Integrating components of culture in curriculum planning

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Abstract

Culture is seen from different perspectives but the focus of this paper is on the totality of people's way of life; those things that bind the society together. In this paper, the key concepts of curriculum, culture, and curriculum planning are explained. The components of culture, namely, universals of culture, specialties of culture and alternatives of culture are discussed. Integration is briefly presented and how to integrate culture in the curriculum planning is discussed. This can be done through situational analysis to identify the necessary cultural contents to be included or integrated in the curriculum. Different modes of delivery to be used are role play, dramatization, collaboration, field trips, games and simulation, and other interactive modes that make learning meaningful and worthwhile.

1. Introduction

Culture is an important factor in curriculum planning and drives the content of every curriculum. This is because the essence of education is to transmit the cultural heritage of a society to the younger generation of the society. Curriculum is a veritable tool for attaining the educational goals of a nation. Education is the hub of all ramifications of development in any country. No country can develop if her educational system is weak. Curriculum planning should therefore endeavor to integrate the components of culture, which is the essence of education in curriculum planning to ensure that the products of the educational system would be functional members of their society.

In this paper the key concepts: curriculum, curriculum planning, and culture are explained and discussed. The components of culture are discussed and how they can be integrated in the curriculum is presented with examples or with illustrations based on

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the Universal Basic Education level. Finally some recommendations are made for improvement of curriculum development in Nigeria.

2. Concept of curriculum

There exist different definitions of curriculum. The definitions are according to the different conceptions of education and the functions of school and types of the school products. The origin of the word curriculum was from the Latin word 'currus', which means to run a race. This implies that children commence to learn as soon as they enrol in a school (begins to run the race). This race is comprehensive in nature because, in the course of the race, the child or the learner encounters many experiences, which may be intellectual, social, moral, spiritual or physical. These experiences are provided to produce the total man, a functional member of the society. The experiences may be formal and planned or informal and accidental or unplanned. In the course of the race, some children may also encounter some obstacles, which they must surmount either through their efforts or by the assistance of someone else to enable them to attain the expectations of the society.

Curriculum can be defined as the document, plan or blue print for instructional guidance which is used for teaching and learning to bring about positive and desirable learner behaviour change (Offorma, 2014). This definition refers to the formal curriculum, which is planned ahead of time, bearing in mind the characteristics of the curriculum recipients, the philosophy and goals of education, (reflecting the culture of the people) the environment, the resources, methods of teaching, and evaluation procedures. It is the road map to attainment of the goals of education.

The definition of curriculum as a structured series of learning experiences intended for the education of the learners is related to the above definition. It is a course of studies offered in the school for the education of the learners, and which students pursue to get a degree, a certificate, a diploma or any other forms of academic awards. Learning experiences, which are culturally based are embedded in courses taught to the learners in schools. The learning experiences are learner oriented, goal oriented and culture oriented; and they can be physical or mental activities, observable or unobservable (Offorma, 2002). Learning experiences are equated to curriculum content by some authors (Tyler, 1971; Ivowi, 2009). Wheeler (1978) distinguishes learning experiences from the content. He sees the former as the activities engaged by the learners and the latter as the knowledge to which they are exposed.

Curriculum is a programme. This includes programme of studies, programme of activities and programme of guidance. One cannot talk about curriculum without referring to the programme of studies, which is seen in form of subjects, contents, subject matters and bodies of knowledge. The programme of activities entails all the learning experiences embarked upon by the learners. Learners learn through activities and so the

programme of activities facilitates the learning of the programme of studies. Programme of guidance is the help rendered to the young and inexperienced members of the society by more experienced persons to guide them to solve their educational, career or vocational, and socio-personal problems. All these mirror the culture of the society.

Curriculum can be further regarded as the instrument by means of which schools strive to translate the demands and aspirations of the society in which they function into concrete realities. It is planned and sequenced. Education is a vehicle through which curriculum objectives are attained. The essence of education is to transfer the knowledge, facts, skills, values and attitudes learnt from one situation to solving problems in another situation, and this is done through curriculum that reflects the culture of the people. Anwuka (2011) is of the view that the numerous competing definitions of the curriculum indicate that their common element is that curriculum has to do with planning the activities and the environment of the learner. He explains curriculum as the planned and organized set of formal educational and/or training intensions focused on the acquisition of pre-specified competencies. The competencies reflect the elements of the learners' culture, which when imbibed by the learners make them functional citizens of their society.

3. Curriculum planning

Curriculum planning is the selection and sequential arrangement of the content and learning experiences to be presented to the learner. Curriculum development precedes curriculum planning. According to Ivowi, (1994), curriculum planning is the same as curriculum development. It involves all stakeholders in the education of the learners and takes into account everything that will make the curriculum recipients functional members of their society.

