

HIGHER EDUCATION & GLOBALISATION



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A publication of the
Collaboration of Education Faculties in West Africa (CEFWA)

Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
Gaaf Building, 110-112 Oyo Road,
Orogun, Off University of Ibadan,
Second Gate, Ibadan, Oyo State,
Nigeria. Phone: 08023519154
stirlinghorden@yahoo.com
www.stirlinghorden.com

University Post Office
Box 20984
Ibadan
Oyo State, Nigeria

7 Ikioda Street
Jattu-Uzairue
Edo State, Nigeria

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Published 2011

ISBN 978-032-314-7

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Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
Lagos, Ibadan, Benin City, Jattu-Uzairue.

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Higher Education and Curriculum Innovation in Nigeria

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Introduction

It is a basic truth that the school is a mini-society and students, therein, will have to go back to the larger society after acquiring the intended knowledge. Thus, the needs of the society have to be considered at any point in time. Every time, especially, in this age of technology, there is no steadiness in the needs of the society, therefore, it is required to change curriculum to match the needs. In the course of curriculum innovation, it is always discovered that the role of the teacher is slighted, which should not be. Teachers need to introduce new adaptations in using new materials that may be introduced as innovation. An undergraduate curriculum is a formal academic plan for the learning experiences of students in pursuit of a college degree. (Kathryn, Nora and Clifton) (2001). According to them, curriculum includes:

Goals set for learning (which includes skills, knowledge and attitudes);
the content in learning; the sequence or processes followed; learner's
instructional methods and activities, instructional resources (materials);
evaluation and adjustments to teaching.

All the above information on undergraduate curriculum in American higher education could also be borrowed to suit Nigerian higher education. For accessibility, quality and coherence in undergraduate curriculum, lecturers should change their way(s) of teaching and move with change, introducing new methods/ strategies to better the lot of students. Various stakeholders in the success of Higher Education should call for increased accountability. In innovation, the curriculum should be geared toward the interest and needs of students and society. Retention rates will be on the increase if students' enrolments are considered with all seriousness. Science, technology and humanities should be appropriately considered in increasing students' pursuits of science and mathematics. Consideration should equally be given to scientific literacy and there should be a wide gap between the science and non science undergraduates. Innovations in Nigerian undergraduate curriculum should emphasize (a) demonstration of broad

competence (b) integrative learning experiences across the curriculum and innovations in instructional methods and assessments (Kathryn, Nora and Clifton (no date)).

Innovations must be creative, selective, and organized; and must involve the utilization of human and material resources in new and unique ways. A good curriculum is a changing curriculum. Innovation, according to Abdulraheem (1999) means the new changes which a country must undergo in order to become useful to herself and to the outside world. If such innovations are not effected on the curriculum, the curriculum will soon become outdated because it will be overtaken by social and technological events. Curriculum in undergraduate programme should undergo significant changes to ascertain relevant educational content in all courses. Changes in curriculum are supposed to be planned well in advance to minimize lecturers' and students' misunderstanding.

There should be regular review of curriculum which will reveal whether there is need for major change(s) in it. Curriculum so changed must ensure that there is well rounded education that undergraduates are well prepared for the future. Changes in curriculum are needed to keep it current and relevant. Revisions or change in curriculum normally take place after due consultations with education stakeholders.

Moreover, innovation is regarded as a new way of doing something new and useful. The goal of innovation is always positive change, making someone or something better, although, it equally involves risk. It occurs whether with negative or positive result. An idea, a change or an improvement is regarded as an innovation, when it is put to use and anytime it causes social or even commercial re-organization. According to Lueke and Katz (2003), innovation is generally understood as the successful introduction of a new thing or method. It involves the blend of knowledge to produce original, relevant, valued new products and services. In this paper, therefore, the goals of higher education are highlighted, curriculum and innovation are also adequately defined in the context of higher education.

Curriculum Innovation/Change in Nigeria

Curriculum innovation is regarded as a crucial element for the future of education development. Innovations should be inspired by necessity to update the teaching methods in the country's educational system. It should be stated that in this educational system; educational goals, teaching materials and technological relevance in every subject differ over time as a result of the country's technological advancement. Curriculum should be geared towards this advancement.

