
CURRICULUM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO ENRICHING EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA BEYOND 2020.

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Abstract

Unarguably, all the philosophical issues that are raised and considered pertinent to the educative process have ramifications in the curriculum. They have curriculum implications because it is through the curriculum that every philosophy of education finds its fulfillment and actualization. As a guide that gives purpose and direction to the activities of the class, the curriculum construction must include among others, needs analysis, goals analysis and behavioural objectives taxonomy. The obvious implications to this which is the author's position is that whether today's education is to help solve today's problem and assist the students to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and value that will enable them to be responsible and effective citizens tomorrow depends largely on the educator's and the society's approaches to the curriculum whereas the content of the curriculum and the nature of its implementation depend hugely on such philosophical perceptions as the nature of man and society and the issues relating to human values and human destiny.

All the philosophical issues that are raised and considered as pertinent to the educative process have curriculum implications. This is given the fact that it is through the curriculum that every philosophy of education finds its fulfillment and actualization. Thus, whether today's education is to help to solve today's problem and assist the young to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to be responsible and effective citizens tomorrow, depends largely on the educators' and the society's approaches to the curriculum. Again, the content of the curriculum and the nature of its implementation depend largely on such philosophical perceptions as the nature of man and society and the issues relating to human values and human destiny.

The Curriculum

Curriculum is variously defined by different experts. For Ali (2002), curriculum is the sequenced contents or course of instruction needed by the learner who is expected to demonstrate some objectives or behavioural change, following instruction and

experience in some contents, provided by schools (teachers and administrators) and based on a structured form of continuing evaluation. For Okafor (2006), “the curriculum may be defined as all the experiences which are provided to the students under the direction of the school. This does not imply that such experiences be attained within the school’s physical environment. It does mean however, that the experiences must come as a result of planning and purposive direction, which should have a built-in flexibility”.

It is the function of the curriculum to give direction to the educative process. Thus, the curriculum must have for its principle, the general and specific aims of education. To be sure then in curriculum construction, the following elements should be present: an analysis of human needs, particularly the needs of students and society. Here, such needs analysis should include the abilities, attitudes, habits, forms of knowledge, and appreciations required for effective execution of special tasks; judicious selection from the vast array of content possibilities of those content elements that will lend themselves more readily toward meeting the needs that have been identified regardless whether these needs are physical, intellectual, vocational, spiritual, aesthetic or social; judicious selection of the learning experiences which are best suited for the attainment of objectives; proper organization and arrangement of the content materials and the learning experiences so as to achieve adequate facilitation of learning; adequate provision for measurement of learning so as to sensitize both the teacher and the students to the effectiveness of the teaching-learning situation; a general reference to the method of implementation (Okafor, 2006).

The above matrices indicate that curriculum construction must include needs analysis, goals analysis and behavioural objectives taxonomy. Evidently, there is bound to be some disagreement among educators contingent upon their philosophical persuasions and configurations with regard to the complexity of contemporary social life and the varied interpretations of man’s needs, whether proximate or ultimate. Hence, according to Mbah (2014), the changes in the needs and aspirations of the society should reflect the changes in the curriculum in order to meet those needs and aspirations.

The curriculum problem has been approached differently by various prominent educators. Among these educators are the traditional and the progressive education theorists (Okafor, 2006). For most traditional theorists, they have high degree of convergence on the essential curriculum principles with reference to its selection, organization and structure. Whereas for the progressive education theorists, curriculum should involve the totality of experiences which students attain within an educational institution not minding whether these experiences are cognitive or non-cognitive, planned or unplanned. Another curriculum problem is in the area of the goals analysis. This problem would affect curriculum construction. In tackling this problem, two antagonistic schools of thought are exemplified. One school which has Platonic

orientation placed emphasis on the individual rational perfection and hence, insisted that the primary objective of schooling was to help the student to attain proper intellectual cultivation, enriched mind, refined sensibility, quickened appreciation, culture, and discipline. The opposing school of thought placed emphasis on vocational efficiency and hence, insisted that education should have a practical and pragmatic orientation in helping the individual toward efficient practical action in a practical world. According to this view, the educated person is one who can function in all aspects of society and perform effectively the tasks of his vocation. He should be experience oriented and action oriented. Education in this context must be functional and the curriculum must reflect this philosophy.

