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Assessing the Quality of Universal Basic Education Junior Secondary School Curricula as Instruments for Drop-Out Reduction in Three Core Subjects in Lagos State

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Abstract

The study assessed the quality of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Junior Secondary School (JSS) curricula as instruments for drop-out reduction in three core subjects in Lagos State. Seven quality indicators used were: comprehensiveness, application of teaching-learning methods and learning materials, responsiveness, relevance, opportunity to learn and adaptability. The study is an ex-post-facto research type. Four instruments: Mathematics, English language and Social Studies Teachers' Questionnaire respectively and Teacher Perception on Reduction of Students Dropping-out of School were used for the collection of relevant data. Multiple regression was used to analyse the data. The composite effects of the seven quality variables made strong and significant relation with students' drop-out reduction in Mathematics, English language and Social Studies contributing (70%, 68% and 53% respectively). Adaptability was highly significant in explaining drop-out reduction in Mathematics and Social Studies curricula whereas relevance was highly significant in English Language curriculum. Relevance made moderate significant effect on drop-out reduction in Mathematics while application of teaching-learning methods and responsiveness had low explanatory powers on students' drop-out reduction in Mathematics and English Language curricula. Application of teaching-learning materials made significant negative explanatory effect on drop-out reduction in Mathematics. In view of the inability of the current UBE core curricula to meet the quality criteria, an urgent review of these curricula is recommended among other things.

Introduction

Educational wastage exemplified in school drop-out is a world-wide phenomenon that is of great concern in developing countries. A school drop-out is a student who despite having ability to complete an educational course fails to do so. Falaye and Adebayo (2002) are of the view that school drop-out or wastage is evident in the large numbers of school children, who for one reason or another do not succeed in acquiring the full range of skills offered at the basic education level, thereby disabling progress into higher level of educational standard. With respects to the views of Peck, Law and Mills (1987) education plays a vital role in national human power development, thus, the issue of educational wastage as well as its prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting the total economic and social structure of a nation.

The National Policy of Education FGN (2004, revised) states that for the benefit of the citizens; the country's educational goals shall be clearly set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individuals and those of the society in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. To achieve the goals and objectives of education of the country therefore, the Nigerian government rose to the challenge of empowering its citizens through policy enactment and embarking on reform programmes to put right some aspects of its education practices that were not in order. Reform is a change in existing ideas, methods, concepts, views and knowledge within a specified time period (Kurumah & Chinason, 2008). Eraikhuemen (2008) puts it succinctly that it is an amendment of what is defective which involves a process of making changes in order to remove the imperfection.

The year 1999 ushered in a reform in basic education in Nigeria to put aright some aspects of the nation's education practices with a view to meeting the needs of the learner, society and for life-long education in this era of accountability driven education. The objectives of UBE as outlined by the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004:2) are as follows:

- (i) developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for the education and a strong commitment to its rigorous promotion;
- (ii) the provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age;
- (iii) reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from formal school system through improved quality, efficiency, and relevance of the curriculum;
- (iv) catering for young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- (v) ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, and manipulative, communicative, and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

As a consequence, available data in Table 1 prior to basic education reform indicate that a large number of male and female students are dropping out of the school system. Part of the objectives of introducing the UBE programme was to reduce this phenomenon through the introduction of programme curricula quality in the various core subjects.

Table 1: Summary of Pre-UBE Implementation Enrolment and Drop-out Figures for JSS, Lagos State by Gender

Year	Class	Enrolment figures			Drop out figures		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1993/1994	JSS 1-3	181,902	180,816	362,718	3,540	2,340	5,880
1994/1995	JSS 1-3	192,603	193,101	385,704	3,228	1,292	4,520
1995/1996	JSS 1-3	328,411	318,401	646,812	6,065	3,422	9,487
1996/1997	JSS 1-3	514,218	504,210	1,018,428	7,550	3,700	11,250
1997/1998	JSS 1-3	458,192	408,119	866,311	3,686	6,586	10,214

Source: Research and Statistics Department, State Ministry of Education, Alausa, Lagos State (Year, 2009)