No matter the kind of innovation in curriculum, it should be geared towards the needs of the learners. Curriculum innovation is necessary in education for teachers and students as it serves as a guide to educational programmes. Such curriculum innovation creates newness of requirement that schools must meet in learning and teaching. They

are equally regarded as an essential for lasting/permanent learning. It contributes to social, cultural understanding and intellectual ability.

The physiological aspect of innovation affords the teacher with the opportunity of developing specific learning context. In the classroom, the implementations of such innovation are guided by the developed resources. Many schools have seen positive results due to changes made to their curriculum. Thus, curriculum innovation deals with exploring the flexibility in the curriculum by introducing new ways of subject content management and adaptation of teaching approaches. Young people have to be involved in this kind of process so as to be more motivated in their learning and achieve more. The term 'innovation' is used to refer to changes created in the society by science, technology, politics, education and a host of others. At times, it is also referred to as organization and utilization of both human and material resources in new ways resulting into higher level of achievement for the specific goals and objectives.

Curriculum change may imply meaningful shifts in teaching and learning processes. Careful planning and management of curriculum change are keys to successful implementation. Innovation in curriculum requires a lot of meticulous planning, and efforts must be installed to prevent a natural death.

Curriculum includes content, objectives pursued and structure. Content relates to areas of knowledge and disciplines. Objectives include purpose of programme, knowledge and skills to be acquired by students, while structure relates to years of study, pattern of study and arrangement of units of study. Innovation relates to the country concerned, for example, in this case, Nigeria. These include practices and approaches introduced at least ten years before the new proposals. In another word, innovation deals with getting new ideas accepted and with the present dispensation, new technology adopted and used.

Reasons for Curriculum Innovation/Change

Curriculum change is viewed as an attempt to revise or do a complete overhaul of the framework of the system of education so that new ideas, structure or framework will replace the old ones that are no longer relevant. Change in a curriculum would endow individual with the skills and understanding necessary to cope with the challenges in learning. It takes time to plan for the desired change which comes through relevant discussions and illustrations. Change is not effective when it is imposed (even by the government). Having stated this, there are so many forces that bring positive change in the society which may in turn help to bring the expected change(s) in the school curriculum.

For change to occur in a curriculum, the process of schooling have to be re-ordered in relation to goal, content, strategies, and human/material resources for the purpose of improvement in education. More effective direction in schooling is provided through curriculum change in anticipation of more functional and structural adequacies.

Although, curriculum change is difficult, energy sapping and costly, the type of change determines the process to be adopted. The circumstance that brings the change will equally dictate whether it will be gradual or rapid. If there is any change in people's culture, it will be necessary also to allow for change in curriculum. Whenever there is any change economically and industrially, there is bound to be curriculum change in the areas of knowledge and skills that relate to these new processes to avoid creating gaps. More importantly, whatever change is experienced in employment market will equally bring a change in the curriculum.

The following should be considered to bring about effective curriculum change:

- a) Ascertaining the need for curriculum change;
- b) Conferences, symposia and workshop have to be held at different times to be abreast of intending changes;
- c) Problems identified in the existing curriculum must be tabled to avoid committing the same error;
- d) The objectives that will make the intending curriculum real must be known; and
- e) Learning experiences that will help in the achievement of the new stated/formulated objectives must be rightfully selected.

After taking the entire framework for change into consideration, proper planning should be put in place. This should be followed by proper Implementation which must be monitored on a continuous basis.

Moreover, the following factors lead to curriculum innovation:

a) Social and Economic Changes

This kind of change calls for new changes in the curriculum. The social change may be as a result of economic and demographical changes either positively or negatively;

b) Technological Changes

New innovation and improved education lead to better jobs and attitudes which call for better methodologies of teaching, better teaching equipment especially in this age of technology; and

c) Political Forces

Different regimes and governments will introduce different educational programmes which should call for revision and changes in the curriculum of the educational system of a country. If a country must move forward, governance should be sustained. For success in policy issues, a politically stable nation will bring about expansion of educational facilities that will sustain educational development.

