

Initiating a Paradigm Shift in Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria for Youth Empowerment and Job Creation in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, there has been increasing global concern over the continuously expanded rate of unemployment around the world, particularly in most developing countries, where the youths have been identified as the most affected groups. This is as a result of the government and its stakeholder's inability to give education the desired attention. Sound education equips youths to challenge the status quo and proffer better alternatives as the way out of the present economic quagmire. It is argued that a new paradigm shift is needed in the area of school curriculum to lead the way to reform present practices; it has to be analyzed occasionally to create a scope that will encompass new disciplines and areas to make it appropriate to the prevailing situation. The task of producing skilled human resource development for youth empowerment, and job creation in society lies with the quality of our school curriculum. The effectiveness of the school curriculum depends on how lots the school is fulfilling the needs of the learners, the society, and the educational objectives. This paper offers; the concept of the paradigm shift, why paradigm shift in the secondary school curriculum, the concept of youth empowerment and job creation, the benefits of paradigm shift in the secondary school curriculum, challenges to the paradigm shift in secondary school curriculum, conclusion and recommendations proffered as part of initiating a paradigm shift in secondary school curriculum in Nigeria for youth empowerment and job creation in the 21st century.

Keynotes: Paradigm shift, Secondary school curriculum, Youth Empowerment, Job creation.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been widely acknowledged as an instrument for achieving socio-economic growth and national development. This is true because it is through well-planned and implemented educational systems that advanced nations of the world have achieved a high level of socio-economic growth and national development. In light of this, Okai Padung and Rukaiya (2016) affirm that education is the hub on which every nation's development evolved, it is also of remarkable benefit in terms of the institutionalization and promotion of culturally inclusive behavior. No wonder Okolo (2010) viewed education as the key to the solid development of the individual for the acquisition of competencies necessary for self-development and national development.

Ofegbulu and Okanwa (2018) acknowledged that the function of developing future citizens is entrusted to the schools. Organizing an efficient school curriculum for its children is one of the primary responsibilities of the government and its stakeholders. The efficiency of the school system can be ensured not by providing a magnificent building to it, but by organizing an efficient curriculum on ideal lines in every way. The current secondary school curriculum in Nigeria remains largely theoretical and outdated, failing to equip students with the practical skills and entrepreneurial mindset required for self-reliance, job creation, and adaptability in the rapidly evolving 21st-century job market. As youth unemployment continues to rise, there is a growing disconnect between the knowledge imparted in schools and the demands of the modern economy, which prioritizes digital literacy, technical expertise, and innovative problem-solving. The absence of a curriculum that fosters critical thinking, vocational training, and technology-driven competencies leaves many graduates ill-prepared for employment or entrepreneurship. Therefore, there is an urgent need to initiate a paradigm shift in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, integrating skill-based learning, ICT education, and vocational training to empower youths with relevant competencies for sustainable employment and economic growth.

The objective of this study is to examine the need for a paradigm shift in the Nigerian secondary school curriculum to enhance youth empowerment and job creation in the 21st century. Specifically, the study aims to assess the limitations of the current curriculum in equipping students with practical skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial competencies necessary for self-reliance and employment. It seeks to explore innovative strategies for integrating skill-based education, vocational training, and technology-driven learning into the curriculum to align with global workforce demands. Additionally, the study intends to evaluate the potential impact of a reformed curriculum on reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic development in Nigeria. Ultimately, the goal is to propose policy recommendations that will facilitate the adoption of a more dynamic, industry-relevant, and skills-oriented curriculum for secondary education. This work is clearly a theoretical focus on developing, analyzing, and expanding the work of other authorities and existing literature in order to proffer concrete recommendations to the problems at stake.

CONCEPT PARADIGM SHIFT IN EDUCATION

The word paradigm comes up a lot in the academic, scientific, and business worlds. A paradigm shift in education refers to a fundamental change in the way we think about and approach teaching and learning. It is a transformation in beliefs, practices, and systems that significantly alters how education is delivered and experienced, (Lesufi, 2017).

Paradigms of education influence how students are taught and assessed and what is valued and included in the curriculum. Mackenzie & Knipe, (2006) in educational research the term paradigm is used to describe a researcher's 'worldview'. This worldview is the perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data. A framework containing the basic assumptions, ways of thinking, and methodology that members of a scientific community commonly accept. Such a cognitive framework is shared by members of any discipline or group.