Table 2: Summary of Enrolment/Drop-out Figures for JSS in Lagos State after the Introduction of UBE

Source: LagosState Universal Basic Education Office: Mary-Land Lagos State

Year	Class	Enrolment figures			Drop out figures		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1993/1994	JSS 1-3	181,902	180,816	362,718	3,540	2,340	5,880
1994/1995	JSS 1-3	192,603	193,101	385,704	3,228	1,292	4,520
1995/1996	JSS 1-3	328,411	318,401	646,812	6,065	3,422	9,487
1996/1997	JSS 1-3	514,218	504,210	1,018,428	7,550	3,700	11,250
1997/1998	JSS 1-3	458,192	408,119	866,311	3,686	6,586	10,214
1999/2000	JSS 1-3	275,808	285,907	561,715	4,158	4,907	9,065
2000/2001	JSS 1-3	288,533	305,776	594,309	860	1,212	1,981
2001/2002	JSS 1-3	827,516	706,583	1,534,099	252	259	511
2002/2003	JSS 1-3	2,094,895	813,297	2,908,192	923	1,737	2,660
2003/2004	JSS 1-3	2,094,895	1,057,286	3,152,181	264	181	445
2004/2005	JSS 1-3	2,723,364	1,425,063	4,148,427	208	244	452
2005/2006	JSS 1-3	181,236	196,031	377,267	65	60	125
2006/2007	JSS 1-3	222,472	232,336	454,808	63	88	151
2007/2008	JSS 1-3	243,245	253,613	253,613	81	84	165

Table 2 shows the enrolment summaries of male and female students as well as the drop-out figures in JSS 1-3 for Lagos State after the implementation of the UBE programme. Though, the enrolment figures do not maintain a specific trend, they have certainly increased from year to year when compared with the pre-basic education reform period. In the year that UBE was

introduced, drop-out figures were higher for both male and female students in all classes. However, except for the year 2002/2003, there seems to have been a reduction in the drop-out trend in the subsequent years that followed. The question that should be asked is what could have been responsible for this drop-out reduction? Could the curriculum in-use have made any contribution to the downward reduction of drop-outs in the schools? This is the thrust of this research.

The focus of this study is on the assessment of the quality of JSS core curricula. In view of this the quality of core subject curricula such as Mathematics, English language and Social Studies and their respective qualified teachers who implement these curricula are inevitable determinants of students' retention or dropping-out of junior secondary schools. The quality of the UBE core curricula as conceptualised in this study would therefore cover seven areas identified by Obanya (2002 & 2004) and Institute of Education (2003). According to these sources, these are: comprehensiveness, application of teaching-learning methods, application of teaching-learning materials, responsiveness, relevance, adaptability and opportunity of teachers to learn. The present UBE curricula in core subjects have also been restructured to be more responsive to the demand and the needs of the twenty first century by placing a stronger emphasis on functional skills that will bring the best out of the learners. Such generic skills according

to Obanya (2004) include communication, the spirit of enquiry, teamwork and computer literacy and deeper understanding of the core subjects discipline which lay sound foundation in the development of the learner in other subject disciplines thereby shaping their productive livelihood and creative activities in them.

The comprehensiveness of any core curricula should cover the three domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The application of teaching-learning methods of core curricula should create a classroom situation which would invite and motivate students to learn. This implies that the methods of teaching must shift more towards those that can develop creativity, independence and survival skills in learners. The application of teaching-learning materials of core curricula is essential in the academic achievement of learners. As such, no proper curriculum implementation can be efficiently done without relevant teaching and learning materials for imparting various concepts in each of the core subjects. The opportunity to learn is vital to the subject teachers in the implementation of the curricula. In the view of Igbokwe (1997), the teacher has been identified as a very important factor in the nation's scientific and technological development bid. Therefore, there is need for the core subject teachers to be adequately equipped both intellectually and professionally to enable them carry out effective teaching of their subjects.

