

THE RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM: A TOOL FOR FUNCTIONAL AND SELF-RELIANT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is on the responsive curriculum: a tool for functional and self-reliant education in Nigeria. It explained the concept of a responsive curriculum as the curriculum that is relevant to the current and anticipated need, problems and aspirations of the learner. The features of responsive curriculum were highlighted. The paper also discusses the needs for adopting the responsive curriculum as a way of facing the challenges of the Millennium Development Goals. It took cognizance of the problems confronting educators in presenting subject matters to students with varied learning styles, background, interest, physical and mental abilities, gender and vocational goals. Its overarching strategy is to improve access and quality of education and make it more relevant to productive activities, value-oriented employment generation and wealth creation. Factors influencing the adaptation were equally discussed. These include; the learners environment, needs and interest of the learner and the society, contemporary life of the learner, techniques and strategies of implementation, relevance of resources and evaluation procedure. There were recommendations and conclusions.

Introduction

The economic strength of a nation is the function of her educational system which in turn, reflects the nation's school curriculum. The global challenges in this recent time call for innovation in the school curriculum to meet up with the demands of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The task of education is to perpetuate society's desirable culture and also, to direct its future development. This implies that the process of the curriculum development must be directed

towards the culture the school has to transmit. The viability of any educational system is gauged by the relevance of her curriculum. Nigeria has experienced different curricula at different times from the pre-colonial era to the colonial, up to this independent era. The pre-colonial curricula though unwritten was functional, geared towards skills acquisition and preparation of a job seeker and not a job provider as it is with the present-day curriculum.

Efforts have been made continually to transform the national curriculum for the improvement of education, yet just a little has been achieved. Our educational system ends up in producing graduates that are job seekers who can not provide for themselves. This creates a problem of mass unemployment thereby, affecting the nation's political, social economics, scientific and technological growth. Nigeria needs to re-orient her educational policies in order to meet up with the Millennium challenges. Ughamadu (2006:2) defined education as a process by which young people acquire the cultural heritage, knowledge, ideas and the civilization of the past as to be able to take part in the civilization of the present and help build the civilization of the future. It is therefore, the means by which the individual is developed so as to live effectively and efficiently in the present society and contribute to its advancement and upliftment. Curriculum being the instrument through which the society educates her young (Okorafor, 2009), implies that the curriculum has to be re-appraised in order to meet up with the educational demands of the society.

In consonant with the above, this paper advocate for a replacement of the current curriculum with responsive curriculum that will help in the production of functional and self-reliant individuals and nation. The discussion is based on: the concepts of a responsive curriculum; features of a responsive curriculum; the need for the adoption of the responsive curriculum; factors influencing the adoption, recommendation, and conclusion.

The Concept of a Responsive Curriculum

Ema (2009:3), defined the responsive curriculum as the “curriculum that is relevant to the current and anticipated needs, problems and aspirations of the learners”. He further said that it is the curriculum that equips the learners for development in Information, Communication and Technology (ICT); local and global challenges of ensuring peace and resolving conflicts, devastating health problems and myriads of social, economic and political demands that stare individuals and societies frontally on daily basis.

A responsive curriculum takes cognizance of vital changes and challenges in the environment and prepares the learner to meet them. Any curriculum that does not respond to the major waves of changes in the learners’ environment, that is, equipping them with the competency skills of solving their current or future problems and that of the society is valueless. A responsive curriculum addresses the learners’ background and recognizes their learning differences.

It tilts towards curriculum diversification and transformation of secondary school curriculum (Mkpa, 2009) and offering instructions which are responsive to students’ multi-ethnic and cultural heterogeneous setting. It demands a shift from the traditional, classical “curriculum of grammar school, lyses, and gymnasium which stressed classical language and academic subject. It is the type of curriculum which are mindful of the vocational and technical imperative of today’s education, arising from the fast pace of scientific,

technological, political, social development and change.

Dike, (1995), defined a relevant curriculum as one that endows its learners with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable them to harness resources (material and human) in order to improve the quality of life and the environment. It is the type of curriculum that would enable her products responds to the society’s goals, economic realities and future life challenges.

Features of the Responsive Curriculum

Abdal-Haqq (1994), identified the following characteristics of a responsive curriculum;

- Integration and inter-disciplinary;
- Authentic, learner centred and orientation to real life situation;
- Utilizing materials from the learners culture;
- Assisting the learner to achieve critical thinking abilities;
- Inco-operating co-operative learning and the development of self-esteem through the recognition and application of multiple intelligence faculties;
- Requiring receptive school climate and recognition of power of the hidden curriculum; and
- Supportive of appropriate staff development and pre-service preparation.

Integration and Interdisciplinary of the Curriculum

This considers the utilization of knowledge or skills from one subject area to another subject area. Here, learning experiences should be organized in such a way as to assist the learners get a unified view of the elements treated in the various areas of the curriculum. Life itself is not compartmentalized and issues and problems

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of life require a unified approach, knowledge acquired from one area may be used to solve a problem from the other area. For instance, knowledge and skills gained in handling quantitative problems in Mathematics should be applied in areas like Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Commerce, etc. This will make the learners not to develop the skills and competencies in isolated behaviours that are only useful in a particular course rather they should be developed for use in diverse areas.

