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Curriculum Implementation Challenges and Private Education in Nigeria

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Abstract: ***Nigeria's population is over 180 million by estimation. It is not out of place to assume that she is one of the fastest growing populations in the world. In as much as she celebrates her status as the giant of Africa, her place as 'a giant' calls for a reflective thought at the rate with which her educational curriculum operates mainly in paper forms. On the issue of the private education, many challenges such as; shortage of qualified teachers without in-service training, structures and infrastructures, interaction with the government for gaining approval, extortion of illegal school tax from proprietors, lack of formal school management procedures like business plans, records and accountability etcetera. The culmination of the above issues is enormous. However, this paper seeks to argue on the negative effects of the 3Rs (rote learning approach) on the Nigerian learners that is promoting poverty and operation. The paper does that using a historical study to suggest for a curriculum that will liberate the Nigerian child, encourage problem solving (critical thinking skills), looks at the implication of the goodwill of a centralized educational curriculum that Nigerian early educational elites partly proposed with the oil boom in mind, the alternative way forward now that the oil has gone low. The paper goes forward to touch on the need to decentralize the educational system and give autonomy for each state to define her community context and design a curriculum that will address her context using the child's mother tongue for contextualized knowledge that will not sever the child from his/her moral/cultural norms considering how fast they are disappearing.***

Keywords: Curriculum, Implementation, Context, Mother Tongue, Private Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

There enormous challenges that are engulfing the private schools in Nigeria such as schools existing without government approval, shortage of qualified teachers, dilapidated structures, difficulties associated with interaction with the government, extortion of illegal school tax from the proprietors, lack of formal school management procedures like business plans, records and accounting modalities (Harma, 2011). Alongside the above challenges, some educated Africans criticize the educational system as still not fit to meet definite needs of the community, due to "under-supply of those who could till and repair", (Fafunwa 2004, 128). This concern calls for a brief reflection on how early educated elites laid the educational foundation after independence. The paper suggests the need to replace the rote learning approach using the 3Rs (Writing, Arithmetic, and Reading) with critical thinking skills called the 4Cs (communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking), decentralize the educational curriculum that heavily relied on the past oil boom and give autonomy for each state to come up with an educational curriculum design and implementation that speaks its context. The paper suggests the need for a curriculum revamp and the use of the child's mother-tongue for a contextual knowledge and problem solving competence before drawing conclusion.

II. HISTORICAL CONCEPTS

Before the arrival of formal (western education), Nigeria celebrated the concept of ethnic child (informal) curricular which put in place character development, intellectual skills and sense of belonging to the community, through according respect to elders, specific vocational training, understanding and appreciation of community cultural heritage (Imam, 2012). Shortly after the arrival of formal education, those good norms gradually disappeared, and creating what could be viewed as a transition stage. It is transition in the sense that Nigeria cannot go back to the way she was before independence; neither could she claim to have the same thinking pattern with the western world that brought her formal education.

The introduction of western education by the early Christian missionaries brought revolution to the Nigerian child. However, there was lack of clear distinction between the missionaries and the colonial masters, some of the early educated elites interpreted their educational objectives then as an act of spreading Christianity in disguise (Fafunwa 2004); a notion that gradually created a setback and religious biasness to a one indivisible nation that is arguably the 'giant of Africa', in terms of size and population.

The first seventeen years after her independence (1960-1977) should have been the right time to amend the lapses of the colonial administration that existed from 1944-1960 and come up with a system that addressed the needs of a Nigerian child.

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Unfortunately, policy makers did not address the curriculum, but rather accused the colonial masters, having realized its negative impact on the nation building. Key among the negative impacts laid by the colonial masters were:

1) An unbalanced federation made of Northern region which was considered bigger than the Western and Eastern regions put together. The turning of the regions into political constituencies led to the hatching of "mutual distrust, and suspicion that plagued the first republic at independence. Ethnicity and religious differences gained a stronger foothold than that of "national identity" (Imam 2012, 186). Remember that the early curriculum was accused of attempting to make every Nigerian a Christian. Nigeria at that prime stage, suddenly forgot that national stability and strength depended on integration of her plural traditions.
2) Beside internal factors, is the negative impact of the 3Rs (Reading, Arithmetic and Writing) known as rote learning (Rasheed 2000, Syomwene 2013) on the Nigerian schools. As good as the 3Rs system is, it is mainly teacher focused, mastering of facts and exams oriented. Some early educated elites took note of that curriculum and how misfit it was on most of the Nigerian rural setups. They realized that the system was mainly suited for blue and white collar jobs in the cities.

