

The Role of Curriculum and Development in Teaching and Learning: A Critical Appraisal

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Introduction

The need for the development of a curriculum to guide the activities of a school or any academic endeavour for efficient attainment of its goals and objectives cannot be overemphasized. Education essentially involves the teaching and learning experiences, and to ensure a fruitful and rewarding experience which implies a good education, the curriculum must be adequately formulated or structured to meet or reflect the needs of the society and of the individual learner.

It is on the basis of the above observation that this paper will attempt an examination of the roles which a curriculum plays in a teaching and learning condition. That is, such questions as how does the curriculum enable the teacher to do his job with relative proficiency?

What importance does the curriculum hold for the learner in his effort at acquiring knowledge and improving himself? And what does the educational system generally stand to gain with the development of a curriculum?, will form the major concern of this paper.

However, to achieve the goal of this paper, an explanation of the concept of curriculum becomes of utmost necessity. Hence, the paper begins with the clarification of the concept of curriculum and proceeds to the analysis of the various roles of the concept in teaching and learning. The point will be made that, a deviation from the curriculum will be detrimental to the educational system, the learner and the teacher. And only by developing a curriculum which is positive oriented focusing on the learner's abilities and interest, can a proper education be attained through an enhanced teaching and learning.

The Concept of Curriculum Development

The concept of curriculum is not very easy to define in any particular way. It has been conceived by different people from different perspective. While some believe that its major concern is learning and the learner and all planned and unplanned experiences of the learner, others believe that it is teaching and the teacher. Thus, Fafumera (1974:58) in a somewhat broad manner defines curriculum as the whole of the educative process, that is the total environment in which education takes place. By this, he means the child, the teacher, the subject, the content, the method, the physical and psychological environment.

Colin (1992:73) seems to agree with the above view when he defines curriculum development as a group of related subjects which fit together according to a predetermined set of criteria to appropriately cover an area of study. He further defines it as a guide which have been explicitly designed and written to assist school communities, teachers, students and parents in their curriculum decision making. What Colin seems to point out here is that curriculum development is holistic and all embracing as it encapsulates all that happens in a study condition both within and outside the school as well as the decisions made in relation to these.

Following the above, curriculum development thus provides a structure for designing subjects and a rationale and policy context for subsequent curriculum development of such subjects as science which will include biology, chemistry, physics, geography etc. When the Latin usage of origin of the word curriculum is understood to mean "runway" or a course which one runs to reach a goal; Rudduck and Kolly's (1976:11) definition of curriculum becomes more appreciative. According to them, a curriculum is a name for the organized pattern of the school's educational programme. It is what happens to children in school as a result of what teachers do. It involves all the experiences of children for which the school should accept responsibilities.

In what seems to be a disagreement with the above view of curriculum, Knight and Rado (1979:33) says "it is a term used to refer not only to what is listed as the domain of knowledge and belief from which the formal teaching content of the school is drawn, but also to the social process occurring in the classrooms, corridors and play spaces of the school". But this paper seems to agree with the definition given by Kerr as quoted by Lawton (1975:6) in which he holds that curriculum is the learning which is planned or guided by the school whether it is carried on in groups or individually inside or outside the school.

This definition of curriculum implies that certain things or activities which go on outside the classroom and even the school environment can pass as part of the overall curriculum once it is guided by the school directly or indirectly. Thus, such activities as homework, excursion etc are integral parts of a curriculum development. This brings in the notion of "received curriculum". By this notion, Brenda and Elizabeth (1995:3) seem to mean what in fact, pupils actually learn. The idea of a received curriculum is that what we think we are giving the pupils or students is not what they are actually picking up or learning. Hence, Lawton was right when

he observed that the curriculum is often taken for granted rather than studied, and discussions of curriculum tend to centre on minor adjustments to traditional time tables rather than fundamental re-thinking of aims and purposes (1991:1).

The point being made here is that, a well developed or planned curriculum must include not only the time table subjects to be taught or learnt but more importantly a fundamental re-examination of what people or the learners in the 21st century need by way of knowledge, skills and experience. To further appreciate the very nature of the concept of curriculum development, it is pertinent to consider some of its essential features. Following this, Aleyidemo, Oyedegi & Muazu (2006:3-4) identified five major characteristics namely: The curriculum must be workable and practicable (functionality), it must be clearly and precisely stated in terms of its aims and objectives bearing in mind the societal values and needs, it must be capable of adapting to the needs of the changing learner and the society.

That is, it must be *flexible* and able to create avenue for growth and development to attain the predetermined objectives. It must be *relevant* by emphasizing those aspects that will be of benefit to the learner and the society. Most importantly it must be subjected to *evaluation* to ensure that there is progress in the right direction.