Orientation of the Learners' Real Life

The learning experiences selected and organized must relate to the learners' real life encounter. It should expose the learners to the experiences within their cultural environment and this enhances positive learning. It makes for utility of knowledge and thence, transfer of learning. This implies that the imported curriculum content and methods need to be adapted, modified or re-packaged for effectiveness.

Development of Critical Thinking

The enormity of problems encountered by the learners in their daily life within the society has made it imperative for them to develop critical thinking skills, which is a problem-solving device. A responsive curriculum whose contents and methods can help the learner develop problem solving capacities is recommended.

Co-operative Learning and Utilization of Multiple Intelligence and Styles

Co-operative learning generates better inter-group relation and results in better self image and learning (Joyce and Weil, 1990). Learners exchange ideas, respect each other's opinion, learns to take turn, builds confidence in the learners as others respect his/her opinion. Multiple intelligence faculties and learning styles are required for learners to respond properly to diverse demands from the social and physical environment. The curriculum whose content and

strategies can result in the acquisition of the co-operative learning skills is advocated.

Supportive Staff Development and Pre-service Preparation

It is pertinent to note that the success of any given curriculum relies on the teacher who understands the concept. The production quality and quantity of teachers that can boldly determine the change in the educational spectrum of Nigeria is an imperative, (Mkpa, 2009). Ema (2009), asserted that the global, economic, political, social and technological changes have made it expedient to examine present staff development policies in the school system. He further enquired of the proportion of serving teachers that are computer literate and some other related questions as these – can source materials from the web or internet be used efficiently? Or can teachers do power point presentation? What programmes are in place to expose them to technology and social demands of the time. He also observed that in many disciplines, the curriculum is derived from the world of work. These are some of the challenges that necessitate curriculum innovation in order to bridge the gap. This calls for increase in range of the school subjects, which equally broadens the curriculum of the teacher institutions. Teacher preparation institutions must recognize the societal needs and aspiration and prepare teachers who produce learners to meet the needs.

The Needs for the Adoption of the Responsive Curriculum

The global challenges of the 21st Century educators have more than ever before been confronted with the problems of presenting subject matter to students with varied learning styles, background, interest, physical and mental abilities, gender and

vocational goals (Ukwungwu, 2009). The world of work in which students live have changed drastically, as such, schools must change their strategies of teaching in order to meet the demands of present time. Workers need the learning capacity to become life long learners, updating their knowledge, skills continually and independently (Iheonunekwu, 2007). A powerful vision of public education is critical for closing the gap between how students live and how they learn in the school.

People need to know how they use their knowledge and skills by thinking critically, applying knowledge to new situations, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating, collaborating, solving problems and making decisions. According to Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (ANS, 1991), these kind of skills as well as the personal qualities of responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity are what schools should in-cooperate into their standard and assessment. The learning skills enable people to acquire knowledge and skills, connect information to existing knowledge analyze, develop habits of learning and work with others to use information (Business Coalition for Education Reform, 2001). This knowing “how to learn” skills provide both flexibility and security in an era characterized by constant change.

Curriculum is dynamic and has to address new challenges caused by changes in weather or changes in society or value systems. Curriculum development is a periodic enterprise and different curriculum packages are designed to address new challenges at different times and for different purposes. Now, there is an internal knowledge economy in which every individual should be an active participant. This new economy imposes on education systems world wide the responsibility of being aware of the needs of industries, persons and institutions, preparing broad flexible programmes which are responsive to the demands of an ever

changing world, through life long learning experiences (Mkpa, 2009).

Curriculum theorists are tinkering with ideas of a diverse curriculum that would benefit learners of all manners by expanding the curriculum to accommodate all those observed differences among learners. To achieve better education for everyone, curriculum planners and policy makers must adopt the principles of recognizing, complexity, diversity and need for action at all levels of education and in cooperation and synergy with promising trends in order to make education available and accessible to all. We should not narrow down our educational activities to the classroom only, so as not to continue producing ill-equipped graduates with little or no practical aspect of the education that can help them perform optimally when faced with the realities of life. Nigeria lacks internal mobility to improve her economic development. This internal mobility can be achieved through diversification of the curriculum in terms of expanding the present curriculum in use to include entrepreneurial education, ICT and all manner of science and technical skills needed by new work place organization. An all embracing subject matter curriculum at all levels of our education will equip school graduates with the necessary skills to contribute to nation building.

The over arching strategy is to improve access and quality of education and make it more relevant to productive activities, value-orientation, employment generation and wealth creation. This implies critical reappraisal of the curriculum in use to produce answers to the prevailing problems (Ukwungwu, 2009). He went further to say that, “curriculum diversification can fill this gap created by inadequacy of the present curriculum.

