

Navigating turbulence: Reimagining curriculum and instruction in Nigeria's era of insecurity, kakistocracy and economic downturn

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Abstract

This article explores the intricate relationships between curriculum and instruction and the unprecedented insecurity, kakistocracy, and economic downturn currently being experienced in Nigeria. These interconnected challenges undermine the country's education system, compromising the future of its youth. Curriculum and instruction, the backbone of education, must adapt to address these pressing issues. By examining the intersections of these factors, it is argued that a transformative curriculum and instructional approach can mitigate the effects of these challenges. Drawing on critical pedagogy and social learning theory, this study proposes a framework for reimagining education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Insecurity, Kakistocracy, Economic Downturn, Curriculum, Instruction

Introduction

Education facilitates the development of individual competencies and capacities that enable people to realize their full potential and contribute productively to society. It serves as a mechanism for acquiring knowledge, skills, and values essential for personal and national advancement. Without education, socio-economic progress stagnates, leaving societies in ignorance (Studies et al., 2017). Recognizing its transformative power, the Federal Republic of Nigeria enshrined the right to education for every child in its 1999 Constitution, in alignment with global declarations such as the Education for All (EFA) and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These commitments underscore education's role as both a human right and a tool for development.

Historically, Nigerian education evolved from indigenous systems rooted in communal life. In the pre-colonial era, learning focused on practical skills such as hunting, cooking, and craftsmanship, as well as moral and cultural instruction through folklore and ceremonies (Joshua et al., 2016). Elders, parents, and religious leaders were custodians of knowledge, and education emphasized moral character and community engagement (Anenge et al., 2018; Ifeoma, 2015).

Curriculum and instruction form the cornerstone of modern education. The curriculum represents planned learning experiences and desired outcomes, while instruction encompasses the methods and strategies used to deliver them. Their purpose is to foster changes in learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and problem-solving abilities (Birabil & Ogeh, 2020). However, in Nigeria, this process faces disruption from insecurity, kakistocracy, and economic downturn—three intertwined challenges that erode educational quality and threaten national development.

Grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), this paper contends that learning involves behavioural modification through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The theory highlights how

environmental and cognitive factors interact to shape learning through modelling and imitation. Applying this lens, the paper examines how Nigeria's socio-political environment influences teaching and learning outcomes and proposes a transformative framework to revitalize curriculum and instruction amid national instability.

Impact of Insecurity on Curriculum and Instruction

Prevalent descriptors of insecurity include: lack of safety; peril; risk; uncertainty; deficiency of confidence; scepticism; insufficiently safeguarded or protected; absence of stability; distress; lack of protection; and hazardous, to cite a few. Each of these terms has been utilized by various individuals to elucidate the concept of insecurity. Although the challenge of insecurity is not a contemporary phenomenon in Nigeria, from the era of military governance to its transition back to democracy, the nation continues to grapple with security dilemmas. Now, scarcely a day transpires without the emergence of reports detailing various security challenges. Given the multitude of ways in which insecurity impacts human life and existence, the notion of insecurity has frequently been attributed with divergent interpretations in relation to the diverse manners in which it influences individuals and the education system (Akpan, Udoh & Eden, 2025).

The security challenges confronting the Nigerian state in the 21st century lack any clear justification from both governmental and private perspectives. Surprisingly, these challenges are predominantly internally generated. Terms such as militant, insurgent, and terrorist have become recurrent descriptors in accordance with the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, where assaults on individuals, property, and governmental infrastructures are executed with alarming impunity. The issue at hand is that the aggressions of some of these groups have undermined the peaceful coexistence of society and the foundational values of the Nigerian state, including the education sector. One of the fundamental human rights of individuals within any state is the right to security, which is why it is typically enshrined in the constitutions of most sovereign nations. Nigeria is no exception; thus, Section 14 (2) (b) of the Nigerian 1999 constitution explicitly stipulates that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government." The government has faltered in its constitutional obligation to ensure a secure and safe environment for human life, property, and the facilitation of business and economic activities. According to Oni (2016) in Akpan and Akpan (2021) security can be conceived as the absence of threats to (a) the sovereign powers and territorial integrity of a nation (b) The capability of a country's Government (c) the safety of the person or property of citizens from oppressive rules, economic exploitation, discrimination and exclusion, diseases, homeless, starvation, ignorance and illiteracy, environmental degradation and all forms of structural and criminal violence.

