

**NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: HOW CAN WE IMPROVE
THE CURRICULUM OF OUR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY
SCHOOLS?**

A REPORT

DATE: SATURDAY, 4 MARCH 2023

TIME: 4:00 PM WAT

**PREPARED BY THE
LITERARY RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION (LRF)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education in Nigeria is plagued with various challenges, including an outdated curriculum that has contributed to a decline in the quality of learning. This has resulted in a decreasing number of youths having the necessary skills to compete globally. Inadequately educated youths are also ill-equipped to contribute to the growth of the national economy or become productive members of the society.

Quality education is essential for critical thinking, problem-solving and generating new ideas to drive progress and innovation. Without it, the country faces stagnation and underdevelopment.

There have been growing concerns in recent years about the need to improve the Nigerian education system and address the shortcomings of the current curriculum, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels. The current curriculum has been criticised for its lack of relevance to the needs of young people in the 21st century and its perceived inadequacy in imparting practical skills that aid the learning and cognitive development of students. These shortcomings have led to calls for a comprehensive review of the curriculum.

Against this backdrop, the Literary Renaissance Foundation (LRF) hosted a citizen engagement deliberation that featured a panel discussion among stakeholders to provide perspectives on the strategies and policy actions toward designing a contemporary curriculum for primary and secondary education in Nigeria. This discussion is the latest edition of LRF's Reading Culture Dialogue, which is a quarterly event held to explore pertinent issues in Nigeria's learning sector and propose recommendations for their resolution.

The Dialogue, a platform for actors to exchange ideas and develop thoughtful suggestions, is part of LRF's interventions in advocating for mass literacy and promoting reading culture in Nigeria toward achieving national development.

FORMAT OF THE PROGRAMME

The Dialogue was the second of a quarterly event organised by the LRF. Participants were stakeholders in the Nigerian learning and knowledge sector, including teachers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, civil servants, and school administrators. The participants were also of various ages and attended the Dialogue from different parts of Nigeria. The session was undertaken as a focused and intentional conversation to assess how the primary and secondary school curriculum can be improved in Nigeria.

Programme date: Saturday, 4 March 2023

Programme Zoom

Venue:

Facilitators: Babatunde Oladele (moderator) and Bede Ehiogu (note taker).

Participants: Graceflora Ohwobete (Lagos), Chukwuma Adekunle (Enugu), Omatseye Oti (Lagos), Olabisi Olasupo (Ibadan), Luqman Babatunde (Kaduna), Nneoma Okoro (Ibadan), Ifemide Omolawal (Ibadan), Tejumade Oke (Lagos), Abraham Akinyemi (Ibadan), Sola Lebile (Akure), Mary Ogundipe (Lagos), Naomi Ojo (Akure), Edi Lawani (Edo).

The Dialogue began at 4 p.m. WAT and continued till 7 p.m. The participants took turns introducing themselves at the start, while the moderator introduced himself, his colleagues and talked about the origin of the Dialogue as well as about the LRF.

The deliberation was very inclusive, with the moderator regularly inviting participants to read various sections of the programme notes in accordance

with the standard procedures set by the National Issues Forum (NIF) of the United States. Prior to initiating discussions, certain ground rules were established and mutually agreed upon by everyone:

Ground rules:

- ❖ Focus on the options and actions we can take nationally and in our communities.
- ❖ Consider all options fairly.
- ❖ Listening is just as important as speaking.
- ❖ No one or two individuals should dominate.
- ❖ Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- ❖ Everyone is encouraged to participate.

Discussion Structure

The discussion on the improvement of the primary and secondary school curriculum was approached from two aspects:

- ❖ Stage One: Development and Planning
- ❖ Stage Two: Strategy Options

During the discussion, the participants focused on three key aspects regarding the curriculum change. Firstly, they deliberated whether an alteration or improvement was necessary and how urgently it needed to be implemented. Secondly, they discussed the development and preparation of the new curriculum, what it would require and how it could be achieved. Lastly, they explored diverse ideas that could be incorporated into the new curriculum for more effective teaching.

Throughout the discussion, the drawbacks of each proposal were carefully examined to ensure that every aspect was taken into consideration. Additionally, the participants were encouraged to propose other viable approaches to ensure the best outcome possible.

The deliberations were well structured and coordinated, with each participant actively participating in the discussion, presenting their perspectives and carefully listening to others. Every attendee was allowed to speak if they indicated through the raising of hand either in their video or through the Zoom function, and there was a sense of mutual respect and understanding during the discussions. The suggestions and input of each speaker were often analysed by subsequent speakers, producing very rich outcomes.

The resulting details from each stage are presented below.

Stage One: Developing and Planning

It was agreed that careful steps were required not just to produce an effective curriculum but also to ensure that it would be continually developed as appropriate, for instance through regular research.

The following actions were considered:

- 1) Education boards should involve teachers from various grade levels and subject areas in the curriculum development process to take a holistic look at the school curriculum.
- 2) Experts should compare our local realities with international standards and develop a curriculum that incorporates the best practices from around the world and can produce students with strong literacy skills.
- 3) Schools should organise periodic training for teachers on dynamic teaching models to help them learn new skills and innovative techniques, and then incorporate this knowledge into the development of more effective curriculums.
- 4) Education boards should provide for the revision of school curriculums periodically.

The possible obstacles to implementing these action points were identified as drawbacks, with each drawback representing a barrier to the action described in the corresponding number.

