

CURRICULUM CONTROL IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined who controls the curriculum. The paper argued that the question of who should control the curriculum is a complicated one because individuals have different opinions on that. The term curriculum was defined as an activity that is deliberately planned and organized while on the one hand, curriculum control was thought of as the power to control the curriculum. The paper also argued that although learners, teachers, parents, policymakers, and experts, are critical stakeholders in education, they should not be allowed to completely control the curriculum. Thus, the Federal Government should be solely saddled with the responsibility of controlling the curriculum to check excesses and ensure uniformity, coherence, standards and compliance. This is because without the Federal Government controlling the curriculum, it will be difficult to implement the curriculum. The paper went further to highlight the need for experts to work in harmony with the critical stakeholders in education, particularly the teachers as is the case in the Netherlands and Great Britain. It was concluded that to achieve our educational goals as a country deliberate effort must be made towards giving teachers key roles in all aspects of the school curriculum and curriculum control is certainly one of such issues.

Keywords: Curriculum, curriculum control.

Introduction

The question of who controls the school curriculum in Nigeria is contentious because people have diverse opinions about this Matter. Learners, teachers, parents, educational administrators, experts in education, policymakers and the Government are all concerned and have varying opinions on who should control the curriculum. Recently, the removal of religious studies from the school curriculum in Nigeria has generated a lot of debates both in the National assembly and outside the national assembly. The Education sector is critical to national development, particularly in a populous nation like Nigeria where youths constitute the majority of the population. Despite the importance of education to the progress of a nation, there are quite a lot of challenges facing the sector in the country, and one of the problems is, who controls the school curriculum? This question arises because the curriculum provides the knowledge, skills, and values that are the bridge between education and development.

Concept of Curriculum

Any meaningful discussion on the concept of curriculum would require an outline, to some extent, of what curriculum is, to understand the task therein. Etymologically, the word curriculum originated from the Latin word "currier," meaning " race course," which refers to the course of deeds and experiences through which children grow to become mature adults (Collins English Dictionary, 2003). Going by this, Curriculum can simply be said to be a course of study. Educators, scholars and those concerned with educational policy have a more nuanced and so more comprehensive view of the word's meaning. According to edglossary.com, curriculum refers to "the lessons and academic content taught in a school or a specific course or programme".

Tanner and Tanner (1975), conceptualized curriculum as all planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcomes formulated through systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the guidance of the school. Oyetunde and Piwuna see curriculum as educational activities that are planned, organized and systematic. As for Denga (2005), the curriculum encompasses planned and unplanned experiences to which learners are exposed within as well as outside the school environment for both individual and collective growth. For UNESCO (2016), curriculum represents a conscious and systematic selection of facts, skills and values, a selection that shapes the way teaching, learning and assessment processes are carried out by addressing questions such as what, why, when and how students should learn.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the concept curriculum is a complex one. It entails, teaching and learning methods, how students' attainments are measured and disciplinary forms of knowledge(i.e. Subjects) around which school curricula are typically constructed and outcomes spelt out. Curriculum commands the entire scope of formative deeds and experiences occurring both within and outside the school for the purposeful formation of adult members of society. Thus it can even be said that the curriculum is a living and breathing programme from which learners can derive the appropriate behaviours, attitudes, values,

knowledge and skills (Adesugba& Temitope, 2019). Any debate then on curriculum must take into cognizance the many facets of the concept, which link together and interact in practice for a fruitful educational outcome. Essentially, therefore, the curriculum is more than the glossy booklet that contains materials to be taught.

The Concept Curriculum Control

Curriculum control simply means the power to influence a curriculum. By extension, it is the power to have authority over the curriculum of a given institution. For instance, in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, each school has an advisory council (made up of local community, school administration and teachers), which is saddled with the responsibility of choosing what gets taught. This form of participatory curriculum decision-making is also the practice in America (Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995). Whereas in some countries like Nigeria, the responsibility for determining the school curriculums rests largely with the government, especially the Federal Ministry of Education.

When it comes to education, it is not only Government entities that are stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, community members and businessmen who help fund the schools have an interest in the process. The issue of who controls the curriculum is hotly debated. The triggers for controversy include societal challenges, globalization, agendas, and the goal and effectiveness of education (Carson, 1984; Handler, 2010; Booth 2016; Alberby & Bergmark, 2017). The debates underscore the importance of curriculum in enhancing teaching and learning.

