

# CURRICULA IMPERATIVES FOR QUALITY UBE IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## Introduction

Tanner and Tanner (1980) endorse that a major curricula imperative of basic education is designed to capitalize on the advantages of the revisionist approach to curriculum development which derives essentially from the progressivist philosophy of Dewey (1859-1952). An important premise of this philosophy subscribes to the view that the curriculum entrenched in basic education is tailored at creating avenues not only for self-direction and for the liberation of individual capacities but also for opening a world of chances and opportunities that may be available to a person in life for self-fulfillment and or self-actualization. The tenets of basic education are largely sustained from a progressivist curriculum legacy and imperative which endorse that in the education process there is always a persistent force towards equilibrium in considering the learner, the society and the world of organized knowledge as vitally interactive sources and influences for curriculum development (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). This orientation, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980), calls for a scheme of things in which educational decisions and practices derive from a guiding philosophy which is designed for creating the prospective and effective citizen whose assets as an individual are largely based on meaningful classroom exposure to organized and requisite knowledge within the framework of a given

society. It also demands a commitment of sufficient attention to a variety of decisions which have bearing on our reflective considerations of the good person leading the good life in the good social order. Further, this development, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980), ramifies into a curriculum change – a development which is largely constituted into a humanistic response to the forces imposed from within the society rather than from without.

Thus, in the final analysis, the purpose of basic education is centred on social control (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). This task and function is designed to propagate the view that people need to read and write so that they can communicate knowledge and ideas, not so that they can be under the control of others. One of the objectives of the curricula imperatives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), particularly in a young democracy such as Nigeria, is for social power and insight, not external social control.

### The Curriculum and Primary Education

Curricula programmes associated with modern trends in primary education are largely designed to solve problems created by the separate subject approach to the curriculum. This approach is characterized by separate classroom instructions in the various traditional subject disciplines. Although these traditional subjects do not only represent ways of organizing knowledge and also constitute means of dealing with knowledge into thought-edifices and categories which comprise the curriculum, they are designed to meet our practical need of making the world more intelligible and comprehensible (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). This practical need notwithstanding, however, these edifices and compartment of subject-matter have emerged to represent a myriad of specialization even at the level of primary education. This fragmentation has given rise to one of the weightiest problems of primary education in modern times – a problem which impinges on the isolation of the curriculum from life experiences and the issues associated with them. this development

has given rise to what Dewey (1952) addressed as “the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum in schools.” In other words, an enthronement of this single subject approach in the sphere of primary education encourages a negation of the wholistic view of knowledge about the world we live in. This development engenders a compartmentalized and specialized view of knowledge in the minds of young children which is very psychologically misplaced, particularly at the primary school stage of development. The traditional approach to curriculum development in primary education has been seriously challenged on the following grounds (Okam and Bosimo, 2000), namely:

- (a) It projects a negation of the importance of child-centredness in primary education (Pring, 1978);
- (b) It fails to bring about a reconciling of the pastoral care of the school with children’s curriculum activities (Pring, 1978);
- (c) It is subject to the dangers arising from a highly structured and arbitrary time-tabling arrangements of the various subject areas (Pring, 1978);
- (d) It subscribes to a negation of the unity of knowledge since the vital links between different subject areas are not emphasized (Pring, 1978);
- (e) Since the approach endorses a support for the subject-mindedness of the curriculum, the emerging curriculum often lacks a disciplined outlook in the sense that it might not often possess any appreciable degree of academic vigour for the advantage of young learners during classroom operation (Pring, 1978);
- (f) The comparative absence of “integrative structures” in programmes associated with the traditional approach to curriculum development usually renders them incapable of being taught in imaginative ways for the purpose of fostering discovery and problem-solving (Pring, 1978);

- (g) A complete subjection and exposure of pupils to the traditional approach to curriculum development often bring about a dampening of their interests and initiatives (Pring, 1978).

Bryan (1974) considers that it was largely as a result of the foregoing criticisms leveled against traditional approach to curriculum development that ushered in post-war curricula reform movements particularly in the sphere of primary education. An important aspect of these reform movements was, in part, instrumental in the establishment of what is generally tagged “basic education.”