The above two views should not be mutually exclusive in curriculum construction. Their approach should not be a question of “either/or” rather, it should be that of “both/and”. This is given the fact that the perfection of the human intellect should not be negated in the educative process and discipline not to be jettisoned. The curriculum constructor should have proper reference to the nature of humankind and to the necessary elements in human destiny. Again, the functional value of education should not be too narrowly circumscribed. There must be some openness in curriculum construction to some ultimate considerations. The curriculum must reflect both the diversity and the uniformity in the nature of humankind.

Planning the Curriculum

The curriculum is a guide that gives purpose and direction to the specific activities of the class. These guidelines must be planned in recognition of three major components: the purposes of the curriculum; current knowledge level of students and continuity and; materials (Ali, 2002). The fundamental job of the curriculum planner is to identify the purpose or objectives of the curriculum as a whole. The objectives are usually drawn from what is to be done and these are stated in practical, realistic and achievable languages. Curriculum objectives usually reflect the educational aspirations of a country or people and thus, states what has to be done for the attainment of those aspirations. The reasonable assumption here is that graduates of our different school levels who have successfully or are supposed to have successfully fulfilled the minimum requirements of the curricular, will make contact and perform function of productions is real world. Hence the need for providing them with a background that will sufficiently prepare them for this role.

The second item is that in planning curriculum for any school level, it is essential that the curriculum planners have a thorough familiarity with the nature and scope of the work the students had previously completed, their current abilities and a projection of student’s capacity to actively participate in and benefit from the proposed curriculum. Curriculum planners must also determine the expected aspects of the content of the curriculum. The curriculum also may contain instructions to the teacher

on what kinds of pedagogical adaptations are necessary for him to drive his points to students of different ability levels. Here, the assumption is that the teaching methodology employed in teaching a concept is a crucial factor with regard to whether learning occurs or not.

The third item which curriculum planners should take into consideration is the idea of ensuring that the selected materials (i.e. content of the curriculum) to be studied are suited to the needs, interest, abilities and expectations of students, industry and the nation. There is need to try out the material under a setting (i.e. age, class, language etc) similar to the actual school situation in which the curriculum will be used in teaching-learning process. The need for this is obvious. First, it determines its appropriateness for the students who will use it. Second, it provides the much needed information on how well the school curriculum is likely to achieve its stated objectives for the students and the nation. Third, it determines its appropriateness for the government and industry that will use it for expertise gained from training the students.

The Method of Implementation

An understanding of the nature of human knowledge is a fundamental requirement for a more perceptive understanding of the theoretical framework regarding the methodology of implementation of curricular offerings. The purpose of teaching is to facilitate learning. Many philosophers and psychologists have addressed this area of human endeavour and have advanced their positions in the context. Many create conditions that will make learning easy. It is in the light of this that the traditional method of teaching-learning situations which emphasized almost exclusively rote learning and didactic teaching was challenged by the philosophy of naturalism. The rote learning technique encouraged memorization of lessons while the outcome of learning was measured in terms of the degree of verbatim recitation or reproduction of the memorized lessons or pieces of informational data. Here, the text material memorized and recited is without elaboration and students who have no good memory are labeled as slow students because there was no genuine attention paid to creativity or to individual differences. Thus, Rousseau's naturalism came out strongly against this approach to teaching-learning situations. Finally, it was Dewey and the progressive school of thought that sharpened the focus of the challenge and laid great emphasis on individual differences and needs (Nzulumike, 2010). Dewey's philosophy of education emphasized "learning by doing". The child has to "do something". He has to "get involved" in order for learning to be meaningful. Again, in the field of child psychology, developmental psychology and intelligence testing, new and important discoveries were made to support the concept of individual differentiations in the educative process. Piaget's "concept of readiness" becomes an example in this regard. The concept of readiness stipulates that youngsters should not be required to perform certain tasks until they are developmentally ready for the task.

The problem-solving method is yet another highly acceptable mode of teaching. It is a scientific method which involves among other things, problem identification, formulation of hypothesis, and verification or testing (Nworgu, 2006). In it, the teacher should consider such factors as the imaginativeness of alternate solutions developed by students, the use of available data to support one's conclusions and, general creativity in the approach to the liquidation of the problem. This method of teaching is "heuristic" as opposed to "didactic". The older form of heuristic is manifested in Socratic dialogue. Hence, the Socratic method or the inductive method by which principle is inducted from data. Seminars are also heuristic. Here, individuals get involved and are made to think for themselves. Other recent outgrowths from the problem-solving method are inquiry or discovery teaching and the project method. The general characteristic of this family of methods is that they allow for open and flexible approaches to learning. They provide the opportunity for individuals to pursue their special interests and to reflect their special aptitudes (Okafor, 2006).

