

MAKING THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM MORE RELEVANT IN NIGERIA
CURRICULUM STUDIES AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY
DEPARTMENT, KWARA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION. ILORIN.

Mallam ALHASSAN Bolaji, Y.S.

Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Studies

Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin.

ABSTRACT

The paper examine the various definitions of curriculum and the extent to which curriculum is able to satisfy or meet the needs and inspirations of Nigeria. It went further to critically analyze curriculum relevance, importance of the curriculum conference of 1969 and its outcome, which was the National Policy on education (NPE). The caper was concluded with emphasizing the ways the curriculum can he made to address the needs, interest and aspirations of the society more adequately.

Introduction

The word curriculum came from the Latin Word, Curere, meaning "to run", or probably more correctly, to run a course, and traditionally the school curriculum has presented a relative standardized ground (a course of subjects) covered by students in their race towards the finishing line (certificate, diploma or degree). From this early usage, the word curriculum has passed into common usage, and many people do think of it as 'a course of study', containing the body of subject matter officially in schools. Although the definition appears clear and simple, it is however too narrow (NTI 1992).

The shorter Oxford Dictionary defines curriculum as a 'course especially a regular course, of study as at a school or University' (p. 212). It records its use since the 17th .century, and this, perhaps, marks the beginning of systematic and self - conscious attempts to regularize course of study.

Further, curriculum is seen by Johnson (1967), as an intention, plan or prescription, end idea about what one would like to happen in schools. On the other hand, it is seen as the existing state of affairs in schools. And since neither intention nor happenings can be discussed until they are described or otherwise communicated, curriculum study rest on how we talk or write about these two ideas of curriculum.

A thorough Literature research revealed that the traditionalists were of two types the rerenalist and the essentialists (Daramola 1995). The perenialist believe that any. Penalised curriculum structure towards contemporary needs is a distraction from the role of the curriculum as the central nerve for intellectual training. In short, the perennial advocated a subject centred curriculum, which places importance on drill and behavior control. The disciplines identified to be in the school curriculum are rules of Grammer reading, mathematics, rhetoric and logical.

Added to this is that the perennialists identified the above subjects in order to develop the logical faculty that leads us to correct thinking (Daramola 1995). The second group of the traditionalist viewed curriculum as a test of fundamental academic discipline such as English Language. These subjects, the essentials argued, were essential for cultivation of the intellect for rigorous academic involvement.

The perennialists conceived the acquisition of academic excellence by mastery subject matter and mental discipline. However, the essentialists submitted that fundamental academic disciplines concentrate on providing the mastery needed for subsequent learning.

Daramola (1995) reported that the progressive movement, a group led by John Dewey at the beginning of the 20th Century in the American Society, condemned the traditionalists views on curriculum and charged them of narrow and parochial thinking the progressives challenge the traditional school curriculum and proposed that a school curriculum should be designed on the basis of contemporary needs in terms of learner's growth, social emotional and physical development. In view of the above, the progressives saw knowledge as neither time dependant not static, but as dynamic as the human nature. They perceived education as the total development of the individual learner rather than a mere process of cultural transmission.

The progressives suggested a "balanced" and coherent curriculum in terms of the development of the learners' cognitive, psychomotor and effective domains. The progressives also agreed that school curriculum should be designed in such a way that human basic characteristics, such as attitudes, feelings and emotions are considered as vital components of the human basic characteristic could lead to enlightened citizenry.

However, Dewey (1938) contended that the curriculum should be a comprehensive unified, problem - solving tool and not a mere assemblage of subject matters. Whenever the curriculum is designed and implemented as comprehensive learning experiences, the individual growth, problem-solving abilities, democratic citizenship, and reflective thinking skills would be developed adequately in the individual learners.

Curriculum, as a process, embraces the total experiences by means of which the school educates the young and inexperienced members of the society. The considered curriculum is the life and programme of the school. It involves guided living. The school selects and recommends the kind of life it expects the learners to lead.

Looking at the definitions given above, curriculum should be seen as a document of intended learning activities and outcomes to which learners are exposed for their (and their society's) well - being.

A definition which appears to be more embracing and partially acceptable is Fafunwa (1967). He defined curriculum as a total environment in which education takes place, including the child, the teacher, subject matter, content, and the physical and psychological environment.

Fafunwa (1967) was of the opinion that any programme planned for use in school should take care of individual difference in learners. It should be continuous, dynamic, and related to the values of its immediate environment. Thus a "Balanced Curriculum" should have three basic characteristics.

- i. Define objectives that grow out of the values held by a society.

- ii. Learning experiences that are geared toward the realization of the planned Objectives.
- iii. Period evaluation of the curriculum in the light of the objectives and the Learning experience.

