CURRICULUM INNOVATION IN PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the curriculum innovation in Primary Teacher Education and its challenges in Nigerian primary schools. It provides a fairly indepth knowledge of the issues involved in Curriculum Innovation and implementation process at the lower level of the Nigerian educational system. Furthermore, the paper presents certain innovation in primary teacher education and analyses the issues that need to be addressed for its effective implementation in the primary schools. Based on this, the paper recommends that Government should employ adequate and qualified Staff and renovate the dilapidated structures in the primary schools among others in order to achieve the objective of the innovation.

Education as a tool for social change has undergone series of changes in recent time. The western type of education Nigeria inherited from the Colonial Masters was not actually meant or established to develop the nation but to be used as mechanism for
effective evangelism and to attract the interest of Nigerian towards western culture. Thus, the Nigeria elites of that era were limited to the education needed for clerical jobs, they were exposed to what is popularly known as “The 3RS” i.e writing, reading and arithematics. Bulus (2010:11) observed that “the aim of education at that time was limited in scope and contents for Nigeria as a country”. After the Nigerin independence in 1960, the need for a desired educational change became apparent in order to align the education of the Nigerian child with the societal aspirations. In line with this, the National Policy on Education was published in 1977 as guiding principles to engender efficient and effective educational system.

Furthermore, among other changes in the educational system was the gradual phase out of Grade II Teachers Certificate thereby focusing on Nigerian Certificate in Education as the minimum teaching qualification in primary schools and the movement from 6years learning experience in primary education to a 9-year Basic Education Curriculum based on the failure of the Universal Primary Education of 1976. These efforts are attempts to impact positively on the educational process of Nigerians from the primary level to the tertiary level. Thus, the recent curriculum and structural innovation in Primary Teacher Education is meant to accommodate various changes in the curriculum content of the primary education. However, the contending issue remains “how far can this innovation salvage the Nigerian educational system? Based on this, the paper discusses the challenges ahead of the primary schools in view of the recent curriculum adjustment and strategies for improvement.

Conceptual Clarifications
This segment of the paper is meant to explain the major concepts which form the central focus of the topic. This becomes necessary in order to serve as a framework for effective understanding of the discourse.

Primary Teacher Education
This can be viewed as the institutions where teachers are produced for effective teaching at the lower level of the Nigerian educational system. It refers to various avenues where teachers are imparted with adequate knowledge and sufficient skills to enable them teach in the respective Nigerian primary schools. Thus, the department of Primary Education Studies (PES) in Colleges of Education and other related institutions are saddled with these responsibilities. It includes the preparation of would-be-teachers to enable them display the expected professional competence in the areas of mastery of subject matter, appropriate methodologies, effective instructional resources and evaluative procedures, etc required of an effective learning process in primary schools. The philosophy behind the primary teacher education is to equip the would-be-teachers with sufficient knowledge, adequate skills, desirable attitudes and values to enable them teach effectively all subject areas in the primary schools as enshrined in the 9-year Basic Education Curriculum. In view of the above, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2009) warned:
That the department of PES should take in to cognizance the types of students they admit. It went further that after fulfilling all the admission requirements in terms of qualification, the department should also set an intelligence as well as aptitude tests to enable them have the best students that would be trained and who possess the qualities to better our educational system at the grass root which is primary education.(pg10).

Curriculum Innovation

First and foremost, the term curriculum was derived from the Latin concept which means “a running course” It is a course to be run to achieve pre-determined goals and objectives. It refers to all learning activities or experiences provided by the school as a social organization. Wenrich and Wenrich (1974) in Joseph (2010:161) perceived curriculum as “The entire spectrum of education experiences made available to students through a given instruction”. Okunròtìfa in Tijani and Inwelegbu (2010:4) asserted that “Curriculum is all the learning experiences or educational programmes planned for pupils under the auspices of the school” Fafunwa in Ogunbiyi (2009:84) stipulated the basic characteristics of curriculum as possessing:

i. Definite objectives that grow out of the values held by a society or its representatives;
ii. Learning experiences that are geared towards the realization of the expressed or implied objectives; and
iii. Periodic evaluation of the curriculum in terms of the objectives and the learning experience, and constant readjustment of methods in the light of new experiences, results of experiences and research.

