# PROBLEM OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTERS AND CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*Nigeria is a developing country with problem of curriculum development and implementation. Her contact with colonial masters and their educational system is responsible for that state. It is felt that children are being educated outside their culture rather than in their own environment. The paper touches on the tasks faced by the curriculum developers; it highlights the effects and problems of implementation and the role of university education in bringing about desired improvement.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Colonial System of Education has influenced the southern countries of the Sahara because it has always been the desire of foreign powers to impose their own culture on their colonies. Nigeria, a former British colony is no exception. At the UNESCO meeting in 1962, a consensus was reached that secondary school education should be adapted to suit the needs and realities of the countries of Africa (Fafunwa, 1980). Despite the proclamation, it is unfortunate to observe that even in the twenty-first century, African education has experienced very minor changes in both the contents and structure of her curriculum. It is felt that the children are getting educated outside their environment and this may lead to the children's inability to gain sufficiently from their culture.

The learning environment of a child should include her/his immediate cultural environment, her/his proficiency in the use of the local language, moral value, respect for elders; understanding of the folk songs and expression of skill in dance and etc; and ability to value the overall community total way of life. It's the cumulative of the above that should form part of the education of the child in the African setting.

UNESCO (1977) puts it that Education is the birthright of everybody. People therefore deserve the right for acquisition of knowledge, life skills, good health, provision of good portable water, etc. Unfortunately this is not so in the developing countries of the world. African states are still plagued by illiteracy and Nigeria with a population of over a hundred and twenty million people still has about 43% illiterates wallowing in poverty. It is known that education whether it is informal or formal, is a deliberate and systematic attempt to cause changes in the behavior of the targeted people. Such changes are observable in the skills acquired, attitudes exhibited, and competencies. As Agun (2003) explained a change in behavior would occur only if the set pattern or behavior is predetermined and the expected facts and information on learning needs to be presented. Agun, (2003) states further that an enabling environment must be prepared and selected instructional materials that are found relevant to facilitate the expected change in behavior must be provided. As observed, learning especially takes place everywhere and not only in a confined four-walls of a school classroom. The imposed curriculum of the colonial masters tends to de emphasize the value of the culture of the developing countries of the world.

### Objective

The paper discusses the tasks of the curriculum developers and highlights the problem of implementation. The paper further examines the classroom environment as it affects education in a developing country. Suggestions are provided on workable curriculum for the developing world.

An attempt is made to define the concept of curriculum.

## Curriculum Defined

In a broad perspective, the curriculum addresses the program of studies, the list of courses and its description, course content, course outlines etc. It refers to the subjects that are taught by a school, college, higher institutions of learning etc. And it also describes the things that are studied in a particular subject. (Longman dictionary of contemporary English 2001). The curriculum is further described as the overall learning program in a school and it covers the time-tabled lessons, sports, social activities; all other facilities and structures that are put in place that would help to the total development of learners who attended it. Dada (1999) define curriculum as planned learning experiences provided by schools to assist the pupils in attaining the designated learning outcomes to the best of their ability. Put simply, curriculum as used in a wide sense, covers the various educational activities through which the content is conveyed as well as materials used and methods employed (Ochs MTH).

## Child preparation for school education

During the early years, the child learns the basic skills of living from parents; family members and neighbors. It is based on the experience that the child gains from the home environment that he/she eventually builds upon during the formal school age. It can be said that the child's habits, attitudes to life and ideas are already formed before he/she experiences the formal schooling. It is also expected that the child already has the control of his/her body physically, develops a creative urge, and uses a language to express the self. The child has ideas about his/her environment and has made social contact with other people. The pre-school learning prepares the child for the primary school curriculum. The early years school learning is a continuity of the home experience, hence no rigid curriculum is required other than train the child for good health habit, sing nursery rhymes; make the child learn through creative responses and play with the child. The early years learning provides basis for the child drawings as psychologists could make meaning out of the child's expression to understand the child. However this activity is not on the curriculum. The Nigerian child rather than being taught in the local language of the

people, has to learn to communicate in English because it happens to be the lingua franca. To make any progress, the child is forced to learn the foreign language at the expense of the language of the local environment. Although the National Policy statement of Nigeria (2004) has a provision that early learning should be done in the child's immediate language of her/his environment, this policy is being put aside in favor of the foreign language (English) as evidence has shown. The kindergarten schools prefer English to impress parents. The problem is that a large percentage of learners are being slowed down as they often fail to conceptualize meanings of words presented to them in the foreign language.

