

ISSUES OF IMPLEMENTING THE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA

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Senior secondary education is the education that students receive after junior secondary education and before the tertiary stage. It is comprehensive in nature with a core curriculum designed to broaden students' knowledge and out-look. The study period is three years. In Nigeria, the administration and control of senior secondary education is vested by law in the state government. They carry out their responsibilities through the ministries of education, who exercise administrative and professional duties, while teachers have the day to day responsibility for what takes place in the schools under the immediate direction of the head teacher's secondary school principals. The state ministries of education, through the inspectorate division exercise control, supervision, and guidance in respect of the implementation of national objectives and the quality of education provided. In addition, parents, board of governors of schools, local education committees, professional organization of teachers, advisory and consultative councils, equipment manufacturers and many other stakeholders play roles of varying importance in the implementation of educational plans to realize the national objective (Adesina, Akinyemi and Ajaji, 1983).

Concept of Curriculum

Curriculum from the Latin word means "the path, the way, and the course" Curriculum says, "of all the things students could learn, this is what they must learn. Of all the things that we could teach, this is what we must teach". The amorphous nature of the word curriculum has given rise over the years to many interpretations. Depending on their philosophical beliefs, people have expressed their interpretation to be among the following:

- a. Curriculum is content
- b. Curriculum is a programme of studies or a courses of study
- c. Curriculum is everything that goes on within the school, including extracurricular activities, guidance and interpersonal relationships.
- d. Curriculum is a series of experiences undergone by learners in school.
- e. Curriculum is that which an individual learner experiences as a result of schooling.

According to Tarnner and Tarnner (1975) Curriculum is: The planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcome formulated through systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the auspices of the school for the learner's continuous and willful growth in personal –social competence.

In the educational use of the word, the term curriculum means a graded course of different school subjects taken from nursery school to the university. Thus, all what students do or learn at school from the day they are admitted into school, until the day they leave school may rightly come under the term curriculum. (Ekpo and Osam, 2009).

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Ivowi; (2008) view curriculum as a tool designed for educating a person in order to change the orientation, behavior, actions and values to that of a good person whose concern is not only develop self but also the world around. To Offorma (2006), curriculum is structured series of learning experiences intended for the education of the learner. Ekpo (2008) maintain that curriculum is all the learning activities that students undergo in an approved institution of learning under the supervision of professionally trained teachers.

Curriculum is a programme. This includes programme of studies, programme of activities, and programme of guidance programme of studies refer to forms of subjects, contents, subject matters and bodies of knowledge. Programme of activities is made up of all the learning experience presented to the learner which can be overt or covert, mental or physical, learner oriented or goal oriented. Students learn through activities, so the programme of activities facilitates the learning of programme of studies.

Programme of guidance is the assistance given to the young and inexperienced members of the society by more experienced persons to help them solve their educational, vocational, and socio-personal problems. Curriculum can therefore, be taken to mean an instrument by means of which schools seek to translate the hopes of the society into concrete reality (Ekpo and Osam 2009).

Curriculum Implementation

According to Chambers (1993) implementation is the various steps involved in producing a functional data. Therefore, curriculum implementation refers to the various steps involved in achieving the desired objectives. It is the delivery stage in the curriculum process. Inyang-Abia and Umoren (1995) maintain that of this stage all the relevant curriculum inputs are brought in direct contact with the target audience in such a way that through a variety of activities, learning experience and mastery can be maximally achieved at minimal cost. Curriculum implementation occupies a strategic position as it links a strategic position as it links the design with evaluation stages that is, the materials and methods are put together to produce desirable learning activities and experience. It imaginatively knit together the instructional content and materials to produce desired outcomes and learning experiences for the learner. Mkpa (1987) maintain that curriculum implementation is the task of translating the curriculum document into the operating curriculum by the combined efforts of the students, teachers and other students, teachers and other concerned stakeholders.

Curriculum implementation needs to start with trial testing of material before installation. According to Ivowi (2008), the importance of trail testing has been ignored too often in Nigeria like Bendel primary science project, basic science for Nigeria secondary schools, Nigeria secondary school social studies projects, primary science programme for the Northern states, Nigerian secondary school, Home economics project, and Nigerian secondary schools science project, all other curricula developed have not under gone the process of trail testing before being installed in schools. Even the current basic education curricula did not undergone trial testing before their installation in schools in September 2008.

The curriculum content and the instructional material need to be introduced to eh the classroom teachers who are the major implementers of the curriculum. This can be done by organizing appropriate orientation models (Ekpo and Osam, 2009).

