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Bright Chima Megbo
Academic Planning Unit,
Federal University Wukari,
Nigeria

Abdulganiyu Saka
Academic Planning Unit,
Federal University Wukari,
Nigeria

Assessment of Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria

Bright Chima Megbo, Abdulganiyu Saka

Abstract

This paper examines the assessment of secondary school curriculum in Nigeria. The paper delves extensively into the areas of curriculum and focuses on different topical issues such as conceptual framework of curriculum, historical development of curriculum in Nigeria, curriculum changes and factors responsible for curriculum changes in Nigeria. It further explores the questions of the need for curriculum change. The paper also examined the key role played by group and individuals towards the actualisation of curriculum change in Nigeria. Series of suggestion and possible solutions to curriculum problems have been offered for enduring and suitable curriculum in Nigerian secondary schools. The paper also explores the strategies for making the curriculum more relevant and how it can be designed to address the needs, interest and aspiration of our society at large.

Keywords: School Curriculum; Education Administrators; Evaluation Method; Strategies; Curriculum development; etc.

Introduction

1. The Conceptual Framework of the Curriculum

1.1 Meaning of the Concept of Curriculum

Every successful concept and project in life requires a proper framework and planning just as processes in education. Whenever we embark on any new plan or procedure, we need to make sure that we have all the plans drawn up. What is on offer, what are the resources we have, what are the steps which we need to take and what are the goals we need to achieve? Those are the key elements that need to be looked upon. A similar set of constraint which applied to education in schools and colleges gave birth to the curriculum

Curriculum is a complex term that has no simple universally acceptable definition. This non-consensus in meaning arises because some scholars define curriculum based on individual's perspective. Curriculum is an idea that has its root in the Latin word "curere" which means "race-course" or probably more correctly to run a course. Traditionally, the school curriculum has presented a relatively standardised course or subject cover to 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 view it as a course of study comprising the body of subject matter officially offered in schools. The term is connected with running a course, specifically body of courses or work schedule in neatly arranged progression for a specific purpose. Curriculum is always associated with teaching and learning as it provides a template on what is taught, why it is taught, how it is taught and to whom it is taught.

Some terms are believed to be synonymous with curriculum, they are often used interchangeably with curriculum; such terms are scheme of work, syllabus, lesson plan which has narrow meaning since they are subsets of curriculum. They do not represent the wider scope covered by the term curriculum. Kerr (1968) and Kelly (1982) maintain that in finding meaning to the concept of curriculum, it should not be seen as a syllabus or else it would be seen as the content or the body of knowledge to be transmitted which of course limits in more than one way the planning of curriculum change and development. Curriculum must be seen as the reconstruction of knowledge and experience, systematically developed under the auspice of the school or relevant agencies which would enable the learner to have better mastery of learning experiences for the learners and society's wellbeing (Moronkola *et al.*, 2000) ^[15]. According to Oxford Dictionary, curriculum can be seen as a course especially a regular course of study at a School or University (p.212). It records its use since the 17th century, and this, perhaps marks the beginning of a systematic and self-conscious attempt to regularise a course of study.

Johnson (1967) defined curriculum as an objective plan or prescription and idea about the activities that would likely happen in schools. On the other hand, it can be viewed as the existing overall of affairs in schools. It is the traditional platform in which the expectation of the society

Correspondence
Bright Chima Megbo
Director of Academic
Planning, Federal University
Wukari, Nigeria

