



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

### **INTRODUCTION**

A school curriculum serves as a guide for teachers in preparing lesson activities for students. It helps schools focus on subjects that matter, set quantifiable goals, and track student development to ensure that teachers have a greater understanding, students know where they stand, and parents are informed. Moreover, a curriculum helps in measuring the learning pace of students so that they will be exposed to training content commensurate with their abilities. Thus, it is evident that a rich curriculum is the cornerstone of quality education in schools.

However, the primary and secondary school system in Nigeria has suffered neglect for many years in the aspect of the curriculum and this has led to poor or no reading ability among students.<sup>1</sup> A 2016 study found that only 33% of Nigerians aged 6-14 are able to read. This means that a whopping 67% of young people in that age bracket cannot read and thus cannot use literacy as a tool for learning.<sup>2</sup>

Such a damning statistic exists due to poor teaching methods and school curriculums that hardly reflect the contemporary realities of the students or equip them with practical skills for learning and cognition. The education system in Nigeria is effectively centred around exams, such that, instead of reading to learn and broaden their horizons, students resort to cramming information to pass their exams, thus discouraging a culture of reading and knowledge acquisition. As a result, the ability of students to apply acquired knowledge to practical situations is compromised. Despite passing their exams, they struggle with knowledge transfer and fail to demonstrate comprehension of the subject matter beyond the classroom.<sup>3</sup>

Considering such evidence, developing an effective primary and secondary school curriculum that engenders a positive and encouraging learning environment is vital to the improvement of education and young minds in Africa's most populous country.

### **ADDRESSING THE ISSUE**

To fast-track national development, primary and secondary school curriculums in Nigeria should reflect educational strategies that enable students to develop good reading ability, since reading has been identified as the

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<sup>1</sup> Oyetunde, T.O. (2016). Improving literacy instructional practices in primary schools in Nigeria: Strategies that work. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, 6(2).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ezenwosu, N.E. and Ogbodo, B.C. (2022). Chapter twelve: students' use of school library for developing reading culture in senior secondary schools in Nigeria. *Festschrift in Honour of the Music Maestro Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke*, pp.106-115.



bedrock of learning and education.<sup>4</sup> They should also emphasise knowledge acquisition and application rather than just note memorisation.

This issue guide provides several recommendations for addressing the problem of ineffective curriculums. These recommendations have been grouped into two stages: the first is the development and planning stage, and the second is the possible strategies.

Each stage includes actionable steps that can be taken to tackle the issue. However, each proposition is also accompanied by its own set of drawbacks that must be carefully deliberated upon.

It must be noted that the suggestions presented in this guide are by no means exhaustive. Moreover, rather than necessarily being strategies that can be adopted, they may also serve as a foundation for building more effective solutions that address the problem comprehensively.

### STAGE ONE: DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

It is obvious that the curriculum used in our primary and secondary schools, particularly public schools, needs a significant rework. Instructors from different grade levels can be brought together to look at student literacy and other crucial aspects of education and determine how they can be improved. Experts should be engaged to compare the current curriculum of the Nigerian system with those used in other parts of the world – while taking into account the local context – and devise an efficient curriculum that would develop the intellectual capacity of students.

Teachers should also be provided with adequate training to enable them to develop better skills with which they can look out for better teaching methods that can be incorporated into the curriculum as and when due.

### A PRIMARY DRAWBACK

School curriculums tend to be rigid, with revision requiring many formal procedures that may slow down the process or even prevent its adoption. Moreover, wholesale changes need government approval which can lead to bottlenecks or politicisation of the process.

| SN | Actions  | Drawbacks  |
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| 1  | Education boards should integrate instructors from different grade levels and topic areas to look at | This process requires the approval of government, which may not consider it a priority. There is also the chance that conservative |

<sup>4</sup> Haliru, R.A., Abdulkarim, M., Mohammed, A.D. and Dangani, B.U. (2015). An assessment of reading habit among secondary school students in Kaduna metropolis. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(10), pp.12-17.



