

REFOCUSING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS THROUGH THE CURRICULUM DESIGN IMPLICIT IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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Abstract

As a curriculum design, one of the major reasons, for instituting and teaching Social Studies in our primary schools is for exploring the characteristic qualities of young children so as to provide them education that is geared at enabling them achieve self- fulfillment and self actualization. As the Social Studies provides a defensible psychological basis for teaching young persons, it offers them meaningful resource-base for teaching them effectively as prospective citizens sooner or later within the framework of Nigeria. The main thesis therefore, is tailored at projecting the curriculum design embedded in Social Studies education as a vital instrument and resource for developing and enhancing education.

Introduction

Before the adoption of the National Policy on Education in 1982, traditional approach to curriculum development dominated classroom pedagogy in primary education in Nigeria. The approach was characterized by separate classroom instructions in the traditional subjects and disciplines such as history, geographical, economics, arithmetic, government, biology and so on. Although these edifices and categories of knowledge which comprise a good deal of the curriculum, were intended to serve a practical need of making the world more comprehensive, these subject disciplines emerged to represent and project a myriad of specialism at the level of primary education (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). This curriculum fragmentation has give rise to one of the weightiest problems of primary education in recent times - a problem which impinges on an isolation of the curriculum from life experiences and the problems associated with this development, particularly in reference to the young learner. This problem gave rise to what Dewey (1952), described as the fatal disconnection of subjects which kills the vitality of our modern curriculum in schools'. -In other words, this single subject approach to the curriculum encourages a negation of a **wholistic-view** of knowledge about ourselves as human beings and about the world we live in. This circumstance is considered negative and counter-productive to early childhood education in primary, school, particularly, if this level of education, is considered as major asset for integrating emergent issues in the curriculum for human resource development.

The Traditional Approach to Curriculum Development and the Problem of Human Resource Development in Primary Education

The curriculum dilemmas associated with curriculum development in education has been seriously challenged and criticized for rendering many of our primary schools negatively functional. In other words, the traditional approach to curriculum development has exceedingly, militated against resource development amongst youngsters at the primary level of education.

Firstly, the approach is highly restrictive and tends to run counter to the growing awareness of the social mobility function of education (Williams, 1961).

Secondly, the approach is not dominated by many serious notion of 'structure' and therefore, encourages rote-learning and memory work, if at all, it has any 'structure'. It is not based on any strict adherence to profound educational thought and/or rational process. Thus, **Schofield** (1971), observed that the approach, at the primary level of education, largely considers the curriculum in terms of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored rather than in terms of activity and experience for the growing child. This approach, according to Morrish (1975: 51), has rendered many primary schools non-functional and these institutions have failed the child in his aspirations in a variety of ways including the following:

Developing in him fundamental human powers and awakening him to fundamental interest of a civilized life so far as these powers and interests lie within the compass of childhood.

Encouraging him to attain gradually, so that control and orderly management of his energies, impulses and emotion.
Helping him to discover the idea of duty and to ensure it; and
Opening out his imaginations and his sympathies in a way that he may be prepared to understand and to follow in later years the highest example of excellence in life and in conduct.

Thirdly an absence of structure in curriculum programme associated with the traditional approach renders them incapable of being taught in imaginative ways foster discovery and problem-solving.

Fourthly, the subject matter and content purveyed through the traditional approach to curriculum issues in primary education, does not possess or display any serious retentive value and function for the growing child (Morrish, 1975). On the other hand, this content emphasized the uselessness, as well as the innate danger of seeking to inculcate what Whitehead (1970), had termed 'inert ideas'.

Lastly, in a further elaboration of Komisar's ideas, Schofield (1972), reveals that one of the lapses associated with the primary schools that have entrenched themselves in the traditional approach to the curriculum impinges squarely on their failure to harmonize the needs of children in schools is to forget about the needs of society and concentrate solely on the real or imaginary needs of the child. Schofield (1972: 75) reflects the problem of the failure of primary education to function effectively as the baseline for enabling children discover what life holds for them thus:

A child's abilities and aptitudes create certain needs which primary education must fulfill. Many primary schools have failed to recognize that because different children have different abilities and aptitude, they have different uphill tasks to employ the education process to meet their varied needs. However, since many of these schools have failed to discover these needs and educate these children accordingly, these institutions cannot be said to be child-centered in any justifiable sense. These primary schools are therefore, not making possible individual development of children through initiating them rationally into the content of the curriculum by way of education.

The Origin of Curriculum Integration in Primary Schools: Justification for this Innovation

The criticisms and elaborations, which brought the theoretical basis for this exposition, capitalize on the view that an adoption of the traditional approach to curriculum development in primary education has generally relegated to the background, orchestration and demonstration of the connection between 'curriculum' 'suitability' and 'human resource development' with reference to the growing child (Okam 2002). Thus, primary schooling as a basis for functional and foundational education has failed through the traditional curriculum to convey to young learners in our school -systems knowledge, beliefs, aspirations, attitudes and skills which are essential for the business of human resource development within the framework of our society. This development explains why the Nigeria National Policy on Education (1998), laments that a major promise of any curriculum design associated with primary education must necessarily derive from its potential as a functional happening in the lives of young learners who are benefiting within the last two and a half decades, this policy has called on schools to seize every opportunity, classroom wise, to make primary education functionally relevant to the human resources and developmental needs of young learners.

