

NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a nation is bedeviled with numerous problems ranging from unemployment to frequent strike actions and cultism in tertiary institutions, religious intolerance, armed robbery, ritual killings, and mismanagement of scarce resources among others. These problems in turn threatened the political stability of the nation. Many educators attributed these problems to the non-functionality of our educational programmes. This implies that these problems are surmountable if our education programmes are made relevant to the needs of the individual and society (Nigeria). In order to achieve this, this paper suggests the necessity for Needs Assessment exercise before developing curriculum for any level of education in Nigeria. The method and procedure for this exercise are also presented.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an indispensable tool in any programme of economic and political development for according to Ukeje (1986), it is not only a prerequisite of economic development but also a necessary condition for political emancipation. It is the means of political socialization, the root of democracy, the source of social integration and the master determinant of all aspects of change. Education is necessary for the production of both progressive leadership and enlightened followership. It is also indispensable for political and social integration, both of which are vital needs in our society today. It is not surprising therefore, that the Federal government of Nigeria has adopted education as the instrument par excellence for achieving nation building.

Nigeria, a nation with abundant human and material resources and long period of Independence (39 years, to be precise) is still struggling to survive in terms of political stability. The country was denied a full-blown democracy for several years by the military. Ogundiran (1998) observed that since her independence, in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed only 10 years of civilian administration to the military's 28 years. The consequences of this denial as observed by Idowu (1999), include chaos, economic hardship, political instability, and increase in crime rate. The corresponding national instability is manifested in form of ethnic clashes, such as between Modakeke and Ife, Ijaw and Itsekeris, Yorubas and Hausas (in Sagamu and Kano etc) religious conflicts and external aggression from neighbouring countries, such as Chad, Sudan and Cameroon. The country is also bedeviled with high rate of criminal activities such as hired assassinations, ritual killings, armed robberies, acid attacks, violent demonstration, mismanagement of scarce resources just to mention but few. In the educational sector, frequent strike action by academic and non-academic staff as well as cultism has become the order of the day.

Most of these problems as observed by Idowu (1999) can not be unconnected with the non—functionality of Nigerian's educational programmes and consequently non-achievement of our educational objectives.

Functional education, according to Fafunwa (1974) and Ukeje (1986) is that which is geared towards the needs of the individuals and the problems of the society. According to the former, African traditional education was functional because its curriculum was related to the needs of the society. Unemployment if it existed at all was minimal. The latter specifically advocated for a functional curriculum for Nigerian schools when he suggested the need for the school curriculum to be designed in such a way as to prepare the youth for specific problems they will meet later in life, both in terms of their jobs and in terms of social living. This means

that needs and utility should replace traditions and conventions in curriculum. Put differently, the curriculum should be geared to the needs of the people, the circumstances of the time and place and the aspirations of the nation.

Ukeje (1986) opined that a formal education programme, which either emphasizes irrelevant

education, or education could hinder economic and political development, which is too costly for the economy to bear. The implication of the above is that Nigerian's political and economic problems can be solved if our educational programme (curriculum) is made relevant to the needs of the people. What then is 'Needs' and how do we make our curriculum relevant to the needs of the people. These are some of the questions this paper tries to answer.

The Concept of Needs

Needs as defined by Pratt, (1980) is the discrepancy between an actual and an optimal state. The optimal state is a condition considered desirable for the individual, while the actual state, is his or her present condition. This kind of needs is referred to, as the discrepancy needs. Scriven (1974) and Roth (1978) in Pratt (1980) defined needs as those things or conditions without which the individual's state would be significantly less than satisfactory. This kinds of needs are referred to as the basic needs.

The first task of curriculum planners is to determine basic needs and discrepancy needs are determined at a subsequent stage. Basic needs according to Pratt (1980) are determined by prescription while discrepancy needs are by description. For instance if we decide that everyone in Nigeria needs political education, we can find out by empirical methods, how far, individuals are receiving or think they are receiving political education. But the basic need for political education cannot itself be determined empirically, it is an axiom that is prescribed by a process of valuing.

