

Evolution of Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria: Issues and Insights

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Abstract

Junior Secondary School was evolved as a result of introducing of 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria. It is post primacy education and first stage or stage I of secondary education. Recently, the FG re-launches Universal Basic Education Programme to cater to both primary and junior secondary school. The paper attempts to look at the nature and objectives, management, curriculum development and transformation, teacher education and training, continuous assessment, challenges, and prospects of Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria. The paper concluded that JSS education should be free and compulsory for every child, as it remains the bridge between primary and senior secondary schools of various fields and equips a child to acquire permanent literacy, communication and numeracy skills expected to be a functional member of the society. The paper also recommended that JSS education should be properly managed and funded to achieve its objectives, JSS certificate should be awarded to candidates that successfully finish and sit for placement examinations and JSCE should be used for gaining admission into senior secondary schools, as applicable to SSCE in higher institutions. Separate commission should be established for management and supervision of JSS education, JSS Certificates should be highly recognized, and external examination bodies should be established to certify / award certificate to JSS as Junior Secondary Certificate Examination (JSCE) among others.

Keywords: Education, Secondary, School, Post-primary and Junior Secondary School.

1.1 Introduction

The importance of junior secondary education in educational system cannot be overemphasized. Apart from serving as the link between primary and senior secondary education, it provides opportunity for a child to acquire additional knowledge, skills, attitude and traits beyond the primary level. A major factor that necessitates the acquisition of junior secondary education in Nigeria is that the education being provided at the primary level is insufficient for a child to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy skills expected from him/her to be a functional member of the society.

Education is one of the most important needs for the well being of individual and that of the society. Thus, education is a powerful instrument of social, political and economic progress and development, without which neither an individual nor a society can attain professional growth. Secondary education in Nigeria has duration of 6 years: three years for junior level and three years for senior level.

Junior Secondary School (JSS) in Nigeria is compulsory, that means a child cannot skip it. After finishing the JSS, children are ready to enter to senior secondary schools, based on their performance and placement by the state ministry of education. The JSS students may sit for science and technical school examinations and/or placement examinations. Those that pass the science and technical examinations may proceed to

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various science colleges or technical colleges and those who fail the examination, may be placed based on their performance in the placement examinations to art or commercial and other senior secondary schools.

In view of the above, therefore, the objectives of this paper are to discuss the nature and objectives, management, curriculum development and transformation, vocational/technical education, business studies, continuous assessment, challenges, and prospects of Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria among others.

1.2 Nature and Objectives of Junior Secondary School

Junior Secondary Schools are connoted and well abbreviated as JSS. It is the education which a child receives immediately after primary education (NPE, 2013).

JSS is a 3 year post primary education that children receive between the age of 10 -14years, it is comprised of vocational, technical and business studies and other subjects. There are core and elective subjects offered among the subjects at this level.

Now all Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools may have the 9-year basic educational curriculum (BEC). But in practice, it is 6-3-3-4. Presently, the subjects offered in JSS have been reduced to 10, both core and elective.

Section 2, item 22 of the National Policy on Education (2013) stated the objectives of Junior Secondary Schools as follows: -

- i. To provide the child with diverse knowledge and skills entrepreneurship and educational advancement;
- ii. To develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and performance of their civic responsibilities;
- iii. To inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independently thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour; and
- iv. To inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of difference in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background.

The above objectives can be achieved through good management, funding, availability of human and material resources, good background from primary school, qualified teachers and instructional materials.

1.3 Management of Junior Secondary School

Universal Basic Education of the federation and various states are supposed to manage the JSS, since the introduction of the board. But presently, JSS is still being managed by the board of senior secondary.

The management of secondary schools comprise numerous tasks of the principals. The principals are the pivots around which all major and important school activities revolve. This means that, the managerial qualities that principals bring to their work have far reaching impact on how the overall enterprise of the school is done.

JSS is part of basic education programme for purposes of policy coordination and monitoring. The federal government instituted a universal basic education (UBE) with the main objectives of the provision of compulsory, free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age as stated in the NPE, 2013.

