
IMPLEMENTING COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

P. C. Ukwueze, E. M. Nnadi, & L. E. Ekwewuo
Department of Arts Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The problem of unemployment among secondary school graduates has become a serious concern leading to the reinforcement of competency-based curriculum (CBC) in Nigeria. Given the essential pedagogical role of teachers in CBC implementation in supporting quality education for sustainable development, this paper critically reviewed texts, journals and other articles on some conceptual definitions of CBC, implementation of CBC, sustainable development, and role of teachers in implementing CBC. In addition, the benefits and challenges of implementing CBC were also reviewed. Findings from this meta-analysis review indicate that teachers' role is dynamic and enormous ranging from planning, organization assessment, and communication, among others. The benefits were found to be more on the learners than the teachers. This CBC enables learners have independent mastery in learning skills which brings about motivation, equity and independence at working pace. The teachers are facilitators with defined goals and modalities to follow to achieve their goals. Challenges are bound to occur ranging from lack of human and material resources along with other intervening factors such as quality assurance, and assessment standards. Suggestions were made based on the challenges found from the review.

Keywords: Competency-based curriculum; Implementation; Nigeria; Senior secondary school; Sustainable development.

Introduction

The rate of unemployment among secondary school graduates and even higher degree students seems alarming and has a very negative impact to sustainable development. Research has shown that over 9 million people in Nigeria are unemployed (Olawale, 2018). Statistics has shown that unemployment is on the increase yearly in Nigeria (Statistics Portal, 2019). With the introduction of competency-based curriculum in senior secondary schools in Nigeria, it is expected that school leavers be skillfully empowered but unemployment has continued to ravage the Nigeria society. Confirming this, Olutunyi (2019) contended that one of the factors responsible for the high unemployment rates in Nigeria is an obsolete higher education system that continues to turn out graduates without employable skills. Competency-based curriculum (CBC) oriented contents and activities are innovative which can only be realized using well prepared educators and other support system to impact the knowledge and skills.

Competency-based curriculum therefore, is a curriculum that emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than mainly focusing on what they are expected to know. In principle, such a curriculum is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and society. For example, teachers may ask students to submit a video essay, or create a digital portfolio that can be shared online. These types of assessments allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject, which is the basis for competency-based learning. The competency-based curriculum is concerned with developing knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare the learners for future employment. The learners choose what they want to learn depending on their career choices. This can only be realized if teachers effectively implement such innovative curriculum which is very vast in terms of teaching, planning, organizing, communicating, evaluating and giving feedback to the society. Competency-based curriculum is valuable and desirable in Nigeria because it promotes the philosophy of Nigeria which includes, among others, to maximize the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society (NPE, 2014).

The implementation of such curriculum based on Gross (1971) implementation theory, was used to realize this goal. The tenets of this theory include: clarity of the innovation to implementers, capability of the implementers, and availability of resources and provision of management support. These elements if properly put in place, enable the teacher to face the challenges of implementing the

innovative curriculum. Anchoring on this theory, this article therefore, critically reviews various text materials by looking at basic concepts such as: competency-based curriculum (CBC), implementation of CBC, sustainable development, role of the teacher in implementing CBC in senior secondary schools, the benefit of implementing CBC for quality education towards sustainable development, and challenges of implementing CBC.

Competency-Based Curriculum

In discussing competence-based curriculum, it will be right to understand what curriculum is. According to Igbokwe, Ogbonna, Eseadi, Nwokenna, Nnadi, Ude, and Ukwueze (2019), curriculum is seen as a programme guide that contains the ideas and skills that the society values and are necessary for social continuity. Mbakwem and Chukwuma-Nosike (2017) see curriculum as an embodiment of all the knowledge, skills and attitudes which a nation through her schools impart to her citizens. This work on competence-based curriculum is anchored on this definition which sees curriculum as knowledge, skill and attitude which a learner gains in the school for the development of the individual, the society and the nation as a whole.

Competency-based curriculum (CBC) is that which emphasizes the complex outcome of a learning process (that is knowledge, skills and attitude to be applied by learners rather than mainly focusing on what learners are expected to learn about in terms of traditionally-defined subject content. According to UNESCO (2017), a curriculum lays emphasis on what learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to know. It is learner-centred and adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and society. According to International Bureau of Education, the learning activities and environments are chosen so that learners can acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitude to situations they encounter in everyday life. Competency-based curriculum deals with the curriculum that lays emphasis on what the students can do practically after going through a programme of study. It measures progress on individualized learning pattern and how students prove their learning personally (Hurix, 2023). In such curriculum, according to Ayonmike, Okwelle and Okeke (2014), there is a clearly defined, concrete and measurable objectives of which every student participating in the programme must demonstrate mastery. According to Higherred (2022), CBC focuses on individual competence: learners are meant to be competent in knowledge, skill and also apply the knowledge and skill in work place. It is aimed at raising skilled workforce and this is necessary for curbing the growing unemployment in developing countries like Nigeria.