### **Some aspects of the Curricula Imperatives of the Universal Basic Education for Primary Schools**

The curricula imperatives associated with the subject-matter of basic education, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980), emanate from a variety of factors intrinsically embedded into it. These vital elements, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980), presuppose that curriculum development must, of necessity, require and derive from the said factors. These factors include the following:

- (i) a consideration of the nature and interests of the learner;
- (ii) a concern for the problems of society;
- (i) an awareness regarding a notion of the interdependence of knowledge;
- (ii) the need for a recognition of the continuity between theoretical and applied knowledge;
- (iii) a recognition of the authentic function of general education as distinct and different when compared with the function of specialized education; and
- (iv) a recognition of the need for an involvement of the whole school community, and not merely the scholar-specialist when dealing with curricula issues which impinge on basic education.

Curriculum programmes involving and embracing the foregoing imperatives and perspectives must, of necessity, require interdisciplinary and problem-solving approaches in their content and subject-matter organization. As Pring (1978) observed, an effective implementation of the curricula underpinnings and imperatives involved in these perspectives in teaching-learning situations must depend on professional teachers whose expertise does not only depend on their subject-matter knowledge or background but rather on their rational application of methodologies and styles of teaching which can contribute significantly in bringing about innovations and developments associated with curriculum integration. Tanner and Tanner (1980) also subscribes that one of the aspects of these innovations and developments associated with curriculum integration seriously impinge on the idea of basic education. The idea of basic education, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980), conjures-up a field to a more comprehensive and balanced reconstruction of the curriculum, hopefully aimed at a development of autonomously-thinking, socially-responsible members of a free society. This 'cognitive perspective' largely explains the basis for entrenching basic education within the curricula framework of primary schools.

At the level of primary education, the idea of basic education may not so much be concerned with the production and propagation of knowledge for its own sake as with a utilization of knowledge derived from a variety of disciplines including the arts, humanities, languages, natural and social sciences and mathematics for the purpose of addressing and solving problems through the purpose of addressing and solving problems through the various thought processes associated with "curriculum integration." Consequently, the divisions of subject-matter that are characteristic of the subject approach to curriculum development are dissolved since these problems are not confined to singular disciplines or subject fields that constitute the separate bodies of organized knowledge (Bellack, 1965; Pring, 1978). Tanner and Tanner (1980) endorse that a teaching of the

curriculum underpinnings of basic education represents a natural response to the shifting views of society with particular reference to the young learner. Further, according to Tanner and Tanner (1981) the idea of basic education advocates, capitalizes and utilizes a “wholistic approach” to teaching and learning. Basic education is, therefore, conceptualized on the theory of integrating related subjects. Thus, its structure is also in line with the Gestalt Theory whose slogan stipulates that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The implication of this perspective is that an issue, a topic or a problem is best tackled by making use of appropriate knowledge from the different subject disciplines. In this orientation and manner, a topic is considered in a wholistic perspective.

In discussing the psychological justification for basic education in primary schools, Lucan (1981) argues that children do not naturally observe the world through the perspectives of the academic disciplines. He asserts that:

A child sees the world as one unit and naturally asks questions which cut across artificial subject divisions. An integrated approach to learning attempts to follow a child's natural ways of learning, viewing the world as a whole, the teacher's role being to provide experiences and to assist him in a display of the inquiry process and suggesting further lines which might be followed in addressing and solving problem generated by an issue.

