

# **OVERLOADED CURRICULUM AND STUDENTS' LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examined the relationship between overloaded curriculum, excessive daily academic activities and the learning effectiveness of Junior secondary school students. The study was guided by two specific objectives and two null hypotheses. The population of the study comprised all JSS 3 students in public secondary schools in Uyo Education Zone. A researcher designed instrument titled "Overloaded Curriculum Questionnaire, OCQ", and an adapted version of Kirkpatrick's Learning Effectiveness Scale was used for data collection. Cronbach alpha was used in calculating the reliability of the instruments. Reliability scores of 79 and 87 were yielded for the OCQ and KLES respectively. 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.

**Key words:** overloaded curriculum, Academic overload, learning effectiveness

## 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 the Institute of Education University of London (2002) 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 (Okoro, 2017; Enang, 2017; Weiten, 2007). Amos, Folasayo and Oluwatoyin (2015) 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 (Sa 2012; Etuk,

Udosen, Emah, Edem and Afangideh, 2019). Etymologically, the word “curriculum” was coined from the Latin word “currere” which means “to run”. Etuk et al. (2019) 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. Maduabom (2006) 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 (Okoro and Ezeonwumelu, 2017). Thus a nation’s curriculum is modelled around the society’s developmental needs. For education to be functional, the nation’s educational system must provide solutions to societal problems (Asaju and Adagba, 2014). 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 (Campbell, 2014).

Overloaded curriculum is one of the problems associated with educational systems in contemporary times. Sa (2012) 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. Ogar and Awhen (2015) 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 Nwiyi (2009) 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 problem 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 (Sulaiman and Akinsanya, 2011; Luciano, 2014; Shenk 2011). Various studies on academic overload have shown its prevalence in secondary schools and have highlighted the negative psycho-somatic effect it has on learners (Yang 2004; Sommer and Dumont, 2011; Shenk, 2011).

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The Nigerian educational system has a flawed curriculum. The inadequacies of our curriculum are well documented by numerous studies conducted over the years. Some of the gaps observed in our curriculum are associated with efforts to align obtainable contents and pedagogies with our multifaceted developmental needs. This has led to duplication of contents, academic overload, content redundancy, and in some cases, over schooling. 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.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was 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. 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.

### **1.3 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 Method**

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 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.

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 of 79 and 87 for the OCQ and the adapted Kirkpatrick’s

Learning Effectiveness Scale, respectively, were adjudged to be adequate for the study.

### 3. Results

Hypothesis One: Duplicated learning contents have 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	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
Duplication of learning	18.22	2.98	0.480*	.000
Learning effectiveness	18.74	1.43		

\* Significant at  $P < .05$

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 2:**

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between academic overload and learning effectiveness (N=220)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
Academic overload	18.08	3.16	0.308*	.000
Learning effectiveness	18.74	1.43		

\* Significant at  $P < .05$

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. Discussions

The results of Table 1 revealed that duplication of learning contents has significant relationship with learning effectiveness. This finding is in line with



the explanations of Demir, Kilinc and Dogan (2012) 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 an apt statement of educational objectives, the learners may struggle to learn the relevant materials that should be learned.

Table 2 also indicated that academic overload has significant relationship with learning effectiveness. This finding is in line with the inference drawn by Luciano (2014) 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 (Shenk, 2011; Sulaiman and Akinsanya 2011).

## **5. Conclusion/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.

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