

The Relevance of Culture in Basic Education Curriculum Planning in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education in any society requires full access that is assured by the government. The purpose of education is to teach people how to make a living so that they can create their own livelihood using locally available resources and consequently, become less dependent on the government. For education planning to be effective therefore, education practitioners must always scan the horizons to provide relevant and up-to-date knowledge so that we do not teach our people to live in the past by giving them obsolete content. This paper there seeks to point education stakeholders in the direction of planning curriculum that is relevant to the cultural aspirations and goals of the population for which such curriculum is being planned.

Introduction

World over, the essence of basic education is to ensure that by the age of 11, all children can read and write adequately and have learnt basic life skills that could be used in the workplace. However, basic education in Nigeria is not meeting this challenge (NESG, 2014). Education does not happen in isolation, rather education influences and is in turn influenced by the culture of the society. Culture, as defined by Reynolds and Skillbeck refers to “the fabric of ideas, ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, aesthetic objects, methods of thinking, customs and institutions into which each member of a society is born. The way individuals make a living, the games they play, the stories they tell...” (1976: 5), while education is “what each generation gives to its younger ones, which makes them to develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are of positive value to the society in which they live” (Fafunwa, 1974).

If culture is the way of life of a people therefore, the people must have a trusted means of ensuring that its new members are properly initiated into this way of life. In non-literate societies, the young ones are introduced into the culture of the people through the process of acculturation which occurs as a result of daily interactions between the young ones and the adults in the society. In literate societies however, this function is delegated to a special institution known as school. The school then uses its curriculum to achieve the objectives of acculturation (Esu et al, 2006). It suffices therefore to say that whatever the school is doing is a conscious attempt at using the curriculum to introduce children to the culture of a particular society.

Curriculum planning is thus, a means of addressing both the learners and the society in which they live. It assists both the learner and society to obtain good education (Esu et al, 2006). It has been established that the society/culture of a people is dynamic in nature. Consequently, the curriculum which serves as the vehicles for transferring relevant knowledge must also be dynamic. To this end, Esu et al (2006) opined “that the things we view as important today may

become obscure and insignificant tomorrow, hence the curriculum should be flexible and open to allow for extension, revision, and re-ordering as changes occur to embrace new ideas, norms and values.” Since the curriculum is a product of the society and is produced to sustain the society, there is need for curriculum planners to have sound knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the society for which the curriculum is planned (Olofu, 2003).

For Nigerian Education to be globally competitive there is need to first identify what purpose Nigerian education is to serve. It has become common practice for Nigeria to jump at every trend that is being adopted by other societies without necessarily considering its relevance to the culture and national aspirations of the Nigerian society. This argument was supported by Ms. Ronke Azeez during the 2014 Nigerian Economic Summit where she stressed that “Education for All (EFA) has come and gone, MDGs is gradually phasing out and the newest trend is the 21st century skill.” She opined that while these trends are not bad in themselves, the Nigerian educational system should be directed by the societal goals for education rather than popular trends and practices. It was through this kind of culturally directed education that Singapore was able to transform its economy from one of the poorest to one of the best economies in the world today.

According to Ruto (2014), the future of our children is happening in our classrooms right now and therefore, we must focus on the learning agenda - measure if learning is happening and use measures that are understood by everyone. This way, we would be able to provide basic education that is not only functional but self-empowering for the Nigerian child. With greater cultural influences from the global community, it has become even more critical that we preserve Nigeria’s culture and values by linking our national priorities with our national developmental aspirations through the planning and development of culturally relevant curricula that not only addresses present societal needs, but also anticipates those of the future.

Curriculum Planning and Development to Guarantee a Future Ready Education System

The concept of Education has been defined in varying ways. However, education was notably defined by Okeke (1991) as the process by which society deliberately transmit its cultural heritage through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions. Going by this definition, it goes without saying therefore that the content of the school curriculum must be saturated with cultural elements that reflect the needs and aspirations of the society. In planning the basic education curriculum therefore curriculum planners must vigorously strive to imbibe the culture of the society for which the curriculum is being planned.

The roles of the curricula in achieving national development goals are very central and as such, there is need to carefully articulate our national curricula at the basic education levels to align with our social, economic, and educational goals. To do this effectively, curriculum planners and developers at the basic education levels must maintain a fine balance between the necessary prescription of curriculum content and freedom for learners and teachers to explore new knowledge and find innovative solutions to problems in a world of rapid changes (NESG, 2014). The implication of this is that there is need for a new approach to curriculum planning such that prescriptions are made for standard skills and knowledge that must be mastered while providing a broad range of options for the demonstration of such mastery. In this approach to

curriculum planning for basic education, much emphasis will be laid on the integral role of assessment in evaluating and tracking progress.

It has been said that the content of education includes those forms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which motivate and control the conduct of children in the school community. As curriculum is based on culture or as curriculum would be shaped by the culture of the society in which it operates, the content should enable the young citizens to conform to the expectations of the groups in everyday life (Nakpodia, 2009). While education is aimed at consolidating existing moral standards in order that individuals may enjoy a satisfactory community life, the school should endeavour to teach knowledge and skills that are relevant to the needs of changing time (Herzfeld, 1997).

The Way forward

- Education is too important to be left to government alone; therefore more private sector participation in the development of education should be sourced and encouraged by stakeholders in the education sector.
- There is need to from time to time, evaluate the education system to look at what is working and what is not, then determine what can be done to change the situation.
- Stakeholders in the sector should launch a massive and aggressive redemption of the education sector across the country.

Conclusion

There's a popular saying by Albert Einstein that "the thinking that established a problem is not going to solve it." There is therefore a need to rethink the underlying principles that underpin the content of our national curriculum if education will serve the purpose of economic transformation in the Nigerian society in particular and in developing nations at large. Teachers and other stakeholders in the sector need to be empowered to deliver the much desired changes in education. We cannot therefore see the outcomes we want to see until we devolve responsibilities/powers to the people responsible for implementing these changes, i.e. teachers and head teachers.

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