A carryover of the problem is mass failure and mass cheating in English language examinations as learners do not have the grasp of the foreign language. Since English is a compulsory prerequisite to getting admitted into tertiary institutions, inability to pass at credit level has led to examination malpractice, as some students would want to pass at all costs. In the year 2000, 65% passed English, 2001; 82% passed, in 2002, about 74% passed, but in the year 2003, the pass level dropped to 60%. (Ojerinde, 2004) From the problems highlighted, there is need for the problem to be addressed, being the concern of parents and the teacher/ learner and the curriculum developers have to work towards it.

## Tasks of the curriculum developers

The panel of "Curriculum planners" usually comprises a pool of experts from different fields. Amongst them are economists, politicians, social scientists and specialists in education etc. The tasks of the curriculum developers are enormous and they include, translating aims into workable objectives; defining what subjects should be taught in school, determine the length of school year, and prescribe the age at which different subject could be learned etc. As observed, the curriculum is a very important factor to the successful development of any nation; because it is the products of the school that will eventually constitute the manpower of a nation.

The questions that the curriculum planners and developers seek to answer in attempt to fulfil the criterion

of relevance revolves around the purpose of education that schools intend to attain; the educational experiences are to be provided such that purposes would be attained; the ways by which educational experiences would be effectively organized and how to determine their attainment. (Tyler, 1949 in Ajala, 2002) It is considered that the imported curriculum and their objectives reflected simply the imperialists' intentions that are directed to the attainment of the 4 R's reading, writing, arithmetic and religion (Fafunwa, 1974, Babarinde, 2002). Provision of relevant answer to the above questions and planning to meet the goal is one of the tasks of the curriculum developers.

The curriculum plays a central role in the determination of what should be learnt. Where the curriculum is haphazardly implemented, there is bound to be long time problems to set right. In such a nation, where a faulty curriculum gets implemented, would very often have negative effect on the socioeconomic and political climate for a long time. Agun (1996) commented that the problem of the developing countries is the rush to implement projects. This may be a reason for the slow development of our education. The curriculum planners are not excluded from the rush.

Over the years, reports of educational reforms have been found to have negative effects on the curriculum implementers. One reason for this is the disregard for teachers. Teachers are always left out of the curriculum planning; whereas it is the teachers especially those who are at the lower levels of the educational system, who implement the curricula. Teachers very often need training/retraining for knowledge updating according to the current changes. It is training and retraining that can make them to become effective implementers. Retraining has not always been given to teachers and implementers as they are often seen to be rigid to change. Since new changes without adequate training would make them not only inefficient teachers' but it also affects their attitude to the implementation of new curriculum. Fear of having to loose their job will not allow them to embrace change (Gramdy 1997).

In the same vein, it is the implementers who can provide needed experience concerning with the problems in the field that curriculum planners require. Since they are always left out of decisions, the curriculum problems get complex further at the point of implementation.

The teachers are implementers of the curriculum in classrooms and sometimes provision of structured material are made available through them to learners so that she/he could go on self-learning. The curriculum planners' tend to saddle teachers with great responsibility for explaining the materials and structuring learning activities that they are ill prepared for. Inability for self-learning may be one of the reasons for health and poverty problems of the developing countries of the world.

### Education, Health and Poverty.

The alarming rate at which people are becoming impoverished is a cause for concern. Whether it is HIV/AIDS infection or infant mortality or literacy, they all contribute to the deplorable state of affairs in Africa. It is disheartening to note that the curriculum planners do not really include such vital socio-cultural issues such as HIV-AIDS control, mortality rates, literacy and personal developmental (survival) strategy as general school teaching subjects. This is a serious omission.

A way of bringing changes through education is without alienating the child from her/his cultural environment. Sound education is therefore considered as a measure to reduce poverty and this should be given in the child's own language.

The vexing problem that generates in Africa is the rush to the implementation of projects. Huge investment has been commissioned into Iron and Steel industries in Nigeria rather than education, most of which have failed. What emerges from lack of patience especially in implementation of innovative programs is 'failure'. (Agun and Imogie, 1988).