In an attempt to delineate the nature of a curriculum, Keith Morrison remarked that a curricular is necessarily politically oriented. By this he avers that the government of the day has a considerable influence over the content and structure of the curriculum. According to him, "School Curriculum is inescapably political and it is this that constitutes both its excitement and its frustration. Discussion on its content are not arbitrary; they represent values, purpose and interests, and education is the process of rendering these transparent" (1977:1).

What is informative about the above examined features of a curriculum is that, several factors influence learning and the learner and these factors could both be induced by the nature of the curriculum and inform the nature and content of the curriculum in use. These factors are: content of the curriculum (what is taught), method of executing the curriculum content (how it is taught), authority (with what status it is taught), recurrence (how often it is taught), default (what is not taught) and out of school context shades of opinion on curriculum in order to discover its essential nature. The next section of this paper will dwell on the roles which curriculum development play in teaching and learning.

Critical Appraisal of the Role of Curriculum and Development in Teaching and Learning

As an educational experience offered to the learner, curriculum performs the following functions for the entire educational systems:

- 1) It determines the educational direction including the decision of the type of society people want to live and serve in.
- 2) It determines the principles and procedures which will help educators in selecting and arranging instructional programmes.
- 3) It concerns itself with the application of the chosen principles.
- 4) It determines and assesses what changes have been brought about.

In addition to the above, the curriculum performs the role of encouraging teachers to evaluate the total learning experience (environment), this is because teachers need to consider the effectiveness of the taught curriculum and their teaching effectiveness as well as students performances. The curriculum also enables the educational goal, system and/or standard to be reconsidered and sometimes redefined. This is possible as it highlights the changing emphasis and the evolving boundaries of subjects. The enablement with which teachers reconsider their packaging and delivery of subjects, as well as development of new emphasis such as vocational, recreational and career pathways is drawn from facilities which a curriculum provides.

Again, the availability of a well planned or developed curriculum enables the student (learner) to gain access to broader education by being able to select from a number of curriculum subjects than a narrow range of traditional subjects. Denis Lawton (1991:3) identifies one purpose or role of a curriculum studies or development to be the clarification of issues and questions of theories, assumptions, values and ideas about good education, curriculum development and studies are designed with the purpose of improving the quality of learning. Colin similarly states that, curriculum development planning or studies will enable the teacher appraise herself to obtain feedback about what they are actually doing compared with what they think they are doing (1992:73).

For Brenda and Elizabeth (1995:3), the right curriculum plays the role of enabling the teacher to properly help and guide the learner to regain some hold on himself and to put his/her best in the subject or the area that interests him most and in which he is good. The teacher is able to do this by identifying the area where the learner is competent in. The curriculum development can also transform the role of the teacher from being just an efficient instructor to being an expert classroom manager and organizer of learning experiences. In order words, a proper curriculum would enable the teacher to be aware or conscious of the question of indoctrination, the impossibility of a value free stance and the need for appropriate methodology and organizations. Indeed, learning and teaching which is in fact part and parcel of education can become more effective in enabling clarity of thought through the instrumentality of the developed curriculum.

Finally, Curtis and Wilmais (1977) identification of three major roles of curriculum in learning and

teaching is worth mentioning. According to them, first, the curriculum enables the teacher as a facilitator to set the initial mood or climate of the group or class experience. Second, it enables the teacher to clarify and elicit the purposes of the individuals in the class as well as the more general purposes of the group. And third, it enables him to organize and make available easily the widest possible range of resources for learning.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the foregoing, it has been observed that a curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a forum that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice. Curriculum development includes reference to aims and objectives, syllabus, content, the organization and structuring of the content, teaching and learning styles and evaluation.

Following the above, it is recommended that, because the diversity of the learners pose some challenges for the teacher, the teacher and indeed teaching needs to have considerable flexibility so that the particular problems of each pupils can be properly considered and this can only be done through a properly developed curriculum. As Howard and Audrey (1977:13) observed, teacher control and influence over curriculum matters affect not only the rate at which any changes might take place but also largely determine the nature of curriculum and result in tremendous variations in schools.

As a result, this paper recommends that unless the curriculum and the way it is approached is allowed to be tailor-made for each individual, schooling can not only be a waste of time but actually damaging in its effects. Curriculum development and planning must involve putting into operation a theory of some kind which will enable the teacher to convincingly explain why they have adopted a new (modular) curriculum.

In conclusion, it is argued that whether a curriculum is subject-centred, activity-experience centred, child centred, hidden, core or broad field, it is an aid in teaching and learning, hence, it offers the teacher considerable opportunities to make their work more effective, to release them from some tasks and to provide variety and flexibility.

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