



Phenomenon Based-Learning for Nigerian Higher Institutions: A new Curriculum Approach to meet the Challenges of the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Education generally, aims at fostering quality of life that encompasses moral, intellectual and economic growth of an individual and the larger society. The success of any society hinges on the nature of its education; and this saliently, can be determined through the framework of its curriculum design, which part of its sources, society and the learners' needs count much weight. Considering the nature of unemployment in Nigeria, and dearth of modern skills among many students of higher institutions of learning, no one will dispute that there is need to have a curriculum design, particularly at higher institutions, capable of imbuing students with soft skills and empowering other individuals to satisfy their optimal needs in the modern-world. This paper attempts to review the nature and problems of Nigerian education, especially in terms of achieving the stated objectives in the National policy of education (NPE), through reviewing the available literature. The exertion suggests that one of the best ways to reduce the mentioned problems is to bring about new curriculum design at higher institutions of learning, called 'phenomenon based-learning'. It is a design/program attempts to capture a phenomenon in formation. It is a multi-dimensional and skills-oriented program, which through its design, individuals (students and non-students) having unique passions will be accommodated to learn modern skills related to their jobs/businesses or passion. Hence, it will enable them to enhance their jobs, become more independent and generally serve as means for satisfying one's passion.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is an organized set of formal education or process of training intentions. It is a four-step plan that comprises four phases (purpose, design, implementation and assessment (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). These definitions sequentially stress on plan that has a determined goal to achieve.

Curriculum is the foundation of teaching and learning process. It is all-inclusive framework that encompasses development of educational program, planning teaching and learning process, selecting and utilization of instructional materials and advocating the appropriate modes of evaluating the learning outcomes (Sharma, 2013). Designing a



curriculum is very crucial; hence, there are several paramount sources need to put into consideration in the process. The most cardinal ones among others are the learner and the society. The two majorly, shape the nature and the outlook of a curriculum. The societal and the learners' needs are the pivotal aspects that influence the curriculum nature; and arising changes in these two, normally affect the curriculum and lead to curriculum reformation (Adibisi, 2012). More so, curriculum reform has been prevalent among countries around the globe in their bid to produce graduates fit for globalization and move towards knowledge-based economy. For instances, on 8 June 2001, the Chinese Government admitted that its current curriculum policies and practices are outdated and failing to meet the needs of the 21st century. Hence, the curricula goals of education were re-designed to respond to the needs of international scholarship and trends in education (Biesta, 2012).

Furthermore, dynamism, innovativeness and technological challenges have continuously made the globe much unpredictable and flexible, especially the educational sector, which its nature predicts social, economic and political development of any nation. In this respect, Nigeria like other countries has been reforming its' educational system in terms of objectives, structures and courses to meet up the arising challenges and demands enforce by technological advancement. For instances, from 1970's to 1980's the system's structure was changed to 6-5-4; later in 2005 it was restructured to 6-3-3-4, whereas in 2008 it was changed to 9-3-4. Specifically, the reformation of 1970's to 1980's was to produce more Nigerian citizens with certificates; but not much concerned on acquiring vocational skills. Consequently, majority of Nigerians during that period were accommodated in schools to obtain educational certificates (Teboho, 2000); and furtherly, the movement has only brought

increase in the students' size of enrolment not in the quality of education. On the other hand, for almost two decades, scholars have been categorizing Nigeria and other developing countries as those whose commitment to education is flabby; and fail to develop a curriculum structure at higher institutions of learning that imbues the citizens with sufficient skills to face the challenges of the 21st century (Joseph & Godstime, 2016).

The 21st century is defined as an era of technological advancement that brings challenges to education, industries and individuals. For example, employers of 21st century are now looking to employ graduates with technical skills, and they are less concerned about the applicant's grades. This demand of labor market has nowadays caused a lot of graduates with even first-class honors degrees but lacking soft skills to become jobless. Therefore, in such era, skills acquisition has been recognized as paramount and effective means in boosting the individual and the national development, especially for a nation where a high level of youth unemployment and social menace like Nigeria exist. For instance, employment in Nigeria is not certain as the university graduates sometimes spend good five years without having a job (Uzoeguw & Egbe, 2014). To reiterate, more than 75% of the yearly universities graduates in the country remain jobless; and scholars attributed the problem on the irrelevance of the higher educational institutions' curriculum, which emphasis centers on training the graduates for seeking a "white-collar jobs" (Undiyaundeye & Otu, 2015). Statistically, Nigeria as a country has been estimated to have a grand population of about 170 million individuals; but pathetically, with unrecognized and unutilized both natural and human resources (Oppong & Sachs, 2015).