“Basic education to be provided by government shall be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative, 3 years junior secondary education inclusive. And the main aim is to provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capability”

For effective teaching and learning at that level, the teacher-student ratio shall be 1:35. Okeke (2005), explained that basic requirements for management of JSS is infrastructure that include necessarily -- buildings, classrooms, laboratories, workshops, administrative blocks, furniture and work benches . Invariably, funds are needed to properly put all these basic requirements in place.

1.4 Curriculum Development/Transformation of Junior Secondary Schools

A new 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) which has only ten subject listings instead of the one presently being used at the basic education level which has 20 subject listings is to be used for teaching and learning throughout the country, task of revising the BEC has been concluded by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). It is a body responsible for transforming of JSS curriculum in Nigeria.

According to the Executive Secretary of the council, Professor Godswill Obioma, the implementation of the revised curriculum will commence next year (2020) in JSS 1 classes nationwide after its ratification by the Joint Consultative Council on Education (JCCE) and the National Council on Education (NCE), adding that the workshop is the final phase of the series of workshops and consultations with critical stakeholders of education for the review of the curriculum.

The process of reviewing the curriculum was finalized by the nation’s curriculum developer at the editorial workshop which held in Enugu where experts in curriculum, subject- matter- specialists, teachers, education policymakers at various levels, employers of labour and parents met for two days and put finishing touches to the curriculum by correcting all grammatical and typographical errors in the document as well as identifying and eliminating repetitions or content duplication.

The Professor of Mathematics Education and Evaluation explains that while the structure of the existing 9-year BEC comprises of 20 subjects, the newly revised structure has 10 subjects. JSS 1- 3 students are to offer a minimum of nine and a maximum of 10 subjects. This reduction in subject’s listings, according to the NERDC boss, was achieved by grouping related disciplines. **His words; “Related UBE subjects curricula like Home Economics and Agriculture are brought together to create a new UBE subject curriculum called Pre-Vocational Studies. Similarly, Islamic Studies, Christian Religious Studies, Social Studies, Civic Education and so forth that focus primarily on the inculcation of values (societal, moral, interpersonal) now form a new UBE subject called Religion and National Values.”**

Key concepts in the former curricula now form integrating threads for organizing the contents of the new subjects into a coherent whole. In the process of the review, particular efforts were made to eliminate content repetitions within and across subjects to further reduce the overload and encourage innovative teaching and learning techniques.

The subjects listed in the new curriculum are English Studies, Mathematics, One Nigerian Language, Basic Science and Technology, Pre-vocational Studies, Religion and Values Education, Cultural and Creative Arts and Arabic Language (which is optional) with the addition of French Language and Business Studies. The NERDC boss said; “The curricula (subjects) are up to date with current demands and practices in the disciplines. This clearly departs from the vicious cycle of theory or mere memorization”.

The curricula content activities are presented in practical oriented steps and stages that enable the learners to see, touch, handle, and feel. This will enable the pupils to truly learn, internalize what they learn, and use it for problem solving and for living. The curricula encourage learning by doing and use of self-learning strategies.”

However, the new plan consists of 10 subjects for JSS 1-3. English, Mathematics, Cultural and Creative Arts, One Nigerian Language, Basic Science and Technology, Pre-Vocational Studies (Home Economics and Agriculture) Religion and National Values Education, French, Business Studies, Arabic Language (optional).

1.5 Teacher Education and Training

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) has responsibility for teacher education and training in Nigeria. At present there are colleges, controlled and funded by the Federal Government, various state governments, and there are some owned by private agencies.

The NCCE was established to lay down minimum standards for all programs of teacher education and accredit their certificates and other academic awards after obtaining the prior approval of the minister. The Commission was also given responsibility to approve guidelines setting out criteria for accreditation of all Colleges of Education and other teacher awarding institutions in Nigeria.

Section 5, item 27 of National Policy on Education stated that the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). The goals of the teacher education shall be-- to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system, provide teachers with intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to changing situations, enhance teacher commitment to the teaching profession etc.

