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TRANSFORMING AND PLANNING THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC RECESSION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Primary education serves as the foundational stage of learning, with its fundamental objective being to create, establish, and provide equal opportunities for all children irrespective of age, gender, or country of origin to attain a well-rounded cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor development. However, Nigeria's prevailing economic challenges have contributed to a moral vacuum in the lives of parents and youths, leaving many unable to fulfill their financial responsibilities. This situation has significantly disrupted the core objectives of the primary education curriculum. To address this, transformation and strategic planning through character education are essential for effectively restructuring the primary curriculum. This paper explores key concepts such as transformation, entrepreneurship education as a solution to economic recession, primary education, curriculum value re-orientation, sustainable quality education, enhancement of school standards, economic recession and its causes, as well as strategies for transforming and planning the primary curriculum in times of economic downturn. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of an entrepreneurial approach to primary education. In light of these discussions, it is recommended that the primary education curriculum should be designed to foster self-realization and equip learners with the skills necessary for self-sufficiency and economic resilience.

Keywords: Transforming, planning, primary curriculum, economic recession

INTRODUCTION

In every culture and throughout all stages of human evolution, both formal and informal education has consistently served as an agent of positive transformation. It remains the most powerful weapon against the persistent adversaries of ignorance, disease, poverty, and stagnation—challenges that have long plagued humanity. In our modern era, this recognition is evident as most parents earnestly work to ensure that their children have access to formal education (Leonard 2013). Education not only reshapes individuals but also has a profound impact on societies. The National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 2013) regards education as a formidable tool for national development, emphasizing its capacity to drive national growth and progress. Education stakeholders have repeatedly called for the nation to evolve into a prosperous, highly educated, and technologically advanced society.

A transformed educational system is not merely effective in achieving its predetermined objectives and goals; it often exceeds them by optimizing resource utilization and enhancing production efficiency. By clearly defining its goals, objectives, and fostering a collective commitment to action, all participants—especially the key players in the education sector such as commissioners, directors of education, school supervisors, inspectors, principals, teachers, communities, and examination bodies like WAEC, NECO, NERDC, and STAN—can contribute significantly. Nigeria's major curriculum development agencies are recognized not only for their productivity but also for their entrepreneurial mindset. They continually retool, restructure, reengineer, and cultivate unique core competencies that distinguish them as leaders and trendsetters in the educational landscape (Mbaegbu 2015). In this context, the curriculum is understood as a series of



planned and organized learning experiences that form the core of school education.

The curriculum is defined as a deliberate, systematic plan that operates under the auspices of the school. Although government bodies, curriculum developers, school authorities, teachers, and parents strive to ensure that the established objectives are met, there are instances when these targets are not fully achieved (Ibiye, 2006). In some cases, students end up learning content that deviates from the intended outcomes. Essentially, the curriculum is a structured plan detailing the activities that learners experience under the guidance and supervision of the school, delineating the necessary scope to reach specific aims and objectives at various educational levels. The planning and transformation of a primary school curriculum, especially during an era of economic recession, must differ from that during an economic boom; it must be oriented toward fostering self-reliance. Given that primary education develops critical skills such as reading, mathematics, information acquisition, and critical thinking, the curriculum for primary education must be designed to promote self-reliance (Akporkonor, 2015).

Concept of Transformation

Society is inherently dynamic, a truth that applies to all its dimensions, including education. The educational system must evolve in response to contemporary realities, often through a process known as transformation. Educational transformation refers to a planned and intentional change aimed at addressing deficiencies and meeting emerging needs, with the underlying belief that significant national progress can be achieved through adjustments in education (Oleabhie, 2014). This process involves altering the culture of the classroom, the school environment, and the curriculum itself, changes that generally occur gradually. Transformation is viewed as an essential modification to confront current problems and issues, and it is a strategy embraced by many nations today to effect radical changes in their educational sectors. Transformation can occur on both large and small scales. Eke (2010), as cited in Oleabhie, Ugbeber, Oleabhie, and Utebor (2014), argues that transformation is typically expansive, driven by social and economic imperatives, and impacts the entire system. Importantly, before undertaking a major transformation in the educational sector, entrepreneurship education should be integrated into the curriculum. Curriculum planners must view it as a remedy for economic recessions.

Entrepreneurship Education as a Panacea for Economic Recession

Entrepreneurship education is the process of acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, and psychomotor skills necessary for self-reliance, job creation, and independent living when traditional paid employment is unavailable. This form of education is designed to equip individuals with the skills required for creative problem-solving and innovative thinking (Oleabhie et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship implies not only the willingness but also the ability to seize investment opportunities in a given environment, enabling an individual

to establish and successfully manage an enterprise based on these identified opportunities.