In effect, the idea of basic education underscores the need to make connections between a variety of subject disciplines towards an understanding of man and his interaction with his total environment. Boyer (1982) argues that as a global society, we simply cannot afford a generation that fails to see or care about connection. He maintains that since broadly-based social issues cross the boundaries of academic disciplines, the notion that the separate disciplines must

always be studied in their pure forms is insufficient for a curriculum intended to demonstrate the relationship between knowledge and rationally-based social participation. In almost the same vein, Tanner and Tanner (1980) posit that one of the curricula assets associated with basic education is that it not only provides opportunities in developing the interrelationships of subjects-matters that otherwise would be fragmented but also avoids the unmanageable multiplicity of disjointed courses and programmes that congest the school curriculum. Uzoagulu (1981) further argues that the strengths of the integrated curriculum that is intrinsically embedded into basic education is designed "to project in a wholistic sense a consideration of man's aspirations, hopes, dreams, resentments, hurts, achievements and frustrations in order to understand and interpret his behaviours with a view to improving his status and also solving his problems through the use of knowledge from a variety of subject disciplines.

### **Justification for associating the Curriculum underpinnings of Basic Education with Primary Education within the Framework of the Community**

Tanner and Tanner (1980) endorse that basic education is designed to capitalize on the advantages of the revisionist approach to curriculum development which derive essentially from the progressivist philosophy of Dewey. A major premise of his philosophy subscribes to the view that the curriculum entrenched in basic education is tailored to creating avenues not only for self-direction and for the liberation of individual capacities but also for opening a world of chances and opportunities that may be available to an individual in life for self-fulfillment and or self-actualization within the framework of his community. The tenets of basic education largely derives sustenance from a progressivist curriculum legacy which endorses that in the education process there is always the persistent force towards equilibrium in considering the learner, community and the world of organized knowledge as vitally

interactive sources and influences for curriculum development. Tanner and Tanner (1980) also subscribe to the view that these three sources and influences emerged in the last two or three decades as a paradigm for the curriculum intrinsic in basic education.

The ideals of basic education are designed to counter the dichotomies and or dualisms which have been allowed to persistently distort the already-mentioned equilibrium which is expected to be positively operational and useful with particular reference to a harmonious existence between the learner, his community and the world of organized knowledge during classroom pedagogy. In other words, the idea of basic education is not so much contrived as to center exclusively on one of these sources or influences at the expense of the others. Thus, a conception of basic education is antithetical to such educational dichotomies as the child versus subject-matter; individual interests versus community interest; thinking versus doing; academic studies versus non-academic studies; and knowledge for its own sake versus applied knowledge for the progress of the community. Thus, in this circumstance, basic education demands that the learner, the community and the world of knowledge must be treated in their complementarity rather than antagonistically if educational progress is to be made. A commitment to the tenets of basic education is expected to provide a kind of general education which would help create unity out of diversity. These tenets are essentially meant to subscribe to Dewey's (1952) views that:

The body of knowledge is indeed one; it is a spiritual organism. To attempt to chop off a member here and amputate an organ there is the veries impossibility. The problem is not one of elimination, but of organization of simplification not through denial and rejection but through harmony.

The curriculum underpinnings of basic education, according to



Tanner and Tanner (1980), must, of necessity, be channeled at addressing and bringing about possible solutions to issues and problems which have bearing on the life of the young learner with reference to his community in terms of the following:

- (a) the question of how best to relate the curriculum to community life;
- (b) a provision of the necessary where-with-all for an endorsement of a proposal for the curriculum to be re-synthesized and re-humanized including an endorsement of a search for new structures with respect to the needs interests and aspirations of the community;
- (c) a commitment to a variety of attempts to develop interdisciplinary courses such as "ethnic studies," "population and family life studies," "urban studies," "social studies," "ecology and social planning," "environmental studies" and "sex education."
- (d) A commitment to personal-community problems-approach to curriculum planning and development;
- (e) A commitment to an identification with inquiry and knowledge production; including a concern for social problem-solving;
- (f) A concern for a commitment to reflective thinking for the purpose of effectively channelling it to social problems of the day to a sufficient degree;
- (g) A concern for an exhibition of intellectual productivity rather than a counter-productive enterprise through the process itself;
- (h) A commitment to the liberation of the capacities of every individual for the purpose of embracing individual autonomy within the framework of the community;
- (i) A commitment to a provision of education tailored in the service of the community ideals; and

- (j) A concern for a commitment to relating learning to real-life situations and problems and thereby possibility bringing about a closure of the gap between curriculum development and community needs.

