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Article in *Journal of Education Society and Behavioural Science* · September 2020

DOI: 10.9734/JESBS/2020/v3i3i830252

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Overloaded Curriculum, Excessive Daily Academic Activities and Students' Learning Effectiveness

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out by both authors. Author EJD developed the research topic, designed the study and performed the statistical analysis. Author EVU wrote the protocol, wrote the first draft of the manuscript and worked on the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JESBS/2020/v33i830252

Editor(s):

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Reviewers:

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(2) Tumla Shrestha, Maharajgunj Nursing Campus, Nepal.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/60640>

Original Research Article

**Received 25 June 2020
Accepted 30 August 2020
Published 14 September 2020**

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the relationship between overloaded curriculum, excessive daily academic activities and the learning effectiveness of Junior secondary school students (JSS). The researchers used the ex-post facto research design to carry out the study. The study sought to determine the relationship that exist between overloaded curriculum, excessive daily academic activities and the learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. A sample of 220 JSS 3 students was randomly selected from the 36 public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled "Overloaded Curriculum Questionnaire, OCQ" and an adapted version of Kirkpatrick's Learning Effectiveness Scale. Cronbach alpha technique was used in calculating the reliability of the instruments. Reliability scores of .79 and .87 were yielded for the OCQ and KLES respectively. Data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, PPMC. The findings of the study indicated that duplication of learning contents and academic overload have significant relationship with learning effectiveness of young learners. The recommendations made based on the findings include that curriculum planners should use curriculum mapping to reduce redundancies inherent in our overloaded curriculum.

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Keywords: Academic overload; learning effectiveness; overloaded curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of every teacher is to impart meaningful information to learners in such a way that they make sense of the contents dished out to them. For a teacher to ascertain if these goals have been met, that teacher should be able to know the rate at which learning outcomes have been achieved. Learning effectiveness is thus, the degree to which objectives of a particular lesson have been met. According to [1] effective learning occurs when “a learner has gained understanding of the individual and social processes involved in learning”.

Effective learning is pivotal to positive learning outcomes. It could be likened to the assimilation of valuable and worthwhile learning experiences. These valuable experiences are often manifested via performance exhibited through examinations, practical exhibitions or real life application in problem solving situations [2,3,4]. In shedding more light, [5] posited that effective learning is dependent on instructional strategies. However, they pointed out that both the teacher and learner play pivotal roles in improving outcomes as effective learning is linked with effective teaching.

The curriculum is at the heart of every defined educational programme. Curiously various attempts, over the years, to come out with a concise definition of the concept has created more questions than answers [6]. Etymologically, the word “curriculum” was coined from the Latin word “currere” which means “to run”. Also, [6] added that a school curriculum embodies “the planned learning contents and opportunities used for the education of the learners which gives them worthwhile learning experiences within the school setting. A curriculum is the totality of learning experiences of a learner, [7] saw the curriculum as the totality of intending learning experiences planned and directed by the school as a means of achieving predetermined educational objectives.

A nation's developmental goals are a function of their educational system [8]. Thus a nation's curriculum is modeled around the society's developmental needs. For education to be functional, the nation's educational system must provide solutions to societal problems [9]. Therefore it is clear that as a result of the cogent need to meet various global developmental

milestones, curriculum planners seek to expand the curriculum to cover a wide area in order to meet up with the demand for a knowledge-based economy. This could cause problems for the learners who are expected to acquire mastery of various learning experiences in a limited amount of time [10].

Overloaded curriculum is one of the problems associated with educational systems in contemporary times. [11] pointed out that in a bid to expand the knowledge base of the society, many curriculum planners have resorted to duplicating contents, thereby creating redundancy and leaving obvious gaps in formulation and implementation. [12] identified continued introduction of new courses as a major problem facing curriculum implementation in Nigeria. This has led to introduction of contents which are similar to pre-existing contents in the curriculum. This, according to [13] could lead to watering down the curriculum and compromising the quality of learning experience in our schools. This could also make learning tedious and monotonous, thereby negating the learners' attitude to school.

In addition to duplication of content, academic overload is another problems associated with overloaded curriculum. Academic overload simply refers to exposing learners to excessive academic activities such that they struggle to cope with the intensity or work load. Academic overload occurs when teachers try to cover a wide range of contents in the school syllabus by increasing the number of tasks and information given to the learners thereby causing academic burnout and other forms of psycho-social stress [14,15,16,10]. Various studies on academic overload have shown it's prevalence in secondary schools and have highlighted the negative psycho-somatic effect it has on learners [17,18,16].

The Nigerian educational system is in dire need for an improved curriculum. [12] intimated that the inadequacies in our curriculum are glaring at both the curriculum development and implementation stages as a result of a seeming lack of engagement of teachers and students who are major stakeholders in the educational process. Some of the gaps observed in our curriculum are associated with efforts to align obtainable contents and pedagogies with our multifaceted developmental needs [19,16]. This

has led to duplication of contents, academic overload, content redundancy, and in some cases, over schooling [13,20]. This observed problems inspired the researchers to find out if overloaded curriculum has significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Educational zone.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Specifically, this study sought to find out:

1. The relationship between duplicated learning content and learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students.
2. The relationship between academic overload and learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students.

1.2 Hypotheses

1. Duplication of learning contents has no significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students
2. Academic overload has no significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an ex-post facto design. This is because the variables studied had already occurred and cannot be manipulated by the researchers. The population of this study comprises all the Junior Secondary school, JSS3 students in public secondary schools in Uyo education zone. Using simple random sampling the researchers selected 220 students (110 male and 110 female students) from the 36 public secondary schools in Uyo Education zone.