Paradigm shifts tend to appear in response to the accumulation of critical anomalies as well as in the form of the proposal of a new theory with the power to encompass both older relevant data and explain relevant anomalies. New paradigms tend to be most dramatic in sciences that appear to be stable and mature, as in physics at the end of the 19th century. Key Aspects of a Paradigm Shift in Education:

1. From Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered Learning
 - Traditional: The teacher is the main source of knowledge (lecture-based).
 - New Approach: Students take an active role in their learning (inquiry-based, project-based learning).
2. From Memorization to Critical Thinking
 - Traditional: Focus on rote memorization and standardized testing.
 - New Approach: Emphasis on problem-solving, creativity, and real-world application.

3. From Fixed Curriculum to Flexible & Personalized Learning
 - Traditional: One-size-fits-all curriculum.
 - New Approach: Adaptive learning experiences tailored to individual needs and interests.
4. From Isolated Classrooms to Global & Collaborative Learning
 - Traditional: Learning happens within classroom walls.
 - New Approach: Online resources, global networking, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
5. From Grades to Competency-Based Assessment
 - Traditional: Emphasis on grades and ranking.
 - New Approach: Focus on skills mastery, growth mindset, and lifelong learning.
6. From Passive Learning to Experiential & Technology-Driven Learning
 - Traditional: Students passively absorb information.
 - New Approach: Hands-on activities, virtual learning, AI-driven education.

Examples of Paradigm Shifts in Education:

- Montessori & Inquiry-Based Learning: Moving away from rigid instruction to exploratory, student-led learning.
- Flipped Classroom: Students learn content at home (videos, readings) and engage in active problem-solving in class.
- STEM & STEAM Education: Interdisciplinary focus integrating Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math.
- Lifelong Learning Models: Education extends beyond school years, with continuous skill development in the workforce, (Iheme, & Iheme, 2021).

Why Paradigm Shift in the Secondary School Curriculum in the 21st Century?

Secondary education; which is the second level of education is the pivot through which young minds are trained. Secondary education is aimed at preparing the youths for useful living and in preparation for higher education (FRN, 2013). Therefore, the secondary school curriculum should be geared towards equipping youths for gainful living in the society; it should teach specific skills to equip individuals for work, (Onwuka, in Ladewo, Bonet and Padung, 2021). Since education is dynamic, as society changes, educational curriculum must also change to meet the changing demands of society. It should be said that the relevance of curriculum change is not only for the nation but mostly to the individual youths as a driving force to leverage them from abject poverty and make them self-reliant, empowered, and job creation. The success of many nations in tackling major developmental problems such as poverty, and unemployment, among others can be traced to their educational system. Based on the challenges faced by distressed economics, the need for creativity in education is needed like never before.

One of the primary reasons for this shift is the technological revolution. The increasing role of digital tools in education demands the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the curriculum. According to Omodan and Ige (2021), digital literacy has become a fundamental skill, just like reading and writing. The traditional curriculum, which primarily focused on rote memorization, no longer aligns with the skills required in a knowledge-driven economy.

Additionally, the paradigm shift is driven by the changing nature of the job market. The 21st-century workforce requires problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Okebukola, 2020). However, the Nigerian curriculum has historically emphasized theoretical knowledge rather than practical

skills. As a result, many graduates lack employability skills, leading to high youth unemployment. A revised curriculum that incorporates vocational training and entrepreneurship education can bridge this gap.

Another reason for curriculum transformation is the need for global competitiveness. Nations worldwide are reforming their education systems to match international standards. Nigeria must adapt to these changes to ensure that students can compete globally. Oyekan (2019) argues that curriculum reforms should focus on competency-based education, project-based learning, and student-centered teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, societal changes and challenges, such as climate change, security issues, and social inequalities, require a curriculum that fosters civic responsibility, peace education, and sustainable development (Akinbote, 2022). Education should not only provide knowledge but also equip students with the ability to solve real-world problems. In summary, paradigm shift:

- Prepares students for the 21st-century workforce (critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability).
- Makes learning more engaging and relevant.
- Encourages equity and inclusion in education.
- Integrates technology and innovation to improve learning outcomes, (Akinbote, 2022).