### **The Goals and Objectives of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education vis-à-vis the Teacher Factor**

Nigeria's desire to embark on a provision of Universal Basic Education for her teeming millions is a grand design. The objectives of this UBE, according to the Guardian (1999), are designed to facilitate entry of large populations of Nigerians (school age children, drop-outs, the disabled, illiterate adults and youngsters from both rural and urban communities and other unschooled groups) into effective formal schooling.

According to the proposed Blue Print of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) as revealed in the Gaurdian (1999), the goals of the scheme are to universalize access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. Other objectives include the following:

- (a) developing in the entire citizens a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- (b) reducing drastically the drop-out rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;
- (c) providing free, compulsory universal, basic education to every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- (d) caring for drop-outs and out-of-school children/adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- (e) ensuring an acquisition of the appropriate levels of

literacy, numeracy, manipulative and life skills needed for laying the foundation for life-long learning.

The foregoing goals and objectives are no easy tasks to surmount. The issues involved are seriously all-embracing and some of these are examined briefly below.

The issue of igniting in the minds of learners a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion, among other things, calls for initiating in them a development and a capacity to learn and to acquire a variety of skills including not only the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and of calculating but also the skills of hand together with the skills of observation, analysis and inferences which are essential for forming sound judgement (Fraenkel, 1973; Du Bey and Barth, 1980). These thinking patterns and activities must be oriented in such a way as to foster in the learners attitudes favourable to social, physical, cultural and economic development – awareness and development which will enable them to participate in the life of the community, and when they leave school to function as innovators in a society where all members can take a pride (Du Bey and Barth, 1980). A need, therefore, arises for fostering developing in the learners the powers of imagination and resourcefulness and a desire for continued learning.

It is worth underscoring that the tasks in implementing the above-reflected curricula issues which are intrinsic in Nigeria's Universal Basic Education at the primary school level requires the services of competent teachers in the requisite numbers. This consideration has serious implications for the teacher particularly if he has to cope with the primary sub-sector demands of the UBE programmes (NPEC, 1999). At the same time, this teacher has to satisfy and meet the local demands and needs of the community in which his school is operating. Other serious issues and questions which impinge on the 'teacher factor and which are also relevant to

the theme of this exposition include the following:

- (a) What training and retraining packages have been put in place for teachers so as to enable them meet their rising challenges as envisaged in the UBE.
- (b) To what extent have the teachers' primary sources of support and professional growth been sufficiently revived and put in place so as to enable him to effectively scale through the emerging challenges of the UBE scheme?

A realistic provision of answers to the foregoing questions and issues is meant to address the place of the 'teacher factor' in the UBE scheme. The position of this exposition hinges on the view that a realization of the goals and objectives of the UBE is anchored on the teacher. It is considered here in very serious proportions, for instance, that the issue of universalizing access to schooling and education generally and the problem of eradicating illiteracy depends on teachers particularly in terms of their preparation, placement and retention. Similarly, an execution of the process of education that would promote learning and discourage a prevalence of the incidence of drop-outs in our schools would also depend on the teacher. It is against this background that the "teacher factor" is posing enormous challenges to the successful implementation of the UBE scheme. It has, therefore, become necessary to streamline some of the major issues impinging on the "teacher-factor" with reference to the curricula imperatives demanded of the classroom teacher who is expected to operate in consonance with the demands of the new UBE scheme. Most importantly for this exposition, the teacher is faced with the problem of forging an effective school – community relationships for the possibility of implementing the curricula imperatives in Nigeria's UBE at the primary school level.

## **Implementing the Curricula Imperatives of Nigeria's UBE at the Primary School level**

A major curricula imperative of Nigeria's UBE at the level of primary education demands of the teacher that schooling should be geared to preparing the young learner or the child for living a successful life both for his own good and for the good of his community as a whole. This line of thought implies that the curricula of the school must endorse and propagate the following ideals, namely:

- (i) reflecting community realities;
- (ii) providing opportunities for individuals for active and meaningful participation in school work;
- (i) Generating creative activity among children;
- (ii) Stressing amongst learners and individuals respect for the dignity of labour, national loyalty and consciousness.