Bryan (1974), further, elaborates that 'curriculum integration' can be visualized as a product of growing teacher knowledge, awareness and responsibility in the field of curriculum development. This curriculum perspective, according to Bryan (1974), has a universal quality and includes many different areas of knowledge and activities which also possess a common element and quality of being selected on pragmatic consideration of the ability, aptitudes, interests and curricular needs of specific groups of children. It largely represents a framework for organizing knowledge for the purpose of establishing relationships between separate modes of understanding as exemplified in the individual subjects disciplines - an area where highly differentiated schools subjects exhibit severe weakness (Bellack, 1965; Pring, 1970; Bryan, 1974 and Okam, 2002).

Tanner and Tanner (1980), endorsed that the 'new' subject matter arrangement rendered in Social Studies education is expected to provide young pupils at the primary school level of education with insight into the use of functional curriculum structures and processes that have relevance to modern civilization. As this integrated curriculum 'package' is intended to offer a content, which is both meaningful and relevant to a young learner's personal life, it is mainly organized according to the needs and problems of young people that demand personal and social understanding.

The Emergence and Functions of Social Studies as a Curriculum Design in Nigeria Primary Schools

An execution and display of the 'integrated' Social Studies curriculum within the framework of primary education underscores the need to make meaningful connections amongst a variety of subject discipline, particularly the Social Sciences, which are designed to bring about an understanding of man and his interaction with his environment. Thus, Boyer (1982), argues that as global society, we simply cannot afford not to see or care about connection.

The National Policy on Education has accepted and adopted Social Studies as a curriculum content in which instructions are geared at culling across differentiated subject disciplines for a provision of general education programmes tailored particularly for young learners in our primary and junior secondary schools. At this level of schooling, Social Studies education is designed to exhibit the intimate relationships between a variety of subject disciplines as concepts from them are brought to bear on societal problem or issues raised in the curriculum for solutions with reference to the citizen and the young and prospective citizen.

As a unique area of study, Social Studies education represents one of those modern curricular arrangements, which capitalizes on the use of methods to sustain the reasons for its existence as an importance curriculum design. One of its assets is aimed at assisting and providing young learners with a variety of knowledge resources designed at enabling them perceive the limitations if using single subject disciplines of the Social Science in interpreting events as they occur in reality. Thus, Social Studies is primarily engaged in describing and explaining human activities (**whether**[^] **social**, cultural, political and economic) through a display of a variety of integrated knowledge forms and resources as these (human activities) occur in the society.

Social Studies education is committed to transmitting and forming the values of young and prospective citizens. The main aim is to improve the process by which individuals use knowledge and content resources from the Social Sciences and other areas of disciplined though integratively in making decisions concerning their individual behaviours and also concerning issues and question which impinge on public policy.

The Curriculum Design Implicit in Social Studies Education: A Boom for Human Resource Development in Nigerian Primary Schools

The pragmatist education philosophers such Dewey (1952) and Taba (1962), stipulated that the curriculum design implicit in Social Studies education must be made operational in a classroom content within a framework of an understanding that the subject area represents a relevant and significant curriculum instrument. The Social Studies curriculum, according to these pragmatist, aims at integrating many subject areas, disciplines and aspirations so long as their subject matters offer to the young child a wholistic portrait of man his knowledge of society for a purpose of achieving an enhanced and sustained of human resource development. The essence of the curriculum design is largely rooted in exploring vast areas of content and methods in an integrated perspective so as to provide young learners with a sound knowledge - base required for enabling them achieve self-fulfillment and self-actualization within the framework of society. Indeed, the ultimate results of the business of the curriculum design intrinsic in Social Studies education, is for the purpose of human resource development, which is tailored at building and producing effective citizens (Okam, 2002; Engle, 1977; Dewey, 1952 and Taba, 1962).

Conclusion

Social Studies education has emerged as an important curriculum instrument for establishing foundational elements for human resource development in Nigeria primary schools. The curriculum elements that are intrinsic in Social Studies education are designed for the production of effective

citizens. The citizens, sooner or later, will constitute a human - resource base for a development of Nigerian nation. Social Studies education capitalizes on an integrative employment of subject matter from vast areas of relevant and disciplined though in addressing the problems which arise in the process of decision making as practiced by individual and citizens alike within a given democratic framework such as Nigeria.

In this perspective, a major concern of Social Studies educator essentially impinges on a rational and integrative utilization of knowledge - resources from a large variety of sources for purpose of improving the life of an individual and citizen alike and that of the society at large within the framework of Nigeria as a developing democracy.

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