



INFLUENCE OF POLITICS IN CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND CHANGE IN NIGERIA EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

From 1999 when we began operating a democracy till date Education has only received between 4 to 10% of Nigeria's budget, while there is an alleged (alleged as the Minister recently debunked claims that the UN set such a Benchmark) 26% recommendation from UNESCO. UNESCO or not...Nigeria trails behind a lot of Countries in SSA when it comes to allocation of funds to Education. In a Country with over 10million out of School children, it would seem a no brainer to allocate more funds to that sector. This work x-rayed the definition of curriculum, curriculum innovation, process of curriculum innovation, factors of curriculum innovation, and politics of curriculum innovation, possible suggestions. Areas where politics intervene with curriculum innovation and change includes; contents to be thought, methodologies, policies and philosophy of education formulation and evaluation. The paper suggests that in other for the curriculum change and innovation to be profitable in the contemporary society, there should be a fair involvement of curriculum planners and consumers. Thus the consumers here include the parents, teachers, students and other stake holders who are not involved in the politics of curriculum.

Keywords: Influence; Politics; Curriculum Innovation; Change; Educational System

Introduction

Curriculum innovation and reform has been common feature of all educational systems. Ofoefuna, (2020) citing Cookey-Gam posit out that right from the time of Plato to the present time curriculum reforms and change have been regular feature of most educational system of the modern world. Plato was compelled to draw a comprehensive curriculum for all grades of schools in his

time due to mental revolution caused by the teaching of the Sophists the new social economic and political changes of the Periclean age. He goes on to observe that, Aristotle's curriculum was based on his psychological, sociological and political thinking.

Curriculum is one among the main concerns in the educational field. The word curriculum



is originated from Latin word “currere” meaning ‘to run a course’. The word curriculum means a course of study or a plan that provides learning opportunities in the form of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. The purpose is to bring about changes and reinforce already acquired behaviour in the learner. In the context of the school system, curriculum is considered to be the totality of what pupils learn at school. However, for purposes of efficient management of the school curriculum, learning is categorized into different courses of study, i.e. the syllabuses. Thus, broad and narrow definitions of curriculum exist. Narrowly defined, the term curriculum can be used to refer to a planned, written academic program (syllabus), to co-curricular activities or to school ethos (hidden curriculum). Usually, broad definitions combine all the above. This suggests that actually curriculum is a set of desired learning outcomes and the structured set of learning experiences aimed at achieving such outcomes. As Marsh & Willis (1995) suggest, ‘it is an interrelated set of plans and experiences that a student undertakes under the guidance of the school.’ It includes the behaviour patterns and attitudes of the pupils and staff and the general tone and ethos of the school or college.

Curriculum to the students is regarded as things taught to the students by their teachers in which the school plans and presents to the teachers. To the teachers; curriculum is regarded as educational experiences that are planned, organized, and presented to the

learners with the school as the controller. To the parents; curriculum is those things parents have sent their children to learn in the school, which are taught to them by the school. These definitions can go on as far as there are different authorities in the field of curriculum, for example in the words of Wheeler, (1967), curriculum is planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school. Dike and Eze, (2009) see curriculum as an embodiment of all the knowledge, skills and attitudes which a nation through her schools, imparts to her citizens.

Change and innovations are sometimes used interchangeably though they are different but closely related as one depends on the other. For example according to Meena (2009), the differences between the two terms seem to be a non-stop topic of discussion among researchers in education and in other field of the study. However as said before and according to Bucciarelli (2015) the two concepts have a cause and effect relationship where by innovation starts leading to change. Innovation can be the introduction of new and improved ways of doing things (ibid) or an adoption of new object, idea or practice by an individual group of organization (Marsh & Willis, 1995). Tidd & Bessant (2009) define innovation can be in terms of inventions in the aspects of what we do, how we do, who we do for and how we frame it. Innovation is assumed to be adoption of a new idea which affects the education system practices as according to Marsh and Willis (1995) arguing that innovation goes beyond



adoption of a new idea or object to mean a process encircling the use of newly planned ends and means which aim at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system. From this perspective, we can say that curriculum innovation is the initiatives that are perceived to be new by those who introduce and experience them towards effective and efficient education practices.