Since the attainment of independence, acts of terrorism have encompassed groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Oduduwa People Congress (OPC), the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Maitatsine group, among others. Presently, Nigeria is witnessing the emergence of new varieties of violent crimes as commonplace occurrences. These include, kidnapping for ransom, pipeline vandalization, ritual killings, armed robbery and ethnic clashes (Bidemi et al., 2018). According to Bidemi et al., (2018), one of the hottest insecurity in Nigeria is Boko Haram, a terrorist sect whose overt and covert activities has threatened the foundation of the country. Analogous to this phenomenon are the activities of herdsmen, which pose a significant threat to the unity of Nigeria. Consequently, the actions of both Boko Haram and herdsmen currently compel Nigerians to navigate their lives in a state of trepidation, uncertain of

when Boko Haram suicide bombers or the clandestine assaults of herdsmen may manifest. The addition of insecurity concerns to the array of educational challenges could potentially precipitate an irretrievable collapse of the system (Michael, 2022).

Ethno-religious conflict and crises represent one of the internal factors that significantly influence curriculum and instructional practices in Nigeria. Ethnic and religious violence has, over the years, resulted in the loss of student lives on campuses, often necessitating the temporary closure of educational institutions. The discussion of ethno-religious conflicts in whatever context became a necessity given the fact that there is a phenomenal resurgence of ethno-religious conflicts across the country, thereby increasing the level of insecurity in the affected locations and entrench bias, favouritism and corruption in the administrative bureaucracy (Ousmane & Ozden, 2020).

Using an excess of four hundred (400) distinct ethnic groups, each affiliated with various religious sects, Nigeria has, since gaining independence, consistently manifested as a multi-ethnic nation-state that has been grappling with the dual challenges of ethnicity and ethno-religious conflicts. This persistence is attributable to the historical phenomena of ethnic division and religious intolerance, which have precipitated an incessant recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts, thereby engendering the emergence of numerous ethnic militias, including the O'dua People Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), and the Igbo People Congress (IPC). Additionally, there are other organizations such as the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Ohanaeze N'digbo. Insecurity in the form of violence, sexual harassment, rape, armed robbery, gun use, kidnapping, stabbing, use of acid, arson, cultism, gangsterism, and bullying, among others, has taken over Nigerian tertiary education campuses to the level that, students drop out of school to avoid being harmed by their colleagues, lecturers are scared for their life. Security in tertiary education campuses is tantamount to a conducive academic environment.

The nature of insecurity at tertiary institutions in Nigeria includes, among others, intimidation, fear of examination failure; cult activities to force an action on teachers and school administration, admitting students into courses other than their choice, and students' lack of self-confidence among others lead them into acts that endanger people's lives on campus. Mkandawire (2016) is of the opinion that it is challenging to implement the curriculum in Nigeria due to Insecurity. Nigeria has been brought under blockade and almost turned upside down by the heart throbbing activities of student cultists. Mosttimes academic activities areshut down, students failed to attend classes regularly. Therefore, Okoye (2018) sees insecurity asthe greatest crisis facing Nigeria's tertiary institutions today. Similarly, Nwakpa (2018) opined, insecurity in tertiary institutions is a social problem and is the concern of all (Citizens, Federal, State, local government, and educational authorities). Insecurity in tertiary institutions should not be compromised because of its far reaching implications and direct consequences on curriculum implementation and instruction delivery.

