

CONTEXTUALISING CURRICULUM IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR
NATION BUILDING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

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Abstract

The curriculum of every nation in the world needs to be contextual. Contextual curriculum lays strong emphasis on the idea that learning happens in a context. This encompasses the relation of learning to experiences, culture and environment. In this case, the learning environment and other factors is Nigeria as a nation. If curriculum is fully contextualised, the country would genuinely achieve its developmental goals. In this paper, therefore, efforts have been made in discussing what contextualised teaching and learning are. This presupposes the fact that learning must be relevant to both learners who learn the curriculum and the country that designs it. More so, the importance of curriculum in education and national development is examined which lays claim to the relevance of the curriculum to the socio-economic needs of the nation. To extend further, the principles of contextual education system are elaborately discussed. The teacher's goal is to help the learners, co-ordinate character and value education, teaching through differentiation, encouraging the child's curiosity and so on. This paper also x-rays curriculum content and nation-building explaining that the context of any curriculum is an embodiment of the attitudes, knowledge and skills which a society intends to impart to her citizens through the schools and other socialising agencies. Based on the above discussions and observations, recommendations have been made for the socio-economic well-being of the nation, Nigeria. This could be realised by contextualising curriculum for nation-building in the 21st century.

Keywords: Contextualisation, Curriculum content, Nation-building, Nigerian Educational System, Development, Socio-economic, Learning and Teaching

Introduction

Education is supposed to help equip learners with the skills they need to thrive as adults and reach their full potential. Connecting with students and getting them to genuinely understand

curriculum material is one of the biggest challenges that teachers face. Many think contextual learning is simply using context to illustrate a point, but it's much more than that. Contextual learning is a student – centred teaching method. Instead of memorisation, it actively engages learners by exploring curriculum topics through real – world scenarios. Example include: relating and teaching lesson that highlight recent real – world events, real case studies, going on school trips, projects that work towards solving community issues.

The benefits do not end with learning curriculum content. Context-based learning boosts the development of important core skills in students, like problem-solving, inquiry and critical thinking. By tackling real-world problems, contextual learning challenges students to use evidence, observation, and logic to analyse and evaluate issues. Classroom tasks or projects relating to real-world applications provide the perfect opportunity for this, with challenging, yet accessible, problems to solve. They also often require a mix of skills, and can even pull Knowledge from topics they have already studied. Secondly, contextual learning activities facilitate active participation in class through open-ended discussions, solving real-life problems, presenting group projects, or encouraging debates, focusing on national development and the like.

What is Contextualisation in Teaching?

Context is vital in understanding nearly everything in teaching and learning. There are two different versions of contextualisation in learning, both are equally valid. One example is in literature. To look at a book as an entity separate from the period in which it was written is not a good idea. Contextualisation in this case would involve drawing on the history and literature from the period of the book and look at the work in context, looking at those features from around the time of the author affect the work. This is in essence, putting the piece of literature in context. The valuable form of creating a context for a piece of work is equally applicable to Art, Music and other subjects you could look at the world around a particular event in order to understand why it was created and the impact of the creation on the local and global environment.

The other form of contextualisation which is prevalent in education does the exact opposite because it creates a context for a piece of work that is relevant to the learner. You might be reading a passage from a Shakespeare play and then relate it to an incident that happened in a soap opera that was on the TV a couple of days ago. In this case, the contextualisation is powerful because the understanding is improved by the reference to a modern parallel that is understood. In science, you might give a real life example of a principle at work. In Mathematics, you could create problems with real life objects that relate to the abstract version that a question asks about.

Elements of a Contextual Curriculum

Contextual Curriculum places strong emphasis on the idea that learning happens in a context. Learning happens in relation to and as a result of experiences, culture and environment. If we believe that learning happens in a context, then no singular, predetermined, standardised path for appropriate curriculum. A contextual curriculum challenges the belief that learning can be reduced to a specific objectives and outcomes. Together we will examine elements that come together to grow a contextual Curriculum:

Core Knowledge area

Focus

- Child development & learning Preschool
- Curriculum and learning environment School age

The teacher is pivotal in relation to curriculum implementation and ongoing development. The teacher is positioned to see the effects and the impacts of the curriculum on the students. Therefore, the teacher is well placed to collect data about the relative strength and weaknesses of the course, particularly in respect of the course content, methods used and the value of assessment methods. Ideally, all teachers should be able to give feedback evaluative data to the curriculum planners and designers, so that the curriculum can be modified formatively.

Teachers play essential roles in curriculum implementation. They are responsible for translating curriculum objectives into actionable lesson plans, selecting appropriate teaching methods and materials and assessing students' progress, adapting instruction to students' needs, and fostering a positive learning environment. Teachers also provide feedback for curriculum improvement and ensure alignment with educational standards.