Similarly, Ogunbiyi (2006) in Ogunbiyi (2009:85) stated that “curriculum should be continuous, dynamic and reflect values of its immediate environment”. From the foregoing it is clear that curriculum is an all embracing learning experiences which accommodates both formal (curricular) and informal activities (co-curricular) of the school under the guidance of trained teachers.

Besides, Mbong (2010:26) stated that the term “innovation” could sometimes be used interchangeably with change, adaptation and reform in educational circles. In support of this assertion, Dagunduro and Sulaiman (2009: 5) stipulated that “innovation is the act of departing from the traditional. It is the process of making changes to something established by introducing something new” Similarly, Mintrom (2000) in Dagunduro and Usman (2009:5) referred to the term “innovative” as idea or practices that are new within the context of the school”

In agreement with the above views, curriculum innovation is the process of eliminating unwanted ideas or practices in the educational system. It is aimed at adequate dissemination of quality instruction within the school system. Curriculum innovation can also be regarded as educational reforms which in the opinion of Monday (2010:13) “constitutes a contemporary priority area across the globe.” Thus, innovation in curriculum involves modification of contents, new approaches to knowledge, instructional resources and evaluative technique of learning outcome.
Rationale for Curriculum Innovation in Nigerian Educational System

Curriculum innovation is not only peculiar to Nigerian educational system but has remained a global trend from time immemorial. For instance, Tucker (1977) in Gambo (1994) cited in Obi (2008:145) held that “by 1960, Social Studies as a subject was introduced in the secondary schools curriculum in Britain at a time when citizens of that country were found wanting in some kinds of social adjustment”. Curriculum innovation is meant to usher in quality delivery within the classroom practices. However, the factors necessitating the change may differ from one county to another. In the Nigeria case, the following formed the basis for curriculum innovation:

A- Societal Demands for Quality Education

Since the function of education is the liberation of minds through intellectual activities that are capable of engendering socio-economic, political and cultural development in the world of mankind, education cannot afford to be stagnant in the scheme of events. To corroborate this view, Monday (2010:13) asserted that “question of how to provide every child with a good basic and secondary education remains unequivocally the challenge facing humanity, based on the premise that high quality education is essential for economic, social and politica development of the nation” Therefore, there is need for curriculum change that would provide quality education for the citizens.

B- Malfunction of the Existing Curriculum Contents

There is always a provision for curriculum evaluation in the curriculum planning and development process. Thus, if after assessment, the expected goals and objectives are found short of achievement, then, there is need for either partial or a holistic curriculum change. Hence, according to Obaa (2009:7) there is need for appropriate school curriculum which is designed to be adapted to the needs of Nigerians society”. In the same vein, Monday (2010:13) opined that “the wave of change is necessitated by the realization of systematic ineffectiveness in the old education theory and practice”

C- Technological Demands

Education is a powerful instrument if well managed. In this era of global economic challenges, many countries of the world are making effort towards the provision of technologically driven education in order to achieve an accelerated national growth and development. Nigeria is not an exceptional in this struggle. Thus, the desire for technological advancement remains the bane for the series of her curriculum reforms. For instance, the introduction of 6-3-3-4 and the introduction Basic Educational Technology and Computer Application at primary and tertiary levels of educational system are meant for technological advancement of the nation.

D- Dynamic nature of the Society

Curriculum by nature is dynamic and it is expected to change in response to the dynamic nature of any society. Nigeria’s desire to respond to the changing needs of the
society regarding the education of her citizens became noticeable after her independence in 1960. To respond effectively to any nation’s educational needs, there must be effective concern about seeking innovation and quality in the nation’s Teacher Education (Mbong, 2010:26).

**Curriculum Innovation in Primary Teacher Education**

There is need at this juncture to provide a brief insight into the curriculum innovation in Primary teacher education for an understanding of the discourse. In order to make primary education functional, attempts have been made to reform the Curriculum of Colleges of Education by the National Comission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2010). In this context, plans are on top gear to convert the department of Primary Education Studies to a school of Primary Education (PED). Similarly, some courses have been dropped while new ones are introduced. For example, School Observation, Hausa, Arabic, French, Islamic and Christian Religious knowledge are recently introduced. In a nutshell, the curriculum of PES has taken into account all the 13 subjects offered at the primary school level. Similar changes have also been made in General Studies.