According to Okoye (2018), security in tertiary institutions connotes the protection of school (Institution), students, instructors, or lecturers, tangible and intangible assets from all forms of dangers. By tangible assets, the author refers to physical structures, library books, electronic gadgets in the departments, stakeholders and players, and regular and occasional visitors to the institution. Intangible assets include intellectual property, research data,

and classified information, and integrity, peace of mind, order, and above all, images. According to Onyenoru (2016), Insecurity in Nigeria's tertiary education can be traceable to authoritarian governance arising from the attrition of institutional autonomy; infrastructural collapse, and social distortion due to inadequate funding; lack of motivation of staff who have a significant obligation to mould the moral character and well-being of the students; the impact of the broader moral crisis on the tertiary institutions, staff, and students; and the precarious socio-psychological mental state of students as youths in social change and their consequent disposition to immediacy. Onyenoru (2016) maintained that campus overcrowding problems have resulted in criminal activities such as extortion, rape, and inter-cult rivalry, making it difficult for lecturers or instructors to implement the curriculum.

Odoh, Saaondo and Kayange (2018) assert that, curriculum implementation takes place when the teacher-constructed scheme of work, experience, personality, instructional materials, and a serene environment for teaching and learning interact with the learner to acquire planned or intended goals/objectives, skills, knowledge, ideas and good attitudes. Security is therefore seen as the central factor for smooth curriculum and instruction implementation. Ogwuchukwu, Okafor and Emeka (2018) buttress curriculum implementation as day-to-day activities that the school management and classroom teachers undertake in the pursuit of the objective of any given curriculum. The authors added that an effective curriculum reflects what the learner eventually takes away from an educational experience. In doing so, a serene environment is required to implement the curriculum effectively.

Ejike (2016) highlights some of the insecurity cases in tertiary institutions in Nigeria to include the followings: "In 1997 at the University of Benin, the Secretary General of the Students' Union was killed by cult members as well as, the Principal Assistant Registrar of the Delta State University. Mr. Peter Otobo fell victim to a brutal homicide orchestrated by cultists in an alarming incident during early 1997. Furthermore, in the same year, a final-year student specializing in banking and finance at Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti (OSOA), was fatally attacked due to his defection from cult activities. He was killed within his hostel subsequent to his renunciation of cultism. On July 10, 1999, a tragic occurrence unfolded when seven undergraduates from Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ife were ruthlessly murdered in their sleep on the university campus. On Saturday, May 9, 2015, Dr. Femi Omisore, an academic in Environmental Design at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, was forcibly abducted from the university premises. On June 16, 2015, Dr. Paul Erie from Ambrose Ali University in Ekpoma, Edo State, also faced a similar fate of kidnapping. A ransom of N50 million was demanded; although N12 million was paid, Dr. Erie tragically did not return home alive. On May 18, 2016, five faculty members from Ekiti State University were forcibly seized by armed kidnappers." Activities of cults disrupt academic, social and recreational events in schools; members of the school community have their movement restrained even in schools and in the night because of actuating (Akilu, 2021).

Generally, according to Onyenooru (2016), insecurity impacts on curriculum and instruction in the following ways:

1. Disruption of Academic Calendar: Insecurity causes frequent closure of schools, disrupting the academic calendar and affecting curriculum implementation.
2. Limited Access to Education: Insecurity restricts access to education, particularly in rural areas, leading to reduced enrolment and increased dropout rates.

3. **Curriculum Gaps:** Insecurity-related disruptions can lead to gaps in curriculum coverage, affecting students' knowledge and skills.
4. **Teacher Shortages:** Insecurity causes teacher shortages, as educators flee conflict zones or are targeted by insurgents.
5. **Psychological Trauma:** Insecurity exposes students to psychological trauma, affecting their learning outcomes and well-being.

Impact of Kakistocracy on Curriculum and Instruction

In the face of oppression, suppression, and a pervasive sense of despondency, Nigeria embraced the advent of democracy in 1999. For Nigeria, the democratic paradigm that has been observed to facilitate transformative change in the Western, Northern, and other facets of the developed world had finally taken root. Consequently, the year 1999 represented a pivotal moment for Nigeria to engage in the application of a model that had previously fostered development in such regions. Therefore, a system that guarantees and facilitates the expression of the voices, aspirations, and desires of the populace was deemed essential. This framework embodies democracy; however, an inquiry arises regarding the performance of the Nigerian nation in this democratic practice after nearly two decades.