Shen (2008) on the other side of the coin describes change as the adoption of an innovation with the ultimate goal of improving educational outcomes through an alteration of practices. According to Meena (2009), curriculum change refers to “any alteration in the aspects of a curriculum such as philosophy, values, objectives, organizational structures, and materials, teaching strategies, student experiences, and assessment and learning outcomes”. Marsh and Willis (1995) describe curriculum change as a generic term that subsumes innovation, development and adoption concepts. Basing on these descriptions we can generally define curriculum change as a conscious, deliberate and collaborative effort to improve the education practices. This is made possible through the adoption of new ideas and beliefs on the curriculum components as suggested by Meena’s definition such as (objectives, content, teaching and learning activities and assessment methods) which later leads to educational improvement.

Politics on the other hand is a set of procedures by which some people try to dominate others formally, informally or

social processes of influences (Joseph, 2015). Young, Levin & Wallin (2007) define politics as a process adopted by a certain society to determine how power, wealth, opportunity, status and other social goods are distributed to members of that society. Basing on these broad definitions one can comprehend that politics encompass the power of an individual or group of individuals to have more influence in decision making than others. In planning educational objectives, content development, teaching strategies to be used to deliver the content, teaching/learning materials, assessment of the learning outcomes and evaluation of the learning outcomes, politics have big influence as it has power to dominate the decision in all those arenas of the school curriculum.

Politics and Education in Nigerian Schools

It is a mere talk to say that education is far from politics (Maclaren, 2013). The fact remains that education and politics are inextricably related. The policies adopted by any educational system are essentially drawn by the government in power (Chapman, 2006) . He further says that, every government is conscious that to ensure its political, social and economic success, the schools must be involved in the promotion of the interests of the governed. On the other hand, educators need the support of the ruling power, the public and other governmental in order to carry out their functions. (Toyo, 2009), posits that no educational system can survive without the financial support and the protection of the government in power. In



Nigeria, the educational policies of successive governments have always reflected and often betray the political creed and social views of each government both at state and federal levels (Ikegbusi, 2014).

According to (Falola, 2010), education contributes to politics, for education is socialisation, and quite essential, a form of political socialization. In the university for example, they can claim that in their leadership, that politics is not involved, but the leaders know that they cannot operate without political leaders as well. (Young, 2012), stresses that university leaders and representatives continuously lobby legislators to get into their system or get their activities approved, and adequately financed. In other to further see the interactions of politics and education at work, it is crucial to examine the pertinent aspects of some ideologies and their interplay with education.

Process of Curriculum Innovation

There is need for a periodic review of the curriculum; since these changes are effected as new innovation evolves in the planning of the curriculum.

Identification of the area that needs change and thus agreement on the need for change. Studying the activities in the school and society may reveal the areas of the curriculum that do not meet the needs of the learners and the society. The curriculum innovators will now make necessary suggestions for the areas that deserve changes.

Identification of direction of change such as new objectives: When the society identifies that the objectives of the existing curriculum no longer meet the needs of the school and the purpose of the society, there may be demand for a change.

Organization of workshops for the production of a relevant curriculum: Education workshops such as the Science Teachers Association of Nigeria (STAN) regular workshops have contributed in- the production of number of curriculum materials to accommodate innovations made.

Pilot- Testing of the new curriculum materials: This aspect of curriculum process is done by using a similar target group to detect any fault and possible correction for adoption.

Dissemination and adoption of the innovation: When a new curriculum innovation evolves in the education system, it will be introduced to schools after the recommendation for adoption of such innovation.

Evaluation: The newly innovated curriculum materials are always subjected to frequent evaluation to find out the extent it has achieved the objectives or for further modification to be effected on the process.

Factors that can Influence Curriculum Innovation

Change in social values, beliefs, traditions etc. As the values, beliefs and traditions of the society change, the objective of education



change to suit the culture and the norms of the society and this may lead to the organization of curriculum conference to set current objective to meet the needs of the society.

Change in the nature of knowledge and content of education: Research findings have developed new ideas which have affected the content of the curriculum thereby giving rise to new knowledge in the methods and concept in the curriculum.

Change in what is known about the learning process: There are some theories of learning that have been propounded by different psychologists, such as Jean Piaget, Brunner among others. These theories of learning have affected learning process and influenced the curriculum.