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|   | the overall picture of school curriculum and student learning.  | elements in government will delay or even prevent the process.  |
| 2 | Experts should compare our local realities with those of international counterparts and develop a curriculum able to produce teenagers with strong literacy skills.   | The politicisation of the process can lead to the selection of incapable people to administer these changes.  |
| 3 | Schools should organise periodic training of 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. | Rigid leadership can stall this process. Moreover, schools might devote their resources to other aspects of education considered equally important. |
| 4 | Education boards should provide for the revision of school curriculums periodically.  | School curriculums tend to be rigid and require much protocol and many processes for revision.  |
| 5 | What else can be done to develop and plan an effective curriculum in schools?   | What are the drawbacks?   |

### STAGE TWO: POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

There are several dimensions that can be adopted into the school curriculum to instil sound education in students. The inclusion of reading as a separate subject in the school curriculum will place more emphasis on its importance and allow teachers to concentrate fully in that period on helping students develop reading skills; while introducing e-readers, whiteboards, flashcards and audio-visual materials will make the lessons more accessible and engaging to the students.

Group discussions can promote deep learning and engagement in schools, especially among older secondary schoolers. When students work together in small groups to discuss a topic or solve a problem, they can practise expressing their thoughts and opinions clearly and respectfully as well as provide opportunities for teachers to assess their understanding and provide feedback.

Further, with designated reading times incorporated into the curriculum, teachers can create an environment that encourages students to read more and develop a love for reading. Regular reading periods will help them improve their reading speed, comprehension, and vocabulary, leading to a greater overall improvement in literacy skills and, consequently, academics in general.



## A PRIMARY DRAWBACK

Teachers who lack sufficient skill or effective teaching strategies may struggle to utilise the time productively.

Additionally, students might not take their private reading periods or even group discussions seriously, preferring instead to use the period for play.

| SN | Actions  | Drawbacks   |
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| 1  | Schools should invest in a library, introduce specified library periods into the curriculum, and provide books at the level and interest of the students, instructing them to engage in personal reading in those specified reading periods.             | 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 should engage students in long hours of literacy activity during designated class times to help them develop good reading skills.   | 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 implementation of the strategy. |
| 3  | Reading should be introduced as a separate subject in the curriculum. Priority attention should be given to literacy as it is the foundation for most learning.  | High-ranking conservative individuals in the educational sector and in government may delay or even prevent the change.   |
| 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.  | This strategy depends heavily on financial support from the government and donations from the private sector.   |
| 5  | Provisions can be made in the curriculum for teachers to provide as much personal support as possible to students by working with them one-on-one or in small groups. This can help to identify any issues with schoolwork and provide targeted support. | The current teacher-to-student ratio cannot support this and introduction of more teachers into the school system requires significant funds.   |
| 6  | Group discussions can promote deep learning and engagement   | They can be time-consuming and difficult to manage, particularly if the   |



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|   | and allow teachers to assess students' understanding and provide feedback.                     | 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. |
| 7 | What other strategies can be adopted to develop a curriculum that emphasises optimal learning? | What are the drawbacks?  |

### ABOUT THIS ISSUE ADVISORY

*This advisory was inspired by and is patterned after the National Issues Forum [NIF] of the United States. It was developed as a tool for facilitating a discussion on the optimal strategies and policies for designing a contemporary primary and secondary school curriculum in Nigeria. Its purpose is to explore ways in which the curriculum can be developed to promote quality education and equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for their future academic and personal pursuits. By enhancing the overall quality of education, we can help to build a more advanced society.*

*The guide is structured in two stages: the first stage focuses on the developmental and planning phase, while the second discusses potential strategies that could be adopted.*

*This issue guide was prepared by Bede Ehiogu of the [Literary Renaissance Foundation \(LRF\)](#) with contributions from Oladimeji Ogunoye and Graceflora Ohwobete. Much credit also goes to Robert C. Richards, Jr., PhD, JD of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service, Little Rock, United States for his guidance and technical support on citizen engagement processes.*

*The LRF is a non-profit aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 of taking strategic and deliberate action to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.<sup>5</sup>*

### 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.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#)