Affirmatively, Ayonmike (2010) stated that societies like Nigeria that experiences increase in the social vices and youth



joblessness should strive to develop a curriculum at higher institutions of learning that teach practical skills. He added that these should be very domineering as they promote self-reliance and creativity as keys to the national economic growth. Surprisingly, the philosophy of Nigerian higher institutions of learning emphasizes much on imbuing students with technical skills and opportunities to develop themselves “in their general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupation” (Arimonu, 2016). Similarly, the curriculum of Nigerian higher institutions of learning emulate teaching technical and vocational courses that will help to realize the philosophy. However, despite the funding and modern facilities infused into those higher institutions of learning, yet the graduates are increasingly becoming jobless and employers are complaining about the dearth of technical skills among the Nigerian graduates. In response to this, Asogwa and Diogu (2007), emphasized that Nigerian government needs to urgently reform its curriculum of higher institutions of learning to come up with a design that promotes self-reliance and expertise in jobs and business. Moreover, such curricula should emphasize on “the acquisition of the requisite skills” has put forward a salient and promising means to increase the power of productivity of citizens of a nations (Odu, 2010 p. 22). Similarly, such curricula should allow individuals to learn relevant skills of their interest that can enable them to strengthen local businesses, support students’ transition from educational institutions to work; enable school dropouts contribute socially and economically.

Accordingly, Okoye and Arimonu (2016), stressed that modern curricula should quench the thirst of a poor, rich and every member of a given society through creating a room for everyone to learn and develop “job-related” competencies in the 21st century,

which many scholars see as an effective and progressive way to reduce poverty in a nation. Relatively, many countries have recognized developing job-related skills as strategic way of boosting human resource; and agreeably, this is immensely needed in the 21st century Nigeria where the educational emphasis is moving towards entrepreneurial skills acquisition and vocational training at all levels of education. In this respect, this paper recommends for “phenomenon based learning” as a new curriculum design and pedagogical approach at Nigerian higher institutions of learning that enhances competencies and imbues Nigerian citizens with knowledge and skills to quench thirst for modern skills, become employable and self-reliance in the 21st century.

HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN NIGERIA: ROLES AND UNIQUENESS

Higher Education is given so many names including ‘tertiary Education’. The national policy on Education of Nigeria (FRN, 2013: Section 8, No. 57, p. 28) stresses that tertiary Education is “the education offered after secondary education in the universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses”. Again, in every nation, higher education is the center to elevate the level of human resources as well as the key determinant factor for the skills acquisition economic growth of any given country; likewise, efficient and effective human resources are achieved through organized and robust higher educational system (Adebisi, 2014). In this respect, higher education is a connecting link through which individuals acquire the desired skills to function well in a society and contribute for economic growth.

The demand of globalized market and the general improvement in technology have made liberal education less relevant and “called for skill-oriented higher education”



(Aderogba, 2011). In response to this, Nigerian government to meet the challenges, streamlined her national policy on Education (NPE), with set of modes, operations and processes that could help in fostering skills acquisition at Nigerian higher institutions (Burker, 2012). Higher institutions of learning are defined as educational centers designed to transmit knowledge and skills for the members of society to compete in the world. These individuals are expected to see realities and practical implications of the acquired skills for their benefit and the larger society (Cantor, 2009). However, it is unfortunate to realize that there has been no serious and firm commitment on the implementation of the newly recommendations by the NPE. This in turn, resulted to have many graduates of higher institutions of learning without employable skills and consequently, led to the drastic high rate of youth unemployment in the country. Therefore, the higher education in Nigeria is supposed to be revitalized to conform to the rationalized objectives proposed by NPE in terms of "skill acquisition and skill development" (Fakomogbon & Adegbija, 2011).

Globally, nations have entrusted their economic and social development on graduates of higher education. These students are trained by the higher institutions of learning to acquire mental, social, emotional skills to enable them to contribute on the economic and social aspects of their state. Similarly, there are two major things that provide grounds for students utilize their knowledge gained from the higher institutions of learning in the national economic development. One, the curriculum should be more of skills acquisition, critical thinking training and accommodating students' interest of learning. Two, provision of enabling environment, equipped with opportunities and equality to help individuals apply the knowledge gained from the higher institutions

of learning. Cecilia and Chigozie (2017) have identified the following as the seven (7) basic objectives of higher education in Nigerian. (a) emphasis on manpower training in order to boost national development (b) emphasis on proper societal values training for peace, harmony and cultural transmission (c) emphasis on critical thinking training to have responsible citizens that contribute their environments (d) emphasis on technical skills training in order to have resourceful and self-reliant individuals who can contribute to their society and economic development of a nation (e) training citizens to have sense of community and grants commitments and services (f) to promote and harden unity among Nigerians; and (g) to build and strengthen both national and international understanding.