The responsiveness of the core curricula is a way of ensuring that the present core curricula designed, respond immediately to the needs of the teachers as regard proper implementation, learner's needs and subsequently, the societal needs. The relevance of the core curricula should focus on the adequacy of the contents of each subject in terms of knowledge, skills, concepts, principles, attitudes and values to be learned and the learners' ability to apply what is learned to address current and new situations that come their way. The adaptability of the core curricula, according to Obanya (2004) is the ability to adapt to changing times, needs and conditions of the society. When these are achieved in this era of globalization, the curricula could help to reduce the of students drop out of school.

The teacher through the implementation of the various core curricula, interact with its contents, the students and other materials. He/she stands as a bridge between what is to be taught, what the students learn and possibly how it is learnt. By virtue of this interaction, the teacher can assess whether a particular curriculum being implemented is achieving its set objectives. The teachers used in this study provided the relevant information upon which the status of drop-out reduction was based so as to authenticate the figures obtained by the Lagos State Ministry of Education. The teachers provided information on whether the core curricula have enhanced students' aspiration for further studies, equipped them with basic and entrepreneurial skills to meet life challenges, increased the proportion of students transiting to senior secondary and reduction in the proportion who repeat, improved enrollment figures in junior secondary school and has generally increased students' interest in schooling.

The new vision of a quality curriculum can only be achieved through teaching for enhanced functionality. According to Obanya (2004) a teacher is expected to engage the learners in challenging activities by setting the scene based on the demand of the curriculum which further makes maximum use of learner's prior knowledge and special skills and maximizes learner involvement. The learner is expected to contribute to

classroom organization to suit different purposes and to initiate activities and challenges. The curriculum, Obanya further explained gives room for a wider variety of materials and out-of-class activities to complement classroom work and subsequently improve love for learning.

Furthermore, as identified by the FME (2006) the Mathematics, English language, and Social Studies curricula make provision for curricula alignment and adaptation for socially marginalized adult learners and those with special needs. In view of this, emerging issues such as value orientation, peace and dialogue including human right education, family life, HIV and AIDS education, entrepreneurial skills are infused into the relevant contents of the curricula in a systematic manner at different class levels. The new UBE curriculum in all core subjects were developed to drastically reduce drop-out syndrome by making teaching and learning to be more relevant to learners daily life tasks, thereby, making it possible to neutralize the combine effect of the risk factors responsible for students drop-out. Other programmes such as; enlightenment programmes on the value and benefits of education and schooling, adequate planning of programme for school support services and promulgation of compulsory school attendance policies were mounted as a backup policy to the compulsory school age and basic Education For All (EFA) programme.

Curriculum quality is an important issue in the educational reform agenda of the current UBE programme in Nigeria. When a new programme or an aspect of it is introduced, the essence is to see that it succeeds by vigorously pursuing the attainment of its set objectives. One of the objectives of the present UBE programme is that the curriculum in-use is to serve as an instrument for reducing student drop-out from the formal school system. This study, therefore, assessed the quality of JSS core curricula in three subjects in terms of seven quality variables as earlier highlighted viz: comprehensiveness, application of teaching-learning methods and materials, responsiveness, relevance, adaptability and opportunity to learn.

Research Questions

1. What is the composite effect of the seven quality variables as instrument for drop - out reduction in Lagos State Schools as implemented in the Mathematics, English Language and Social Studies UBE curricula?
2. What are the relative contributions of the quality variables in explaining the education of students dropping out of school as implemented in these core UBE curricula?

Methodology

Research Type

This study is an ex-post-facto research type. An ex-post facto research is a robust tool that enables better insights on the explanation of changes of the dependent variable (drop-out reduction) by the seven independent variables.

Sampling Techniques and Sample

Multi-stage and simple random sampling techniques were used to select ten of the twenty local government areas in Lagos State. One hundred public junior secondary

schools and one teacher from each of the core subjects of Mathematics, English language and Social Studies were selected. This gave a total sample of two hundred (200) teachers who participated in the study.