.Concept of Youth Empowerment and Job Creation

Stella, Nwosu, and Mathew (2021) are of the view that job creation has to do with designing work to be done by individuals for which they are paid for accomplishing such tasks. The creation of a job can be possible if the graduate has acquired the entrepreneur and vocational skills needed to create or secure a job either in an industrial establishment or become a self-reliant individual by setting up a personal firm capable of employing others. Also, Anyadike, Emeh, and Ukah in Stella, Nwosu, and Mathew (2021) asserted that job creation has emerged as the single most critical economic challenge facing the world today. Creating a job as an entrepreneur is a function that an individual has to learn how to strategically scan the environment to identify the immediate needs of society and possibly provide the needed solutions. In the attempt to provide the needed solutions to societal problems, processes are set in motion and it is the processes put in motion that open up the opportunities for engagement of human effort called job creation. Jobs are said to be created when firms are established by entrepreneurs and require people with requisite skills to apply for existing vacant positions. It can then be said that job creation is the act of providing jobs for the unemployed, either by helping them to create jobs for themselves or providing paid jobs where they can get salaries or wages as the case may be. Ojiefu in Stella, Nwosu and Mathew (2021) reported that rising unemployment and the low entrepreneurial drive amongst school leavers in Nigeria led to the need to reposition the secondary schools system as centers for building self-sustaining graduates that will be future captains of industries.

Empowerment is seen as the act of providing opportunities for individuals to develop their skills to become problem solvers and decision-makers without becoming a problem to society (Cray, Nguyen, Pranka, Schild, & Whitecomb in Chuku-Akwu, Onuodu, Ehiodo, 2021). Empowerment – ‘power within’ and power with’- generates collective action for reducing societal inequalities, securing more equitable access to labour, land, and financial markets, and developing more responsive and accountable state institutions, (Eyben, Kabeeb & Cornwall in Ladewo, Bonet and Padung, 2021). Empowerment is a process that challenges our assumptions about the way things are and can be. It challenges our basic assumptions about power, helping, achieving, and succeeding, (Czuba, in Ladewo, Bonet and Padung, 2021). Every society has the responsibility of preparing its youths for survival and continuity allowing them to contribute to the development and sustenance of their generation.

Benefits of Paradigm Shift in Secondary School Curriculum

A paradigm shift in secondary school curriculum will help to:

- a) Develop a healthy attitude towards work and life;
- b) Curb out the unemployment problem;
- c) Reduce the market demand for skilled manpower;

- d) Prepare students for identified vocations spanning several areas of activity;
- e) Self-entrepreneurship and employment attitude, knowledge, and skills will develop among the students;
- f) Deprived section of society, women and rural students will also get the opportunity to fulfill their dreams through skill acquisition,
- g) Make the skilled student technicians,
- h) Prepares students for the 21st-century workforce (critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability).
- i) Makes learning more engaging and relevant.
- j) Encourages equity and inclusion in education.
- k) Integrates technology and innovation to improve learning outcomes (Tayum, 2021)..

Challenges to Paradigm Shift in Secondary School Curriculum in the 21st Century

The following are the challenges to the paradigm shift in secondary school curriculum:

