'more and more'

content instead of embarking on curriculum enrichment which is a thorough re-examination of goals, objectives, methods and materials including skills acquisition and not a mere 'add and delete' kind of business. Also, he observed that curriculum overload can occur where closely related contents are not well integrated and where very little distinction is made between core and supplementary areas of curriculum content. It is noteworthy to observe that even when care was taken to avoid curriculum overload in the UBE core curriculums, NERDC (2003), this was inevitable.

When a curriculum is overloaded instead of curriculum enrichment as observed by Obanya (2002), it leads to heightened demands on both the teachers and the students in terms of the volume of work to be covered within the period of the basic education cycle. Going by the example of English Language curriculum at the basic education Obanya (2002) used to illustrate this point, it is right to contend that other core curricula are not spared. Considering the incessant closures of schools in the country due to strike actions, the problem of syllabus coverage becomes a serious challenge. The views of the British born Principal of Henry Alex-Duduyemi Memorial College (HAMEC) Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, further corroborated the views of Obanya. In an interview with *Sunday Tribune* September 4, 2011, while providing first-hand field opinion on the state of education in Nigeria, the Principal asserted that overloaded curriculum besides other factors like poor teaching methods and teachers' lack of confidence in themselves were the bane of Nigerian education system and poor students' performance in public examinations.

## *2. Subject Teacher Incompetence*

With increased demand on covering additional content areas of subject, many teachers whose subject curriculums have been updated or reviewed are prone to exhibit signs of incompetence due to pressure of work, which can also lead to poor teacher performance. The situation is worsened where these teachers are not accessible to current and relevant textbooks that cover the relevant new areas, besides contending with the type of teachers'-work environment, in which school year is unstable due to politically, economically and socially induced factors. The prescribed curriculum is often not implemented in most schools. These situations pose the challenge of discrepancies among the intended, implemented and the achieved curriculum.

### 3. *Confusion in Students' Learning*

Just as the teacher is overworked so also are the students. As more and more content is expected to be covered by them, so also is the possibility of it resulting into inadequate learning of these and other contents especially among students who are vulnerable to performing poorly. Many of these students may get confused during the process of studying and may make demands on the teacher to suggest to them areas of concentration, or do selective reading of content during examinations to their own detriment.

### 4. *Increased Failure and Drop-out Rates*

Curriculum overload leads to teacher and student incompetence, a factor that impacts significantly on failure and drop-out rates among students prone to these negative school outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Caruthers, 2006) and this phenomenon leads to wastage and hardship on the students, community and the nation (Emeke & Uwakwe 2004).

### 5. *Constant Revision or Dearth of Relevant Textbooks*

With frequent updating of the school curriculum, comes the necessity to revise existing textbooks or produce new ones in the relevant subject areas updated. This situation can sometimes be problematic. As such, only big time publishers may eventually revise the affected textbooks while small ones find the cost too enormous to bear due to unsold stock of old textbook that will be left to waste; hence they often jettison the idea to revise. The effect is that schools and teachers who prescribe such textbooks for use in their schools are at a disadvantage. Also, the burden of the cost of new or revised editions (which are usually higher) are passed onto the parents. Many parents who do not usually buy books for their wards except Mathematics and English textbooks do not see the need to purchase such books whose cover prices are exorbitant. In most cases, these core books are usually purchased and distributed by states that practise free education. Observations from many skill acquisition workshops organised by ministries of education and universal basic education boards in some states of Nigeria have shown that teachers often complain of inability to effectively implement the school curriculum in their subject areas because of lack of relevant and current textbooks in their areas of specialisation. The situation among primary school teachers is worse. Another major problem arising from the dearth of relevant textbooks is that popular texts are often pirated by small-scale publishers in locations where such books are in high demands but the supply is poor.

### 6. *Wastage of Resources*

The whole exercise of curriculum updating leads to wastage of scarce resources as parents are forced to buy almost the same textbook year in-year-out because a few contents have changed or even when only the cover page and not the content is changed, and siblings of the same family cannot pass on a fairly used textbook to the sibling next on the line.

### 7. *Production of Poor Curriculum Documents*

Some of the revised curriculum documents are sometimes poorly produced due to the urgency to meet deadlines. Errors of misplaced content, typographical errors and lack of continuity of content are common, that one begins to wonder if these errors emanated from the typesetting or thought-patterns of the reviewers. These errors could pose serious problems of confusion and the teaching of wrong concepts to teachers. This observation may have been responsible for the introduction of two versions of the UBE curricula as was observed in a short period between 2004 and 2005.

