

Designing Appropriate Curriculum for Special Education in Urban School in Nigeria: Implication for Administrators

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The provision of a well-planned, modified, and articulated curriculum that would provide students with disabilities appropriate access to the general curriculum and effective instructional support is the thrust of this paper. The paper examined the various issues on the concept and objectives of special education and the role of a well-designed curriculum as a panacea to integration of the special-needs children. The paper highlighted the defining features of any good curriculum and examines the key leadership issues related to effective special education and reviews the emerging standards for administrators' performance in determining the knowledge and skills needed by effective leaders.

Keywords: curriculum, administrators, designing

Introduction

Education obviously is meant for the generality of population irrespective of the individual's physical disposition. NERDC (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council) (1989) stated that education is the social instrument through which the culture of a people is perpetuated, implemented, and refined. To fulfill this very important purpose, education must therefore serve not only the physically and academically adequate, but also those who display a wide variety and range of different learning patterns. This invariably implies that every learner should have educational opportunities consistent with his/her abilities. The educational programme must deliberately plan and develop diversified programmes that will satisfy diverse needs of which special education is one of such programme.

Egbo (2005, p. 2) noted that despite many well-intentioned educational policies that have been adopted by the federal government of Nigeria, for example, the 6-3-3-4 secondary school structure and the new UBE (universal basic education) scheme education in Nigeria has fallen victim to the nation's chronic, social, and political challenges that tend to reduce institutional efficiency. In a situation, report on "the state and future of special education in Delta State", Onwubolu (2005, p. 15) lamented that inadequate curriculum, poor funding, lack of interest in the education of exceptional children, lack of adequate personnel, and equipment are problems deterring the growth and development of special education in the state.

Abang (1992) noted that the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 shown education system has not been successful in the schools for learners with disabilities because the government has not required commitment and seriousness in the implementation of the system.

The role of the school administrator is vital in the education of the child. Administration involves the planning and organization of activities and resources aimed at fulfilling the goals of the particular organization. The administration of education is central to the realization of educational objectives and must provide for all and work towards the improvement of the less privileged.

The Concept of Special Education

The need to provide special education programme in Nigeria was first made in the National Policy of Education (FRN (Federal Republic of Nigeria), 2004). FRN (2004) defined special education as the education of children and adult who have learning difficulty because of different categories of handicaps, such as blindness, deafness, hardness of hearing, social maladjustment, among others, due to circumstances of birth inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern, or accident in later life. There are also the specially gifted and talented who are intellectually precocious and thereby find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy in resistance to it (p. 28). Ozoji (2005) saw special education as a formal special training given to people (children and adults with special needs). Special education, therefore, is the education of people who need additional, academic, and social assistance.

The United Nation declaration on the rights of special needs to education affirms that their acquisition of education will enable them to develop their capabilities, skills to the maximum. These group of persons require special assistance through special education to equip them for gainful living. NERDC (1989) classified the basic feature of students with special needs as those who deviate from average or normal learning. Commonly identified ones are:

- (1) Neuromuscular or physical characteristics;
- (2) Sensory abilities;
- (3) Mental characteristics;
- (4) Communication abilities;
- (5) Social or emotional behaviour.

These groups require some modification of the normal school practices and special educational services in order to develop to their fullest potentials.

Objective of Special Education

FRN (2004) in its National Policy on Education stated the objectives of special education as follows:

- (1) To give concrete meaning of ideas of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, mental and emotional disabilities notwithstanding;
- (2) To provide adequate education for all handicap children and adults, so that they will fully play their role in the development of the nation;
- (3) To provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children, to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development.

To achieve the above objectives of special education, the preparation of teachers for adequate education, for both learners with and without disabilities and use of appropriate suitable, useful, and adequate curriculum, and for learners becomes imperative. The role of the educational administrator in this regard is to plan and

organize activities resources aimed at the fulfillment of the outlined objectives. Although school administrators (principals) do not need to be disability experts, they must have fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to perform essential special education leadership tasks.

The Concept of Curriculum

Mogbo (2002) defined the term “curriculum” as encompassing the content, structure, and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values.

This includes the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students acquire as well as the factors that inform the ethos and general environment of the school.