The researcher had in mind, in the course of this study, that personal information collected from the respondents must be treated with almost confidentiality. Thus, it is vital that information is used, solely, for the purpose of analyzing data for this study and should not be divulged to any third party, without the express permission of the respondent.

The researchers designed an instrument titled "Overloaded Curriculum Questionnaire", OCQ, to collect data on the independent variable, while an adapted version of Kirkpatrick's Learning Effectiveness Scale was used to ascertain

learning outcomes in the affective, psychomotor and cognitive domains.

The instruments used for data collection were administered by the researchers and two research assistants. The researchers met with the principals of the secondary schools designated for the study. This was necessary to get the approval of the principals before distributing copies of the questionnaire to the students. The researchers employed research assistants to save time and ensure that copies of the questionnaire got to all the respondents. The researchers also ensured that the assistants were adequately trained for the purpose of the research. The items in the questionnaire were explained to the students to ensure they understood the items.

20 students who were not selected for the study were engaged to ascertain the reliability of the study. The Cronbach Alpha technique was applied and reliability scores were .79 and .87 for the OCQ and the adapted Kirkpatrick's Learning Effectiveness Scale, respectively, were adjudged to be adequate for the study. In testing the hypotheses, the Pearson product Moment Correlation was employed by the researchers.

3. RESULTS

The participants for this study comprised 220 JSS 3 students (110 male students and 110 female students). These students have an average age of 13 years and consist of students that reside in boarding houses and those that come to school from their homes.

Hypothesis One: Duplicated learning contents have no significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students.

Table 1 showed a calculated r-value of 0.480 which is greater than the P-value at .05 level of significance and 218 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis which states that duplication of learning contents has no significant relationship with learning effectiveness was rejected. Therefore duplication of learning contents has significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone.

Hypothesis Two: Academic overload has no significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students.

Table 1. Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the: Relationship between duplicated learning contents and learning effectiveness (N=220)

Variables	X	SD	r-value#	P value
Duplication of learning	18.22	2.98	0.480*	.000
Learning effectiveness	18.74	1.43		

* Significant at $P < .05$ # Pearson product moment correlation

Table 2. Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the: Relationship between academic overload and learning effectiveness (N=220)

Variables	X	SD	r-value#	Pvalue.
Academic overload	18.08	3.16	0.308*	.000
Learning effectiveness	18.74	1.43		

* Significant at $P < .05$ # Pearson product moment correlation

Table 2 indicated a calculated r- value of 0.308 which is greater than the P-value at .05 significant level and 218 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis which stated that academic overload has no significant relationship with learning effectiveness was rejected. Thus, academic overload has a significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students in public secondary school students in Uyo Education Zone.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of Table 1 revealed that duplication of learning contents has significant relationship with learning effectiveness. When curriculum developers try to incorporate various contents and learning experiences into the curriculum, they end up reproducing a repertoire of learning experiences already captured in the syllabus. This finding is in line with the explanations of [21] that an effectively planned curriculum must capture only necessary needs of the learners' society to yield expected goals of instruction. When curriculum developers fail to produce a concise statement of educational objectives, the learners may struggle to learn the relevant materials that should be learned, rather valuable resources are spent on experiences and content that has either been learned in the past, or are no longer relevant in contemporary times. [22] concurred with this assertion. He [22] posited that a good curriculum reflects not only the immediate needs of the society, it also embraces and focuses on contemporary know how so as to provide needed answers to prevalent questions in the society.

Table 2 also indicated that academic overload has significant relationship with learning

effectiveness. When students are continually bombarded with information and academic tasks by their teachers, the law of diminishing returns gradually set in. Academic burnout, loss of motivation and attention related problems are some of the possible downside of exposing the learners to enormous academic tasks; beyond what they can realistically surmount [17,23]. This finding is in line with the inference drawn by [15] that the length of time spent on instruction has influence on learners' achievement and study habit. When young learners are denied time to engage in other extracurricular activities or bombarded with take home assignments, the learners suffer reduction of academic achievement drive and may develop academic burnout [16,14].

Ogunmakin and Akomolate [23] also asserted that when teachers fail to appreciate the fact that some of the instructional materials that learners are exposed to are alien to them. When these young students are not properly guided to make sense out of these materials they develop lack of self-efficacy which has negative implications on their academic engagement and achievement. [24] also added that learners may resort to truancy, and in more extreme cases consider dropping out from school. This negative attitude towards learning according to [24] is linked to the learners' feelings of trepidation of school and school work.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the findings of this study it was inferred that overloaded curriculum and duplication of learning contents both have significant relationship with learning effectiveness of JSS 3 students. Based

on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Nigeria's curriculum planners should ensure that redundancies are identified and eliminated from our curriculum. This can be achieved through integrating curriculum mapping into the curriculum development process.
2. Teachers must pay more attention to the affective needs of learners. There is cogent need to deemphasize on the cognitive domain to the detriment of the other domains of learning. This is vital for the young learners' cognitive and socio-emotional development.
3. Curriculum planners should always remember that the learner remains the most important stakeholder in school. Learner-centred approach must not be sacrificed in favor of covering all aspects of the curriculum. The teachers should ensure that contents are broken down into meaningful and simple units to allow the students learn at their own pace. This can go a long way in reducing academic frustration and burn-out.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard guideline participant consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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*The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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