YOUTHS UNEMPLOYMENT: A BEDEVILING ISSUE IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

The high rate of unemployed graduates of higher institutions learning in Nigeria is becoming horrendous day after day; and it is a fact that the cause cannot be separated from the graduates' dearth of employable skills (Akram, 2012). Numerous scholars have seen unemployment as the persisting, fastest and despicable phenomenon that destroys the socio-economic progress of most of the developing nations (Adawo, 2013). Furthermore, it has been expatiated that several factors such as curricula deficient, dearth of concrete national employment policy, lack of enabling business environment and especially, absence of standard curriculum design that is tallied with the industrious needs, accumulatively caused the increased rate of unemployment in Nigeria. Other factors may include change of government, which so often results in change of educational policies that might affect present practice (Aderogba, 2011).



To reiterate, the fastest growth of unemployment among the graduates of higher institutions of learning today, in Nigeria and other developing countries, emerge as a bottleneck, which incapacitates both labor market and the general progress of the economy. The backwashes cause by unemployment in developing countries are countless as well as outrageous. They are identified in two categories; those that affect the psychological stage of an individual. This later exceeds to second category to affect the social and economic levels of an individual. The former, derives away the affected individuals from community engagement. It makes them feel unfulfilled and dishonored, which, destroys their level of self-esteem (Ayonmike, 2010).

Unemployed graduates in Nigeria and other developing countries, feel marginalized; and indeed, being workless and unhappy in a world of material consideration, they are prompted to violence. Again, such individuals feel inferior within the societal context; their relatives and friends often look at them as liabilities (Dubb & Howard, 2007). While the economic effects of unemployment in such countries, include “reduction in gross domestic product” (Adawo, 2013). This, however, leads to other effects like demoting the economic welfare of a nation, destruction of human capital and degrading the output of the economy. In Nigeria, these and other consequences drastically, cripple the economy; and in recent decades, promote massively other social menaces such as stealing, robbery drug abuses and kidnapping, which jeopardize immensely, the peace and stability of the country and bring about increase in poverty (Eze, 2013).

Phenomenon-Based Learning: Challenges for Higher Institutions in the 21st Century Nigeria

In the 21st Nigeria, there have been an intense increase of higher institutions of

learning across the country. It is so pitiable to notice that the expansion did not align with the demands of both the individuals and the workplace (Uwaifo, 2009). The country has more than 478 higher institutions of learning, yet the country is suffering from a dreadful issue of graduates with unrelated employable skills, which could be a bottleneck in meeting the challenges of the modern world (Akram, 2012). It is expatiated that despite the expansion of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, the curriculum is yet to promote creativity and self-reliance among the students. Thus, there is need to improve the quality of Nigerian higher institutions of learning by modifying the curricula framework to ensure job-related skills acquisition and maintain proper and serious implementation of the higher education goals as preserved in the Nigerian National policy on Education (Ayonmike, 2010).

Yang (2008), stated that successful implementation of educational policies needs an adequate monitoring and supervision. He added that policies without accurate implementation will surely cripple the national development. Scholars have expatiated that the quality of a national development is determined by the adequacy and quality of the manpower of a nation; and skill acquisition is the criterion for determining the manpower quality (Oduk, 2010). In more than a decade, Nigerian government economy has been termed as static and conservative, which failed to diversify in order to achieve optimal progress. Although, the curricula, right from the secondary to the University level has experienced number of innovations, aiming to promote soft-skills acquisition among the Nigerian citizens, which will enable the citizens to become self-employed and subsequently reduce rate of youths unemployment in the country (Okorie, 2012). However, absence of harmonious and comprehensive curriculum plan that can possibly harness between the



number of graduates and the available employment opportunities, both trigger the disheartening issue of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. Therefore, there need to have new curriculum approach that can help to tackle these challenges in the 21st Nigeria.

To respond to the identified problem, there is need to reform the Nigerian curriculum of higher institutions of learning and introduce a new design called 'phenomenon based-learning'. This is a curriculum approach that stimulates nurturing individual's creativity, self-reliance, independent and employability, which are the major concerns of the 21st higher education curriculum all over the globe. To achieve this, many educationists of the 21st century are much interested in discussing and addressing the importance and the nature of knowledge and the learning environments. Many are of the view that educational system needs to change for the purpose of in order to imbue students with creativity and employability skills (Sharma, 2013). The traditional approach on the concept of schooling, the curricula and the learning are all questioned in the 21st century. Living in a globalized society (21st century) demands for competencies, dispositions and skills, which the traditional settings and approaches of the present education and schooling cannot provide especially in Nigerian context, where graduates of higher learning lack soft skills (Adebisi, 2014).