As cities began to be a reality, there was no policy emphasizing integration of their plural traditions via her educational curriculum. Lack of this policy soon led to the growing seeds of mistrust, hatred and suspicion among Nigerians. As a result of the absence of solid foundation, Nigeria's shaky democracy gave way to the military coups (Imam 2012, pp. 186-7) in which is still a challenge because lives are lost in Nigeria at almost every election. Can one assume that the policy makers could not do much because they were a product of the 3Rs curriculum that Fasokun (2000) describes as an educational pattern that robbed the African child of inventiveness, originality and creativity?

Another challenge is the common alphabet "A" for Apple that is taught in almost every school. This concept does not place the Nigerian child on a good foundation to own education. Instead, the child begins the curriculum with a signal that he is prepared for a different setting rather than his community which does not generally grow apples. Another contemporary challenge is the curriculum that is assumed to promote Islam which "predated Christianity by over 300 years" (Fafunwa 2004, p.67) in Northern Nigeria before the arrival of Western education with minimal cognitive impact as what a Nigerian child should adopt. The policy makers now feel that the re-naming of Christian Religious Knowledge "Civic Education" (Today's Challenge: Nigerian Foremost Christian Magazine, Vol.11, No.7, August, 2017, Pp. 7-19) is the solution that the Nigerian child needs to address his complex twenty-first century challenges with.

III. THE DISCOVERY OF OIL

The exploration of oil which began in the 1970s was a huge privilege and a blessing to Nigerians. The opportunity should have brought improvement to her educational system from the colonial curriculum (the 3Rs). Unfortunately, the opportunity further compounded the nation's educational problem since key stake holders viewed educational quality differently (Rasheed 2000). The nation deviated from quality in terms of a teacher playing the role in the curriculum design, to emphasizing higher order thinking skills based on the learners' needs (Morel & Tusing 2017). The attention of stake holders shifted to devising modalities of eradicating illiteracy in the entire nation unprepared. She was not fully prepared because the proportion of trained experienced teachers to the pupils was not balanced. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) started bringing on board unqualified teachers in 1981; a situation that has continued till date. The country did not learn her lesson but jumped into borrowing an American curriculum called 6-3-3-4 (Imam 2012; Amakiri, & Boma 2015; Ogunyinka, Okeke & Adedoyin 2015). Considering that the curriculum was not her initiative, the policy was only perfect on paper using an indoctrination (Hickey 2005) learning approach. It is indoctrination in the sense that the learning was based on experts' values and knowledge, not the Nigerian child's needs and context. Today this has reviewed to what is called 9-3-4. With the new educational system of 9-3-4, there is still the challenge of full implementation and evaluation for motivation. This is due to the gap that exists between the official written curriculum developed by experts and the actual curriculum taught in the classroom (Shilling 2013).

IV. A WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIAN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Now that the oil boom has gone low, it is time to go back to reality and re-structure the educational system. It is time for the Federal Government to decentralize the educational policy based on States. Allow States to define their contexts, and design curriculum that will address the challenges of their communities. If doctors treat patients based on their separate needs (Sparapani & Perez 2015), Nigeria with all its diverse cultures and geographical locations cannot assume the use of a unified curriculum as the solution in her educational policies. The Federal Government could work on grand and suggest necessary subjects that could boost the integration of the country for one indivisible Nigeria.

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Nigeria must realize that she is in the twenty-first century; a dispensation that is calling for her policy makers on education to work hard by looking back and deliberately seek a redress of the lapses she inherited from the Colonial masters.

Lapses like the "unbalanced regions" Northern, Eastern and Southern and creatively come up with ways that the Nation's widening gap of distrust, ethnicity, religious differences will be narrowed for an integrated nation.

Review the rote learning curriculum, the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) where emphasis is on the teacher, mastering of facts through regurgitation, and the high emphasis on tests/exams for promotion.

Chapman (2018) describes the approach as learning principles that focus on the branches of a tree rather than its roots. Nigerian private schools should bear in mind that these 3Rs were the philosophies of the "Essentialists", "Perennialists" and the "Progressivists" of John Dewey where the learning objectives were mostly at the lower level learning domains (Moss & Lee 2010). Dwelling on these 3Rs learning philosophies will subject her educational system to a curriculum that "perpetuates poverty and oppression" (Raheem 2006, p11).

The twenty-first century Nigerian Private Education should have gone far to grappling with the 4Cs (Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity), (Alismail & McGuire 2015, p150), if her learners must have education that provides liberation and prepares them to be problem solvers. Critical thinking skills have been discovered to be a new system of education that focuses on learners. The learning skills are mostly:

1) Interactive in place of lectures. The teacher in interactive approach; uses discussion method through social interaction in a small class or deliberately share the class into smaller groups for that approach to learning.
2) The approach adopts writing or jotting down notes which is believed to involve the mental manipulation of data, pictures, spoken or written words by the learners. This approach forces the learner to think as he writes.
3) There is use of higher level questions such as analyze, synthesize and create learning through the use of why? How? The approach replaces the asking of simple recall questions which mostly uses What?