Bishop (1985) recommended the Research Development and Diffusion (RDD) Model. In this model an innovation is conceived at the center such as a curriculum development center where it is researched, developed, and then diffused into the education system, Ekpo (2006) maintain that to implement a curriculum means to teach for the realization of some predetermined aims, goals and objectives.

Implementation is usually done by teachers who have to interpret a curriculum and decide on how to select the contents of the subject matter, appropriate methods of teaching the contents to the learners integrate instructional resources with the teaching methods and evaluate the process and product of their functions in order to know whether or not the curriculum has been implemented in the right direction.

Teachers' role in effective implementation of the senior secondary school curriculum cannot therefore be treated with levity because a good curriculum can be marred at the implementation stage by classroom teachers who are not well informed (Ekpo and Osam, 2009).

Senior secondary education curriculum efforts of government to achieve a good curriculum for the senior secondary started with the organization of the national curriculum conference of September, 1969 held in Lagos. The sponsor of the conference was the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). The conference was attended by various stakeholders in education in Nigeria.

Some of the fundamental proposals made at the conference provided the foundation for the structure of senior secondary education in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (2009:8) provides the following as some of the objectives of senior secondary education in Nigeria:-

- a. To provide students opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background.
- b. To provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades.
- c. To develop and promote Nigeria languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage.
- d. To inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence.
- e. To foster National unity with emphasis on the common ties that write us in our diversity
- f. To raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feeling of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- g. To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- h. In realization of the above objectives, a senior secondary curriculum has been put in place as contained in the National Policy on Education (2009:20) as follows:-

Group A – Core

English language

Mathematics

A Nigerian language

One of Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science

One of Literature in English, History, Geography or Religious Studies

A Vocational Subject

Group B – Vocational Electives

Agricultural Science

Food Nutrition

Applied Electricity

Home Management

Auto-Mechanics

Metal Work

Book-Keeping Accounting

Technical Drawing

Building Construction

Woodworks

Commerce

Shorthand

Computer Education

Type writing

Electronics

Fine Art

Clothing and Textiles

Music

Group C – Non – Vocational Electives

Biology

History

Chemistry

Geography

Physics

Bible Knowledge

Further Mathematic

Islamic Studies

French

Arabic

Health Education

Government

Physical Education

Economics

Literature in English

Any Nigeria Language that has ethnography and literature,

etc.

The National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates that every student shall take all the six (6) core subjects in group A and a minimum of one and a maximum of two (2) from the list of elective subjects in groups B and C to give a minimum of seven (7) and maximum of eight (8) subjects. One of the three elective subjects may be dropped in the last year of senior secondary school course.

Steps in the Implementation of Senior Secondary Curriculum

The implementation of the curriculum is a very important stage because it is at this stage that all that has been planned at the federal and state levels will be translated into action. If it is properly executed, expectations from education will be realized. On the other hand, poor implementation will make a mockery of the entire system. The following steps can be followed in the implementation of the senior secondary curricular:

Setting Objectives: even though the objectives have been set at the national/state level, there is need for a further breakdown of the objectives into meaningful terms from the national level to the

implementation level where the objectives become specific enough for action and evaluation. For the setting of school objectives, the head teacher may present the plans from the ministry of education to staff as part of their preparation for the academic year. Small committees may be set up to prepare possible specific objectives (Ekpo and Osam, 2009)

Determining Subject Areas: When the specific objectives have been prepared, there is need to look closely at the object areas indicated in order to think of additional learning areas. The examination of the subject areas is incomplete without a close look at the contents, their sequence, and level of difficulty. There should be a link among the contents (Ekpo and Osam, 2009)

Books and Materials: The suggested textbooks and other materials should be looked at closely. Are there new books or materials that the staff do not know? Or are there other things that the staff need to know? (Ekpo and Osam, 2009)

Unit Planning: A unit plan simply means the amount of work, material, or area that can be finished within a prescribed time. It is sometimes referred to as the scheme of work and it is possible to break a topic in the scheme of work into a number of units, each unit being a sub-division of that topic. For each unit, specific objectives should be stated, the teaching-learning approaches and teaching aids should be indicated and the evaluation of that particular bit of work in the unit should also be stated. Therefore, unit planning serves as a useful guide for the teacher and those who may handle a particular class in the absence of the actual classroom teacher (Ekpo and Osam, 2009)

Lesson Plan: This involves further selection from the unit plan of what can be realized within a class period of thirty-five to forty minutes. It contains the specific objectives, method of teaching, teaching aids and how to evaluate that small bit of work (Ekpo and Osam, 2009).