### 8. *Development of General Apathy*

The whole process of incessant curriculum updating generates ripple effects on the educational scene as must have already been observed in this write-up. In-appreciable improvement in students' academic performance and low standards of education, besides the problem of constant curriculum updating, can further create widespread apathy among the generality of the people. This is due to the inability of the education system to rise above its problems and also using education to solve developmental problems of the country.

### **Stakeholders Roles in Curriculum Restructuring**

In Nigeria today, the National Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) is charged with curriculum development and restructuring processes. NERDC metamorphosed from the former National Education Research Council (NERC) whose activities were reorganised with those of the defunct Centre for Social and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) and was charged with curriculum development beside other functions. Stakeholders in education play important roles both in the development of school curricula and in the subsequent restructuring of same curricula to bring them in line with societal needs. In the past, stakeholders such as the missionaries, book publishers, non-governmental organisations, leaders of various workers associations such as NUT and

other trade unions, ministry of education officials and other government representatives, members of the public and representatives of public examination bodies made their inputs in the development of the school curriculum. The students themselves should lend their voices to what they should be learning. Current practices in curriculum restructuring should not be different from these best practices because the curriculum content to be taught is balanced from these various stakeholders' views on what young Nigerians should learn.

Policy makers who enact policies on behalf of government, ministry of education officials who take decisions on behalf of teachers and students, the teachers who implement the prescribed curricula and the public such as the media, employers of labour and market women—all have much to contribute not only to the development but the restructuring of the school curricula. Thus, policy makers, implementers and consumers of the content of the curriculum must form a curriculum think-tank team at any of these stages to brainstorm on the way forward, even though not all of them will play equal roles, for example that of drafting the curriculum.

### **Basic Guiding Principles for Thorough Curriculum Restructuring**

Curriculum updating though should be periodic, it has to be cautiously executed and with substantial reasons. The purpose and content to be structured must attain a critical mass. A review should be at least between 5 to 8 years interval. This period will ensure that the contents prescribed for the attainment of learning achievement in various subjects have been covered by several cohorts of students and have tested the waters. As articulated by Richmond (1973) and here modified, these guidelines should include:

- (i) Need to manage conflict as a pre-condition for obtaining cooperation. This means that all opposing views must be cautiously weighed and taken care of.
- (ii) Need to determine the state of the education system in terms of the internal and external forces in the system that may pose conflict for change.
- (iii) Need to ensure that there is teamwork of all relevant stakeholders.
- (iv) Need to be accompanied with relevant learning materials to be effective.
- (v) Methods of curriculum delivery should shift from teacher-based to more of learner-based.

- (vi) Objectives of learning should be derived from the learning experiences selected.
- (vii) Methods of continuous assessment and evaluation should be built-in from the outset for self-correcting purposes and the results feedback into the system. This means that National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) should be taken seriously and as a matter of urgency be built into the system and conducted regularly (possibly every two years) to gauge the progress of education in Nigeria. The strengths and weaknesses collated from NAEP and from other sources could then be used as important inputs in updating the implemented curriculum. Outcomes of school-based and national public examinations are not enough evidence for frequent changes. Major forces of curriculum change such as employers of labour, media, changes in social mobility must be respected.
- (viii) Basic skills to be changed, which are outshoot of contemporary learning situations should be redefined and in line with practical issues on ground for meeting them.
- (ix) Curriculum restructuring should be dynamic, forward looking and continuous, not static and should not necessarily be a yearly activity.
- (x) All forces of interest either at state or national level (NERDC, States or Private sector e.g. publishers), should strike a balance and come out with a joint working document rather than a proliferation of versions of the same thing, since the policy document and objectives of education of Nigeria are the same for all children of this country irrespective of their geographical location.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This discourse which appraised the recent curriculum restructuring processes in Nigeria, contends that curriculum restructuring either in terms of reviewing or updating should follow a systematic process, adopting sound or best practices and should not be engineered by 'fire-brigade' approach, a trial-by-error, or perform or be fired approaches. These approaches seemed to have heralded some of the recent curriculum restructuring processes in the last decade in Nigeria. Global best practices ensure that curriculum restructuring is based on thorough research evidence, subjected to annual national assessment and evaluation with reports widely circulated to stakeholders. It must meet the philosophy of the nation and be quality-driven. It should not be based on the whims and caprices of those in authority to initiate such a change.

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