can be translated into knowledge. This knowledge comprises attitude and skills which are expected to be acquired or developed by learners within the school system in formal and non-formal setting (Okebukola 2004) [16]. Orji (2001) defines curriculum as both planned and unplanned activities taking place within the school environment with the intention of achieving school's aims and objectives; such activities may include a host of courses, physical activities, guidance, specific instruction, testing and evaluation in specific field. In the view of Ifejika (1990), curriculum can be seen as the overall experience which the learner acquires under the supervision of the school for the purpose of affecting desirable order or patterns or behavior under a specific set of conditions. The planned and unplanned curriculum or instruction that takes place in the school environment may be in a formal classroom setting or non-formal where learning is taking place under the management of the teacher or guardian. The experience the students have regardless of how and when they take place, could be referred to as a curriculum. A curriculum comprises all the knowledge, experience and skills imparted to learners under the guidance of the school and all the courses offered in the school. This definition explains that the instructional process can be written or be oral especially in a situation where the learner cannot read and write for instance non-formal system of education. Dada (1999) opined that curriculum is a programme of learning planned for a target group of students for a specific period of time in order to achieve set educational goals. Ajayi (2003) defined curriculum as a structured series of learning outcomes.

The curriculum defines the educational foundations and contents, their sequencing in relation to the amount of time available for the learning experiences, the characteristics of teaching institutions, the characteristics of the learning experience, in particular with regard to methods to be used, the resources for learning and teaching. Some researchers in education are of the opinion that the curriculum has political, technical and professional dimensions. Indeed, curriculum has a linking between goals of education and everyday life in learning institutions, schools, colleges and universities. According to the most popular theorists of the curriculum, the curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge (Bernstein, 1973).

Finally, curriculum can be defined as all the learning activities carried out in the schools, which is well planned and guided by the schools, regardless of the fact whether it is carried out in groups or individually inside or outside the schools. A curriculum is more than putting together a set of academically required subjects. It must impact all aspects of the student life, the learning needs of students, the time available for the sessions and workload.

2.0 The Importance of the Curriculum

2.1 The Importance of the Curriculum in Primary Schools

In Primary schools, the curriculum is primarily drawn by the education boards. They study the needs of the pupils and the society before selecting the subjects, contents, and drafting a curriculum. Here, the pupils have a choice in their subjects and based on a universal curriculum which works on all the areas which aid in total development of the pupils. The boards make sure that no area is left untouched. Hence the curriculum aids in the proper development, while the child comes to terms with his/her own inclination. Therefore, at the primary school level, the curriculum is to provide a structured platform which would give every child equal opportunity to excel.

Curriculum should provide wholesome school programme to develop the desirable behavior patterns in the pupils.

2.2 The Importance of the Curriculum in Secondary Schools

At the secondary school level, students exercise their liberty by choosing their path of study. Although it can be argued that complete autonomy does not rest on the students, however a level of choice about their path of study is evident. This helps in the development of the student, with added importance of being given the field of his/her own choice. At this stage, the development is more focused and enhanced through the implementation of a proper curriculum. Without an effective curriculum the student would not be able to understand or meet the challenges of the society. At the junior secondary school level, students are expected to be provided with learning and necessary information that enables them acquire further knowledge and develop manipulative skills. A comprehensive curriculum addressing students' needs would enable them to achieve laudable objectives; the curriculum is prepared to be vocational and academic. The Senior Secondary School level curriculum is designed in a comprehensive way and lists core curriculum subjects which students must offer in addition to those in the area of his/her specialties or chosen major. Basic subjects that will afford the students the opportunity to offer either the Arts or Science specialisation in higher education are part of the Senior Secondary School curriculum.

2.3 The Importance of the Curriculum in College and Higher Education

At a higher stage of education, an unprecedented autonomy is provided for the students, the student can opt for a more focused curriculum based on their choice of subjects. A student will attain graduate, post-graduate or a doctoral degree based on the choice of his subjects and mode of his study which could be determined by him.

2.4 The Importance of the Curriculum to the Teacher

Since it is only the teacher who knows the students' learning needs well enough to continually modify the classroom environment in response to these needs. Therefore, the teacher should be involved in the development of the regional or national curriculum. In most cases, in developing countries, teachers are not yet adequately prepared to teach. In this context he/she may not be able to contribute to the development or innovation of the curriculum until he/she has undertaken a substantial teacher development programme. Good knowledge of the curriculum will help the teacher to identify and address the individual differences in order to accommodate all students' needs; this would enhance the adequate involvement of everybody in the learning process.

