



## FUTURE CURRICULUM AND 21ST CENTURY SOFT SKILLS

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### Abstract

The paper focused on future curriculum and soft skills. The study reveals the necessity for the implementation of soft skills in our curriculum. It also discusses the foundations of future curriculum, the approach of future curriculum, forecasting in education for the future, the challenges of emerging curriculum, the importance of future curriculum, the various types of soft skills and their importance to future problems. It also addresses how soft skills should be implemented in the curriculum. The paper concludes that future curriculum should be projected to accommodate soft skills as the professional world no longer cherish certificate. The paper recommended that curriculum of the future should be progressive to allow implementation of soft skills; students should be exposed to activities like debate, group work and writing.

**Keywords:** Future curriculum, curriculum, soft skills.

### Introduction

Over the years education has been traditional in nature and its attainment or success is measured through one's ability to read, write and solve some level of arithmetic and mastery of core academic subjects. The world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has changed and requires a fundamentally different orientation as it moves from a traditional setting to a more technological makeup. To cope effectively in increasingly complex societies and globalized economy, a future progressive curriculum is needed that enable students to think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate

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with diverse peers and solve complex problems. Encourage students to adopt a global mindset and engage with information and communications technology etc.

The truth is that the traditional education system is generally not preparing the learners to face challenges of the future and the future curriculum has been the response to reform and strengthen the education system resulting in a wider area of 21<sup>st</sup> century surroundings. A suite of initiatives and research has taken place, skills that culminated with the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals and the Education 2030 agenda in particular.

This paper addresses the future curriculum and soft skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; it is also to understand how the soft skills of 21<sup>st</sup> century can be implemented in the curriculum and how soft skills are important to the future.

### **Future curriculum**

Curriculum is defined as the design or planning of an institution or country and that in itself encompasses a wide range of meanings that encompass which a whole programme that is planned under the guidance of a school (Slaughter, 2007). It was stated by Shane (2003) that future curriculum is a design or plan of the entire education programme for the society. It was further emphasized that the curriculum for the future is a curriculum for tomorrow on the basis of systematic forecasting today. Each aspect of curriculum development include goals, content, implementation of strategies and form the form of evaluation. Future curriculum development is used in the education system so that what is implemented in the education system has a clear direction in a better future generation outcome without unnecessary cost, loss of energy and resources (Siraj, 2007).

### **Foundation of future Curriculum**

The foundation of future curriculum course is necessary so that certain changes can take place in the future. The foundation is the layer of the future course. According to Longstreet and Shane (2003) the foundation is divided into three but are all embedded in the eight basic.

### **The Eight Basics**

1. Planning the course of the future does not mean changing the present.
2. The future is an event subject to change in comparison to the present.
3. Mankind invents things today and in the future also based on what is planned.
4. The future course planning is organized on the basis of values and beliefs.
5. The course of the future begins in the present moment. Therefore, the present is an important foundation for future course.
6. Future curriculum policy focuses on possibilities and impact or outcomes related to planning for a better future.
7. As a forecasting development tool the future course can be designed and measured.
8. Only humanity in the present can set the benchmark for a better idea of the future.

### **Vision for Future Curriculum**

There are many approaches to measure the future curriculum but some relevant approaches will be mentioned for the benefit of this paper.

**Foresight approach:** Long –term thinking and an assumption of foresight are essential in the future curriculum. This approach concerns with equipping curriculum planners with the ability to design a curriculum that will not only equip students with future literacy in anticipation of future changes but also provide technical know-how or agency for future changes, as it will prepare students with the intelligence and courage to create. To do things for tomorrow that we expect to happen (Kuo-Hua, 2020).

**Scenario planning:** The curriculum is adjusted to the aims and objectives of any implemented educational system. This approach directs education towards the modern trends and objectives required in full - fledged learning activities. It gives room for adjustment of curriculum to provide an educational curriculum that is in line with social change. For example in Nigeria curriculum was adjusted to include information technology at all levels of education as the world is becoming technologically advanced and it is needed for all activities (Koeto, 2019).

### **Importance of Future Curriculum**

Future curriculum according to Gordon (2004) is important to any nation in the following ways:

1. The role of planners and curriculum designers will be crucial in ascertaining the future direction of the education system.
2. Forecasting the future with data can help an organization or country to make various preparations including finance, infrastructure and human resource to achieve each goal.
3. The institution or future of a nation can be achieved through amendment.
4. Planners and curriculum implementation experts are the main asset of the future generation of an institution or country.
5. Future curriculum developers with expertise will be able to plan for current concepts that are based on national culture, logic, and ethical values.