- 1) This process requires the approval of the government, which may not consider it a priority. Additionally, there is a possibility that conservative factions within the government may hinder or even obstruct the process.
- 2) The politicisation of the process can lead to the appointment of incompetent individuals to oversee these changes.
- 3) Rigid leadership can stall this process. Moreover, schools might allocate their resources to other aspects of education that are deemed equally important.
- 4) School curriculums tend to be inflexible and revising them might be a cumbersome process.

These points were discussed at length by the participants. Some believed that the curriculum was already rich enough and did not require much change, identifying implementation, political appointments and nepotism hiring as areas that need to be addressed. On the other hand, others argued that the curriculum was obsolete and needed significant improvements. Overall, the participants accepted the action points while also acknowledging that the drawbacks represent genuine obstacles.

Stage Two: Strategy Options

Several approaches that could be incorporated into the curriculum to instil a reading culture and sound education were proposed. However, some possible hindrances to those approaches were also brought forward.

The following propositions were discussed:

- 1) Schools should establish well-equipped libraries with books tailored to the interests and levels of students and include designated reading periods in the curriculum to promote personal reading.

- 2) Teachers should involve students in extended literacy activities during scheduled class hours to foster strong reading abilities.
- 3) Reading should be introduced as a separate subject in the curriculum. Priority attention should be given to literacy as it is the foundation of most learning.
- 4) Make learning aids such as e-readers, whiteboards and audio-visual materials an important part of the curriculum. With these tools, the lessons can be made more accessible and engaging to the students.
- 5) Provisions can be made in the curriculum for teachers to provide individual or small-group assistance to students, enabling them to identify and address any academic challenges.
- 6) Group discussions should be introduced to promote deep learning and engagement, while allowing teachers to assess students' understanding and provide feedback.

The drawbacks to these propositions were also presented for discussion:

- 1) Schools may not have the required funding for a supply of relevant reading materials. Students may also turn the library period into playtime if there is no adequate supervision.
- 2) Teachers without adequate skill in teaching reading strategies will be unable to use this time effectively. Besides, poor remuneration might discourage teachers from giving their best, leading to poor efforts in the implementation of the strategy.
- 3) High-ranking conservative individuals in the educational sector and in government may delay or even prevent the change.
- 4) This strategy depends heavily on financial support from the government and donations from the private sector.
- 5) The current teacher-to-student ratio cannot support this and the introduction of more teachers into the school curriculum requires significant funds.
- 6) They can be time-consuming and difficult to manage, particularly if the teacher has a large class or if the discussion is not well planned. Students

may also turn the discussion into playtime or steer it away from the objective.

The panel explored these strategies and how effective they could prove in fostering sound education in young people. One aspect that was emphasised was making teaching more practical to enable students practise what they learn. The panel also advocated the inclusion of reading as a separate subject in the school curriculum, with teachers ensuring that everyone participates actively. They equally proposed making book projects all-engaging and incorporating them into continuous assessments to motivate students.

Further, encouraging reading outside of school was also deemed essential, with parents, and other adults advised to provide a small home library and find innovative ways to help young people develop a love for reading and writing. In addition to reading, the panel also suggested activities such as preparing and delivering reports on news or African historical events, which could help improve the educational capacity of young people. Finally, on the aspect of funding, the panel agreed that public schools need support beyond what the state government can provide and cited Governor Abiola Ajimobi's school-board initiative in Oyo State as a successful example of incorporating old students and the PTA to help with fund-raising.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All the elements presented to the participants on enhancing the curriculum in Nigerian primary and secondary schools were extensively deliberated on. The participants were given adequate time to express their views, and their contributions were noted down as they spoke. After each participant had spoken, their views were summarised by the moderator to be certain that the point they wanted to stress had been well understood.

The discussions centred on the need for a curriculum change, the potential impact of the proposed changes and the possible barriers that could hinder the implementation of the new curriculum. The ground rules for the Dialogue were followed to the letter, ensuring that the deliberations were conducted in an organised and constructive manner.

The Dialogue was an overall success, as all participants actively participated in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and suggestions. The outcome of the Dialogue will inform the development of a comprehensive plan for improving the curriculum in our primary and secondary schools, with the aim of ensuring that our education system is equipped to meet the evolving needs of our students and society.

Recurring points among speakers include the following:

- ❖ The current curriculum in use is teacher-centred. The educators are primarily focused on ensuring their students pass exams rather than imparting knowledge for its own sake.
- ❖ The curriculum is overloaded. There is also an emphasis on methodologies and technicalities that prioritise theory over practicality.
- ❖ Competition among schools contributes to an overemphasis on the exam scores of students rather than the knowledge and skills they have gained.

- ❖ Even with a comprehensive curriculum, a major issue is the implementation and teaching methodologies. Unfortunately, the prevalence of nepotism in our national and educational systems results in ill-suited individuals being assigned to inappropriate roles.
- ❖ Reading should be incentivised.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were discussed:

- 1) There should be a transition towards an inquiry-based and discussion-oriented approach to teaching. Discussions between teachers and students on the topics at hand should be held regularly, giving the students the freedom to broaden their knowledge, and the teachers the opportunity to assess students' understanding.
- 2) An integrative approach to teaching that incorporates opportunities for students with varying learning styles should be adopted. The curriculum should also be updated to align with technological advancements.
- 3) Reading as a separate subject should be introduced into the curriculum, but an emphasis should be placed on adequate supervision. During this reading time, students should be made to read separate texts and critique them in their own words in order to ensure that every student is engaged.
- 4) Funding of public schools should not be left to the state government alone. Working with old students and the private sector as well can ensure that schools get much-needed funding for their activities.