In other words, the need for curriculum change may be summarized in the following statements:

- a) The society changes in values, goals and needs, especially, in this age of technology. For education to live up to expectation in a society, the curriculum must undergo change/changes to meet up with the corresponding change in the society and the challenges therein. Those planning for the change must have everything needed and necessary information at their fingertips so as to re-design an educational programme that will help to attain social, economic and other relevant goals of the society;
- b) New ideas are discovered when knowledge expands, so efforts to provide solution to the challenges must be put in place; and
- c) Learners' interest and requirements (what they need to know) are expected to change from time to time. These needs should, therefore, be considered. The curriculum must be changed anytime there is a reason for it so as to meet the needs of students. Whatever is considered in the curriculum must put the learner's interest into consideration and must make them effective participants in the society.

Nowadays, there are series of awareness of members of a given society on education. Since the public are now being acquainted with what goes on in the school; they tend to make value judgment. This in essence means that the planners must change the curriculum to take care of these reasonable criticisms that will move the school system forward. The boundaries in sciences and social sciences also call for curriculum innovation that will meet up with these challenges. At the junior secondary schools, they offer Integrated science/Basic technology and Business studies. Getting to senior secondary, these are split into other science, social science areas which equally have implications for tertiary education.

Moreover, new disciplines emerging in the education sector as regards education policy in the country call for innovation and change that will cater for this field of knowledge. Emphasis on rural development and dwindling economy of Nigeria may also call for change or innovation in curriculum. According to Boston (2002), curriculum innovation is not that easy. It is a very difficult and chaotic process. According to Ken (2007) in excerpts from Erastus Akingbola; he submitted that at one point the Nigeria higher education system was excellent but now it is accepted that the system has failed. He stressed that for a university to be a world class university system, there should be quality facilities, curriculum and access to infrastructure to mention a few. There is an emphasis on online learning, creating the abilities to extend across markets across the globe.

While reviewing Akingbola's presentation, Ken (2007) further mentioned that in 1970s the Nigerian government reduced allocations to higher institutions but continued to establish new universities for political reasons. Things got worse when there was reduction in research focus and all other supportive means of excellence in higher

education. Curriculum innovation in higher education will cover the following areas so as to bring out the best in the students being produced:

- (a) Adequate facilities to increase excellence; and
- (b) Rebranding the primary and secondary education systems so as to make undergraduate have focus, having all it takes for their study.

Nigeria needs a university system that will rank high with other world class university systems. There is need for a curriculum innovation that will provide the needed skills to make them compete internationally. Amongst other recommendations by Akingbola stated by Ken (2007) are:

1. Allowing universities to set admissions criteria to select students;
2. Select students;
3. Develop curricula; and
3. Restoration of grant funding to universities.

Diversity learning should be a top priority in Nigeria- this will equally bring about multicultural and intercultural understanding. This diversity learning refers to sensitivity to difference including race, gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability.

There should be general shift from content to competencies. There must equally be provision of momentum that will enable higher education to make giant and unprecedented strides.

Fall-out from the Current Curriculum

The belief that the quality of graduates has declined (Low quality skills). Fresh graduates are put through specialized management training programme before giving them full employment. This is because of the past experiences of the establishment concerned. They prefer giving preference to Nigerians who studied abroad.

1. Persistent Skills Gap in the Economy.

As released in the Nigerian Tribune of 16th march 2009 p.13 the current curricular of the universities were designed under colonial rule, the focus was to produce skills for the civil service and the few multinational commercial businesses that dominated the economy then.

2. Inadequate and Obsolete Infrastructure

Poor equipment as well as poor research and library facilities in the universities are major problems. Instructional and infrastructural facilities are non functional, obsolete or dilapidated with adverse consequences on the quality of teaching learning and research.

3. Other Issues

Explosion in student admission which have overstretched instructional and infrastructural facilities in the context of poor or limited funding. With just few exemptions, private universities equally tend to replicate existing programmes in the older universities.

There is need for private sector support to upgrade the quality of teaching, learning and research in universities. This can be done by forging and deepening partnership in teaching, funding of research projects, establishing endowment and challenging universities skills gap in industries.

Ministries of Education (Federal and state) should be able to discover problems of educational sector in relation to the societal needs and promote innovation that will help to fulfill the needs.