Instrumentation

Four research instruments were used for data collection; Mathematics Teacher Questionnaire (MTEQ), English Language Teacher Questionnaire (ELTEQ) and Social Studies Teacher Questionnaire (SSTEQ) had items measuring the seven quality variables of a curriculum viz: comprehensiveness, application of teaching and learning methods, application of teaching and learning materials, responsiveness, relevance, opportunity to learn and adaptability. The fourth instrument Teacher Perception on Reduction of Students' Dropping-out of Schools (TPRSDOS) had 10 items that measured reduction of students' dropping-out of school. The reliability coefficients of the instruments using Cronbach Alpha method after administering them to a representative sample of sixty teachers in the respective subject area were MTEQ (0.95), ELTEQ (0.96), SSTE (0.93) and TPRSDOS was 0.89, 0.85 and 0.83 for English, Mathematics and Social Studies.

Data Analysis

The field data were analysed using multiple regression analysis decomposed into composite and relative effects of the quality variables.

Results

The study assessed the extent to which seven quality variables (comprehensiveness, application of teaching and learning methods, application of teaching and learning materials, opportunity to learn, responsiveness, relevance and adaptability) made composite and relative contributions to drop-out reduction as implemented in UBE Mathematics, English Language and Social Studies curricula using the multiple variable regression analysis. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Explanatory and Predictive Powers of Quality Variables and Students' Drop-out Reduction in Mathematics, English and Social Studies

Dependent Variable	R ²	F	Qualities Variable	B	T
Drop-out Reduction in Mathematics Curriculum	0.850	34.166*	Adaptability	.434	5.031*
			Relevance	.316	3.029*
			Application of learning methods	.272	3.004*
			Responsiveness	.192	2.363*
			Comprehensiveness	-.052	-.538
			Opportunity to learn	-.104	-1.466
			Application of teaching	-.185	-2.369*
			-learning materials		

Drop-out Reduction in Language Curriculum	0.839	30.834*	Relevance	.496	4.389*
			Application of learning methods	.211	2.117*
			Responsiveness	.183	1.952*
			Adaptability	.094	1.192
			Comprehensiveness	.000	-.002
			Application of teaching-learning materials	.000	.004
			Opportunity to learn	-.075	-1.090
Drop-out Reduction in Social Studies Curriculum	0.749	16.485*	Adaptability	.646	5.742*
			Responsiveness	.193	1.872
			Opportunity to learn	.060	.538
			Comprehensiveness	.049	.624
			Application of teaching-learning materials	.049	.624
			Relevance	.032	.233
			Application of teaching-learning methods	-.029	-.270

* P<0.05

The results presented in Table 1 show that the seven quality variables explained drop-out reduction in UBE implemented Mathematics curriculum ($F = 34.166$), English Language curriculum ($F = 30.834$) and Social Studies curriculum ($F = 16.485$). The seven quality variables accounted for 70% of the total variance in drop-out reduction in Mathematics curriculum, 68% in the total variance in drop-out reduction in English Language curriculum and 53% of the total variance in implemented Social Studies curriculum. With respect to the t-test results as regarding the significance of the multiple regression coefficient, the seven quality variables to a significant extent, predicted implemented UBE Mathematics curriculum ($t = 5.031$; $\beta = .434$); English curriculum ($t = 4.389$, $\beta = .496$) and Social Studies curriculum ($t = 5.742$, $\beta = .646$) to a significant extent. Also, the quality variables of relevance, application of teaching-learning methods, and responsiveness contributed positively to Mathematics drop-out reduction ($t = 3.029$, $\beta = .316$; $t = 3.004$, $\beta = .272$; $t = 2.363$, $\beta = .192$); whereas application of teaching-learning materials made a negative effect on Mathematics drop-out reduction. ($t = -2.369$, $\beta = .185$). Application of teaching-learning methods and responsiveness predicted reduction in school drop-out in English Language curriculum ($t = 2.117$, $\beta = .211$; $t = 1.952$, $\beta = .183$).