Since the curriculum comprises all aspects of the student's life, the template of the curriculum would aid the teacher to discharge his/her duties to the fullest. Sometimes, teachers may not have the time to improve parts of the curricular for all the subjects they teach, therefore, they source good reference materials from which they put together innovative lessons plans and schemes of work of their own. This approach to curriculum improvement has enabled the teacher to be proactive, creative and acquainted with new ideas. The curriculum is a reference library which relevance is as follows:

To achieve Educational Aims; merely defining the aims of education is futile. There should be well planned effort to achieve the aims of education, we must think of knowledge, activities, experiences and other influences which would aid the achievement of education.

Define the criterion for teacher selection; it is curriculum that can show what type of teachers is required in the schools. We should know the type of work they are going to do and must be based on the requirement of the curriculum.

Selection of suitable teaching methods; curriculum enables the teacher to select the suitable methods of teaching as how to teach would be determined by what to teach.

Reflect trend in education; curriculum is a means to achieve the aims of education which are dynamic with the changing social requirements. Naturally, the curriculum will reflect trends in education, including the suitable knowledge which will help in the attainment of set educational goals.

3. Brief History of Curriculum Development in Nigeria

The early period of curriculum development Nigeria could be referred to as a period of complete Christian missionary activities because the period witnessed great evangelical educational activities. In the Southern part of Nigeria, missionaries were left to embark on educational activities with emphasis on religion and character-training. They also taught Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. From a historical perspective, the colonial administration influenced the existence of the curriculum in Nigerian educational institutions. They identified the characteristics, causes of the problems and challenges facing colonial education. This was the basic preparatory task for curriculum development and innovations necessary for sustaining human resources development. It is relevant to note that the pre-colonial generation in Nigeria embraced traditional education, a typical example is the advent of Islamic education in 12th century which marked the beginning of schooling in Africa.

Daramola (1995) ^[8] reported that the progressive movement led by John Dewey at the beginning of the 20th century in the America condemned the traditional views on curriculum and changed their narrow and parochial thinking. The groups challenged the traditional school curriculum and proposed that a school curriculum should be designed to reflect the basic need in terms of learner's growth, development, social, emotional and physical development. From the above point of view, the group viewed knowledge as neither time dependent nor static, but as dynamic as the nature. To them education is the total development of the individual learner rather than a mere process of culture transmission. The group then suggested the idea of a balanced coherent curriculum in terms of the development of the learner's, cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Further, the school curriculum should be designed in such a way that human basic characteristics such as attitude, feelings and emotion are considered as vital components of human basic characteristics which enlighten citizenry.

The curriculum should be a comprehensive unified, problem solving tool and not a mere gathering together of subject matters. Whenever the curriculum is designed and implemented as a comprehensive learning experience, the individual growth, problem solving abilities, reflective thinking skills would be developed adequately in the individual learners. The curriculum as a process embraces the

total experience by means of which the school educates learners.

4.0 Why Curriculum Change In Nigeria

The determinants that facilitate or hamper curriculum change are related to the purpose of education. The purpose can be cultural transmission, environmental adaptation and total personality development. Transmission leads to adaptation and adaptation to personality fulfillment.

However, the objectives of total personality fulfillment are debatable. Education future course will be decided by the impact that culture has on the current value debate. Humanism for all versus humanism for some and cognitive man are the two emotion-arousing issues which are included in the debate. Some findings and experience show that curriculum change is driven by factors such as local individuals and practical constraints rather than higher academic motive. The factors responsible for curriculum changes are political, cultural, environmental, but also government policies.

4.1 Curriculum Change

The process of curriculum change can be traced to a saying that life is not stagnant, and every individual must change as society changes. Anybody who refuses to change as the society changes might be overtaken by the society, such individual will be totally outdated. The modern world today is characterised by change. Since almost everything in the world changes, it is inevitable that change is of central concern in addressing curriculum needs and societal dynamics.