The impetus of change or proposals for change should comprise of a wider range of institutions, including professional organizations, government agencies, private foundations, interest groups and individuals. Adequate attention must be given to the distinctive nature of the youths/adults in higher institutions since curricula are meant for them.

The task of renewing school curricula requires thorough understanding to review the context, processes, goals and priorities. Developing and renewing school curricula are becoming challenging taking into consideration the rapidly challenging world. Facilitating curriculum change requires that developers, policy makers and implementers possess more complex competencies and references models.

The curriculum may be structured on the basis of courses necessary to meet certain job requirement or on the basis of a particular description designed to meet the need of a programme. After the content of the curriculum has been determined, materials need be prepared, for example, textbooks, manuals, audio visual materials, review of curriculum. In education, curriculum change is important for sustenance of the tempo. Thus, curriculum innovation must be tried so as to find out the best solution that will lead to ethics of reality. The curriculum content should be diversified so as to enforce quality and relevance to the needs of individual and the society at large so as to sustain growth and reduce poverty. Whenever the need and aspirations of the society change with time, it becomes reasonable that curriculum which is a medium of education must change.

Constraints to Curriculum Innovation in Higher Institution

Innovation in curriculum may be hindered by the following:

1. **Poor communication:** This may be as a result of lack of good /accessible roads, poor phone networks. In effect, officials are prevented from successfully linking up with others on time;
2. **Human nature:** People may resist change when they don't see any reason for it. Once they are recording success in the existing ideas, they may not see any need

for any other idea. Real change, by nature is a slow process but many people don't understand it;

3. **Fund:** fund is necessary in all areas if there is going to be development. Facilities for innovation are very important, they should be placed on the appropriate places, but where there is no fund, this may not be possible. Eventually the innovation will be an illusion; and
4. **Incompetent leadership:** If there is a leadership that lacks vision and mission, such leadership will not be competent to successfully handle the processes involved.

Guidelines for Successful Curriculum Innovation

If there is going to be success in curriculum innovation, the following have to be focused:

1. Teacher preparation is necessary and adequate materials must be made available. Teachers must be teachable and ready to embrace new skills, focus and competencies that will make them relevant;
2. The objectives of innovation must be clear so as not to bring about complications;
3. For the achievement of excellence, there is need for encouragement, motivation that will assist those involved to be committed;
4. The Vice- Chancellors of University, Provosts of Colleges of Education, and Rectors of Polytechnics and even the States and Federal Ministries of Education must support the innovation; and
5. Every other person connected with moves on innovation must be well groomed and carried along with clear understanding. They should be made to see the innovation as helping to improve teaching and learning. Different individuals with different personal priorities and opinions have to be brought together with encouragement so as to embrace quality undergraduate education.

Apart from the listed Guidelines, attention should also be given to teaching methods because teachers will implement the curriculum that has been designed. Whenever the curriculum is changed, the stakeholders should be invited to a forum. The essence is to familiarize them with methods of teaching the new curriculum, its demands and content.

Managing curriculum change requires skilled leadership. As a result of this, all those that will take up leadership role in the quest for change must be accommodating, understanding and full of leadership qualities that will make the change notable.

Change always involves human and emotional factors. Those involved in the change must be competent, skilful and committed. They should not be discouraged even when faced with challenges in the process.

Serious gaps in various courses may call for series of changes to enable them play their expected role in this time of competitive economy. For example in United States of America, there are innovative changes in many engineering programmes under the strong influence of Engineering Education Programme Coalition. Whereas in Canada, the

changes have been carried out more slowly as isolated initiatives with no real national dialogue. (Boston 2002)

Conclusion

Managing a curriculum, according to Boston (2002), is a complex problem. Once motivation and the conditions necessary for change have been established, two frameworks support the process. The first is a learning framework centered on what students learn, the second is a conceptual framework enabling the detailed design of learning activities which implies a change in attitude towards teaching. Before any curriculum can undergo innovation; there should be a rationale for it. In addition, there is bound to be pre-analysis of the existing one. There are strategies that are technologically related which can replace practices that do not merge with contemporary educational system.

Importantly, teachers should also undergo changes going by the various sophisticated methods of teaching. Lecturers are expected to implement the changed curriculum, thus, they are supposed to be kept abreast all methods and strategies that will make innovation worthwhile.

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