While democracy is often characterized as governance by the people, who ensure their active participation in selecting their leaders and shaping policies that address pertinent issues within their communities, a disjunction appears to exist between the theoretical ideals of democracy and the tangible realities on the ground. How might one articulate this apparent chasm that democracy was intended to bridge alongside the stark conditions present? The precarious state emerging from this dissonance is of significant concern to this discourse. This precarious state is aptly termed kakistocracy. Despite the widespread promotion of democracy by Western nations, it is evident that many countries around the globe continue to grapple with challenges in this regard. In fact, one hardly finds a government or system that labels itself as a kakistocracy, but an understanding of the concept would clearly showcase features and traits that are noticeable for a regime, system or rule to be considered Kakistocratic (Onebunne & Chukwujekwu, 2023). Kakistocracy refers to governance by the least qualified or most unsavory members of society. It may also be characterized as a regime that perpetuates and exacerbates detrimental and regressive conditions for its citizenry. The ramifications of this phenomenon include the misappropriation of the collective wealth of the populace for individual and elite interests, consequently engendering widespread poverty, deprivation, and other inhumane circumstances. This predicament represents the core of poverty in numerous developing nations; despite being rich in human capital and natural resources, they languish in poverty and remain reliant on foreign aid for survival. Although some studies have been done on the concept, 'kakistocracy', not much has been done to really demonstrate its meaning and how ubiquitous this phenomenon has become, mostly amongst developing countries (Ananchukwu, 2011).

Etymologically, the term "Kakistocracy" is derived from the Greek lexemes *kakistos* (meaning "worst") or *kakos* (denoting "bad") and *kratia* (which translates to "rule," "power," or "government"), thus it serves to portray or elucidate a governmental system characterized by administration by the least qualified, most malevolent, and reprehensible individuals. It is very instructive to note that when it comes to the hierarchical representation of the

capability of the personnel that make up the sort of arrangement, they are not merely bad, but worse than bad, thus living a sane mind to only imagine empathetically that which such a set of leaders can impact the state with (Onebunne & Chukwujekwu, 2023). There is an important connection between kakistocracy and kleptocracy (Mojo, 2020). Onebunne and Chukwujekwu (2023) see the concept of kleptocracy as a government whose members seek predominantly to obtain personal advantage (material, social, political etc.), at the expense of the governed. Thus it would only be corollary to assert kleptocratic management, an offshoot of kakistocracy, as closely related to corruption. The Nigerian political system or system of governance although labelled as democratic, is a charade as it neither meets the need of the people either economically, educationally, politically or otherwise (Ekong & James, 2023).

The proclivities of kakistocracy extend beyond the confines of state governance; this particular leadership paradigm may elucidate the myriad afflictions faced by society, including breaches of conduct among citizens, corporate malfeasance, ethical breaches within ecclesiastical institutions, irregularities in civil society, marital infidelity, the erosion of the rule of law, and the ongoing existence of illegitimate authoritarian regimes alongside despotic leaders. While the former seemingly appears as one wanting to develop the people, but lacks the wherewithal to get that done, the latter lacks the desire and is simply out to enrich himself or his class (Ogwuchukwu, Okafor & Emeka, 2018).

It may be inferred that despite Nigerians' engagement in democratic practices, they do not fully embody democratic principles as certain essential components are conspicuously absent; these components encompass the right to free expression, active political engagement, and the safeguarding of democratic entitlements. The lesson from the above is that kakistocracy may be *prima facie* regarded as democratic, but once a government is proven to lack the ability to meet a high percentage of the general needs of the people, then such a government can be described as kakistocratic (Mojo, 2020). This sort of government is crises driven, replete with propaganda, heavily nepotistic, sectional, parochial, and vindictive. So the query that logically follows would be, how has the Nigerian brand of democracy impacted her very critical sector of education in terms of curriculum implementation and instruction delivery? A serious pointer to confirm this is the fact that thousands of Nigerians leave the country both through legal and illegal means, just to avoid the stringent conditions in this (Onebunne & Chukwujekwu, 2023).