### **Forecast in Education for the future**

Forecasting in education is a technique that uses data to predict future trends. It allows for planning or allocation of budget in education. Forecasting is important in education as it forms the basis of understanding the current trends in community life. One of the current trends that should be fully incorporated in the curriculum is technology.

Technology is part of our daily lives and is woven into the lives of children of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Education has started moving in the direction of technology. The emergence of various digital tools appears to have been adopted by educational stakeholders and agencies to complement the teaching and learning process. The Joint Matriculation Board (JAMB) and West African Examination Council (WAEC) have adopted the use of computers for conducting examination. Educational institutions all over the world including Nigeria, are incorporating technology to

boost the functioning and efficiency of schools. Forecasting is necessary in this area as the world is tilting towards technology for most things including teaching and learning process, for example, the emergence of Google classroom in which all to continue the transmission of knowledge even in the face of security challenges and pandemic. The importance of technology is immense and as a result forecasting is necessary if our education must remain relevant and can be represented in the following ways:

1. **Learners' freedom:** the freedom of learning will be required more as time goes on as students will begin to have the opportunity to set work time whenever he or she wants. People will continue to seek for education even while working. For this reason, many options are beginning to avail themselves. Having multiple solutions will certainly increase the number of educated people. The online platform gives students the leeway to work and learn, allowing for distant learning, networking opportunities and flexibility of schedule.
2. **Practical learning:** our students love to read books and passively listen to their teachers. Theory is a fashionable thing in our schools and practical is missing. Practical proves that what is taught theoretically is true and it is needed for the future as the world needs students that can handle task. Education is shifting from mere transmission of knowledge to development of skills. Skill will be more appreciated in the nearest future than literacy skills.
3. **Place of smart phone in education:**  
The use of smart phone is will be made mandatory in the near future as its importance is immense as it contains educational apps that communicate knowledge to students. The emergence of smart phone has made learning on any topic easy as all it needs is connecting to the internet to gain relevant needed information. The smart phones and blackboards will continue to be a constant screen for our students (Olugbenga, 2020).

### **Challenges Associated with Emerging Curriculum Trends**

The following according to (Gordon, 2004) are some of the factors militating against curriculum trends:

- a) The availability of technological gadgets which may hinder human relations and prevents the acquisition of soft skills. Class engagement with students may be reduced as teachers will only serve as facilitators.
- b) The online platform may change the way teachers engage students. Teachers may find the new trends daunting as engagement online is a lot different from the physical classroom.
- c) The issue of inadequate technical gadgets, erratic power supply and internet coverage in schools and homes may hinder the full adoption of technology in our educational system.
- d) The lack of technical know-how among teachers in manipulating the new sophisticated digital tools.

- e) Resistance to change which may come in diverse ways as relying strongly on existing "status quo".

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Soft Skills**

21<sup>st</sup> century faces tons of challenging responsibilities, which require the launch of a curriculum that enables the future generation to face the challenges of real-life situations to sustain the development of the world and make it a better place to live in. Traditional education is designed to groom learners only to read and write and had not being able to respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. Until recently, career success in a given position appeared to be based solely on the soft skills and ability to perform certain task. Soft skills dominate career choices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kwon, 2008).

Skill refers to practical work. The term alone has a broad meaning and describes a special ability to accomplish task from easy to difficult. Skill is interpreted as the ability to master difficult- to-control skills. Soft skills, also known as common skills or core skills are skills which are desirable in all professions. They are a set of productive personality traits that characterize one's relationships in a social environment. It relates to one's attitudes and intuition. Soft skills are less about competency and more personality driven (Zhang, 2012).

There are presently more than ten soft skills, according to Whitmore (2012) and they are as follow:

**Critical thinking:** it is the ability to think logically about a problem in order to solve it. It is used to describe thinking that is objective, reasoned and goal directed. The type of thinking that is involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating livelihoods and making decisions, when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task.

**Problem solving:** This is considered a soft skill (a personal strength) rather than a hard skill learned through education or training. It is a skill that deals with amalgamation of various soft skills like decision making, leadership and team work. Problem solving begins with identifying and defining the issues, formulating alternative solutions and implementing the selected solution.

**Public speaking:** Also called the art of oratory and traditionally meant the act of speaking face to face to a live audience but today includes any form of speaking (Formally and informally) to an audience, including pre-recorded speech delivered over great distance by means of technology. It is a soft skill that requires excellent communication skills, enthusiasm, and the ability to engage with audience.

**Professional writing:** it is an activity of writing for prize or as a profession; as a product or commodity, professional writing is any form of written communication produced in a workplace environment or context that enables employees, for example, to communicate effectively among themselves, lead informed decisions, advise clients, bid contracts etc.