Again, for individuals to successfully live in the 21st century society; and to become self-reliant, there is need to provide learning environment that promotes problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration; and most importantly which accommodates the needs and passions of the societal members; and in nutshell, this is what Phenomenon-based learning is all about (Tuomi-Grohn, 2007). This stresses that it is

quite essential that educational curricula of the 21st century is supposed to promote activities within and across "formal and informal settings" that stresses on skills training acquisition, aims at individual and community development (PBL). In this context, learning is not seen as a recycling of ideas, but rather entails transformation of ideas, innovating new environment of learning that provides optimal satisfaction to the members of the society (Akram, 2012).

Different scholars have defined phenomenon-based learning (PBL) from various point of views. Although, almost every definition emphasizes on holistic curricula approach that advocates on teaching real life issues, ideas based on students' needs and problem-solving training (Biesta, 2012). PBL is defined as a "cross-curricular" and pedagogical approach, which aims at preparing students for the 21st century challenges. These include skills acquisition training through using technologies (Akram, 2012). Furthermore, PBL is a curriculum shift emphasis from what learners learn and to how best they learn. More so, PBL is a multidisciplinary curriculum design that calls for constructivist means of learning, where students are exposed to a topic or skills of their interest in a holistic approach, rather than "subject based approach" (Schuller & Watson, 2009).

In addition, PBL encompasses topical learning, whereby the phenomenon of interest could be a peculiar topic, fact or event, which in other words known as theme-based learning approach (Eurydice, 2015). It is almost a unanimous view that PBL emerged as a replacement to traditional learning approach (subject-based), which perceived to be outdated and irrelevant in terms of development of the 21st century skills (Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE), 2016). Similarly, the approach (PBL) is a student-centered approach to learning that engages learners to a unique environment, which



enables them to explore a phenomenon of their interest to the optimal level of satisfaction (Biesta, 2012). Likewise, the phenomena under study are explored holistically. In other words, skills, events or a phenomenon are not only studied within their real context, rather the skills of interest are studied cross-sectional (across related subjects) (Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE), 2016).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In modern world, the educational policy makers are moving away from designing and prioritizing high level literacy education towards emphasizing on skills training to promote workforce and economic growth of a nation. Introducing educational system of new approaches that addresses cultural success and promote economic competitiveness, is a prerequisite to every national education. In this context, the real phenomenon-based learning, aims at assimilating the individual needs and that of the general members of the society is recommended. It is a new curriculum design proposing to quench the students' 'thirst' to obtain technical and theoretical knowledge on a specific skill of interest. In addition, it is a proposed curriculum framework to also accommodate societal members (technical apprentice), who wish to enhance their skills through acquiring advanced knowledge in modern trends. Likewise, manpower production is one of the fundamental purposes of creating higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Therefore, work-skills training that promote individuals' empowerment is indispensable from the role of higher education institutions of learning. Such empowerment should prioritize inculcation of skills that would enable citizens to become employable, self-reliant and productive. The possibility of actualizing these, requires inculcation of right attitudes, habits and marketable skills that can enable

individuals to utilize the available resources and opportunity within the environment. Based on the foregone discussions and reviews on the nature and problems of Nigerian higher institutions of learning, there are two major loopholes identified in the system, which include absence of curricula-skills oriented and mismatch between the demands of the employers and the curriculum structure. Therefore, the review recommends the followings:

1. There is need for a robust and effective revitalization of the Nigerian National policy on Education to introduce a 'phenomenon based-learning instructional approach at higher institutions of learning for skills acquisitions and self-reliance training.
2. The curriculum framework of higher institutions of learning should be reformed to provide an avenue whereby community members with a passion to obtain expertise on a skill, will be accommodated. This could be achieved through introducing a part-time program on various skills training. In this context, lecturers from related areas will be utilized as resource persons to provide the required training. Again, the training will be meant to intensively expose individuals of interest to a skill-training within period of at least three (3) months and issue them with a certificate of attendance.
3. The above proposed curricula approach should target both graduates and community members, especially local apprentices who want to learn modern knowledge and technical skills related to their work in order to meet the challenges posed by the 21st century.
4. Relatively, the curricula should also provide room to accommodate the passion and needs of those graduates who wish to obtain rigorous skills-training on a area in order to compete in a globalized marketplace.



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