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Factors Influencing the Adoption of the Responsive Curriculum

The world in which we live is increasingly sophisticated, multifaceted and nuanced, people need high-level learning skills to act, respond, learn and adjust to ever-changing circumstances. As the world grows increasingly complex, success and prosperity will be linked to people's ability to think, act, adapt and communicate effectively. Children of this generation live in a world of almost unlimited streams of trivial and profound information of enormous opportunities and difficult choices, helping students make vital practical, emotional and social connection to skill and content is more important than ever. According to National Employer Leadership (NEL, 1999), to help students make these meaningful connections, the curriculum designer and the teachers can create a context for the learners by considering these factors:

a) The Learners' Environment: The content should be made relevant to the learner's life, i.e. relating the content to the actual environment of the life.

b) The Needs of Learner/Society: The objectives selected must address the needs and aspirations of the learner/society. The educational objectives selected should be modified to reflect the current and future needs and problems of the learner and the society. This implies bringing the world of the learner into the classroom. That is bridging the gap between the learners' existence in the home and in the school.

c) Contemporary Life of the Learner: Taking the learner into the world, that is relating what the learner learns in the classroom to a similar context in the society; to create a link between what the learner is exposed to in the school situation and what operates in the society. This implies adopting the strategies for implementation of the curriculum taking cognizance of the learner's background.

d) Techniques and Strategies of Implementation:

Adopting strategies/techniques that will offer the learner the opportunity to interact with one another, with teachers and with other knowledgeable adults in authentic learning experiences (Iheonunekwu, 2007).

e) Relevance of Resources: The resource materials selected for the implementation of the responsive curriculum should be culturally relevant. That is the cultural milieu of the learner should be a determinant factor in the selection of a relevant resource material. The illustrations and examples in the texts material shall take prominence of the learners' culture.

f) Evaluation Procedure: The evaluation procedure should adhere to the criteria of effective evaluation. Now that the school system has adopted the continuous assessment system, teachers should try as much as they can to avoid the abuse of the procedure. It is worth noting that evaluation of procedures in African countries has remained parochial for a long time, despite technological development across the world. The adaptation rate of more advance procedures is very low, let alone adaptation of the advanced systems to suit local circumstances (Ukwungwu, 2009). It is necessary to adopt and adapt the modern techniques for evaluation to minimize the fraud of examination mal-practice.

Conclusion

A functional education must cater for the needs and aspirations of the nation. In this era of knowledge explosion, diverse needs and interest of the learner and the society, there is a pressing need on the curriculum to meet up the challenge. This can effectively be achieved by designing a curriculum that will

take care of these needs areas. It should be constructed in such a way that there must be integrative and interdisciplinary teaching and learning acquired from one area to solve many other problems facing them in life. The skills acquired must have utility value. The learners should acquire skills that will make them useful to themselves and the society.

In order to develop competent skills, attitudes and knowledge base on critical and constructive thinking, the curriculum should be embracing, diversified and responsive to any change. This will enable the learners to adopt and adapt easily to any changing situation. The curriculum should relate to the needs of the society and skills acquisition should be emphasized.

Recommendation

The successful implementation and attainment of the objectives of the responsive curriculum for functional and self-reliant education depends on the collaborative efforts of the following: the learner, the teacher, the parents, the curriculum planners and the administrative sectors.

1. The Learner: The learner must be actively involved in the learning process. They should have control over their learning and construct meanings for their own learning, construct meanings from their experiences in terms of what they know at that time of learning.

2. The Teacher: The teacher should be flexible in his approach in handling the affairs of teaching in the classroom. He should allow the learners to control the process of learning in the classroom. He should encourage the learners to be autonomous and show initiative, provide opportunities for the learners to interact with each other, allow learners thinking to drive the lesson, encourage learners to ask thoughtful and open-ended questions.

3. The Parents: Parents should make the home environment conducive for the child's learning by providing him/her with the necessary materials and even creating opportunities for him/her to practice what is learned in the school. They should help to direct the children on the courses/to choose and not to impose on them the courses/careers of their own interest.

4. The Curriculum Planner: The awareness of the functions of the curriculum to educational enterprise has imposed a great challenge to the curriculum experts to construct a curriculum that will be relevant to the ever changing needs of the society. The content and learning experiences should be the ones that will expose the learner to various fields of work to equip them with the skills and competencies to grapple with the challenges of the new era. In their resource material production, they should not be ignorant of the resources within the local environment as this leads to the enhancement of our indigenous technology and bridges the gap between the school and the society. The curriculum should address the industrial needs of the nation.

5. The Administrative Sector: This refers to the government, local, state and federal. Enough funds should be provided for the provision of materials and human resources. Schools need infrastructures such as workshops, laboratories and their equipments, adequate classrooms and reading materials for effective teaching/learning to take place. Whatever funds none governmental organization like UNICEF, ETF, and others make available should be used for that purpose.

Sufficient and quality teachers should be trained with the appropriate skills and competencies to develop critical and

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reflective thinking, construct things and harness the natural resources of their environment. The condition of service of teachers should be made attractive and enviable to the public so that well meaning youths will be attracted to the profession.

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