Teaching: At this stage, the goods are actually delivered to the students. If the planning of units and the lesson have been done properly, there is an assurance that, in the hands of a good teacher, the teaching stage will be fruitful (Ekpo and Osam, 2009)

Evaluation: Finally, the curriculum should be evaluated to see the achievement of the stated objectives. The process should begin from the classroom and end up at the ministry level. This will enable the school to assess its own objectives and programme based on the results of evaluation from the various classes, based on the evaluation results from various schools in a state, the state ministry of Education will judge whether or not its objectives have been achieved. Based on the results from the various states, the Federal Ministry of Education can decide on the achievement of its goal for the entire educational system (Ekpo and Osam, 2009).

Factors That Support Curriculum Implementation

The under-listed factors can help or contribute to effective curriculum implementation:

- i. A good starting point: It is usually helpful if schools are already heading in the right direction, particularly if curriculum ideas could be linked to some form of existing practice or recent professional learning. Recognizing congruencies could help foster readiness for

- implementation and could be particularly encouraging for new or inexperienced leaders or administrators.
- ii. **Effective Leadership:** Committed professional leadership with capacity for change management is an essential ingredient for effective curriculum implementation.
 - iii. **An Action Plan:** A planned approach to implementation is usually very helpful. Schools that had defined the activities and tasks to be undertaken, had designated who would be involved and specified a timeline for completion of each phase usually make good progress towards curriculum implementation.
 - iv. **Wider Consultation:** Teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders should be consulted. Feedback from various stakeholders usually provides a solid foundation for developing a vision, a set of values, key competencies and assessment objectives.
 - v. **Student focus:** The centrality of the learner is one of the key features of schools that usually make good progress in Curriculum implementation. This involves informing students about the curriculum and what it meant for them; consulting them about teaching and learning; demonstrating that their perspective was valued and that their views have been considered in decision making. It also means teachers putting learner-focused strategies into practice.

Factors That Can Hinder Curriculum Implementation

- i. **Limited Funding Capacities:** It is very difficult to implement a curriculum successfully if the education system has limited funding capacities. Under funding raise a lot of other implications on the part of curriculum. The economy of a nation will determine the success of curriculum implementation. In developing countries including Nigeria, the numbers of students and teachers have kept on rising but government money available for education is less (Sibulwa, 1996)
- ii. **Unavailability of School Facilities and Equipment:** Absence of school facilities and equipment such as functional classrooms, resource centres, offices, school halls, well equipped libraries, laboratories, workshops, etc can hinder curriculum implementation.
- iii. **Staffing Issues:** First, a high staff turnover would threaten curriculum implementation. Second, new or inexperienced teachers can find it difficult to cope with the flexible nature of the curriculum, perhaps feeling a need for more detailed direction so as to what they should teach. Third, staff who had been teaching perhaps for many years in a more traditional way might be apathetic or resistant to the idea of wholesale change.
- iv. **Overload in Curriculum content**
- v. **Large class sizes**

Overcoming Impediments to Curriculum Implementation

To me this is an area for committee work. It would be dangerous if not impossible for a single person to provide the kind of answers that will emerge from the questions that the issues solicit. For example, what is to be done on poor teaching, poor performance of students or poor funding? These could call for reforms – updating of course content; curriculum renewal and innovations which could involve curriculum restructuring. Fund raising or increase in school fees may be the answer to poor funding, while recruitment and restraining of teachers may seem to be the best answers for poor teaching. Reactions to issues of this nature call for collective decision making. Therefore, committee systems should be used to avoid irrational decisions (Ekpo, 2006)

Conclusion

In this presentation, curriculum is outlined as an official document for learning that should place in schools. It is developed officially and made available to schools for implementation which is the actual engagement of learners in learning activities. It is usually done by teachers who have to interpret the curriculum decide on how to select the contents of the subjects matter and decide on the appropriate methods of teaching the contents to the learners. The senior secondary curriculum has core subjects and elective subjects. Seven steps have been presented to facilitate the implementation process of the senior secondary curriculum. Factors that support curriculum implementation; factors that hinder curriculum implementation and strategies for overcoming impediments to curriculum implementation have been discussed in this paper.

In Nigeria, the Senior Secondary School curriculum is still heavily burdened with a lot of setbacks ranging from policy formulation to curriculum implementation. The issue is not formulating policies. Our youths are our future leaders. Therefore, all the stake-holders in the educational sector must come together to set the right priorities in secondary education so as to join in the on-going technological race. It is only when this done that Nigeria will achieve her lofty goals of buoyant economy and self-reliance.

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