



UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND BREAKING DOWN SAME INTO WEEKLY SCHEME OF WORK TO ENSURE COMPLETION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper was aimed at identifying the importance of national curriculum in the development of educational in Nigeria. It further outlined the role of Syllabus, Scheme and Lesson plans in achieving quality education.*

KEYWORDS: Curriculum, Syllabus, Scheme of Work, Lesson plan.

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INTRODUCTION

The national curriculum is a set of subjects and standards used by primary and secondary schools to enable students learn the same things across the nation. It covers what subjects are taught and the standards children should reach in each subject. It is designed to ensure nationwide uniformity of content and standards in education. It is usually legislated by the federal government, possibly in consultation with states. National Curriculum is a critical part of the education system in Nigeria, and it has a key role to play in securing the right of all children and young people to a broad and balanced education. An effective National Curriculum gives teachers, pupils, parents, employers and the wider community a clear and shared understanding of the skills and knowledge that young people will gain at school.

National curriculum describes what students should know, understand, value and be able to do at each stage of their development. It is a framework that provides the structural basis of school education and makes explicit the vision that this curriculum sets out to achieve. The framework also describes how learning is structured across the stages of schooling and categorised into different key learning areas (Ajibola, 2008). According to Khwaja, et al (2014), in general terms, the term curriculum refers to the contract between society, the state and educational professionals with regard to the educational activities that learners should undergo during a certain phase of their lives to learn something desirable. It is the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciations, and values under the auspices of an academic institution. It further identifies effective pedagogy to be adopted and the roles of all key players in creating positive learning experiences in schools.

Characteristics of a good curriculum

1. A Curriculum should be continuously and evolving, it should be relevant for a long period of time.
2. For a curriculum to be effective, it must have continuous monitoring and evaluation.
3. Curriculum must adapt its educational activities and services to meet the needs of a modern and dynamic society.
4. It should meet the challenges of times and make education more responsive to the clientele it serves.
5. A good curriculum is developed through the efforts of a group of individuals from different sectors in the society who are knowledgeable about the interests, needs and resources of the learner and the society as a whole.
6. A good curriculum must be ready to incorporate changes whenever necessary.
7. The curriculum should be open to revision and development to meet the demands of globalization and the digital age. (Alao, 2011)



Subdivisions of a National Curriculum

To achieve the weekly completion of scheme of work, the national curriculum is further broken down into:

1. Syllabus
2. Scheme
3. Lesson plans

Syllabus

A syllabus is a document that communicates information about a specific course and defines expectations and responsibilities. It is generally narrower in scope than a curriculum. According to Okai (2010), the term syllabus refers to an outline or list of topics students are supposed to study in a given year or specified period of learning. Syllabi are therefore brief outlines of lessons, or aspects of the curriculum that list topics to be taught in a given course or programme. These outlines of syllabi guide teachers on the extent of work involved in given classes.

Habaneck (2005) observed that a syllabus ensures a fair and impartial understanding between teachers and their students so that there is minimal confusion on policies relating to the course. He believes that a syllabus sets clear prospects of material to be learned, behaviour in the classroom, and effort on students' behalf to be put into the course. As such, it is a outline of course direction that relays the teaching idea to students, so that students may choose early in the course whether the subject material is good enough to them. The syllabus also gives universal information with regards to the objectives of the course. With these considerations in mind, the topics to be learnt must proceed from known to unknown. For example in the case of history, one should start with local and indigenous history before exploring topics that are external to the pupils' immediate environment. A syllabus contains the aims and assessment objectives of the subject (for example history) at a particular level of education, the sequence of the content knowledge to be taught, and the assessment procedures to be adopted. Sometimes the national syllabus is too broad that it cannot be completed in a period of three years as is the case with the Nigerian Advanced Level History syllabi. Heads of departments and subject teachers should then prepare and develop their own school syllabus derived from this broader national syllabus. Even when the syllabus can be completed within the course time frame, it is still important that teachers make their own school syllabus as derived from the national syllabus so that they have a simpler school based document. According to Taruvinga (2000), this school syllabus serves as the point of reference for the schemes of work.

Schemes of Work

According Habaneck, (2009), scheme of work is the structure and content of an academic course. It splits an often-multi-year curriculum into deliverable units of work, each of a far shorter weeks' duration (e.g. two or three weeks). Each unit of work is then analysed out into teachable individual topics of even shorter duration (e.g. two hours or less) (Akuezilo, 2006). Schemes of work maps out clearly how class activities and assessment strategies will be used to teach each topic and assess students' progress in learning the material associated with each topic, unit and the scheme of work as a whole. As student's progress through the scheme of



work, there is an expectation that their perception of the interconnections between topics and units will be enhanced (Adeogun, 2006). When the curriculum and the syllabus are sent to schools by the authorities concerned, there is need to divide the yearly content of the syllabus into definite amount of work that may be covered per term. If, for instance, there were thirty topics to be covered for the Ordinary Level History for the three years, there would be about fifteen topics per year. When the history teacher splits the year's work into portions to be studied per term, month or week, we have what is called schemes of work. As such, a scheme of work describes the content and learning experiences that should be treated every term of the academic year (Okai, 2010). This scheme of work is very important to the teacher in that it guides him in planning the unit of instruction and consequently the daily lessons in line with the time available for each topic in the term. The scheme of work also guides supervisors of schools in determining the efforts of the schools and teachers towards meeting the societal demands on them

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan is the lowest or most specific level of instructional plans. It is derived from the analysis of the scheme of work / unit plan. Thus, when the scheme of work is broken down into smaller topics and sub-topics, we have the lesson topics, which can be used to plan a lesson (Okai, 2010). A lesson plan could therefore, be described as a planned organised amount of subject –matter and learning experiences that the teacher will communicate to the learners with details of how instruction will take place within a lesson period. Lesson planning is an important activity for a teacher. Taruvinga (2000) observe that a lesson plan supplies guidance and feelings of confidence to the teacher in the art of teaching. If lessons are well or pre-planned, both learning and teaching becomes simplified. According to Okai (2010), a lesson plan is useful for the following reasons:

1. the teacher follows correct steps and procedures in teaching.
2. time is not wasted in the class since the period of one lesson must be used to cover the day's lesson topic.
3. activities are related to the content and objective
4. instructional materials are adequately selected and utilized.
5. proper evaluation procedures and tools are used.
6. a substitute teacher can use the lesson plan to hold on the class.

CONCLUSION

National curriculum is an overall outline of the subjects to be taught, and the teaching methods for ensuring that each student has learnt the appropriate materials. A syllabus is derived from the curriculum. It is about that list of topics to be taught and learned for a specific period or programme, while scheme of work is drawn from the syllabus and broken into pieces to be taken on a termly basis. The lesson plan is a further breaking down of work to be done. Thus the curriculum and the national syllabus can be seen as broad and general statements of what is to be learned during the course study period; the scheme of work is derived from the syllabi



and therefore more specific and detailed; while lesson plans are derived from schemes of work and are also more detailed and specific than the schemes of work. Curricula, syllabi, schemes of work and lesson plans are policies and documents necessary for effective teaching to occur at any level of our educational system. While the curriculum and syllabus are usually prepared by the authorities in national government offices, the schemes of work and lesson plans are prepared by the teacher.

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