The Importance of Curriculum in Education and National Development

Curriculum plays a pivotal role in determining the quality and effectiveness of an educational system. When assessing the standard of a school, three critical aspects are typically considered. The calibre of teachers, the learning environment and the curriculum itself. Teachers must be highly qualified and well -trained, the facilities should include state -of-the-art laboratories and libraries, and the curriculum must align with contemporary educational and developmental needs. Globally, the level of a country's development is often reflected in its academic curriculum. Sadly, Nigeria's curriculum has been criticised for its lack of relevance to the country's socio-economic needs. However, the introduction of the new Senior Secondary School Education curriculum aims to address these concerns bridging skill gaps and aligning education with national developmental goals (nssec.gov.ng).

The principles of contextual Education System

Contextual education system is best introduced through the following principles as follows:

- *Contextual Curriculum:* Contextual curriculum is implemented through themes, and children explore each theme as a matrix integrated subjects. In order to ground the curriculum, four corner-stones are emphasised and central activities stem from either of the cornerstone: hands-on science curriculum, emotional intelligence and character education curriculum, thinking curriculum (technology and Mathematics, and literacy curriculum. (Global Education Leaders, 2013). The curriculum serves as a guideline for planning, is extremely flexible, hands-on, play-based and sees child holistically.

According to Gardner, (2011), his views on rethinking education have it that the changes in our world have (should have) a great impact on education. The students of today see knowledge as "open collaborative, accessible, often from the bottom up and frequently presented in multimedia" and they see the world as a place to learn. Contextual education system rethinks how we teach and learn, and builds a new system for a world on the shoulders of giants before us.

- *Character and Value education:* Value education in a technology-driven, constantly changing world, ensures stability, continuity and sustainability. Character education is the formation of good habit based on fundamental values. The teacher has to be an example for his students. If we want to bring up a respectful person, we have to be respectful ourselves. If we want our students to be tolerant, we have to be tolerant ourselves etc. The values taught in the contextual education system are gratitude, trust, perseverance, co-operation, curiosity, creativity, empathy, enthusiasm, autonomy, sincerity, respect and tolerance (Gee, 2013; Wagner, 2015; Claxton & Lucas, 2016).
- *Personalisation through differentiation:* Differentiation is one of the key principles of contextual education and it is a crucial part of daily learning. When differentiating, one should look at the group of students one has and match the needs of the students (Willingham, 2009). The core of the differentiation is flexible grouping and smart planning, when the prior knowledge is reviewed and a deeper understanding is constructed based on new concepts and skills. Differentiation is crucial because children have different needs and their home and cultural context may differ greatly. Those differences influence learning, and we should not ignore those differences while planning curriculum and learning (Damon, 1995). In contextual education, inclusion of all is a natural part of education, and children of all backgrounds and all abilities are equal participants. Each and every child is viewed as an integral part having unique needs, and the contextual awareness allows us to apply differentiation even better. (Robinson, 2016).
- *Teacher's goal is to help a child:* A teacher must be trained to understand that the success of an education process depends not only on the child's ability to assume responsibility for the educational process and, in particular, its planning. A teacher should not pass this responsibility to parents and the children. The teacher has to continually improve, adapt to the needs of a particular age (developmentally and appropriate practice) and the needs of individual children. He must have an excellent and thorough understanding of the context. The context of each child is multifaceted: its socio-economic, cultural, biological, educational, family relationships, etc. Only after thorough examination of these multifaceted contexts, closely related to the educational process, the teacher(s) will be able to partly assume responsibility for the child and successfully achieve educational goals (Berry, Byrd & Weider, 2013; Carey, 2014).
- *Encouraging the child's curiosity:* According to Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield & Hargreaves (2012), we are born with an infinite desire to explore the world around us. Natural curiosity encourages children not only to ask questions, but also to look for answers. The natural desire to explore and discover the world around us allows teachers to integrate Science, Language, Mathematics and other disciplines. The knowledge and the skills gained help to understand how the world around us operates. Hands-on, experiential, and play-based learning engage children and teach them to solve real world problems. (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015).

Curriculum Content and Nation Building

According to Okoro (2023), the content of any curriculum is an embodiment of the attitudes, knowledge and skills which a society intends to impart to her citizens through the school

and other socialising agencies. The wealth or poverty of a nation depends on the content of the curriculum. A researcher, in agreement with this observed that “the survival of a society depends on how that society addresses contemporary problems such as population growth, migration, ethnic relations, food, poverty, crime, unemployment, drug abuse etc. The survival and prosperity of a nation depends upon that society’s capacity to apply its knowledge to resolve its practical problems. John Dewey in this regard identified the school as miniature society through which the society can address its problems and needs. All these constitute the content of the curriculum. The needs and the aspirations of the nation give the curriculum content which in turn determines the progress or nature of the society. For example, in a country where the rate of population growth does not balance with the productivity or resources that nation will continue to depreciate economically.