Nigeria as far back as 1984 operates the 6 - 3 - 3 - 4 system of Education. The school going child spends six years at the elementary or primary school, three years in the junior and the last three years in the senior secondary school class. A learner, who gains admission to tertiary institution offering degree program, spends another four years and

is getting educated.

One problem that becomes glaring is that the first three years of education at the junior secondary school level, as the planners put it is terminal for those who could not go further. Based on this assumption, plans were made to equip learners with basic skills that would empower dropouts. Equipments were purchased for their training but it is left unexploited without teachers to use the machines. Teaching the deserved learners is a problem not only to the curriculum developers, but the teachers and the students also form the core beneficiary as they are also affected negatively. The investments thus made in expensive machines, equipment and materials become wasted as they rot away in workshops in several schools.

## Stages of curriculum development

Agun (2003) describe the four main stages involved in the development of a curriculum. They are curriculum determination, curriculum development/construction, curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation. Generally, curriculum determination is based on goals that reflect the objectives of institutions whereas the statement of goals is designed to meet the needs of the society as influenced by the socio-political-economic and culture of the people. The curriculum should normally take care of the needs of the learner whose behavior is being modified in order to meet the goals specified. The curriculum documents are produced at the curriculum development stage. The activity involves in a clear statement of objectives in terms of learners' behavior. The objectives are also related to the goals of a particular level of education. The levels of the Nigerian education are, pre primary and primary school, basic/ junior and senior secondary, tertiary/ higher institutions, the university education is inclusive.

## Curriculum development and educational technology

Imogie (1988) expressed his views on educational technology and curriculum development that the main concern of the discipline, in the general area of curriculum development tends to bring improvement in the quality of learning experiences and instruction. Stating further, the author put it that educational technology is also interested in the methods and strategies for planning, designing and developing a new curriculum. Interest on educational technology is also one of the strategies involved in successful dissemination, diffusion and adoption/ adaptation of a new curriculum. The author presents the sub areas of curriculum development specialization as Curriculum innovations, Programmed Learning, Instructional Design, Computer Education, Educational Broadcasting, Audiovisual Services or Production of Instructional materials. There is also Photography and Cinematography.

Considering the various needs of the professional teacher, educational technology focused for a long time and has been directed on production of effective teachers. The student teachers are trained to acquire the skill and adequate academic competency which would make them to function when they go for graduation. Some of the techniques involved in bringing about improvement included micro teaching simulation game interaction, analysis and computer programmed designs etc. Educational technology encourages locally sourced materials for the improvement of the teaching and learning process so that teachers' problems may be reduced.

## Problem of implementers

Education is the aggregate of all the process by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of positive behavior and positive values in the society in which he/she lives. Education is also viewed as a transformation process during which the future of any society will be shaped through the instruction of the citizens so that they may learn. It is the schools/institutions that serve as the hub of the whole transformation process. It is also the school that provides the opportunity for teacher to carry out his/her duties to the learners.

The teachers' role is changing very rapidly from the old fountain of knowledge when he/she served as the leader, moralist and preacher of conformity to the new role as Manager, Administrator, Guide and Counselor and a mediator to the numerous learners who surround him/her

in the environment. The teacher is saddled with the burden of instructing learners of various interests, age, different aspirations and values. To function in his/her new position, the instruction that is provided for learners' consumption are planned and applied based on the knowledge and principles of instruction. This is a problem for some teachers.

It is expected from the teacher to effectively perform his/her function as implementers of the curriculum, that he/she must have competency in the processes involved in communication and learning the knowledge of contents and subject matter which are essential to the success of the management of learners and classroom procedures. The ability to write instructional objective is of paramount importance. Aside the problems of the relative constant changes of the curriculum of studies that he/she does not have input, a sound knowledge of how to use instructional materials to successful teaching also becomes very important. He/she is also expected to be competent in selecting resources based on criteria such that it meets the specific instructional objectives.

At the end of learning event, the need to evaluate the total teaching and learning has to be done. The teacher should evaluate the self, the learner and the total environment against the learner instructional objectives. How to carry out the process effectively, is the problem of the implementers if no retraining has been given to them.