In planning a curriculum, a number of elements are considered. They are: the learner, the teacher, the society, philosophy of education, psychology of learning, examinations, economy of the society, resources, subject specialists, and values. All these factors each have link to the culture, as nothing can be done in education without recourse to the culture of the society on which hinge their demands and aspirations.

There are different models of curriculum planning and each focuses on the culture of the society for which the curriculum is being planned. Tyler (1971) and Wheeler (1978) emphasize selection of the objectives as the first step, while Taba (1962) and Nicholls and Nicholls (1978) believe that Situational Analysis should be the first step so as to understand the culture of the people and the available accumulated body of knowledge, before embarking on selection of the objectives. Even for selection of objectives, one of the major considerations is the contemporary society, which depicts the culture of the people. Therefore, for any curriculum to be worthwhile, the planning must have its foundation on the culture of the society that owns the learners.

4. What is culture?

Culture has different meanings and it is used in different ways. Culture can be used for a good-mannered person or a person with good taste. It depicts good behaviour. It is the people's pattern of learned behaviour. Scientists also culture living cells, which is putting the cells in an environment where they can grow or thrive to become visible. In our context, culture refers to people's pattern of behaviour. It is the totality of the way of life of a people. It involves everything that can be communicated from one generation to another. Culture is the fabric of ideas, ideals, beliefs, norms, customs and traditions, systems of knowledge, institutions, aesthetic objects, and material things of arts. It involves food habits, languages, festivals, marriage ceremonies, methods of thinking and etiquette.

Culture is maintained and modified through education. It is believed that wherever educational institutions discharge their responsibilities well, they influence the life of the society, which implies their culture. Curriculum must be a reflection of what people do, feel, and believe. All these have cultural affiliation. It is said that culture is to education what current is to electricity. Any society whose education is not founded on its culture is in danger of alienating the products of that system from their culture. The curriculum planners must be familiar with the culture of the society for which the curriculum is being planned.

5. Components of culture

There are three components of culture. Sociologists have categorised culture into three, namely, universals, specialties and alternatives. The universals of culture are the core of any culture; everything that is generally accepted by all the members of a society. They are the things that bind the society together, promote peace and sustainable development. They are the norms of the society and they are obstinate and difficult to change, for example, language. The importance is seen in its value. Every language develops from a cultural milieu. People's beliefs and values belong to the universals of culture. These generally accepted behaviours are inculcated to man through enculturation both at home and in the school. The purpose is to produce individuals who are well integrated and interactive and to maintain the culture of that society.

The specialties of culture are the different domains of knowledge or discipline in which members of the society are well trained to earn their living and contribute to the development of the society. Members of this group are groomed in the knowledge, skills and ethics of the profession or vocation and they are expected to exhibit these in their practice of the profession. Some examples of the specialties are teachers, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, wine tapers, farmers and potters, etc. Existence of specialties in the society enhances division of labour and thus the sustainable development of the society.

Through specialties of culture, the individual contributes his/her quota to the development of his/her society.

The specialization of some group or class is based on their capabilities and interests. Their specialization leads group awareness, which encourages or leads members to develop specific patterns of behaviour or skills. Since every normal human being is a potential contributor to the advancement of society, opportunities for specialization in a variety of trades and vocations should be provided by the educational system. This explains why there are varieties of subjects in the school curriculum. The essence is to present to the learners with options from where they can select areas of specialization based on their capabilities and interests.

The cultural alternatives are different methods, means, designs and ways of doing things that are acceptable by the society. The society recognises that individuals can make use of their endowments and giftedness to invent things and methods of doing certain things. This is only possible with very intelligent, resourceful and creative people. The inventions are acceptable as far as they do not contravene the ethical, moral or religious standards of the society. Members of this group are talented. They require very special education to perfect their respective talents. They undergo more rigorous discipline than ordinary members of the society do. For example priests, artists, philosophers. Inventors also belong to this group. Their education lasts longer and it is more intensive than the requirements for general education. The alternatives are for exceptional, creative and gifted members of the society. They are limited in number.

The school programmes are organized in such a way that these components are recognized. The universals are grouped as the core curriculum, which every learner must offer; e.g. English, Mathematics, an indigenous language. The specialties are seen in the subjects required for specialisation in different professions and vocations, while the alternatives fall within the elective courses. This is why in curriculum planning there are: the core, the ancillary and the electives. It gives the learners the opportunity to fulfil their needs.