- a) Inadequate Qualified Teachers- Education brings about behavioural change and teachers are the change agents. Therefore, anything that affects teachers affects the entire education system. The new subjects that were introduced into the curriculum especially the trades and entrepreneur subjects as well as computer studies which are now compulsory need to be handled by teachers who are specialists in those areas. At the moment, there are not enough specialized teachers. Studies show that most classroom teachers are not computer literate (Duguryil, Duguryil & Katnyon, in Adegboye, 2020).
- b) Total Dependence on Examination as an Assessment Tool- Assessment of learning outcomes should lay more emphasis on psychomotor and affective behaviours of students rather than on cognitive behaviours as has been the case. It is the acquisition of skills and the right attitude that are more important in transforming the nation into an industrialized self-reliant nation (Adegboye, 2020). The author further observed that much dependence on examination which most times concentrates on the assessment of cognitive learning has resulted in producing half-baked young graduates who can neither be self-employed nor fit into the labour market.
- c) Poor Infrastructure and Material Resources- For this program to succeed, emphasis must be placed on the acquisition of skills through learning and doing, which is hands-on. Learning by doing or hands-on experience takes place in laboratories and workshops which are well-equipped. These facilities are not functional in most schools of the federation. Most laboratories are empty rooms with little or no laboratory equipment (Osuafor & Okoli, in Adegboye, 2020).
- d) There is a serious deficit of trained professionals who meet modern business needs. Our job market has changed significantly. Our old education system is based on the Industrial Revolution and the labor needs of that system. We can't raise our children that way anymore since the labor market needs people with different skills. Instead of knowing how to do one thing well, businesses need people who can innovate intelligently.
- e) Creativity, teamwork, conflict resolution, critical thinking, leadership ability, and innovative ideas are things that businesses are looking for in people's resumes. Consequently, it's important to study the right thing and be capable of doing a lot of things. That's the only way you'll be able to face the future.
- f) Inadequate Textbooks- The mandate was that before the commencement of the new programme, which is the implementation of the new curriculum in September 2011, year one book of SS education, would have been in the market. The textbooks are not readily available at stores and shops.
- g) The incessant Strikes-Nigerian education system is bedeviled by incessant strikes by classroom teachers at all levels. It has become the norm. Strikes most times are associated with the poor condition of service. Sule in Adegboye, (2020) associated the incessant strikes and unrest among teachers with conflict and disagreements between teachers and the managers of educational institutions as well as government arising from unpaid or poor salaries and allowances, inadequate and uncondusive learning and teaching environment.

CONCLUSION

The Secondary education curriculum structure has all it takes to advance the country scientifically, technologically, industrially, and socio-economically. It is assumed that there should be a paradigm shift in the

school curriculum by exploring the various areas and removing obsolete information from the curriculum. Technical and vocational courses should be taught practically away from the traditional theoretical method of teaching. The traditional subject should be explored and analyzed properly to give space for a flexible and need-based curriculum. Distress times call for choice and priority setting. The Nigerian educational system should make a paradigm shift in its curriculum to a more practical-oriented one that will empower its graduates to empower others and revive the distressed economy to a developed economy. It, therefore calls for a concerted effort of all the stakeholders – the government, teachers, students, parents, philanthropists, book writers, and publishers to tackle the challenges facing its implementation and create a conducive environment for its sustainable success for empowerment and job creation in the 21st century.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Employment of Specialized Teachers- Young graduates who have specialized in any of these trade subjects should be given automatic employment after their National Youth Service Corps. Those of them who did not graduate from education should be encouraged to go for in-service training in education while at work to enable them to acquire teaching methodology skills.
2. Secondary schools should be adequately equipped with the relevant tools to enable the learners to acquire the needed skills through proper funding. Learning by doing or hands-on experience takes place in laboratories and workshops. These laboratories and workshops are not functional and is available in most schools of the federation. Most laboratories are empty rooms with little or no laboratory equipment because of poor funding.
3. Provide ample opportunities for teachers to practically demonstrate their acquisition and mastery of desirable knowledge, skills, and values through seminars, workshops, and practical teaching and learning exercises.
4. Remuneration of Teachers- Encouragement and special incentives should be given to teachers. Such encouragement can be in the form of prompt and regular payment of salaries and promotions as and when due to avoid stagnation. Outstanding performance by a teacher should be properly recognized and rewarded. If these are done, the incessant strikes will be reduced, teaching will become more attractive and the issue of brain drain to areas of greener pasture will be a thing of the past.
5. Provision of Textual Materials- Authors and interest groups should be encouraged to write books on the new 'trades' subjects. NERDC should also review the books and recommend the good ones to schools. School libraries need to be stocked with relevant textbooks and other literature while students are guided on how to make use of them.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation- Evaluation and monitoring systems are critical for ensuring sustained interest and commitment in the development of science and technology programme and indeed, education in general. Education is a business enterprise and like any other business, needs proper monitoring by the authorities that be. No business can progress without adequate checks and balances and education is not an exception. There must be adequate monitoring of the newly restructured secondary curriculum at every stage of its implementation to ensure compliance by all concerned and that the available resources are properly managed.
7. Professional Development of Teachers- The serving teachers need to be abreast with global educational changes and innovations. There should be continuous in-service training of teachers both within and outside the country. There is a need to sponsor teachers to International Conferences for them to interact with their colleagues in other countries and acquaint themselves with developments elsewhere that will be of interest to the Nigerian educational system.

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