Nation building can be viewed from various angles of human activity which can lead to a better living standard of people generally. Stability and progress are often realised in a nation’s industry, agriculture, health and natural resources through educational endeavours. In this way, peaceful co-existence, security of lives and property, and freedom can be guaranteed. Many nations of the world have employed tremendously the power of education to achieve their national hopes and aspirations. Ukeje (1995), Gbamanja (1997 and Dike (1995) have ascertained how America, Japan and Germany used education to attain their desired goals. At the dawn of American independence, Thomas Jefferson sounded a warning to the new nation “A nation cannot remain both ignorant and free”.

It was the warning about the crucial importance of education in nation building that made America invest the prime part of her energies in the educative process. Also, with the launching of the Sputnik 1957 by the former Soviet Union, America was challenged. And how they met up with this challenge was through revamping, refurbishing and beefing up what was contained in the curriculum, that is, modifying the content of the curriculum to reflect science and technology. Hence today, they have technological powers that have made them wealthy and powerful.

Nigeria has not developed like the U.S.A because it depends on colonial curriculum and our resources have been controlled by those who have the knowledge on how to do it. It is well known fact that no nation can rise above its curriculum since the wealth and poverty of any nation is determined by the type and quality of curriculum it has. Okafor (2000) in agreement with the above finding, observed that a developing country like Nigeria only achieve its articulated national objectives through well planned curricular programmes and in his assessment of Nigeria’s achievement of national objectives discovered these objectives had hardly been achieved. This is why Nigeria is classified as underdeveloped.

Curriculum Content in the 21st Century

There is need to re-examine our curriculum content especially in the area of science syllabus at the senior secondary school. Dempster (1993) is of the opinion that educators should re-examine the school curricula with a view to “separating the wheat from the chaff so that only essentials will effectively be taught”. We are now in the era of science and technology and the contemporary world of today is scientifically and technologically oriented. So, there is a great need for science and technology literacy in Nigeria. Yakub (1997) cited in Okafor (2000) pointed out that without our children having excellent understanding of scientific and technological concepts, reaching our personal and societal goals in the 21st century will be a mirage. Science and

technology are primary instruments that can make any nation move forward. Therefore, the content of the curriculum of a nation should emphasise more on science and technology and societal issues, so that the 21st century science would be more inter-disciplinary focused on societal values.

Science and technology are sources for social and economic changes and their applications in various fields of human endeavour have been responsible for raising people's standard of living. For instance, countries like Japan, China, Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong whose productive forces boosted their national economic growth depended on science and technology to suit their environmental and cultural values. Nigeria can be responsible in the same direction of these countries in the 21st century.

Recalling the World Declaration on Education for all in the project 2000 and forum at UNESCO 1993, sound education was recognised as fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education and of scientific and technological literacy and capacity and thus to self-reliant development. They also suggested that government, industry, public and private sector interests and education in all countries should review critically existing provisions for science and technology education at all levels and in all settings with the aim of giving appropriate attention to development and maintenance of learning programmes to the needs of individuals and communities. Again, it aims to develop appropriate in-school and out-of-school opportunities, programmes, curricula and assessment procedures for science and technology education. In order to achieve economic recovery in our nation, alternative curricular content and new tasks for curriculum experts and teachers must be designed such as project 2000.

Conclusion

It is very clear that the economic backwardness of our nation stems from the fact that Nigeria is still operating with the curriculum of the colonial masters. Truth be told, there is no technologically-driven and scientifically-propelled learning content set forward and implemented in the Nigerian system of education. If at all such curriculum is in existence, it is only said and not done. A country like Nigeria must be intentional about nation-building. The school curriculum should be prepared to enhance competitiveness in the areas of science, technology, human resource development and the like. It is rather unfortunate that Nigeria is underdeveloped in terms of socio-economic strides. This is because the school, which is the starting point for socialisation and training does not have such backup or learning content. There is no contextualised curriculum. If there is any, where is the political will to realise its goals that could be evident in tangible developmental strides? There is no problem-solving curriculum. Else, the issues about underdevelopment and other forms of crises, economically and socially would now be a thing of the past after sixty five years of political independence.

Recommendations

Our educational stakeholders have extensively gone through researches to better the lot. Therefore, the following recommendations have been put forward:

1. Science and technology should be the watch-word for curriculum planners and designers and all agencies of curriculum development for Nigeria to compete favourably with other developed nations of the world.

2. Curriculum content must address those issues that cause depression in the economy, for example, issues of drug abuse, terrorism, violence, secret cult, religious crises and the like.
3. It is recommended that the educational programmes be refined and modified to take into account the current trends in technological development.
4. As a matter of fact, since Nigeria is existing in a world of change, workers need to be flexible and acquire new skills especially in this computer technology era.
5. There is a clarion call for the overhauling of the curriculum content today to address contemporary issues in our society, and more importantly, appropriate strategies for implementation must be adopted.

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