The aim of competency-based learning is to ensure that students learn the knowledge and skills that is considered important to excel in school, higher education, careers and life after school. Competence-based learning in the words of Higherred (2022) and Great School Partners (2014), can be termed proficiency-based, mastery-based, outcome-based, performance and standards-based education. Students work at their own pace, demonstrating and structuring their own methods of learning so as to meet these objectives. Competency-based learning is a reform of traditional-based learning. In competency-based learning, the learner moves at his/her own pace. The focus is to master each objective before moving to another. The learner is not in competition with anyone (Higherred, 2022). This makes the learner have a serious grip of the skills he/she has acquired, thereby becoming a functional member of the society with sustainable skills that leads to growth and development of oneself and the nation if well implemented.

Implementation of CBC

Implementation has to do basically with activities in the classroom, with the teacher at the center of the interaction process. Implementation of curriculum according to Agwu and Chukwu (2018), is putting into use or action the written curriculum to the extent that the curriculum document could be functional. Curriculum implementation, according to Audu (2011), is the engagement of the learner with the planned learning opportunities. In implementation, the objective set at the level of development of the curriculum is targeted by the curriculum implementer, who is the teacher, although other factors could also come into this action.

Though competency-based learning is learner-centred, the learner cannot do totally without the instructor, which is the teacher. However, Ugwu, Ugwu and Bosah (2019) contend that a professional and qualified teacher is needed for curriculum implementation. At implementation, the objective set at the level of development of the curriculum is targeted by the curriculum implementers (Ukwueze, 2023). According to Beach, (2021), individual learners are highly flexible, efficient and goal oriented towards skill acquisition if properly guided. A well implemented innovative curriculum like CBC can only lead to sustainable development if the learners are properly assisted.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development is a development that is meant to meet the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the future generation. In 2015, seventeen sustainable development goals were adopted in various areas of needs (United Nations, 2016). Number four of the Sustainable Development Goals is to ensure quality, reputable and inclusive education. Improving quality of education for sustainable development according to Achor (2013), starts from effective innovative curriculum implementation. With competency-based curriculum already integrated into the senior secondary school curriculum, if well implemented, sustainable development will be achieved in Nigeria at the long run. All these depend on the role of the teacher in achieving the goal set.

Role of the teacher in implementing CBC at the senior secondary school level

At the senior secondary school level in Nigeria, the teacher is expected to guide the students to acquire CBC successfully before completing the education programme. It lasts for three years and that is the level where majority of the skilled-based subjects are integrated and taught in preparation of the students towards the world of work. At this level, the skills acquired from various areas if well implemented, could help the students acquire lifelong skills for sustainable development even if they could not further in future.

The role of the teacher in implementing competence-based curriculum involves planning, organizing, assessing by moving between groups of learners, facilitating discussions, helping students explore and set goals, or may be engaged in more direct instruction with a few students at a time. Research has shown that effective implementation of innovative curriculum using technologies enhanced communication and interaction in the class that was well planned and prepared by a knowledgeable teacher (Ogwu, Patrick & Ukwueze, 2019). Teaching CBC include creativity, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, citizenship and connectivity. Others include interpersonal skills, planning and organization, classroom management, facilitation and engagement. Hence in the U.S.A. and England, Barrett and Hordern (2021) thought of rethinking the foundations towards powerful professional knowledge in teacher education for effective implementation of innovative curriculum. Teachers' competence has the greatest impact on students' achievement towards sustainable development if their roles are well followed.

The benefit of implementing CBC for quality education towards sustainable development

The benefits of CBC could be seen from students and teachers' point of view. Competence-based curriculum helps students develop and demonstrate mastery over a topic, builds a culture of equity and inclusivity, and prepares students for life beyond the walls of the school (Jasnani, 2023). Competence-based curriculum is believed to allow students work at their own pace, which makes learning flexible and engaging, real, effective, efficient and goal-oriented (Higher, 2022). This type of curriculum also makes learning interesting and motivating reducing boredom because the learners are allowed to participate and act to perform their activities in order to accomplish the task (Beach, 2021). CBC according to Jasnani (2023) brings out the hidden potentials of learners since some learners are silent in class. It also makes evaluation fun and enjoyable to students, instead of being a threat, evaluation is seen by the learner as a means of measuring progress (Beach, 2021). This increases students' motivation and makes them more capable as they assess themselves. It supports learners with diverse literacy levels, knowledge and background and other related aptitude, and they are better prepared with necessary skills to succeed as adult (Jasnani, 2023). In a nutshell, since the students take responsibility for their education, they would not like to disappoint themselves, thereby improving learning towards sustainable quality living.