Mogbo (2002) saw curriculum as all planned experiences, opportunities, and activities provided by a school to assist the learners attain the designed learning outcomes and desired change in behaviour. According to Mogbo (2002), the way in which the curriculum is defined, planned, implemented, and evaluated crucially influences the quality of education provided.

The above view inform curriculum as the live-wire of any school. Ozoji (2003) supported this view when he pointed out that any effective and ideal curriculum process should be made up of such fundamental issues like objectives, content, learning experiences, organization, and evaluation of these to achieve the goals of the curriculum.

Curriculum planning involves the following steps:

- (1) Diagnosis of need;
- (2) Formulation of objectives;
- (3) Selection of content;
- (4) Organization of content;
- (5) Selection of learning experiences;
- (6) Organization of learning experiences;
- (7) Determination of what to evaluate and ways and means of doing it. (Taba, 1962)

Designing an appropriate curriculum should take into cognizance in the curriculum plan that would suit every Nigerian child including the special needs. Such a curriculum should be planned in such a way that would provide opportunities, activities, and experiences for the education of the special needs.

In support of the above, Nwachukwu (2006, p. 276) identified areas in which curriculum planners and teachers would be enabled to identify as:

- (1) The content of the curriculum that is taught to children generally at school;
- (2) The adopted curriculum that addresses the peculiar needs of children with special needs;
- (3) The curriculum that would make special-needs children’s education worthwhile;
- (4) The curriculum that is specially designed to address the specific learning needs of special-needs children.

The author is of the opinion that one of the defining features of any good curriculum is planning.

Curriculum planning involves:

- (1) Breadth and flexibility;
- (2) The choice it offers in the selection and sequencing of content ensures its adaptability to the dignity of children’s circumstance and experience.

Planning curriculum should focus on:

- (1) Activity-based learning;
- (2) Self-directed learning;
- (3) Cooperative and group work;
- (4) Peer learning.

Curriculum guideline should involve:

- (1) Development of key skills within broad content areas;
- (2) The use of individualized education programme;
- (3) The use of variety of assessment tools;
- (4) The use of multi-disciplinary approaches in the education of students with special needs.

Similarly, Oboegbulem (2004) stated that the teaching methodologies in curriculum planning should involve:

- (1) Individualization of instruction;
- (2) Special remedial programme when necessary;
- (3) Bringing the child in a strategic-sitting position in the classroom when need be;
- (4) Emphasizing less structure and more self-selected activities;
- (5) Motivating children through encouragement and deep teacher support;
- (6) Emphasizing group projects;
- (7) Using audio-visual aids;
- (8) Using concrete instead of abstract materials;
- (9) Reducing competition to a minimum.

Framework for Designing Appropriate Curriculum for Special-Education Learning Disabilities

In designing appropriate curriculum for special education needs, the key learning areas as shown in Table 1 are very important.

Table 1

Framework for Designing Appropriate Curriculum

Curriculum guideline for special education needs	Curriculum in primary school	Curriculum area in post-primary school
Communication and language	Language	Language and literature.
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
Social, environmental, and scientific education history, geography, and science	Social, environmental, and scientific education history, geography, and science	Science and technology; social, political, and environmental education.
Social, personal, and health education	Social, personal, and health education	Guidance counseling pastoral care
Physical education including functional movement	Physical education	Physical education
Arts education (visual arts, music, drama)	Arts education (visual arts, music, drama)	Arts education
Religion and moral education	Religion and moral education	Religion and moral education

Note. Source: NCCA (National Council for Curriculum Assessment), 1999.

National Council for Curriculum Assessment

National councils for curriculum assessment are as follows:

- (1) Communication and language: (a) sensory and perceptual; (b) emotional cognitive development; and (c) interaction with immediate environment;

- (2) Mathematics: (a) explore; (b) solve problems; and (c) comprehend basic concepts;
 - (3) Social, environmental, and scientific education, history, geography, and science education: (a) understanding of environment; and (b) concept of time, cause, and effect;
 - (4) Social, personal, and health education: (a) must be seen as parts of fostering personal development; and (b) explore wide range of stimulating equipment;
 - (5) Arts education, visual arts, music, and drama: creative experience and activities and enjoyment of music;
 - (6) Religious and moral education: should be church responsibility.
- Skills that are essential to all learners:
- (1) Development of enabling skills: (a) attending; (b) listening; (c) interacting; and (d) responding;
 - (2) Life skills—skills that are essential for all facets of a person's life: (a) communication skills; (b) personal and social skills; (c) aesthetic and creative skills; (d) physical skills; and (e) mathematical skills;
 - (3) Assessment tools at primary school: (a) teacher observation; (b) teacher-designed tasks; (c) projects; and (d) take home assignment.