Recently, in Nigeria there have been many changes particularly in the education sector. All these changes in education attract corresponding change in the Nigerian National Curriculum for Schools. For instance, there have been major changes in the curriculum especially in relation to content, course materials and methods of instruction. The following education groups, such as CESAC (Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre), NERDC (Nigeria Educational Research and Development), NTI (National Teacher's Institute), NBTE (National Board for Technical Education), etc. have been closely involved in the curriculum innovation in Nigeria. Researches by some scholars in Nigerian universities have resulted in the need to place emphasis on the understanding and mastery of concept by students rather than memorization of the course content.

Another dimension of curriculum change is the civic aspect that concerns itself with the community. In the past, virtually nothing was done about this dimension in Nigeria. However, recent changes in the Social Studies curriculum and some other secondary school curriculum subjects in Nigeria secondary school are all geared towards the civic dimension of curricular changes.

4.2 Problem Facing Curriculum Change in Nigerian Schools

There are many issues and challenges involved in the process of changing the curriculum; they include.

Inertia: - This occurs when the Teachers, the School Administrators, Ministry of Education officials and the Community are well satisfied with the status quo in schools. Little or no changes in the curriculum are advocated for. To avoid non-functioning curriculum, the agent of curriculum change must find means to get things moving. To combat inertia amongst teachers, school administrators and government officials, education advisors and curriculum

developers must explain the need for curriculum change. The predominant cause of resistance or reluctance of educators to curriculum change or review could be that they might not have been briefed or made aware of the process. If the curriculum change process is well planned and key stakeholders are briefed accordingly ahead of the commencement of the desired curriculum innovation programme, the process and implementation is likely to be successful.

Insecurity: - Lack of security or assurance is one of the major setbacks to change curriculum. This can be generated from feeling of inadequacy on the part of individuals placed in charge of curriculum revision. Sometimes, insecurity comes from doubt among individuals about their ability to do things in different ways. This feeling of insecurity based on inadequacy is often an obstacle to curriculum change.

Incompetence: - This can be traced to the leadership that lacks vision and creativity. This is a serious concern as such leaders are often unwilling to relinquish their authoritarian role. When incompetence is replaced by collective insight, imagination and inspiration at leadership level change will certainly take place.

Time: - Those who do not want change in the curriculum or change in the organizational culture of the school often complain of pressure on their time in taking part in the curriculum innovation process.

Finance: - people who want to change the curriculum in most case are slowed by obstacle of finance, because changing the curriculum involves money, materials, equipment, re-training of teachers etc. Therefore, when funds are not made available, little or no change occurs in the curriculum.

5. Evaluation of the Nigerian National Curriculum for Secondary Schools

Evaluation of learning and teaching is a process of arriving at value judgment in respect of an observation after a logical consideration of a number of measurements and assessments. According to Onocha (1993) evaluation is defined as a process of gathering valid information on attainment of educational objective, analyzing and interpreting information to aid judgment on the effectiveness of teaching.

Bello (1988) ^[7] views evaluation on the basis of attributes like honesty, personality, skills, scholastic ability, knowledge and the like as a process of obtaining information for judging the worth of a person. There are two major types of evaluation, namely formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is the kind of evaluation used to measure the student achievement during the course of study or a particular programme within the stipulated period of time. The purpose of this type of evaluation is to assess the area of strength and the weakness of a student. This process informs the planning and teaching of the teacher, as well as the curriculum development, in order to provide a solution to the challenges faced by the student.

In summative evaluation, the test is carried out to determine the performances of the student at the end of the instruction or programme. This type of evaluation which is usually conducted either at the end of term or as an end of the academic year examination naturally move towards making a judgment in respect of the student's overall performance.