Given the volatile job market and the increasing recognition of the need for vocational graduates to pursue self-employment, the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in the curricula of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions has become imperative (UNESCO, 1997). Thus, entrepreneurship education is structured to prepare individuals for the establishment and operation of small-scale enterprises. Without acquiring the necessary entrepreneurial skills, graduates are likely to face significant challenges in earning a living. The overarching goal of entrepreneurship education is to generate employment opportunities through small-scale enterprises. More specifically, its objectives include:

1. Developing a pool of potential entrepreneurs equipped with the skills to start and successfully manage small and medium-scale industries.
2. Encouraging self-employment as a deliberate and informed choice.
3. Creating employment opportunities for others.
4. Reducing reliance on government and large firms for paid employment.
5. Stimulating rural development and achieving a substantial level of broad-based economic and industrial progress.

Global shifts in recent times have underscored the need for innovative reforms in school curricula. Education systems worldwide, including Nigeria's, are undergoing changes to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Primary Education

Primary education in Nigeria typically begins at the age of four (Zalakoro, 2015). Students spend six years in primary school and, upon graduation, receive a school leaving certificate. The curriculum at the primary level includes subjects such as Mathematics, English Language, Christian Religious Knowledge, Islamic Religious Studies, Science, and one of the three indigenous languages and cultures—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, or Igbo. In private schools, additional subjects like Computer Science, French, and Fine Arts are often offered. Pupils in primary schools are generally required to take a Common Entrance Examination to gain admission into Federal and State Government Secondary Schools, as well as private secondary schools.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program was introduced to replace Nigeria's Universal Primary Education Scheme within the (6-3-3-4) system of primary education. The new 9-3-4 system was designed to align with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) initiative (EFA, 2002). Under the UBE scheme, children receive six years of primary education as part of a continuous nine-year educational experience, during which progression from one class to the next is typically automatic, though still determined through continuous assessment. This scheme, monitored by the Universal Basic Education (UBE) authority, has established education as both free and a right

for every child. Consequently, UBE extends to early childhood care and education (Zalakoro, 2014). The law also mandates a nine-year formal schooling period, supplemented by adult education, non-formal education, skill acquisition programs, and educational provisions for special groups such as nomads, emigrants, the girl child, women, Almajiri, street children, and individuals with disabilities.

Primary education represents the initial stage in the educational journey, aimed at providing all children—regardless of age, gender, or background—with opportunities to achieve balanced cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor development. This early stage of education is crucial in establishing learning processes and employing strategies that enhance critical and creative thinking skills. Primary education is also responsible for acquainting pupils with their civilization and traditions, fostering respect and love for their national heritage, and instilling awareness of their national orthodox religion and history. Ultimately, primary education strives to promote harmonious coexistence among pupils from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Zalakoro, 2015).

Curriculum Planning

Curriculum planning is fundamentally about making informed choices regarding the learning experiences deemed appropriate and desirable for the younger generation in society. As noted by Keziah and Lawrence (2013), it involves constructing a comprehensive program of learning experiences aimed at achieving predetermined goals and objectives for a particular community. The primary aim of curriculum planning is to design an educational program that not only fosters a society's ideas and values but also addresses its social, economic, and other pressing needs to the fullest extent. Importantly, curriculum planning is an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Its dynamic nature reflects the ever-changing characteristics of society, which constantly evolves in terms of needs, economic aspirations, and values. In the current era of economic breakdown, it is imperative that the target group undergoing learning experiences also experiences a re-orientation of values.

Value Re-Orientation

It is essential to recognize that the school serves as a microcosm of the larger society, meaning that developments in the broader community significantly influence the school environment. Hence, there is an urgent need to reaffirm our national values. This is the central focus of transforming and planning the curriculum in light of the economic recession—we must fundamentally alter our approach. The time-honored values of honesty, commitment, industry, merit, excellence, patriotism, dignity, and celebration should be emphasized, while an undue focus on materialism and superficial notions of "success" must be discouraged (Asuou, 2013). Moreover, the national education aims and objectives—which include instilling the proper values and attitudes necessary for the survival of both the individual and Nigerian society—should be prominently reflected in our educational system. Consequently, education managers, curriculum planners and developers, teachers, researchers, and other school personnel

at all levels must be redeployed and refocused to ensure effective service delivery. We need to broaden our vision, sharpen our insights, and adjust our mindset to achieve the overarching aims of education in this era of economic recession.

Sustainable Quality Education

Efforts to achieve sustainable, high-quality education should begin at the tertiary level, as initial successes here are likely to cascade down to lower levels. Although recent modifications in university curricula—such as the incorporation of Civic Education, Entrepreneurship Studies, and other general studies courses—have been introduced, they have not fully addressed the issue of educational quality. While increased access to tertiary education has been achieved through the establishment of federal universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, as well as through the involvement of corporate organizations and private individuals, the core issue of quality must be tackled by enhancing the content delivery system. This entails focusing on both the personnel and the curriculum to ensure that our children acquire knowledge and skills that are relevant on both national and international scales in the 21st century. It is crucial that the content delivered to students is presented in a manner that promotes genuine and meaningful learning (Asuru, 2013).

