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BASIC EDUCATION LEVEL CURRICULUM REFORMS: CATCHING CHILDREN YOUNG FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE

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Abstract
This article is focused on the structure, special features and the implementation strategy of the Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum with some emphasis on the Basic Science and Technology component as one of the key cluster subjects prepared with the aim of catching the young learner to love science, learn science and create developmental change in the learner's environment or community. The paper makes some recommendations based on the review among which, is that teachers should be trained on how to integrate information and communication technologies in pedagogy. Government should organize workshops to train teachers on how to bring science to the learners as fun.

Introduction

The world is undergoing major transformations. The global transformations are multidimensional, affecting the technological, economic, social, cultural and political development of human communities particularly those of developing societies like Nigeria. Education in the generic and global context is a strategic instrument for social and economic transformation. The focus of education system all over the world is the development of the human capital required to meet present and future challenges of globalization and knowledge economy (Dike, 2014). Consequently, the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education held in Seoul, Korea identified challenges that would inform changes in education worldwide as:

- Population growth and rapid urbanization.
- Poverty and lack of skills for income generation; and
- Low participation rate in technical and vocational education (Obioma, 2011).

Hence, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) recognizes that Nigeria's economy could only be transformed and sustained through education that empowers the people and assures the technological development of the

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country. No wonder education is a foundational component of Nigeria Transformation Agenda and Vision 2020. Hence between 2008 and now, the country has witnessed two major curriculum reform initiatives at the Basic Education level, namely:
1. The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (September 2008- August 2014); and
2. The Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (September 2014 –Present).

The purpose of this article is to review the philosophy and structure of both the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum and the revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum in Nigeria with particular emphasis on the features of the Basic Science and Technology Curriculum intended to make the young learners create change in their learning environment, communities and Nigeria at large. The paper has been organized under the following sub-headings:

- The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (September 2008- August 2014)
- The Structure of the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum
- The Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (September, 2014 –Present)
- Features of Basic Science and Technology (BST) intended to Catch Them Young and Create Change in the community
- Implementation Strategy of the Revised 9 – Year BEC
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) (September 2008- August 2014)
Following the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria to introduce the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in September 1988, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2008), re-structured and re-aligned all extant primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) curricula into 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum for implementation in Nigerian schools with effect from September, 2008.

The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum emphasizes value re-orientation, poverty eradication and employment generation capabilities in learners. In these curriculum reform initiatives, science, technology, mathematics, and vocational education and training are specifically designed to provide the contents, learning experiences and skills for the socio-economic transformation of the communities in Nigeria.

Using available sources and literature, this article identified the philosophy and structure of the 9-Year and the Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curricula in Nigeria categorized into Lower Basic (Primaries 1-3), Middle Basic (Primaries 4-6) and Upper Basic (Junior Secondaries1-3), the basic features of the Revised Basic Education Curriculum, the structure, objectives and features of the Basic Science and Technology Curriculum and the implementation strategies of the curricula thereby creating developmental change in the Nigeria communities (NERDC 2013).

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The Structure of the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum

The structure of the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum was such that subject offerings ranged between ten and sixteen from Primary I to JSS III and almost every subject was a stand- alone subject. For example, Basic Science, Basic Technology, Physical & Health Education, Computer Studies/ICT, Christian Religious Studies/Islamic Studies, Civic Education, Home Economics, Agricultural Science, and Business Studies were all separate subjects (FME, 2008).

The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum was particularly developed for the attainment of the Education for All (EFA) goals, the critical targets of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was developed in response to Nigeria's need for relevant, dynamic and globally competitive education that would ensure that learners at the Basic Education level are capable to compete favourably anywhere in the world in terms of knowledge, skills, techniques, values and aptitude. Thus the 9-Year BEC addressed among other things, the issue of value re-orientation, poverty eradication, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and life skills. Implementation of the 9-Year BEC commenced nationwide, in Primary 1 and JSS 1 classes in September, 2008, while the old curriculum (the 6-3-3-4 Curriculum) was systematically being phased out. The first batch of JSS students graduated in June, 2011 after writing the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). By September, 2014, the cohort of pupils that benefited from the use of BEC at the primary school level entered class one of the Junior Secondary School.

The Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (September, 2014 –Present)

Nevertheless, the school curriculum is a dynamic and open document that is constantly changing with the needs, challenges and aspirations of the society. Thus in the light of the feedback on the implementation of the 9-Year BEC received and the contemporary global and national concerns, the Nigerian government revised the 9- Year BEC in 2012 in line with global best practices as in Kenya -7 subject, Tanzania- 8 subject, United States of America -6 subject, Malaysia and Indonesia -9 subject offerings (Obioma, 2012). The curriculum revision process involved identification and grouping of related disciplines such as Christian Religious Studies/ Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Civic Education, and Security Education to create a new composite or cluster of Revised BEC subject called Religion and National Values. Key concepts in the former curricula now form integrating threads for organizing the contents of the new subject into a coherent whole.

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Features of Basic Science and Technology (BST) intended to catch them Young and Create Change in the community

While selecting the contents, major issues shaping contemporary growth and development of nations, and influencing knowledge driven societies were identified and infused into the curriculum content at every level, from primaries one through to junior secondary classes; with a progression in infusion of concepts as class advances. These include, but are not limited to: a. Environmental Education, b. Climate Change, c. Drug Abuse Education, d. Foods and Drugs Safety Education, e. Disaster Risk Reduction Education, f. Consumer Education, g. Safety and Security, h. Entrepreneurship, i. HIV/AIDS.

The topics in each theme are spirally sequenced, from simple to complex across the 9 (nine) years of schooling in order to sustain the interest of learners and promote meaningful learning and skills development. In addition, the curriculum promotes guided inquiry and activity-based teaching and learning using locally sourced materials. Furthermore, the contents of the curriculum are enriched with real-life examples that are not only indigenous and familiar to learners, but also engender the development of relevant attributes and survival strategies for living successfully in contemporary society and global world.

FME (2012) provides the contents and further learning experiences that will engender the acquisition of functional skills for job creation and wealth generation that will lead to the reduction of poverty within the communities and the nation, at large. The activities are both learner-centred and problem solving - centred, and encourage student-teacher, student-student interaction, working in groups or pairs and student interaction with resource materials.

Implementation Strategy of the Revised 9 – Year BEC

Dike (2014) remarked that it is not enough to produce curriculum, it is even more important to put in place machinery that will ensure that its ideals are realizable through effective classroom practices. For instance, even though the implementation of the Revised 9-Year BEC has just commenced systematically in Primary 1 and JSS 1, it is known that the structures and appropriate activities that foster effective implementation of the curriculum are either inadequate or lacking in Nigerian schools. (Abakpa, 2013; Akpan, 2012; Okpala, 2011). Foremost among the myriad of challenges of Basic Education in Nigeria are the issues of teacher quality and development, lack of enough specialist teachers; dearth of relevant support materials for teachers and inadequate supervision and mentoring of teachers. Thus, to realize the ideals of the 9-Year BEC, relevant support materials that will aid the effective delivery of the curricula content in schools are being provided. Such materials include computers, functional laboratories, learner- centred textual materials prepared by NERDC and some publishers to generate learners' interest and challenge them in innovative and creative thinking. Basic Education teachers are also being trained and retrained in their subject areas on continuous basis, and resources are being provided for the acquisition of

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consumables and non-consumable items required for teaching and learning of the curriculum contents.

Further to these, the Federal Government of Nigeria through NERDC has produced very detailed teachers guides in each of the ten subjects for effective implementation of the Revised 9-Year BEC. The teacher's guide in each subject covers the following seven (7) units on how to:

- Understand the revised curriculum;
- Break the curriculum into syllabus, scheme of work, unit of work and lesson plan;
- Plan lesson using Modern Teaching Approaches;
- Teach topics and concepts that learners find difficult to learn;
- Find, access and develop resources for teaching; and
- Assess learners in each subject area.

Specific innovative classroom practices illustrated in the teachers' guides include:

- Purposive learner-learner; teacher-learner and school-school collaborations;
- Deployment of ICT and other technologies to support learning;
- Quality interactions (learner-learner, learner- teacher, learner-resource material interactions) taking place in the classroom;
- Issues arising from the learners' environment as the focus of teaching and learning activities.

In addition, series of national workshops using interactive and activity –based approaches have been organized to train the teachers in the use of the teachers guides for effective delivery of the contents of the Revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum in the ten subject areas. These measures are being taken to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum and hence make the young learners ultimately create developmental change in their communities.

Recommendations

In addition to the implementation strategies discussed above, workshops, in-service training and short courses should be designed to train teachers on how to bring science to the learner as fun, utilizing low- cost materials in the immediate environment of the learner. Such teachers should also be trained on how to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT's) into pedagogy. These measures will help catch the attention of young learners and hence increase their capacity to create change in their environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the basic education curriculum reform was designed in such a manner that it addresses the yearning needs of the members of Nigeria communities thereby bringing all round development in the country.

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