Some Scholars Stance on Curriculum Control

Against the participatory curriculum decision-making is the argument in favour of state control curriculum. Carson (1984) articulated that decisions about the curriculum, especially as to how much of the humanities should be taught as opposed to how much science and mathematics, are political and should be the prerogative of the democratic representatives of the people, that is the central government. Besides, the state has access to advice and proposals from specialists in universities and within the government bureaucracies. On the contrary, Booth (2016) is of the view that a state-controlled curriculum is dangerous because it can lead to the promotion of ideologies which parents don't share or even the curriculum being captured by interest groups.

Some scholars strongly maintained that curriculum content should be chosen to meet children's needs and interests. They even advanced that students should determine the curriculum of studies. In their view, students' active involvement in the decision-making of their curriculum has the twine effect of creating interest in the acquisition of knowledge and contributing to their development of life skills such as: feeling responsible, development of democratic attitudes, and leadership qualities. Contrary to this, Alberby & Bergmark (p. 2017), opined that if learners are allowed to have control of the curriculum' perhaps only things that are of interest to the child, which could be immoral, may dominate the curriculum. For example, materials like bet9ja, naira bet and computer games may find their way into the curriculum.

Another school of thought would prefer leaving the curriculum in the hands of the local community. This is based on the conviction that parents have the right and responsibility to raise their children and control their upbringing, and when the local community is left to handle the curriculum, its content will be geared towards the local interests and goals and this could bring immediate benefits both to the area and student (Adesugba & Temitope (2019). The challenge with such a stance as argued is that children may end up learning different things as dictated by their backgrounds. Take for instance, in such a situation, would Local and state history not be given more weight than national history in the classroom?

Carl (2009) and Handler (2010) were of the view that teachers involvement in curriculum is important. Teachers can contribute by collaboratively and effectively working with other specialists to arrange and compose materials, textbooks and contents. They can also help to align the content of the curriculum with students' needs in the classroom. This view is countered by Ramparsed (2000), the scholar maintained that it would be unacceptable to entrust teachers with the school curriculum since some lack the necessary skills for the job.

White in Carson (2006) contended in support of curriculum control by experts. This is because, curriculum decisions include technical and policy components, covering everything from the best ways to teach and learn, to the best method of assessment. As for Dewey (1897), education is a social contract with the society, therefore its activities should reflect the community. The importance of curriculum in education cannot be overemphasized. The overall objectives of education depend largely on the nature of the curriculum. The quality of education is determined by the curriculum. This explains why curriculum experts have observed that curriculum making either at the level of planning, design, implementation or reformation needs the input of critical stakeholders if it is to be relevant, meaningful and adequate to meet the demands of the people for whom it has been put together.

Issues in Curriculum Planning, Design and Development

The dynamics of social changes, emerging technologies, and the need for productivity and progress could render existing curricula either obsolete or out of tune with currency, to compel curriculum reviews to make them responsive to the needs of students and society (Herrare, 2012). Thus most schools' curricula evolved in response to societal needs. The idea of participatory decision-making in the curriculum is becoming increasingly popular (white, 2006; Alerby & Bergmark, 2017; Vogt, Nieveen & Thijs, 2018). In most cases, the centralized curriculum with the prescribed curriculum materials, achievement standards, and standardized testing to evaluate students, is what is obtained. However, there is a great deal of scepticism about the central curriculum control policy model. School reformers and reform researchers view the excessive top-down Control as part of the problem bedevilling the school system and called for less central control. In its place, they advocate for school management, teachers, students, community and other initiatives at the school level to control the curriculum (Alerby & Bergmark, 2017; Booth, 2016).

The curriculum captures the why of the curriculum, what is to be taught, when is to be taught how is to be taught and of course where it is to be taught. In curriculum development and design the purpose of a curriculum has to be explicitly stated in the learning outcomes or

objectives, and the broad aims or goal as well. The purpose captures the whole idea that underpins the creation of the curriculum. This is what is referred to as the "why" or "intention" of the curriculum. The decision made at this point shapes everything else concerning the curriculum, from content, and assessment to method (Priestly, 2019). Composing a curriculum also demands selecting the content, which is the subjects, skills, topics, and values, given as a syllabus, and these constitute the programme of study. This is the "what" of the curriculum. The content of the curriculum could often be an area of serious disagreement. Some think that curriculum content should be chosen based on the interests and needs of learners. Others maintain that there are forms of knowledge, rigorously developed which are vetted as intrinsically worthwhile and have been packaged in the various academic disciplines that are essential for all generations (Young & Muller, 2010). These forms of knowledge students ought to learn regardless of interest or need.