Onebunne and Chukwujekwu (2023) highlighted the following as the effects of Kakistocracy on curriculum implementation and instructional quality:

1. **Corruption:** Kakistocracy perpetuates corruption, diverting education funds and compromising curriculum quality.
2. **Politicization of Education:** Kakistocracy leads to politicization of education, prioritizing political interests over educational needs.
3. **Lack of Accountability:** Kakistocracy undermines accountability, allowing poor curriculum implementation and instructional practices.
4. **Teacher De-motivation:** Kakistocracy de-motivates teachers, affecting their instructional effectiveness and commitment.

5. Limited Access to Resources: Kakistocracy restricts access to educational resources, hindering curriculum implementation and instructional quality.

Impact of Economic Downturn on Curriculum and Instruction

Given that education is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of any society, its development and expansion are inherently contingent upon the economic vitality of that society. Consequently, Nigeria is not an exception; any economic distress invariably adversely impacts the educational sector, which suffers significantly as a result. It is the aspiration of every nation, regardless of its developmental status, to witness equitable advancement in the living standards of its citizenry. However, the advancement hubs surrounding the economic sector of such a nation are pivotal. Moreover, the veracity cannot be overstated, as various sectors—such as health, agriculture, technology, and education are profoundly reliant on the economic sector for their sustainability. This implies that when the economic sector encounters failure, all other sectors subsequently experience adverse effects. In Nigeria, institutions and employees are experiencing hardship during this period of economic compress as they experience high inflation rate due to the devaluation of the nation's currency, loss of job, excessive taxation and negligence on education on the side of the government where meagre percentage is allocated to education in yearly budgets (Akpan, Udoh & Eden, 2025; Anochiwa & Maduka, 2015).

The education system is part of the general macro economy hence whatever happens in the system will definitely have an effect on the schools. The education system cannot compromise standards and quality on the account of poor funding. Most institutions in Nigeria are confronting economic constraints and this slows down the speed of achieving the institutions' activities, including curriculum implementation and instruction. Since the funding of education is solely external at most levels, public or government schools are mostly affected with the economic hardship. Bakare, Kareem and Oyelekan (2015) opine that; "research on school quality in developing countries is challenging because formal data collection initiatives on schools are typically infrequent." This assertion is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria, where countless children are observed wandering the streets during designated school hours, while both governmental authorities and parents exhibit minimal concern due to their inability to address the academic requirements of these vulnerable youth.

However, Benjamin (2017) sees the effects of economic downturn or recession in Nigeria to include the following:

1. Education financing: The financial crisis or economic downturn has really affected the educational sector. Economic downturn reduces education budgets, affecting curriculum development and instructional resources. There is reduced expenditure on instructional personnel, generally, the largest portion of the education budget. This is because money gotten from the economy is supposed to be channeled to the development of the education, but owing to economic recession, the money needed in the educational sector is diverted to other sectors.
2. Employment trends in the educational sector: There is also the reduction in recruitment of teachers and other personnel needed for effective education curriculum delivery and massive retrenchment in schools especially private ones where parents cannot afford payment.

3. Infrastructural and teaching resources deficit: Poor learning environment is evident as it is not conducive due to schools underfunding. Critical instructional and learning resources are lacking in schools nationwide. Economic downturn restricts access to technology, hindering curriculum innovation and instructional effectiveness..
4. Decreased Enrolment: Economic downturn decreases enrolment, affecting curriculum relevance and instructional effectiveness. Undoubtedly, lack of funds stands out as the number one problem in teaching and learning. In view of this, most institutions are left with no option rather than to source for funds to maximize whatever has been given (Obiakor, 2021).

Conclusion

Insecurity, kakistocracy, and economic decline have severely undermined curriculum implementation and instructional quality across Nigeria's education system. These challenges have eroded standards, weakened institutions, and limited educational outcomes. Education must therefore be repositioned as a transformative tool for national renewal through a curriculum that fosters peace, civic responsibility, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

1. Curriculum Reform: Integrate peace education, civic engagement, and entrepreneurship to promote stability and innovation.
2. Teacher Development: Strengthen professional training and motivation to enhance instructional quality.
3. Governance: Promote accountability and reduce political interference in educational management.
4. Funding: Increase and sustain budgetary allocation for curriculum delivery and infrastructure.
5. Research: Undertake continuous evaluation and comparative studies to align with global best practices

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