In addition, Ibrahim (1998) maintained that some authors attempt to differentiate between what they referred to as official or intended and the actual curriculum. The official curriculum covers what is laid down in the syllabi, scheme of work of course of study with intention. The actual curriculum is observable practice in the school. The main differences lies in the intention and the reality, with the actual curriculum showing the actual occurrence (reality) following the implementation, during the period when learners interact with the environment. Thus, is the formal curriculum can be perceived, as the theory while regular practice in the school situation is the actual, a deliberate, systematic, and planned attempt undertaken by the school to modify or change the behaviors of the citizens in which it is situated (Onwuka 1985).

Curriculum, therefore, is a written plan, a document design, depicting the scope and arrangement of projected educational programme which is meant to bring about the desired changes in the learners when they are exposed to the content and the learning activities therein. A curriculum is no randomizing of items, but a structured and proper hierarchical order of related learning items.

Why the Curriculum Changes

Farrant (1980) argued that the curriculum represents the distilled thinking of society on what it wants to achieve through education. In addition, it tends to mirror society itself, reflecting its aims, values and priorities. It spells out clearly the knowledge society considers important and useful. It identifies those physical and mental skills that societies prize, and adopt those methods, which it approved. For these reason an examination of a national curriculum appears to be very important.

Constant curriculum review has led to the new concepts of knowledge. The new Mathematics, for example has emerged as a new way of looking at number, and revolutionize the curriculum offered for traditional Mathematics; and new discoveries in psychology have encouraged new method of learning, such as programmed learning and resources based learning (Farrant 1985). Change in the society made former curricula hopelessly irrelevant. This has been particularly so in Nigeria where the curriculum inherited before independence was geared to colonialism.

The Relevance of Curriculum Conference of 1969 Held At Lagos.

The first national curriculum conference was held in Lagos, 8 - 12 September 1969 (Daramola 1985). This conference has in attendance may categories of people, including professional experts businessmen organizations, religious bodies, parents, labour unions, medical doctors; legal practitioners engineers as well as representatives of the Ministry of Education. According to Ibrahim. (1998). the good spread of representation at the conference possibility accounted for the conference's resounding success.

The conference was purely a Nigerian affair because it was aimed at solving her educational problems independent of the imperialists. Through the interpretations or amplification of the recommendations of the 1969 Curriculum Conference by Nigeria Educational Research and Development (NERDC), the various working groups which participated in the series of subsequent workshops and seminars organized by it contributed ultimately to the formation of the National Policy on Education (revised in 1981) (NTI 1992). The document has become one of the most important curriculum documents in Nigeria today. The National Policy implies the general framework for a new curriculum, including implication for providing a uniform educational system for Nigeria but, tie-laps, most important of all, the National Policy on Education. Making the Curriculum More Relevant To Nigeria Needs

The philosophy of a given society may be interpreted to mean the ideologies, belief system, values systems, and priority ordering of society. The educational system could only be meaningful if the school system understands the nation's belief and value system and evolves a school curriculum in a such a way that democratic views and conviction are allowed and developed.

In the new philosophy, indigenous technologies, rather than importer technologies are anticipated. Self - sufficiency and self - reliance in all aspects of the national economy are advocated, in essence, it is anticipated that Nigerians would be producers, rather than be consumers, a position that had wrecked the country's foreign exchange earnings.

The curriculum which is not designed on the basis of the basic needs of the learners is described to be very restrictive and incomplete thus not acceptable in contemporary society. Learning experiences are more meaningful to the learners when their basics need is met. Only then is life emphasized in the curricula designed. The curriculum planners should take into considerations the basic needs, goals, values and value system, its aspirations and expectations with its general pattern of life.

In addition, the planners must consider. The learner's and mental capacity, and his other physical and psychological characteristics. The 6-3-3-4 system of education is based on the overall philosophy of Nigeria is geared towards self realization, better human realization, better human relationship, individual and National efficiency, effective citizenship, national unity as well as towards social cultural, political, scientific, and technological progress of the country.

The curriculum should be quantifiable and measurable and subject to regular review, so that the various subject curricula can continue to meet the needs and aspirations of the society. The curriculum designers and implementers are advised to screen curricula for comprehensiveness in terms of adequate provision for the basic needs for learners before such curricula are adjudged suitable for school use.

Concluding Remark

The progressives' argument that the curriculum should consider the learner' needs characteristics, mental and emotional states, including previous experience, appears relevant to contemporary Nigeria. It is through carefully selected learning experiences that the youths can be adequately socialized. Thus, no curriculum can be effectively and efficiently

planned or developed without first identifying the overall philosophy and objectives of the society. The National Educational philosophy in Nigeria seems to be the most influential factor on the curriculum in use across the country. The overall philosophy and objectives of education for primary, secondary and tertiary level of education are available in the National Policy of Education (NPE, 2000).

It must be emphasized that as the goal and aspiration of the society changes, there has to be changes in curriculum. The curriculum should be geared towards self - realization, individual efficiency and development. In a nutshell, no government, no matter how rich, will finance any curriculum that does not reflect its national objectives

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