Learning necessarily involves a method of instruction, technically referred to as pedagogy. Priestly (2019) sums up this as the "how" of the curriculum. A well-developed curriculum will have to identify the teaching strategies, the delivery mechanism, as well as Learning activities that could lead to the achievement of the objectives and ultimately the goal of education. Thus Wood (2014), advanced that learning processes are more important to the concept curriculum than even content. Yet, in a multicultural and multi-religious society, choosing methods of and activities for learning that are effective and efficient, appropriate and not offensive to the sensibilities of all can be an uphill task. For example, should boys and girls sit together or separately in a class? Who should teach sex education: male teachers for boys and female teachers for girls or any gender for all? Inherent to the concept of curriculum is the component of assessment. This has to do with the use of tests, homework, and observations to judge the extent of students learning. Priestly (2019) noted that assessment could be used formatively, summatively or evaluatively. This implies assessment is a highly technical process that requires knowledge for it to be properly employed. Opera and Nwokafor (2020) articulated that the entire educational enterprise revolves around the "who." The other components of "what," "where," and "how" have significance only about the "who." Even the differentiated instruction is targeted at the "who."

Curriculum is a term for a coordinated set of activities that facilitate learning. The complexities of curriculum development processes and the range of issues informing the "why," "what" and "how" of teaching, learning and assessment present major challenges when the contention on who controls curriculum arises. Therefore the answer to who controls curriculum must factor in these various components of curriculum to ensure quality education. For any curriculum to be effective and impactful, the question of who controls the curriculum is sacrosanct. This is because when unqualified persons are allowed to control the curriculum its effects could be counterproductive.

Curriculum Control in Nigeria

The issue of who controls the curriculum in Nigeria will better be appreciated with a glimpse into the history of education in the country. The educational policies and precedence of the Federal government of Nigeria have evolved in response to the changing political and economic challenges. For instance, in the colonial period, the colonial masters were in charge

of the curriculum. They determined what was to be taught based on the need at the time. However, after independence, the priority was to widen access to education to help in producing high quality and medium-level manpower relevant to the country. Such a need warranted the Federal Government to take over the education system and be in charge of the curriculum.

At the moment, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) regulates educational provision in Nigeria in both public and private schools. The National Policy on Education which is the main document on educational operations in Nigeria, drawn up by the Federal Government, offers standards and modes for the delivery of qualitative education in the institutions of learning in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education which was first published in 1977, from the proceedings of a curriculum conference, where public discussions and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders were held, has been revised several times. The 2014 edition is the latest, it outlines new areas of knowledge, and their objectives, as had been approved by the Federal Ministry of Education. That is the body saddled with the responsibility of carrying out reforms in the education sector. Thus, in Nigeria, like some nations around the globe, the state has a great deal of influence over school curricula (Ingersoll & Rossi, 1995), and so are examination bodies. It is clear to see that in Nigeria the school curriculum is under the control of the Government and no one else. Kennedy (1996) in his write up argued that:

It is in the interest of governments to control the content of the curriculum and the manner of its delivery since in this way they may have some influence over the thinking and behavior of society's future citizens...Paradoxically, however, too much-centralised control impedes the implementation of change and innovation and stifles the development and creativity among teachers and learners... (p.78).

The reality is that everyone has a role to play. The experts should work synergistically with other critical stakeholders in education as this can help in the development of a comprehensive curriculum that can transform Nigeria on the path of development. Curriculum planning should be done democratically. Resorting to the democratic method, allows the participants to debate on all desirable curriculums of education to be implemented. The future of education in Nigeria is in the hands of all its citizens starting from the families, the churches/mosques, the communities, the schools and the Government. If each one of the institutions mentioned makes education a priority by reviewing and making sure that we have a functional curriculum, not just loaded, bulky and theoretically based, the sky will be our starting point.

Conclusion

Curriculum control all over the world is unique to each National setting. The curriculum cannot be stagnant. The curriculum must be a living document that is in constant flux. It must be constantly revised to address new findings and the resulting new visions. To do this the process, although a technical one, must involve all stakeholders: institutions,

experts, organizations, the business community, school teachers and administrators the government to allow cross-fertilization of ideas if our institutions of learning will have a virile, dynamic and an all-round education. As the saying goes; no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers and by extension, no education can rise above the quality of its curriculum. This shows how important the teachers and the curriculum can be in the attainment of success in the teaching and learning process. Thus, curriculum control in teaching and learning is paramount as it helps bring about progress in education and the nation in general.

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