The rationale behind this is to ensure adequate and effective teaching and learning in the Nigerian primary schools. Though this innovation is in the right direction, what remains uncertain is the ability of the government to provide basic support mechanism to achieve the predetermined objectives.

**Primary Education and Challenges of Curriculum Innovation**

Primary education according to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004:14) is established to promote socio-physical and mental abilities of the children between the ages of 6-11 years. Tijani and Musa (2010:134) are of the opinion that “This tier of education is universal and aimed at producing basic tool for further advancement in education to adulthood” Without any doubt, this level of education is preoccupied with many challenges emanating from the highlighted curriculum innovation. Some of these are discussed below:

**A- Poor Infrastructural Development**

Primary education is bedeviled with diapidated infrastructural facilities that are not good enough to make any curriculum innovation work no matter how beautiful it is packaged. Teaching and learning demand conducive atmosphere. A situation where classes are held under the tree constitute a threat to meaningful academic activities and quality education at the tertiary institutional levels. Sharing this view, Ada (2010:5) believed that the quality of education in current Nigerian society is on the decline from primary, post primary through tertiary institution to the universities.

**B- Population Explosion**

An observation of the primary schools revealed over population of pupils so much that more than 80 Students sit in a class. This over crowded situation makes class
control and management very difficult for teachers. The implication is ineffective dissemination of information and grossly inadequate evaluation of learning outcome. To support this view, Dagunduro and Sulaiman (2010:10) averred that “an average classroom in the primary school contains 70-100 pupils at a given time. This affects effective classroom management”

C- Insufficient Computer Machines

The introduction of computer signifies the need for adequate supply of the relevant gadgets to train the pupils with the knowledge and skills in computer application. However, this has not been made possible due to insufficient, and in some cases, lack of computer apparatus. The researchers’ visit to some primary schools revealed ugly situation of 2-3 computers in the schools.

D- Power Supply

It is a known fact in Nigeria that there is no adequate power supply. Therefore, the desired learning experience in computer knowledge of the primary school pupils is far to be achieved without the school making provision for alternative source of energy. Then, where will the school get money to purchase a generating plant in a situation where the head masters turned the little charges generated in the schools to their own “National Cake”? Except viable plans are put in place, the desired objective would not be achieved.

E- Insufficient Qualified Teachers

The admission policy into teacher education programme raises the question of Quality. Many students admitted through Pre-NCE are not qualified to be trained as future teachers. Grossly inadequate time for their preparation and their inability to display professionalism remain another contending issue in primary schools across the nation. This would hinder effective implementation of the curriculum innovation. Similarly, Bulus, (2008) remarked thus:

Over 90% of the Nigerian school going children go to the public schools. These public schools owned by the various tiers of government lack the capacity to engage or retain qualified teachers. The available ones are driven away by horrible conditions of service—no accommodation, transportation or any form of dignified life. (pg29).

F- School Time Table

There has been outcry of too much load on the time table of primary school which limited the duration per subject to 30-35 minutes. Now that subjects are added, primary schools are faced with the challenges of time table adjustment to reflect the curriculum change.

All said and done, with the ugly picture presented above, perhaps a reference should be made to the question posed in the introduction of this paper that “how far can
this innovation salvage the Nierian Educational system? Without any doubt, the educational reform process has failed to provide adequate and sufficient human and material support needed for the realization of its noble goals and objectives. Therefore, the problems of primary education should be looked into for the benefit of the present and future generation of the Nigerian society.

Conclusion

The place of curriculum innovation in educational enterprise cannot be underestimated if education is expected to stand the test of time. A well designed innovation should be seriously pursued with effective implementation strategies devoid of any hindrance to achieve the target goals and objectives. For the fact that any academic progress in Primary Teacher Education is meant to be reflected in the various primary schools, the challenges facing this level of education have to be removed to usher in a completely new hope for the teeming population of pupils and the Nigerian educational system.

Recommendations

Considering the issues raised in this paper and the impact the curriculum innovation is intended to make in the educational system, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Government should employ adequate and qualified staff in order to achieve the objective of the innovation.
2. Government should renovate the dilapidated structures in the primary schools, build new ones and equip them with adequate teaching and learning facilities for the benefit of the Nigerian child.
3. The head masters of the respective schools should ensure proper adjustment on the time table to accommodate the changes in the curriculum.
4. Government should supply generating plant to schools. This would make literacy in computer application a reality.

References


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