Change in the system of education: The curriculum of any school is based on the system of education that is in place. The content of the curriculum is modeled within the system. The educational system that Nigeria operates now is 6-3-3-4 system of education; therefore, the curriculum content is based on that.

Change as a result of feedback from evaluation: When the curriculum is evaluated, it will reveal its strengths and the weaknesses. This influences the innovation of a new curriculum. Finance can also affect curriculum innovation.

Factors that Militate against Curriculum Innovation

There are many factors that militate against curriculum innovation. These factors vary from place to place and depend on the economic, sociopolitical, culture and the psychological conditions of the people which form the background of why people seem to oppose curriculum innovation. The following factors are outlined thus:

Non-involvement of teachers in decision making and actual development of curriculum: Materials and curriculum innovation: when teachers are not involved in all the curriculum processes, they may develop negative attitude towards the implementation of such curriculum. Teachers who are the implementers of curriculum should be involved at all levels of its development.

Finance: It is necessary to make funds readily available to procure curriculum materials, equipment and facilities and for the training, and recruitment of teachers. No educational plans can be fully achieved without adequate funds.

Infrastructure: Infrastructural facilities can be a hindrance in the achievement of curriculum innovation. These facilities may be in form of physical plants, laboratories, electricity, and other equipment necessary for the realization of the curriculum.

Conservatism: Many teachers develop negative attitude to new innovations in the curriculum. This change may be tried in some pilot centers to get tile teachers acquainted



with the new curriculum innovations before implementation.

Political barriers: Some new innovations may not survive because of political differences. If there is good and a new innovation by a political opponent, the other party who are in a position to implement it may not be interested in carrying such innovation out.

Dependency on other systems: Some poor countries cannot stand the taste of good and costly innovation because of the dependence on other countries for the supply of essential materials for the achievement of such innovation. If such supplies are not available, the innovation suffers.

Bureaucracy: Official bottleneck has adversely affected the implementation of innovations especially in Nigeria. These types of problems include quota system, federal character, and tribalism. Therefore, non-qualified personnel may be involved in the implementation of such innovation that the individual has no knowledge of

Social and cultural barriers: The cultural background of people may militate against curriculum innovation. For example in Northern Nigeria, women are not given the free opportunity to be used in planning and even in the implementation of curriculum innovation.

Paper qualification: Because of the emphasis placed on paper qualifications, those who are knowledgeable and who contribute greatly in

curriculum innovation are not given the opportunity to do so.

General conditions: Inaccessible roads, remote places, isolation and bad climate conditions may pose problems in locating persons who should be involved in the curriculum innovation process. In some areas in Nigeria today, teachers reject posting because of the remote nature of some schools

Scope of the Politics of Curriculum

Herod Lasswell defined politics as 'the process of who gets what, when and how'. Politics is thus equated to allocation of values (resources). Curriculum politics and policy choices are increasingly related to larger issues of school change and improvement, and to varying theories of what it is that shapes the outcomes of education. At one time, there may have been a common sense assumption that curriculum was central to the enterprise, in that, what was taught is what would be learned. A substantial debate exists as to how important formal education as a whole is in shaping student outcomes, with some arguing that socio-economic status and other non-school factors are by far the most important influences on outcomes while others believe that what happens in schools can play an important role (Levin, 2004b).

As governments have attempted to support large-scale educational change (Fullan, 2000), curriculum has become less an activity in its own right and more as an element in a more comprehensive approach to education change. In many jurisdictions with centralized curriculum like Nigeria, review



and renewal processes have been altered to be more consistent with wider education programs. In other settings, curriculum has been a prime vehicle for realizing wider change (e.g. Luke, 2004).

The policies of curriculum can be thought of as involving two kinds of discussions. The first concerns the overall shape of school curricula: what subjects will be included (or excluded), how much of each, and at what stage of students' education. Examples would include debates over whether literacy or mathematics are getting sufficient share of the school day and school year, whether sex education or religion should be part of the curriculum, when students should first study a foreign language, or the degree to which they should be required to study music or physical education.