6. Integrating the cultural components into the curriculum

Integration involves inclusion of the required knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in the curriculum. According to Agwu (2009:172), 'integration means that what the school offers must be related to what the community requires.' In the organization of content and learning experiences (method of teaching), integration refers to the horizontal relationship of curriculum content and learning experiences. It is the merging of related content and experiences from different subject areas into one area of knowledge. It deals with using content from one subject area to solve problems in another content area. Our discussion therefore deals with the inclusion of the cultural elements in the school

curriculum to show the relationship between what is taught in school and what the learners experience in life or in their society.

One of the bases of the Nigerian philosophy of education (FGN, 2004:7) is 'the full integration of the individual into the community'. At the basic education level, which includes primary and junior secondary schools, the curricula are integrated. The essence is to integrate the learners as functional members of the society. The broad fields design is used whereby aspects of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes are brought together and systematically arranged in terms of their gradient of difficulty. For example, Social Studies, Basic Technology, Basic Science, Business Studies, Language, Cultural and Creative Arts and Civic Education are all integrated subjects. Integration cannot be attained if the school curriculum is planned without recourse to the culture of the community. It therefore behoves the curriculum planners to link the curriculum content and experiences to the culture of the people. This can be achieved by doing a situational analysis before curriculum planning as given by Nicholls and Nicholls (1978); and Taba's (1962) curriculum planning models.

Situational analysis is the diagnosis of all the elements that influence curriculum planning and implementation. It surveys the society, the environment, the educational system, the learner factors, the teacher factors, learning process, school facilities, and available accumulated body of knowledge. The societal values are also taken cognisance of, as respect for the values of the society are very important. It gives one the sense of belonging and well-being, self-respect, and self-esteem (Obilor, 2003). Khan (2004) identified three types of values. They are behavioural, procedural and substantial values. Behavioural value deals with the type of behaviours exhibited by the teacher and the learners. It is reciprocal in nature. The teacher exhibits good behaviour which the learners imbibe and internalize. Procedural value entails manner of approach in problem solving; for example, respect for evidence, willingness to participate in rational discussion. Substantial value are beliefs held by individuals as a result of their family, ethnic, religious or cultural experiences or attitudes of people to social of political issues. The data collected from these sources would furnish the curriculum planner with the required capability to plan a good and functional curriculum.

Another way of sourcing for data for curriculum planning is through interview of the significant others in the society, the experienced and exposed elders, who will supply information on their culture, values and ethical issues on which to base the curriculum. According to Esu and Enu (2009:288), 'values and ethical issues constitute the core of the society as they constitute the philosophical framework that guide and direct actions either as an individual or as a group.' These are integrated in the curriculum to make it functional.

The data collected from the sources are integrated in the curriculum content as stand-alone subjects (inclusion) or as topics in the existing subjects (integration). In the

Universal Basic Education (UBE) curriculum most of the subjects are organized using integration. Related knowledge areas are brought together to form Broad fields curriculum, for example, Basic Science and Basic Technology, Social Studies, and Cultural and Creative Arts. There are aspects of culture that cut across different subjects which are introduced in the subjects such as Mathematics, English, Literature in English and so on; such as honesty, etiquette, festivals, respect, etc.

The inclusion of the mode of delivery of the curriculum at the planning stage takes cognisance of the nature of integration. Such modes include role play, dramatization, collaboration, field trips, games and simulation, and other interactive modes. Through these modes, it is easy to relate the curriculum content to the real life experiences of the learners to show them the worthwhileness of the school programmes. Through these modes of instruction, they will be well equipped to transfer what they learn in school to solve their problems. This is the essence of education.

7. Conclusion

Curriculum is regarded as the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes presented to the learners in order to change their behaviours to become functional members of their society. A well-planned curriculum must reflect the culture of the people for which it is planned for it to be a functional curriculum. Every curriculum is based and covers the cultural universal, cultural specialties and cultural alternatives. These are reflected in the school curricular.

These three aspects of culture are taken cognisance of in curriculum planning and implementation to ensure that the curriculum is functional. A functional curriculum reflects the culture of the people. The essence of education is to produce the total man; someone who can use what he/she has learnt in school to solve problems. Culture is maintained and modified through education and so must be integrated in curriculum planning.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered:

1. The cultural elements in the UBE curriculum should be delivered using interactive modes, as these are the major means of ensuring that the learners imbibe them.

2. Teachers who are curriculum implementers should be groomed as specialists in the interactive and integrative modes to effectively equip them to handle the broad fields curricula.

3. The curriculum planners should endeavor to integrate emerging cultures in the curriculum as the society is dynamic and there are new cultures that should be included in the curriculum to make the learners functional members of the society.

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