Discussion

This study found a significant relation between the seven quality variables; comprehensiveness, application of teaching and learning methods, application of teaching and learning materials, opportunity to learn, responsiveness, relevance and adaptability as implemented in UBE Mathematics, English Language and Social Studies curricula. Adaptability of the UBE curriculum to societal and learner needs was found to have made highly significant relative effects on students' drop-out reduction as implemented in Mathematics and Social Studies UBE curricula. This finding tends to support that of Kolawole (2002) who while re-inventing the current Senior Secondary English curriculum found that adapting the curriculum to a new situation by changing in some way the area of content and learning activities of the curriculum, facilitated better expression in essay writing.

The variable of relevance which made highly significant relative effect on drop-out reduction in this study, support previous research findings conducted by Okpala and Onocha (2002) which found that physics teachers' assessed the curriculum as relevant to the needs of the learners. The findings with regards to teaching and learning materials which made a negative relative effect on students' drop-out reduction in this study seem to agree with previous work by Kojigili *et al* (2007) who found that the state of application of learning materials in schools could hinder the implementation of UBE Mathematics curriculum. This observation is equally through with respect to the other core curricula in school. The fact that this variable was not significant in the implementation of UBE English and Social Studies curricula goes to show that practicing teachers are deficient in the use of teaching -materials at this level of education.

Further findings in this study indicate that application of teaching and learning methods had low positive relative effects on drop-out reduction in Mathematics and English Language curricula implemented, is in contrast to the findings of Iheanacho (2007) who found that most secondary school teachers are professionally inadequate in their teaching skills and methods; and Emeke and Odetoyinbo (2004) who reported that the implementation strategies in terms of the teaching strategies such as expository methods employed by teachers of Integrated Science did not reveal the revisionary character of the Integrated Science curriculum programme. Also, findings on the poor application of teaching-learning materials corroborates that of Okwilagwe and Adetayo (2011), Oguntimeyin (2004) and Adeogun (2001) who observed that teachers at the basic education level are inadequate in the preparation and use of instructional materials in teaching-learning situation. This is of great concern since effective learning is absorbed through the senses, but learners were found to have been denied this opportunity in this study. The fact that application of teaching methods, and teaching-learning materials were not significant explanatory factors of drop-out reduction in English Language and Social Studies further buttress the views of Okwilagwe and Adetayo (2011), that practicing teachers in most Nigerian middle basic education level have not complied with the curricula policy regarding methods of teaching at this level that should be practical, interactive and experimental. So also is the policy on application of teaching-learning materials.

There is no doubt that a curriculum that is adaptable, responsive and relevant, and one that encourages the use of effective teaching-learning methods will prepare the recipient for quality societal life where they will be useful to themselves and the society by participating in societal growth and development. Other variables not found to be significant in explaining drop-out reduction like comprehensiveness of the curriculum and opportunity to learn do not seem to augur well for effective implementation of the UBE programme and may hinder the timely achievement of the objectives of UBE at the Junior Secondary level, especially that of equipping the students with skills and competencies to live better life and be gainfully employed, meeting the pre-vocational and the academic options of junior school education.

The overall percentage contribution to drop-out reduction observed in the study (English Language 68%, Mathematics 70% and Social Studies 53%) are indicative of the fact that the core curricula are still far from attaining the set UBE objectives. It shows that there are other factors besides the quality indicators measured in this study that are responsible for the downward trend observed in drop-out statistics of Lagos State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Only some of the indicators of curriculum quality variables were found to have made significant relative contributions to students' drop-out reduction as implemented in Mathematics, English Language and Social Studies curricula. By implication, all of the core curricula do not seem to have met fully the seven quality criteria of an expanded curriculum. Core curricula in English Language, Mathematics and Social Studies should either be reviewed so as to meet the comprehensive criteria (cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains) as well as emphasize the remaining quality criteria. The teachers of these subjects should not selectively teach and assess content that cover the cognitive aspects of learning. In view of this, major policy implication and recommendations from the findings of the study are that: special attention should be given to the quality variables that the JSS UBE core curricula have achieved by Universal Basic Education Board in order to reduce the incidence of students drop-out in Lagos State to its barest minimum. Efforts should also be made to update the core curricula to reflect the other criteria found to be inadequate, such as the need for teachers to look inward to improvisation of teaching-learning materials and appropriate methods of teaching and learning to further strengthen the implementation programme.

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