In Nigeria, Mathematics and English have been allocated equal times in the primary and secondary schools curriculum but the debate now revolves around English and Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa where strong undertones of 'colonialism' and 'nationalism' and the prominence of "official" language dominate. In fact, the Constitution of Nigeria now recognizes only English languages as official but at school level prominence is still given to mother tongue.

The second kind of debate is over the content of particular subjects (learning areas). People will disagree over what should be included in each subject and what should be included at various age levels for students. Should spelling be taught explicitly? If so when?

How much of their country's history and geography should students learn as opposed to that of other countries? Should all students learn algebra? Should all students – or any – be required to study Shakespeare? These debates take place not only in the most obvious areas, such as what is taught or studied in literature and at what age, but also in areas that might be thought to be more objective, such as science or mathematics. For example, should global warming be a part of Science curriculum? (Connelly 2007).

For example sometime in the past a particular author and text book was withdrawn and taken to court because sex education was fully discussed. Igbo language which used to be compulsory subject when writing WAEC or NECO is no more simply because of Politics of Curriculum.

In addition to the content of specific subjects, schools are seen as the place where children will be inoculated against all social ills or taught all the virtues from street proofing to AIDS, antismoking, drinking, and drug abuse education (Connelly 2007). Schools are expected to prevent bullying, obesity, and anorexia while also eliminating racism and promoting equity in all its forms. In many cases these topics cut across the formal school curriculum, so whoever provides what instruction and when can be an important curriculum issue.

In Nigeria, one of the national objectives of education is fostering national cohesion. The National policy on Education (FRN, 2013), as a constitutional body interpreted this



objective as posting teachers anywhere in the country under a policy known as delocalization. But the outcry and political pressure that followed has had the National Assembly reverse this policy despite the glaring imbalances in teacher distribution both in absolute numbers and also in subject area specialization.

A second set of arguments, often much more cruel, occur when curriculum debates occur due to disagreements on important value questions. Because schooling is seen as fundamental to the development of our children, it can turn into a battleground for wider social disputes.

Thus people will disagree about whether particular content should be part of school curriculum at all. Sex education is one obvious example, but significant philosophical or value disagreements are also expressed in many other areas. There can be deep-seated arguments about the content of history and literature curricula, such as how much attention in these subjects should be given to minority groups or to dissidence. People's fundamental ideas about their country get expressed in disputes over the role of first languages for immigrant students or around curriculum about various forms of diversity and human rights. Any issue that is politically contentious can also turn into a curriculum dispute.

Debates about evolution provide another example in which differences in religious beliefs get expressed in curriculum policy disputes. Even in fields such as literacy and

numeracy there are in some places bitter disputes, such as the reading wars and math wars. These debates are sharper because they embody deeply held views not only about the nature of education but about essential life values (Connelly 2007). It is not lost to Kenyans on a debate whether the Nyayo philosophy espoused by the second president was truly a philosophy despite textbooks on the same being sent to learning institutions at the time.

Another significant feature of curriculum politics is that in many cases questions of content cannot be separated from teaching practice. Many of the most heated issues in curriculum – for example, whole language or constructivist mathematics – are as much about teaching methods as they are about curriculum content. On the other hand, there are occasions when the whole concern is about the content of curriculum documents with little attention to pedagogy. For example, debates about whether particular topics should be included in history curriculum or certain books in literature courses may be entirely about what appears in the official documents; what teachers do if and when they teach the content may be of little concern in the political arena. Nigeria case here is even funny. History has been totally removed from curriculum due to politics.

Conclusion

Politics dominates human life. Decisions on what is best education for our children will always involve appreciation that man is a



political animal. Jostling, bargaining and negotiation characterize the process of developing a curriculum. All that is needed is to strive to strike a balance that incorporates the needs of society and the anticipated trends in future. Done correctly, a great curriculum is delivered and the reverse is true.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made as a way forward:

- 1) Politicians should allow the education authorities to select leaders of schools with a stated standard; this will give chance for experts and qualified leaders to take leadership positions in schools.
- 2) There should proper and adequate funding of the educational sectors, at it will give room for effective implementations of the educational policies.
- 3) Ministerial appointments on academic matters should be strictly on merit and experiences on areas of specialization; this will help to achieve the goals and objectives of education as the appointee is well grounded on the field of educational management and administration.
- 4) Quota system and godfather should be kept aside until professionals are filled in supposed

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