Needs are different from both wants and interest, neither of which is an adequate basis for curriculum. A want or desire is always conscious, having to do with someone's state of mind. Needs are not necessarily perceived by the subject. For instance, a pregnant woman needs routine drugs but she may not necessarily want them.

The needs approach to curriculum deliberately rejects children's interests as a starting point. Interest in this sense means be concerned with or moved by an object or class of objects (Webster's, 1973). Children interest may or may not be evidence of needs. The responsibility of curriculum planners is not to reinforce student interest but to weigh their immediate interest against their immediate and long-term needs. This means that if something is worth teaching (needs), it is the duty of the professional teacher to motivate the learner to want to learn it, if the students are simply not ready to learn, the wise teacher will wait until they are. The Needs-versus Interest issue in curriculum can be summed up with the following slogan: If it's in the child's interest, interest the child.

The principal advantage of this approach is that it focuses attention on the learner as against tradition and academic disciplines, which are the characteristics of the Nigerian curriculum today. The latter is what Blackmore and Cooksey (1980) described as Bookish, irrelevant academic, subject centred and usually very standardized kind of curriculum. Mukulu (1971) described this kind of curriculum as out moded and politically conservative.

The Concept of Needs Assessment

Pratt, (1980) defined need assessment as an array of procedures for identifying and validating needs and establishing priorities among them. The concept presupposes that there is an element of deficiency either in a programme or on an individual that requires immediate attention to improve the effectiveness of the individual or programme. Available literature show that needs assessment is considered important in all parts of the world and very useful in every aspect of man that requires development, motivation and effectiveness.

Needs assessment has been increasingly recognized as a necessary part of curriculum planning since the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare began to demand in the 1960's that school districts undertake comprehensive studies to justify their request for funds. Curriculum design can begin with a general assessment of needs or with a specific problem the curriculum designers attempt to resolve. In most cases, the latter is usually adopted but it is advisable that the whole

range of human needs be assessed before assessment of specific needs. The primary question in a general needs assessment is what human needs should the curriculum endeavour to meet? Needs assessment involves the collection of both opinion and factual data.

Sources of Information

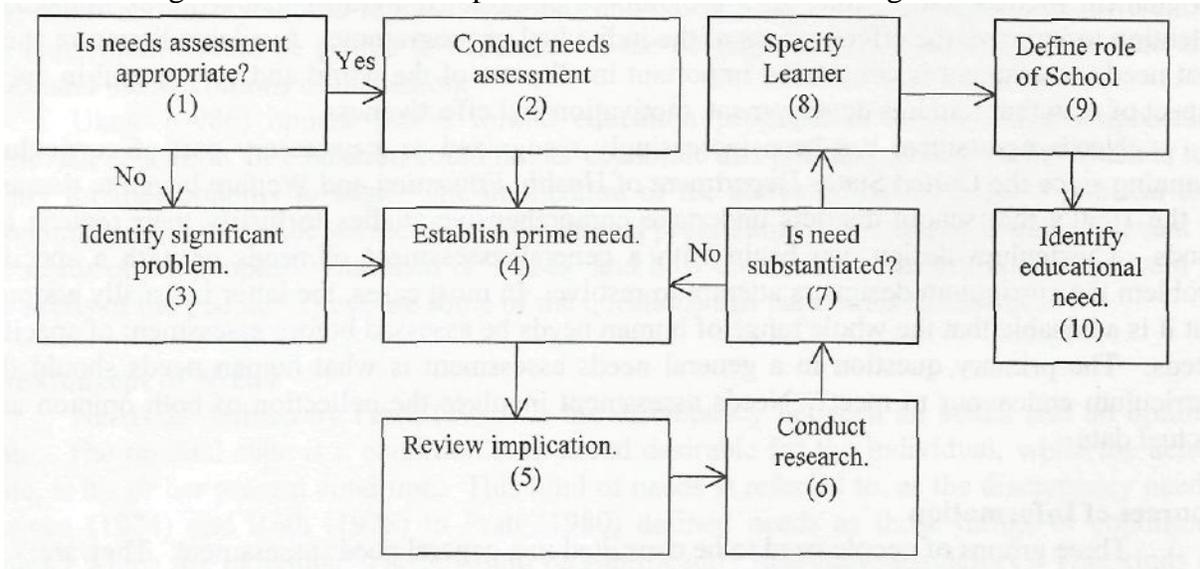
Three groups of people need to be consulted in a general needs assessment. They are:

- (1) People who have right to be consulted; this group includes parents and taxpayers as well as students. Their opinions will tend to spring from their own experience of schooling and its relations to their lives.
- (2) People in position to affect the implementation of any curriculum that is subsequently developed. They include officers within government education departments and teachers of organizations, members of school boards and Parent-Teachers Association, School Administrators and teachers, religious and political groups with special interest in education, legislators and the press. The consultation of these groups will enable the curriculum designers to determine which curriculum possibilities can be supported and which other are politically unfeasible.
- (3) People who have special insight or expertise. These include teachers, academic specialists (such as Mathematicians, historians), social experts (sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists). They can provide professional opinion on human needs. Others include employers of labour, recent graduates and non-graduates or dropouts and community agencies.

The methods that can be used for obtaining data for Needs assessment include Questionnaire, Interviews, Public hearings, analysis of social indicators, observation, reading of literature on human needs, thinking or brainstorming.

Procedures in Needs Assessment.

The diagram below shows the procedures involved in assessing needs in curriculum design.



Silvern's Model of Needs Assessment. Source:

Pratt (1980) P. 94.

The above diagram shows that research into a specific need such as political stability should

clarify several issues. One is whether the need is real and significant. Another is the nature of the need that underlies a visible problem. A problem as defined by Pratt (1980) is specific obstacle to the satisfaction of a need. Such problems as they affect political stability could be lack of patriotism on the leaders, civil strife, tribalism, and unemployment, religious intolerance, ritual killings just to mention but few. It is the duty of the curriculum designers to identify which of these problems are significant. This could be done by determining how common these problems are. After this has been done, the curriculum designers proceed to the next stage.

Establishing Prime Need & Implications

Supposing the committee on needs assessment concludes that the prime need is for the nation to have national stability. This need is of curriculum implication, considering the fact that the government has adopted education as the instrument per excellence for achieving national development. Consequently education can be used to bring about national stability. The committee can also consider the political implication of such education such as in the area of finance. Would government finance such a curriculum? These and other questions need clarification for such a curriculum to succeed.

Conducting the Research

At this stage, the committee set up to conduct research will design procedure for and conduct research into the need. This is done by collecting relevant data or information from person, group of persons, of organizations earlier identified as sources of information. The methods to be used in collecting data have been highlighted earlier in this paper. They include questionnaire, interview and observation.

Substantiating Need

Here the information collected as professional opinion has to be confirmed by literature available in textbooks and official reports on the need for national stability and education for national consciousness.

Specifying the Learners

Here the committee will decide what category of people needs this kind of education. Is it the children, youths, adults? Or all of the above.

Defining the Role of the School

Here the committee will decide whether it is the sole responsibility of the school to provide this kind of education or other agencies press, home, (church and mosque) have roles to play as well. The roles of the school is expected to be clearly defined here.

Identifying the Educational Needs

With the para-educational responses to the need referred to the appropriate agencies, the curriculum area is left with the educational need which can be stated as follows: To develop sound national consciousness on the part of the individual and to enhance the development of a stable political culture in Nigeria.

The needs research is now complete. The curriculum developers can proceed confidently that a significant need exists and has been accurately defined.

CONCLUSION

The cost of education programmes that fail to meet human needs cannot be counted only in terms of wasted times and efforts but also in terms of the unfulfilled potentials of individuals, frustration of ambitions, alienation and loss of self esteem, unnecessary or false

dependencies, in bitterness and delinquency and in loss and damage to the society (Pratt, (1980). This means that whenever curricula are better designed to meet human needs, the benefits will be felt in subtle and varied ways throughout the whole community.

The writer is of the strong view that the current political and economic problems can be overcome if we make our educational programmes relevant to the needs of the people.

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