In the use of the higher level questions approach, learners gradually become familiar with asking their own questions and search for answers.

The classroom content comes up with discussions that do not have one straight jacket answer. It gives freedom for others to voice out their opinions, and results in making the learning atmosphere a pluralistic one. The approach also protects the learner's rights, avoids personal attacks and appreciate individual differences (Karabulut 2012). To meet the above critical thinking learning principles, Private schools in Nigeria will need curriculum revamping.

V. REVAMPING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Having understood that the familiar curriculum that most Nigerian private schools use is the rote learning system (the 3Rs); for Nigerian Private Schools to come up with a transformed twenty-first century learner, she must revamp the educational system using these three approaches as follows:

1) Each private school must identify her educational goals and objectives at the primary and the secondary level separately.
2) She must come up with detailed description of her educational system based on her unique context.
3) Identify the key areas that her curriculum would need a re-direction in her context. This re-direction will include:
a) Coming up with her educational philosophy of what she exists to achieve in the learner.
b) Align the school philosophy with the Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution on education.
c) Come up with a philosophy for each level of learners and the quality of teachers that can handle each. The philosophy must as well include clear standards of recruitment into each of the levels.
d) State appropriate goals for each level of learners and how the goals can go beyond the context of functions to relating learning cognitively, character wise (Nigerian good cultural norms), and skill wise.
e) State how each subject's learning objectives align with the school goals.

In setting clear broad goals or mission statements encompassing the above 5 key concepts, the school goals must include policies present and future, conditions, priorities and resources available, desired needs of the learners (not teacher), and evaluation strategies.

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VI. THE REVAMPING PROCESS WILL INCLUDE

1) Having a good knowledge of the conditions of the school catchment areas, knowledge of the past, evaluation of the significance of the past and present for action.
2) Come up with original school goals without borrowing or adopting from any school.
3) Involve all parties, board members, staff and stake holders in the need assessments through the use of interviews, questionnaires, internet, etcetera for a relevant curriculum.
4) Put what is being done now; the existing goals and opinions aside and study deeply the following outcomes:

a) The ultimate present contribution that each level of learners could make to the school and the society.
b) Ways each learning level could help learners succeed in today's and tomorrow's world.
c) The learning needed for effective citizen of Nigeria by asking these questions: What should that learning be? What choices do we make? Do the needs have desirable outcomes? Note that goals that are set on needs assessments are not easily forgotten (Unruh 1984).

When all is put in place, there will be need for a theoretical model on each of the educational programs (Primary and Secondary) for managing the anticipated change process.

VII. IMPACT OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The early educated people in the Southern part of Nigeria better understood the commitment of the early missionaries to learning Yoruba and the other two major languages (Igbo and Hausa). The commitment led to developing alphabets that the Nigerian policy of education adopted including the three languages in her curricular. Nigeria has 522 spoken languages at the moment while 7 are already extinct (Ogunbade 2016, p.13).

The missionaries did not only see the importance of learning the major languages of Nigerians then, but stressed the use of these mother tongues in Nigerian curriculum far back in 1842 to 1881, (Fasokun 2000, p. 3). The misconception of the importance of the mother tongue to an early school learner by the Nigerian early elites has created and brought about the huge negative impact to the high dropout especially in rural settings. Fafunwa got it right when he adds: If a Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire those skills and attitudes through the mother tongue as the medium of education, which after all is the most natural way of learning, (Fasokun 2000, 4).

The Colonialists struggled in seeing the benefit of this mother-tongue, perhaps due to the motive of achieving their objectives. This concept should have been one key policy to re-visit after the independence. However, the concept is still relevant if Nigeria desires to minimize the influx of young rural educated folks to the cities and the existing gap that is between the schooled and the unschooled. The effective use of the mother tongue is one of the strongest tools that would enable the rural learner to interact effectively with his environment. Today, the same missionaries some Nigerians blamed for forcing Christianity on them using education, have developed written alphabets in hundreds of Nigerian languages to prevent their languages from extinction and yet Nigerians are not motivated to harness the effort but are still bent on using English at the foundational level.

Using mother-tongue at the early stage of the learner is one of the major tools that can harness and curtail the extinction of the 39 Nigerian national languages (Summer Institute of Linguistics (2021), that are close to extinction like the 9. The extinction here means few surviving speakers of that native dialect. The good of the mother-tongue in learning has a way of contextualizing education that can minimize the disconnection the Nigerian child has in understanding his context.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has briefly discussed curriculum implementation challenges and private education in Nigeria. The paper began by reflecting on the Nigerian historical concepts set by the colonial masters that are still a challenge to the integration of a unified nation. The paper stepped further to observe that the oil boom which was supposed to improve the educational standard, further compounded the challenges, shifting away from quality to quantity in terms of wanting every Nigerian child to be educated without having quality man power in place. Part of the shift in focus is the borrowing of the 6-3-3-4 she did at neglecting the cultural and geographical diversity of the country. The paper suggested a way forward for the Nigerian Private Schools. Part of the suggestion is a call that the earlier the country gives autonomy to states to design the curriculum that addresses their context, the better for the Nigerian child.