Even the best curriculum can be undermined by an ineffective delivery system. In a vast country like Nigeria, where schools remain insufficient for the burgeoning youth population, an excessive teacher-student ratio further impedes the attainment of quality education. Teachers and lecturers must be not only knowledgeable but also highly competent (Comfort, 2013). Education should be organized as a sustained and systematic process designed to impart a balanced combination of knowledge, skills, and understanding—qualities essential for every aspect of life (Asuru, 2013). This process should aim at unlocking each individual's potential and equipping them with the competencies needed to contribute effectively to both personal and societal development.

Improvement in School Quality

School quality is reflected in the instructional processes experienced by each learner, the degree of classroom interaction, and the overall efficiency of schools in fostering the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies. Ultimately, this quality is measured by student achievement, which is supported by the availability of effective instructional resources, facilities, and teaching practices that promote high achievement (Asuru, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to enhance school quality at all levels by providing adequate and modern teaching and learning materials, upgrading school buildings, furnishing classrooms with appropriate furniture, supplying current textbooks, and refining teaching and learning processes. Additionally, recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is critical. These measures will have a positive impact on student achievement, ensuring that learners acquire not only academic knowledge but also practical skills, demonstrable competencies, and

positive values and attitudes—factors that are especially vital during times of economic recession.

Economic Recession

What exactly constitutes an economic recession? The causes and remedies for Nigeria's current economic recession have become focal points of discussion both domestically and internationally. Major institutions, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), have concurred that Nigeria's economy has indeed slipped into a recession. They assert that economic stability may not return until early 2017, with growth remaining subdued. An economic recession is characterized by a significant decline in economic activities that lasts for more than a few months, typically observable through reductions in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale and retail sales (Emmanuel, 2014). Additionally, it can be defined as a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters. By this definition, Nigeria is currently experiencing an economic recession, as evidenced by the first and second growth rates of 2016, which were -0.36% and 1.59%, respectively (Emmanuel, 2016).

Causes of Economic Recession

Economic recession is a complex phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors, both internal and external, that disrupt the normal functioning of an economy. Several interrelated causes have been identified in the literature, and understanding these is critical for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in designing appropriate interventions, including in the realm of curriculum planning. Below is a discussion of some of the major causes of economic recession,

1. **Fluctuations in key economic indicators;** One of the primary causes of an economic recession is a sustained downturn in key economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production, and retail sales. As Emmanuel (2014) notes, economic recession is often defined as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, and typically visible in a reduction of real GDP. This decline often reflects deeper issues such as decreased consumer spending and reduced business investments, which collectively contribute to the contraction of economic activities.
2. **Macroeconomic policy mismanagement;** Inadequate or inconsistent fiscal and monetary policies can play a significant role in triggering an economic recession. When governments mismanage public funds, engage in excessive borrowing, or implement policies that fail to stimulate economic growth, the economy can suffer. For instance, studies have highlighted that high levels of public debt and poor fiscal discipline may lead to reduced investor confidence and lower economic activity (Emmanuel, 2016). Mismanagement of economic policy can also lead to inflationary pressures,
3. **Corruption and inefficient resource allocation;** Corruption is another critical factor contributing to economic recession. As noted by Donatus (2015), widespread corruption and misallocation of resources undermine the effectiveness of economic policies and discourage both domestic and foreign investments. When resources are diverted away from productive uses, economic growth slows, leading to an environment where inefficiencies prevail. This misallocation not only hampers economic development but also erodes public trust in government institutions, further destabilizing the economy.
4. **External shocks and global economic trends;** External factors such as global economic downturns, fluctuations in commodity prices, and geopolitical tensions also have a profound impact on national economies. Many countries, especially those heavily reliant on exports of a single commodity (like oil), are vulnerable to global price shocks. For example, a sharp decline in oil prices can significantly reduce national revenue, leading to an economic recession in oil-dependent countries. Additionally, global economic slowdowns can reduce demand for exports, further straining national economies (Emmanuel, 2014). These external shocks are often beyond the control of national policymakers, yet their effects can be profound and long-lasting.
5. **Structural weaknesses and lack of diversification;** Structural issues within an economy, such as overdependence on a narrow range of industries or lack of diversification, can also trigger economic recessions. An economy that does not diversify its industrial base is more susceptible to external shocks and internal mismanagement. This lack of diversification can lead to instability, as downturns in the dominant sector (for example, oil and gas) can have a ripple effect throughout the entire economy. In this regard, long-term structural reforms aimed at diversifying the economy are essential to mitigate the risks of economic recession.
6. **Socio-Political Instability;** Socio-political factors, including political instability, policy uncertainty, and social unrest, also contribute to economic recessions. When there is widespread uncertainty about the political future or when policies change erratically, businesses and investors may postpone or cancel investments, leading to a slowdown in economic activities. Political instability often leads to disruptions in economic planning and implementation, thereby hindering sustainable economic growth.