Competence-based curriculum makes work easy for the teacher. Instead of teaching everything, the teacher just kick starts the teaching and the learners take it up from there. In the views of Beach (2021) and Jasnani (2023), CBC allows teachers to define clear goals, attainment and completion, gives teachers the opportunity to sketch visible learning map, allows teachers to use several modalities, and enables them to use learning resources anytime, anywhere as well as technology. Despite all these benefits there are bound to be some challenges.

Challenges of implementing CBC in senior secondary schools in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the challenge of competence-based curriculum could be discussed based on the following themes and facts as stated below:

- **Lack of adequate teacher education and training in support of quality curriculum implementation:** Competency-based curriculum is a new innovation and majority of the teachers

teaching them never went through them in school. It makes such innovation strange and vague to them, and implementing them becomes a challenge. Hence, CBC lacks competent teachers that are knowledgeable in lesson delivery. A teacher can never guide or mentor what he/she is not aware of. According to Nwabuike, Aneke, Otegbulu (2016), a competent teacher is one that delivers the curriculum contents and instructional plans in the way they were planned. Some of the teachers, according to Sanusi and Aina (2017) are not qualified to implement the curriculum put in place in Nigeria. Findings have shown that teachers' lack of knowledge in an area of specialty influences their competence in implementing a curriculum which affects quality education in Nigeria (Bosah, 2018).

- **Lack of critical mass professional curriculum and textbook authors and developers:** Some curriculum developed is usually piloted with teaching using obsolete or wrong text materials as substitutes. Libraries not functional in some secondary schools to enable CBC function.

- **Lack of adequate educational infrastructure and school facilities for the implementation of quality curriculum:** Educational infrastructure and school facilities help to ease, encourage, improve and promote teaching and learning activities. Such school facilities include: textbooks, reference books, journals, posters, charts, programmed texts, non-print materials, like films, tapes, computers, CDs, multimedia projectors, televisions, models pictures, recorders transparencies, globes, laboratory apparatus and chemicals. Instructional materials make teaching and learning more real and natural and facilitates understanding and retrieval of information by the students (Azikiwe, 2018). Others include: modern classrooms, creative centers, smart boards, laboratories and latest technologies are needed to enable students to actively participate in the learning process. Some schools do not even have a single computer according to Azikiwe (2018) and Ukwueze (2023). This is a major challenge of implementing competency-based curriculum in senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

- **Lack of appropriate quality control mechanisms and quality control:** There is no mechanism put in place for occasional assessment and check of the curriculum put in place to teach. The class size, assessment standard, facilities, instruction among others need to be checked often to make sure that things are moving right as expected. However, in Nigeria, these mechanisms are lacking.

- **Poor funding and support system from the government:** No matter how good a curriculum is, if there is no adequate funding the curriculum objective cannot be met. In Nigeria, so many excellent educational policies have been made, but schools are handicapped because they do not have the fund needed for proper implementation of these well-developed curriculum. Poor attitude of the government towards funding of education is one of the factors that affect the proper curriculum implementation because it is the government that decides the kind of curriculum program the nation embarks on. In Nigeria, the government formulates educational policies and determines implementation strategies. If the government does not support competency-based curriculum, for example sending teachers for in-service training, conferences and workshops, it will not take place in the country.

Conclusion

Curriculum goes through changes and innovation, as the societal needs and aspirations change. Competency-based curriculum is an innovation in the curriculum that emphasizes the development of the total man which entails the development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain which replaced the traditional curriculum where focus is only on cognitive domain. Competency-based curriculum empowers the youths to be skillful, enterprising, and contribute meaningfully to the development and transformation of the nation; thereby reducing unemployment among the youths. The role of the teacher ranges from planning, organizing, communicating and evaluating learners to achieve sustainable development goal in Nigeria. Competency-based curriculum is saddled with some challenges which if well-handled, will improve implementation in senior secondary schools and bring about the needed sustainable development.

Suggestions towards improving the implementation of CBC

In order to curb the challenges facing CBC, the following suggestions were made:

1. Teachers should be sent for in-service training in various areas of skill acquisition by the government to enable them get prepared and knowledgeable on teaching this new curriculum.
2. Government should properly fund this new innovation by providing facilities, equipment and modern infrastructure that are needed for teaching.

3. Regular workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized for competency-based teachers so that this innovation in education will be made clearer to them.
4. Competency-based teaching is demanding and time consuming. Teachers of such should be given incentives by the school administration to enable them put in their best for effective curriculum delivery.
5. A quality assurance mechanism should be put in place by Ministry of Education to assess schools and recommend findings for effective correction in the system.
6. Government should map out fund for graduates with skills and help them to establish business or mini companies to encourage employment

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