1.6 Continuous Assessment in Junior Secondary Schools

The Federal Ministry of Education (2004) states that Continuous Assessment is a mechanism whereby the final grading of student in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of behaviour takes account in a systematic way of all his/ her performance during a given period of school.

In reference to National Policy on Education (NPE -2013) that spelled out the rationale for implementing continuous assessment in the Nigerian schools, JSS inclusive, states that “when the details of continuous assessment system are explained, at least the system has been liberated from a pupil assessment based on only on a single final backward looking examination which assessed only one aspect of the pupils, that is his academic progress and ignores other aspects such as character, attitude, interest and physical skills which are in practice the major determinants of a person’s worth in life”.

Section 2, items 24 (NPE, 2013) states that Continuous Assessment (CA) and school examination shall be on a ratio of 40:60 and shall be used as basis for advancement from one class to another in both public and private schools.

Ojerinde, (1984) agree that assessment is an integral part of the teaching learning process and therefore, it is very reasonable and necessary that the teachers should be involved in playing an active role in the final assessment of the learner. And this is done through the practice of continuous assessment.

1.7 Challenges of Junior Secondary Schools

Junior Secondary Schools are facing a lot of challenges in Nigerian education system. Some of the challenges are:

- i. Integration of some subjects and taught as a single subject--this brings about lopsided view into one area especially if the teacher is not well trained or qualified.
- ii. The ratio of teacher to students in JSS is 1:35. But students’ population in the class is not manageable in size in most of the classes nowadays.
- iii. Misconception of the natures and roles of JSS. Most teachers and parents misinterpreted the roles played by JSS in the development of child literacy and numeracy skills. Training on the nature and roles of JSS should be organized in the form of on the job trainings, workshops, seminars and in-service programs to raise the level of awareness.
- iv. Lack of infrastructure, instructional materials and other facilities were among the main challenge in the teaching and learning process in JSS. Thus, more should be done by concerned bodies to allocate enough budget to this level of education.
- v. Management of junior secondary school at both the Federal and State levels are in shallow shape as more emphasis has been laid on senior secondary school.

1.8 Prospect of Junior Secondary Schools

Junior Secondary Schools have bright future if properly managed according to its objectives. The major prospects included are the following: -

- i. It can be a terminal point for some students as they learn a basic technology, basic science and basic financial accounting, so can be self employed.
- ii. The combination of basic science, technology and business studies make the JSS very unique in its contents.

- iii. The teaching of basic skills, knowledge, attitude and communication skills make the JSS eager to learn since they are in their tender ages.
- iv. In line with the recommendations of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2008), what the students learn at the JSS level will lay the foundation for the students SSS education and it should be systematically connected to it.
- v. Adequate attention should be provided by the government to JSS education, by the provision of incentives. Some of these incentives should be in the form of scholarships to outstanding students to senior secondary school.

1.9 Conclusion

Junior Secondary Schools remain the bridge between primary and senior secondary schools, which provides knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding needed to perform in the various senior secondary schools. It needs more attention than senior secondary school and higher institutions, because it can be a terminal point for some students and a child can be equipped with permanent literacy and numeracy skills expected to be a functional member of the society. **JSS education should be free and compulsory for every child.**

1.10 Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered:

- i. Federal, state and local governments should establish separate commission/board to provide sufficient resources, management and supervision for effective running of JSS.
- ii. JSS education should be properly managed and funded to achieve its objectives.
- iii. JSS certificate should be awarded to candidates that successfully finish and sit for placement examinations.
- iv. JSCE should be used for gaining admission into senior secondary schools of students' choice, as applicable to SSCE in higher institutions.
- v. JSS Certificates should be recognized as Junior Secondary Education Certificate, and accord all due respect like employment, seeking political office etc. because it may be a terminal point for some students.
- vi. External examination body should be established to provide certified/awarded certificate to JSS students as Junior Secondary Certificate Examination (JSCE).
- vii. The training needs of the teachers should involve programs that will enable them to face challenges associated with innovations in JSS curriculum, adopt modern methods of evaluating students' performance, acquire knowledge of subject and use of modern methods of teaching, develop skills in the provision and use of instructional materials.

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