The foregoing ideals have lots of implications for the teacher who is operating with the framework of the community and which he regards as his constituency. These implications are considered below:

The teacher has to seize every opportunity classroom-wise in making the content of education functional and relevant to the needs of the learner. The processes involved must be geared to relating all lessons to the dilemmas of the times in terms of the learner and within the framework of his community. These lessons have to be rendered in such a way of as to emphasize, on the part of the learners, a display of the skills of analytical reasoning rather than engendering mere rote learning. Lesson programmes dispensed by the teacher must not only be preoccupied with a highly diversified content but need to emphasize the process by which this content is interconnected and interrelated.

The philosophy of the curriculum that the teacher propagates and dispenses in respect of the learner has to be functional. This

'functionality principle' necessarily demands that this curriculum content needs to be problem-solving in its orientation; it must not only possess a retentive and transfer value but must display a purpose that relates to life situation in a learner's community. These criteria of the philosophy envisaged in this content must be made operational in a classroom-setting (by the teacher) within a framework of an understanding that it (the curriculum content) represents a relevant subject-matter which aims at integrating many related areas of knowledge which offer to the young learner in a community a wholistic portrait of man and his knowledge of his environment.

The teacher has to portray the philosophy behind the curriculum underpinnings of basic education for the purpose of equipping young learners with the necessary tools for making their own contributions in terms of social changes but also for giving directions to these changes within the framework of this community. In other words, the teacher has to display this curriculum as an activity-oriented enterprise which has to offer young learners the opportunity to practice skills which will assist them function effectively at school and in life situations within the framework of their community.

The teacher has to be engulfed in a curriculum development process which is largely aimed at incorporating integratively knowledge and inspirations from many realms of learning. He has to channel the content associated with this curriculum development, among others things, at creating a universe of inquiry, discourse and understanding amongst the youngsters of the community who are obliged to share certain responsibilities and problems. The teacher has to orient this curriculum package towards a provision of young learners with some insight into the use of various knowledge structures and processes that have relevance to modern civilization. If this curriculum has to be relevant and meaningful to the lives of the individuals operating within the framework of the envisaged community, the teacher has to organize it largely according to the

needs, aspirations and problems of young learners that demand personal and social understanding.

There is a call for the teacher to achieve real instructional vitality in all classroom programmes if learners must be involved and committed in the teaching-learning situations associated with basic education. This orientation makes it binding that instruction rendered by the teacher regarding its curriculum content must be structured not only to emphasize a development of the skills of analytical reasoning on the part of the learner, but also has to be rooted in a concern for problems and issues that confront a learner within the framework of his community. The aim behind this is to help learner establish relationships that cut across the various subject-matter or content employed by the teacher during instructions. In other words, the teacher must not only be preoccupied with an employment of methods geared towards a purveyance of a variety of content or subject-matter but must also be concerned with displaying the processes by which the various structures associated with this content are interconnected and interrelated.

Thus, the content which the teacher employs in his classroom pedagogy must not only be concerned but be brought to focus continually on social questions, problems and issues, whether large or small, which the learners in their community anticipate. In this circumstance, it does follow that social and individual problems which impinge on the community will provide the linking threads of the curriculum and instructions displayed by the teacher during classroom operations. This development necessitates introducing and acquainting learners, by teachers, with simple research tools for the purpose of enabling them study social problems effectively within the framework of this community. The role of the school in this orientation must be made to exemplify, in every respect including its governance, by the teachers, a society of intelligent and responsible individuals working towards improving the life which people are living in the community. This trend of thought demands that the

school will be used as a laboratory where learners can openly investigate the working of human community.