Another form of teaching that needs mention is the philetic teaching. This has for its hallmark, a mutual affection between instructor and student. Interestingly, philetic and heuristic teaching are the most rewarding methods personally, but they are also the most time-consuming. Again, the newest approaches in curriculum construction and methodology of implementation that has gained ground is the goal-oriented, criterion-reference approach known variously as the Competency Based Education or Competency Based Curriculum or Performance Based Education (CBE/CBC/PBE). This started in the state of Oregon in America in 1972. The requirements applied to three domains of "survival level" competencies namely, personal development, social responsibility, and career development (Okafor, 2006). These requirements are intended to ensure that youngsters could survive economically and socially after completing twelve years of formal education. In CBE, the concept of life-roles and their attendant activities are the prime movers in determination of curriculum, provision of instruction and measurement of student performance. Also, the determination of credits is based on clear and specific criterion-referenced outcome statements which students must know prior to engagement in the learning experiences. In other words, students must know in advance what tasks they have to accomplish or what competencies they must master in order to attain the credit or certification. Furthermore, CBE conducts batteries of tests which are referenced to the batteries of objectives and goals delineated and known before hand. These tests which help to determine to what extent the student is learning, are often geared not only to state norms but also to national norms. They also help to indicate how well a teacher is teaching. Thus, CBE promotes the notion of accountability.

Problems of Implementing the Curriculum

Implementing the curriculum presupposes that it has been developed. After the curriculum is developed, it may be adopted for use in the school system. Implementing the curriculum is as difficult if not more difficult than developing it. For example, the facilities required for implementing the curriculum effectively surpass those required for developing it. Hence, the problems often encountered in implementing the curriculum can be grouped into six viz the school; availability of instructional materials and equipment; funds; imposition of curriculum; curricular not subjected to more rigorous method of field-validation and; non-recognition of improvised and substituted methods and materials in teaching (Ali, 2002). Under the first group of problem, qualified and sufficient number of dedicated teachers are needed to teach the contents of the curriculum. Unfortunately, their availability and effectiveness in performing their teaching role affect the degree to which the objectives of the curriculum are achieved. The second group of problem which is the availability of instructional materials and equipment must be fully addressed since these items are the tools the teacher needs to be able to successfully teach the concepts contained in the curriculum. The third group of problem is funds. Clearly, the most crucial in curriculum implementation is money. This is because money is essential for the procurement of needed materials and services for implementing the curriculum. Thus, implementation may fail if there is lack of sufficient funds.

Besides the foregoing, there is evidence that all curricular in use at all school systems in Nigeria were imposed on schools or students. This is given the fact that the opinions of school authorities, teachers and students are usually not sought before any curriculum is introduced for use.

Another serious implementation problem is that even when some curricular materials may be face-validated through critiquing sessions by subject experts, most curricular are not subjected to the more rigorous method of field-validation. No doubt, face-validation is a softer option, cheaper, more affordable and so, more readily implemented than field-trial. Yet, face-validation denies the developers of the curricular the opportunity of determining and improving their efficacy (i.e. whether they are teachable or usable at the classroom, within the time frame work or are their objectives useful and achievable e.t.c); relevance and functionality through curriculum renewal processes.

Further implementation problem is that teachers are yet to recognise that in using curriculum, many improvisations and substitutions of methods and materials can be made thereby adapting the teaching to suit the needs of the students and encourage the use of the resources to the immediate environment for teaching. This recognition is not in-built in the teacher education culture in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The philosophical approaches to curriculum, planning and implementation are wide and varied. It is left to the educator to make a selection and where necessary, to develop modifications from the general theories in response to specific needs of individuals, situations and environments; and to always keep in mind the need to preserve those fundamental and transcendental constructs which enrich and humanize to the optimum curriculum and instruction.

Recommendations

In every teaching-learning situation, the teacher has to maximize as much as possible, what interests the students. Quite often, interest is generated by relevancy of content. For most students, relevance in education is measured by the degree to which education leads directly to employment and improved quality of daily life . Again, the structure of the subject has to be well organised in such a way that the student can master the basic ideas of the subject. Furthermore, the problems of implementation of the curricular can be minimised if not solved when such problems constraining their use are addressed. More importantly, useful information obtained from any validation should be reflected in the updated, revised or renewed curriculum.

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