Evaluation of student performance would help both the teacher and curriculum evaluator in the following ways;

1. To help the teacher gain adequate knowledge about the background of the student before providing instruction.
2. Aid the teacher in selecting appropriate educational objectives and gauge students' learning and growth, and the improvement of instructional strategies.
3. Enhances the curriculum evaluator and teacher's ability to determine the extent in which learners have benefitted from a course of instruction.
4. Facilitates the teacher's prediction on the students' future performances. Evaluation also aids the teacher to diagnose the students' strengths and weaknesses and proffer appropriate solutions to the learner's problem.
5. Enhances the teacher's knowledge about the process of selection, certification, and serves as a quality control tool. This knowledge will aid the curriculum evaluator in comparing the level of student attainment and achievement. Monitoring the growth and development of individual students would help to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

Student performance evaluation is the final phase of curriculum development process. It is the conclusion about the success or failure of educational enterprises. The fact is that certain goals have been stated regarding formal education, certain behaviours are expected to be exhibited. In realisation of those goals, we should be able to answer some questions as curriculum evaluators: have the students actually acquired the knowledge, skills, attitude, beliefs and the values that were ought to? And does the student respond in the expected way?

6. Making the Curriculum more relevant to Nigerian Schools

The philosophy of every society can be interpreted to be the ideology, belief system, value system, and priority ordering of that society. The educational system can only be measured and meaningful when the education and the school system of that society understand the nation's belief, value system and prepare the school curriculum in such a way that democratic view and conviction are allowed to be developed.

Firstly, classes that are rigorous, interesting and relevant for all secondary school students are urgently needed in the nation school. One has to take a look at the changes taking place in that direction. Recently, we don't have high enough expectations for our secondary school students. Many of our students, particularly those in inner cities and villages, do not receive the rigorous course work they needed to either go to university or enter a career after their secondary school. Another way to make our curriculum more relevant is by creating a School-to-Career programme; this will also save our secondary school students. The programme will focus on the core curriculum of a career direction chosen by the student. This type of programme should be designed to excite students about academics and reduce the dropout rate. For instance, curriculum designers should incorporate multimedia programme which will graduate students with artistic, technical and communication skills. We should also have a partnership with the local police, fire-fighters academics, etc. – the effective relationships formed with these sectors of the national workforce would avail the students more job opportunities and aid career guidance.

Creating more personality is more important. For example, most of our district secondary schools have at least 500 students. Each school should be divided into smaller groups of 100 students or less so that students can be treated as

individuals with aspirations and goals. A student who wants to become an electrician apprentice requires algebra, a college preparation course, vocational training that would provide him with the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the chosen job goal. The importance of this curriculum initiative is that it will make the student relevant in an environment that will cater for their interests. Sometimes, students say they want to leave the school to help their families, but if the student sees the connection of education to their future earning power and personal goals, it will encourage them to stay back in school. The National Curriculum in Nigeria ought to create an effective system of public education to raise graduates who will be active, successful, and able to contribute to national development.

Further, our secondary school curriculum should include the development of service-learning skills. This should harness meaningful community service experience with academic learning, personal growth and civic responsibility. There are many reasons why students drop out of schools, but the most common reasons are boredom and disaffection. Service-learning is an active learning strategy that connects students to the school and the real world. Personal and social developments are also influential and students learn a sense of responsibility. Middle school students in particular, also benefit from service-learning activities. In service learning, students have the opportunity to work as a team, build their self-esteem, self-efficiency and collaborate with positive adult role models.

To meet *all* the needs and aspirations of the society, the curriculum should be quantifiable and measurable and subject to regular reviews, and offer a viable range of learning options for the students. The curriculum designers should be prepared to screen the National Curriculum for comprehensiveness in terms of adequate provision for the basic needs for learners before such curriculum is accepted for school use.

7.0 Conclusion

The progressive argument is that the National Curriculum should consider the learners' needs, characteristics, mental and emotional states as well as their experiences in order to be relevant. It is through including carefully selected learning experiences that the youths can adequately imbibe positive social values. It is without a doubt that no curriculum can be effective and/or efficiently planned and develop without first of all identifying the overarching philosophy and objectives of the society. It must be emphasised that as the goal and aspiration of the society changes, there has to be changes in curriculum. The curriculum should be geared towards self-realisation, individual efficiency and development.

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