The Role of the School Administrator in Designing Special Education Curriculum in Urban Primary or Secondary Schools

Special education presents one of the major challenges to administrators of schools curriculum. Administrators need to provide students with special needs and appropriate access to curriculum and effective instructional support. The role of the administrators is closely monitoring the student performance and progress through participation in their assessment. Various researches on special education have indicated that the roles of school administrators are very vital and pivotal to the success of special education process. This has a lot of implications on key leadership issues related to effective special education and performance of principals to determine the knowledge and skills they need.

Studies have shown that special education has evolved from primarily segregated learning environment often characterized by low academic expectations, social isolation for students and their teachers, and a curriculum poorly aligned with general education (Turnbull & Cilley, 1999). Today, special education is viewed less as a place and more as an integrated system of academic and social supports designed to help students with disabilities succeed within LRE (least restrictive environments) (Sage & Burrello, 1994; Eskay, 2001, 2009).

In view of the above, the school administrator is responsible for the improvement of educational opportunities for all students, especially those with unique learning needs. As noted in the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the principal's values, beliefs, and personal characteristics inspire people to accomplish the school's mission. The administrator as the principal of the school ensures that staff members have the support and resources needed in the area of common planning time, unmanageable teaching schedules, heterogeneous classroom rosters, and professional development opportunities to perform their jobs well (Sage & Burrello, 1994).

This calls for effective principal's leadership behavior for: (1) Encouraging teacher leadership; (2) Team learning; and (3) Flexibility and collegial self-governance.

Effective principal emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and professional growth. Maintain a clear focus on powerful academic outcomes for all learners.

Research has shown that principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrating administrative support for special education, providing high-quality professional development for teachers, and producing enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for others at risk for school failures.

Finally, in designing an appropriate curriculum for special education in an urban school, the following principles should be taken into consideration:

- (1) The curriculum should reflect the lives of the children and families;
- (2) Reflect the diversity found in the society for example, gender, age, language, and abilities;
- (3) Provide for children's safety while being appropriately challenging;
- (4) Encourage exploration, experimentation, and discovery;
- (5) Promote action and interaction;
- (6) Organized to support independent use;
- (7) Are rotated to reflect changing curriculum and accommodate new interests and skills;
- (8) Are rich in variety;
- (9) Can accommodate children's special needs.

Conclusions

The achievement of a well-designed curriculum in special education depends on the ability of the school administrator to ensure appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities. This involves adequate planning of the curriculum that focuses on activity-based learning, self-directed learning, and cooperative group work and peer learning. The school administrator need to make provision for adequate resources for the implementation of effective curriculum which involves provision of adequate personnel for the training and re-training of in-service and pre-service teachers who will be able to develop key skills within a broad content areas, using individualized education programme, variety of assessment tools as well as multi-disciplinary approaches in the education of students with special needs. The school administrator need to provide teacher-educators with facilities that will enable them to possess the skills needed, understand the curriculum, new methods, and techniques in teaching for the attainment of the goals and objectives of special education.

Recommendations

Designing an appropriate curriculum for special education in an urban school can be a very interesting and exciting experience where the following principles are taken into consideration in planning curriculum for them:

- (1) Limit the number of new concepts introduced in a lesson to avoid confusing the students;
- (2) Teach from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Be sure that students understand one concept before going to another;
- (3) Do not use elaborate language or unclear models in teaching concepts. Use simple language;
- (4) Space your introduction of new concepts. Do not introduce many concepts at a time to students. It can be confusing. Provide sufficient guided practice for the group before progressing to individual turns;
- (5) Introduce higher-order skills only when the basic concepts have been learnt by students. Higher-order skills will not be useful or reliable if the basic concepts are not firm;
- (6) It is said that "practice makes perfect". Allow the students to learn concepts and use them frequently first before application. This method will help them remember and recall the concepts.

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