**Teamwork:** it is the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient manner. Team work as a soft skill involves the combination of other soft skills. Working in a team towards a common goal

requires intuition and interpersonal skills to know when to be a leader and when to be a listener.

**Digital literacy:** it refers to a person's ability to find, evaluate and communicate information clearly through typing and other media on various digital platforms. It is related to the grammatical composition of the person, typing skills and ability to produce text, images, audio and designs using technology. According to American Library Association (ALA) digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create and communicate information requiring cognitive and technical skills. While it was initially related to digital skills and stand-alone computers, the advent of the internet and use of social media has resulted in some of its focus shifting to mobile devices.

**Leadership:** leadership as a soft skill is defined as a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the help and support of others in the accomplishment of a common and ethical task. The ability to lead successfully often depends on the leader's ability to strategize, listen to feedback, and incorporate the ideas and contributions of his and her team. A leadership skill gives the ability to inspire others and lead teams to success.

**Work Ethic:** This is a positive soft skill that manifests an attitude of determination and dedication towards one's work. The belief that work and exertion have an inherent ability, quality or value to have moral benefits and to strengthen character and personal abilities. Work ethics makes an individual excellent at work. Examples of work ethic include dedication, reliability, discipline etc.

**Listening skills:** listening is a highly valueable soft skill because it shows that people with listening skill understand, act and create projects, build strong relationship with co-workers and solve problems and conflicts.

**Creativity:** This soft skill brings out innovative solutions to various problems. Thinking creatively allows one to continually learn and push boundaries. Creativity can help with brainstorming ideas and solutions, asking questions to generate original ideas etc.

### **Importance of soft skills in 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Soft skills are essential part of improving one's ability to work with others and can have positive impact on advancing one's career. It shows to the outside world how a person perceives the various characteristics that will help one to be successful within an organization and it focuses on differentiating adequate candidates from ideal candidates. Soft skills have proven to be beneficial to organizations and society at large and will continue to be in the near future (Misthree, 2012).

These importance according to Thomas (2019) include the following;

1. Soft skills improve interactions between coworkers and help build good rapport between workers and clients.
2. It improves team work in an organization or in an interpersonal space.
3. It brings a healthy and productive work environment.
4. It sets one apart in an organization.
5. They complement hard skills



6. Workplaces of the future will depend more on these skills
7. Automation cannot replace soft skills.

### **Implementing soft skills in future curriculum**

One of the many importance of future curriculum is to predict the future and as a matter of urgency soft skills need to begin to reflect in our curriculum because of its immense importance to work and society either as co- curricular or extra –curricular activities. Soft skills cannot be taught easily because they are very difficult to measure and verify as easily as hard skills. However, soft skills are very important and schools still need to pass on these skills to students (Grossberg, 2010). According to Guinns (2005) for this to be possible the curriculum must change from traditional to progressive that is for the future and build students for the future which is achieved through assignment like group project and class discussions:

**Students should lead learning:** learning takes place best in environments where students feel empowered to learn. Progressive oriented teachers are more like moderators, offering inspiration and guiding students to discover themselves. Students are given the opportunity to be self- learners, which guarantees lifelong learning. This can improve skills like public speaking, decision making and leadership skills.

**Create an inquiry – based classroom environment:** students leading the way to learn need to be able to ask questions and find the means to answer them. Students need to wonder aloud which leads to new information. These way students grow up to be problem solvers and critical thinkers.

**Encourage collaboration in schools:** students are social beings and should be encouraged to form pairs and small groups. This method helps to develop speaking and listening skills and also develop team work in humans.

**Develop critical thinking skills in the classroom:** learning is much more than just memorizing and remembering. Critical thinking skills take students beyond simple understanding. It is important to undertake activities that will improve skills that will stand the test of time. This may be achieved by giving students room to ask more questions, evaluate existing evidence and motivating students to engage in activities or task that will allow for self – thinking.

### **Conclusion:**

Future curriculum should be planned to accommodate soft skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the era of certificate is gradually fading away and more emphasis is being placed on soft skills such as digital literacy, which is firmly sought for in the professional world. It is imperative that schools should think of ways to integrate and implement these skills into their curricular, so that students are prepared to be successful in their professional careers.

### **Suggestions**

1. Future curriculum should be progressive so as to accommodate the use of technology that will allow learner centered approaches in our educational system.

2. Curriculum planners should regularly forecast, develop and prepare to embrace emerging curriculum that will solve future problems.
3. Students should be exposed to activities like group work, public speaking and writing skills at a very early age.
4. Schools should encourage hands on activities and project based learning.
5. Provision of materials that will prepare students for the future.

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