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This new curriculum will need to change from the 3Rs (rote learning) to 4Cs (Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity), a relevant curriculum that will liberate the Nigerian child from oppression and poverty to freedom and solving his needs. Revamp the educational system for a relevant curriculum that will address the context of the learner. The paper ended with suggesting the need to go back to using mother-tongue in early childhood education; a policy that will help to contextualize learning and curtail further language extinction.

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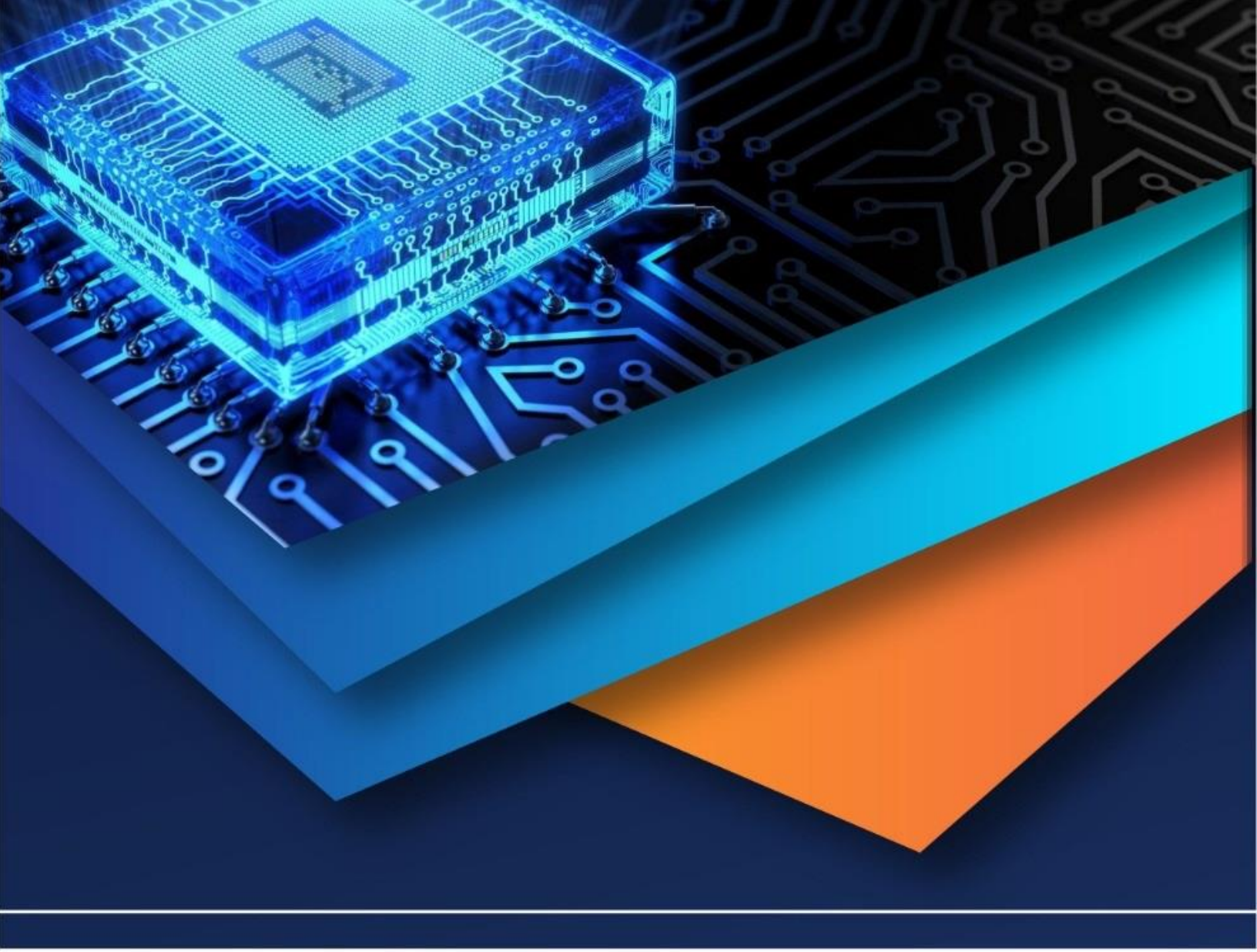

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