Transforming and Planning the Primary Curriculum in an Era of Economic Recession

Transforming and planning the educational system in Nigeria is essential for redeeming and restoring our national character and image. The concept of education grounded in human values necessitates the use of both direct and indirect methods throughout the schooling process. For the education system to instill and solidify positive values in children—who are tomorrow's leaders—teachers must act as role models (Donatus, 2015).

Given that primary education is the foundational stage where a child grows and matures, it is imperative that teachers possess intellectual competence, emotional stability, and unimpeachable moral standards. As Proverbs 22:6 in the Bible states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Curriculum planning, at its core, involves selecting the learning experiences that are most appropriate and desirable for society's youth. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), primary education is intended for children aged 6 to 11, forming the bedrock upon which the rest of the education system is built. This policy also emphasizes that teaching should be conducted using practical, exploratory, and experimental methods. Yet, one must ask: how many practical methods are truly being implemented in our primary schools? (NPE, 2004).

The harsh economic conditions in Nigeria have created a moral vacuum, adversely affecting both parents and youths who struggle to meet their financial obligations. These circumstances have fostered an environment in which unethical practices—such as cheating, theft, bribery, and corruption—have become rampant. Additionally, many mothers now have to allocate less time for nurturing their children because they are preoccupied with providing materially for their families. This economic strain has significantly eroded the traditional value system in Nigeria.

Moreover, the influx of foreign ideas and technological influences has transformed Nigeria into a more open society. The unrestricted entry of foreign films, pornographic publications, satellite broadcasts, videos, and similar modern technological products has had a profound impact on the Nigerian value system (Donatus, 2015). Today, society is marked by high levels of distrust and suspicion, where misplaced values are common, and little attention is given to the education of the youth who will one day lead the nation.

Entrepreneurial Primary Curriculum

The primary educational system has often been critiqued, particularly in comparative studies, as merely serving as a preparatory stage for higher levels of education (Akpan, 2015). In this context, primary school leavers are frequently not equipped with the necessary life skills to face real-world challenges, but are only prepared to transition to the next level of schooling. This lack of life skills continues into secondary education and ultimately into higher education, where graduates often find themselves qualified only for government

employment or further academic study, such as pursuing a master's degree. The consequences of this systemic shortfall are evident in the form of youth restiveness, unhealthy competition for political offices, high crime rates, and an oversupply of cheap labor, all of which are driven by high unemployment rates (Akpan, 2012). To reverse this situation, the status quo must be challenged by integrating practical, entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum. This could include computer simulation and programming, practical writing techniques, innovative methods for sourcing teaching and learning materials, editorial services, manufacturing and maintenance skills, and other pertinent competencies. Such measures would facilitate meaningful development across all economic strata.

Conclusion

Primary education is the foundational stage of formal learning, aimed at creating, establishing, and offering opportunities to all children—regardless of age, gender, or country of origin—to achieve balanced cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor development. In Nigeria, however, education has increasingly become a source of social instability rather than a stabilizing force, a trend that was evident even before the current economic recession. One must question whether the economic benefits of education are confined to a privileged few, with the very structure of the economic system exacerbating rather than resolving the issue of unemployment. Despite the myriad problems plaguing primary education in Nigeria—ranging from cultism, examination malpractice, sexual harassment, and corruption to reliance on handouts, inadequate funding, incessant strikes, understaffing, brain drain, poor infrastructure, outdated laboratories, and insufficient equipment—it is vital not to dismiss the sector (Gabriel, 2014).

It is equally important to recognize that the prosperity of any society depends on the moral disposition of its members. As Gabriel (2014) asserts, when moral laxity, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds, bribery, corruption, a lack of duty and social responsibility, and a disregard for the public good prevail, societal development is obstructed and rendered nearly impossible. Transformation through character education is, therefore, the key to effectively planning the primary curriculum. As Asuka (2014) aptly observes, if a country produces "intellectual giants" who are, in fact, "moral dwarfs," it is merely creating obstacles to its own development. Educated individuals who lack moral integrity are, indeed, the greatest impediments to the progress of their country.

Recommendations

From the discussion, the following recommendations are made

1. Primary education curriculum should be geared towards self-realization
2. Schools should incorporate programmes such as programmes writing practical and small scale improvisation/techniques for teaching and learning

materials, maintenance skills, farming techniques and reservation to maintain but a few.

3. Moral values should be made compulsory in school
4. Improve on quality of teachers.

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