## Classroom learning environment

The eighteenth-century curriculum gulf is very much around in classrooms in developing countries. Instructional presentation, consideration of age and ability of children is still being used to determine what should and should not be taught to the child. Younger children are excluded from participation in scientific, artistic and literary explorations even when the children can happily engage in the activity. Streaming and segregation of pupils according to their ability as presented by learners on a first contact have not been totally removed from schools practices (Boucher). It is felt that restraining learners' due to age and ability should be done by implementers of the curriculum. For now,

teachers have to manage teaching fifty to seventy five students as the result of knowledge and population explosion. Under this circumstance, effective communication with learners in the classroom is expected to be more difficult when the grasp of a foreign language is involved. The attention that learners' need will also be limited, learners may become unruly, exhibit inattention and loose interest in learning.

The duty of the teacher as facilitator of learning designer and Instructional implementer becomes difficult. Learner participation in the teaching learning process becomes passive because they misperceive concepts being taught in classroom most of the time in foreign language. The stated problems are left for the teacher to solve. Similar problems of the foreign curriculum are experienced at the university level. It is believed that the standard of education has dropped compared with the skills and competencies exhibited thirty years back by older generation.

## University education

The fall in the standard of Nigerian university education is a problem ascribed to the curriculum developers. The reason is not far fetched. Since the foundation of education in Nigeria is tailored towards the west, quality curriculum content has been far removed from African culture. This is one reason for the decline in standard of Nigerian education.(Richard Akinjide.,2001; Afe Babalola, 2000,; Pai Obanya 1999; James Ajala; 1986; Babs Fafunwa,1983) The problems of learners have been traced to the foundation that learner received at the kindergarten level where learners have been taught through irrelevant curriculum. Babarinde (2002) reports that Nigerian cultural values have suffered in the hands of western oriented formal education, the author advocates for the inclusion of relevant indigenous values into the curriculum that would lead to integration of people, who have lost the values of their culture.

The traditional function of university education is teaching, and as observed scholars secluded the self from the society as they engaged in teaching students. Research also appear to be a pleasure with no relevance

to mundane affairs (Audu and Biobaku 1976).

Today, universities cannot be succeeding without being in partnership with the community that gives its existence. The 'ivory tower' concept in Nigeria especially means under development because government hardly meets the huge resources that are needed to the successful run and maintain the demand of her education at the university level. Nigeria paints the case study of problems of the developing countries of the world. While the developed world has opportunity for speculative research, the developing countries are yet to permeate the society that would provide the resources. The universities are to be charged with provision of solution and uplift the socio- economy of Africa.

## Conclusion

The three major scientific attitudes of mind are curiosity, manipulative ability and freedom from restrictions. The curriculum that is designed with the above input in mind will not be far from achieving the set goal. No doubt the education level of people is reflected in their attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Nursery education is geared towards exercises, it is therefore necessary to approach the curriculum development of the early learner with activities such as story telling of heroes, birds, use of folk songs and practical play activities to motivate them to learn so that there will be a continuity of learning with language of the local environment as acquired from home.

Curriculum planners may have to ask questions such as 'Whom do we teach?' 'What we Shall teach?' and 'Who will do the teaching?' These questions will provide a very strong basis for reviewing the curriculum. The child should however not be educated out of his environment in the early years. It is worthy to state that education should be geared to the needs of the learner and times.

The Early Greeks, Romans and Reformation periods focused attention totally on the Individual learner and his environment. Plato, Aristotle, Comenius, Pesterlozzi, Bramed Dewey and Sidney Hook and several other philosophers in their own way have found that learning should not only be child centered, his/her education

should be within the child's culture.

## Recommendation:

It is of necessity to relate curriculum with the needs of the child and the society. The child should also be taught using the immediate language of her/his local environment.

Diversification of the curriculum studies will be essential in order to make provision for the aptitude of all learners. The curriculum is also expected to take care of the intellectual, sociological, economic and physical needs of learners. The plan of the curriculum for higher levels of education should take care that the head, heart and hand are fully involved in the cause of learning. (Reactivity energy). It was suggested that the curriculum of studies must be designed to accommodate subjects like Agriculture, Fine Arts and Crafts, Trades, Home Economics Technical Drawing, and Commercial subjects. This is the age of rapid information technology and ICTs should therefore be made relevant to all learners, adults and community members alike. It is expected that efforts should be made to preserve the cultural values of Africa through sound education.

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