The instructional devices entailed in the foregoing considerations demand an instituting of meaningful and relevant combinations of curriculum content, curriculum goals, methods, resources and materials that can most efficiently and effectively be delivered by the teacher in the interest of learners. The crux of the competencies required of the teacher calls for his willy-nilly involvement in an effective exploration of appropriate management of instructional procedures and approaches including materials and resources that are available to him. The teacher is bound to visualize these procedures, approaches, materials and resources as a form of cohesive body of knowledge that can be effectively applied to a wide range of conditions which must be manipulated by learners to achieve dividends reflected in these goals and objectives (Okam, 1992).

The teacher has to be committed to a revision or complete phasing out of the present traditional approach to classroom evaluation of learners' performance. The teacher has to devise more comprehensive and systematic schemes for collecting evidence of learners' progress and growth not only in cognitive achievements but also in the affective and psychomotor areas. It has, therefore, become important for evaluators of learning outcomes in teaching-learning situations to accommodate the view that the present day evaluation in classroom situations has become far more all-embracing in the sense that everything that goes on in any given teaching-learning situation is evaluated (Okam, 1992). This modern approach is designed to last for longer periods than the traditional methods because it is expected to achieve the following outcomes, among others, namely:

- (a) a determination of the details about how learners have acquired knowledge and what they can do with this;
- (b) an assessment of teachers and the resources for teachers;
- (c) an evaluation of particular methods in terms of how much learners have been able to learn and how they react to the subject-matter being taught.



Based on the above considerations, it becomes necessary that the following evaluative criteria, among others, be adhered to by the teacher if he is expected to create a meaning and lasting impact amongst learners in terms of an achievement of the objectives that have prompted a classroom dispensation of a given content.

Firstly, any evaluation associated with a given content areas must be an all-embracing process. This implies that all available means of collecting data bearing on students' learning must be explored and utilized in the evaluation process.

Secondly, this evaluation must be goal-oriented. In other words, the need to clarify what is to be evaluated always has priority in the evaluation process.

Thirdly, there is a great need to select evaluation techniques in terms of the purposes to be served.

Fourthly, evaluation needs to be a continuous process. Ideally, it is expected that evaluation should be an interrelated part of all teaching and learning processes. It is not something that only occurs at the end of a lesson unit or at the termination of a school year.

Fifthly, if evaluation is to achieve comprehensiveness and effectiveness, it has to be a co-operative process (team evaluation) involving teachers, students, parents, curriculum developers, government agencies, etc. Co-operative evaluation enables a school to arrive at a total individualized evaluation of each students. Thus, team members observing the student under varied circumstances are in a better position than one single teacher to make judgment about.

## Conclusion

In our present circumstances in this country, the idea of Universal Basic Education largely calls for a scheme of things in which educational decisions and practices derived from a guiding philosophy which is designed for creating the effective Nigerian citizen. It also demands a commitment of sufficient attention to a variety of decisions which have bearing on our reflective

considerations of the good person leading the good life in the good social order (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). Thus, curriculum change which derives from the imperatives of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education becomes a humanistic response to the forces imposed from within her society rather than from without.

A major asset associated with the idea of basic education is that it advocates for the need to embrace the "fundamental skills model of the curriculum" which subscribes to the view that a mastery of certain core areas of knowledge for successful later learning in the academic disciplines is very necessary. The task of the school is to provide those sets of symbols and sets of facts that are necessary preliminaries to all later learning and understanding. Progressive educators recognize that the importance of these fundamental skills do not merely derive as preparation for later learning but as relevant features of a child's present life-style. In the same vein also, these progressives recognize the curriculum programmes associated with these fundamental skills as fulfilling a wide range of functions spanning across cognitive development to socialization. They also recognize that these fundamental skills are not merely learnt for their own sake but must be developed in a wide range of life contexts. Again, the progressives construe these fundamental skills and understandings as being developed through a comprehensive and all-embracing curriculum.

The purpose of basic education, according to Tanner and Tanner (1980) is centred on social control. This task and function is designed to propagate a view that people need to read and write so that they can communicate ideas, not so that they can be under the control of others. The objective of the curriculum associated with basic education, particularly in a young democracy such as Nigeria, is for social power and insight, not external social control. The teacher has to recognize these truths if he is to dispense the curriculum imperatives of Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) very effectively within the context of the primary school.

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