

Curriculum And Teaching: Interrogating The Interconnection Among The Curricula, The Syllabi, Scheme Of Work And Lesson Plans In Effective Teaching And Learning

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Abstract: This paper explores curriculum and teaching: interrogating the interconnection among the curricula, the syllabi, scheme of work and lesson plans in effective teaching and learning. Cognizant of the truism that teaching is at the core of educational planning and thus remains a factor in actuating effective education outcomes; recognition is also accorded to the imperative of the curriculum as another component in educational planning and by the same token a composite to effective teaching and learning. The importance of good teaching notwithstanding, its outcomes may be far from the ideal. This may be blamable on improper linkages and understanding of the relevant teaching resources. Evidently, some teaching personnel across the board neglect to make adequate use of or are seemingly ignorant of the existence of such resource for teaching purposes. This indeed has far reaching consequences on the attainment of educational goals. Worried by this scenario the paper attempts to interrogate the interconnection among the curricula, the syllabi, scheme of work and lesson plans in effective and quality teaching and learning. The paper succinctly elaborates on these concepts and further explores their linkages in the quest for improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Keyword: Curriculum, Teaching, Interrogating the Interconnection, Curricula, the Syllabi, Scheme of Work, Lesson Plans, Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world and everything that abounds therein is changing rapidly; and the education system is not left out. Therefore, it is not in doubt that the need for better training of more responsive and thoughtful individuals in various subject areas. Tangential to the above is also the need to evolve and re-evolve curriculum that is capable of driving and sustaining the change. In the light of the above, the curriculum remains a driving force for effective teaching and learning.

Effective teaching and learning does not take place in isolation. It is a process that requires proper selection and arrangement of the teaching items or materials. This implies a process of selecting and sequencing of learning contents and methodologies, using the curriculum, syllabus, scheme of work and lesson plan as veritable resources for actualizing

effective and efficient teaching and learning. Thus, according to Wikipedia (2017) the distinction among these educational terms is largely on the degree of generalness, specificity and the stage at which it occurs.

This paper sought to explore for the purpose of interrogating among the curriculum, the syllabus, the scheme of work and the lesson plan at secondary school level. It argues that curriculum, syllabus, schemes of work and lesson plans are important factors at all levels of education but more precisely the secondary school level. Nevertheless, the difference among them is not usually clearly comprehended by good number of teachers at that level of education, which in the view of this writer is worrisome. The remaining part of this paper will therefore provide insights into these subtopics for better understanding and actualization of effective teaching and learning.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is substantial evidence to show that most secondary school did not pass through Colleges of Education and thus do possess basic teaching qualifications. Consequently, such teachers could not distinguish between the terms curriculum and syllabus. Extant literatures have not provided enough description to distinguish between curriculum and syllabus. Reading through the works of Smith, et al (1957); Good (1959); Taba (1962); Foshay (1969); Tanner and Tanner (1975); and Connelly and Clandinin, (1988), one gets the impression that curriculum is synonym to syllabus. Yet, in Nigeria, as in the United Kingdom, curriculum and syllabus are two different though related concepts. Bearing in mind that effective teaching will beget effective learning, it is imperative to explore the interlinks amongst curriculum, syllabus and the other related terms that form the basis of this paper.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper sought to expose the concepts and interrogate the linkages amongst curriculum, syllabus, and scheme of work and lesson plan as veritable resources of effective teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools.

II. METHODOLOGY

The term methodology describes the choices researchers make about cases to study, how data is gathered, the types of data analysis among others in planning and executing a research study. The methods can be quantitative, qualitative or both techniques depending on the research objectives. In this study, exploratory research design was employed. The goal of exploratory design is to discover ideas and insights (Eboh, 2009; Shafi, 2011). This study employed the exploratory design in order to provide a better understanding of the relevant concepts of the topic. In addition to the exploratory design, this study employed qualitative method in its data collection and analyses. Qualitative research emphasizes meanings (words) rather than frequencies and distributions (numbers) when collecting and analyzing data. Primarily, qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret the meaning of situations or events from the perspectives of the people involved and as understood by them (in this relying absolutely on documented evidence). It is generally inductive rather than deductive in its approach, that is, it generates theory from interpretation of the evidence, albeit against a theoretical background. Thus qualitative measures are often binary in that they are interested in the presence or absence of phenomena.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory that guided this study is the curriculum theory. Curriculum theory perceives learning as planned and guided. The argument is that for learning to occur, the process has to specify in advance what it seeks to achieve and the process thereof. This fits well with both the title and content of this paper. The paper argues that the relationship among the

curriculum, the syllabus, the schemes of work and the lesson plan is well explained in a stages or process format in which one comes after another in a formal school setup. In fact the contemporary curriculum theory and practice emerged within the formal school setup (Smith, 2000).

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

In doing justice to this paper, a review of relevant concepts of the study is needful here.

CURRICULUM

From the onset it is essential to understand the meaning of curriculum. According to Hlebowitsh (2004) the term curriculum is derived from the Latin word "Currere." Currere, which means to run / to proceed. By this token, the word curriculum refers to the 'course of deeds and experiences through which children grow to become mature adults'. In the context of this paper therefore curriculum is taken to be a well-defined and prescribed course of studies which students must complete for them to pass a given level of education. It is also referred to as a predetermined subject matter in a planned sequence of experiences leading to certifiable completion. From the above point of view, curriculum is quintessential for effective teaching and learning. The curriculum is like a compass that directs the activities of teaching personnel in actuating the objectives of the education system at various levels.

Extant literatures have not clearly provided a line of demarcation between curriculum and syllabus. To buttress this standpoint, it is necessary to review some meanings of curriculum. Following are some sample definitions of curriculum from famous classical American scholars. Smith, et al (2017) defines a curriculum as a "sequence of potential experiences set up in the school for the purpose of disciplining children and youth in group ways of thinking and acting". Also Good (2017) defines it as "an over-all plan of the content that the school offers the student by way of qualifying him/her for graduation or certification or for entrance into a professional or vocational field". In his submission, Taba (1912) perceives curriculum as a plan for learning; while Foshay (2016) regards curriculum as all the experiences a learner has under the guidance of the school. Drawing from the above definitions, certain keywords are identified, such as school, learner, and experiences. This simply indicates the environment, subject and object required for effective teaching and learning. At the centre of all these is the teacher.

On the other hand, some scholars have defined syllabus from different perspectives, which clearly reveals its distinction from curriculum with reference to the definitions above presented. Allen (2014) asserts that the term syllabus refers to "the content or subject matter of an individual subject, whereas the term curriculum stands for the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system". What this implies is that the syllabus is a microcosm of the macrocosm called curriculum. The difference lies in the content and objective; syllabus been subsumed in the curriculum.

The curriculum therefore embodies general educational activities and goals intended to be realized using the education system as a vehicle and for the overall development of the society. No wonder Wisegeek (2014) sees curricula as guidelines prepared for educators prescribing what they need to teach students in the education systems. He further adds that “curricula not only give outlines of the subjects that need to be taught, but they also give teaching and learning methods to ensure that students have indeed learned the necessary materials”. Adding to the above line of thought, Hlebowitsh (2004), sees curricula as sets of courses, inclusive of their content, offered at a school or university, while Dictionary.com (accessed on 14 October 2014) defines curriculum as “the sum total of courses of study given in schools, colleges, universities; regular or particular courses of studies in schools, colleges, and so on”.

Across countries the curriculum is used to provide for the missing links in terms of the knowledge and manpower needs of the society and to address its developmental requirements. Curriculum is thus the total experience of the learner as illustrated by Van den Akker (2003). Curriculum is thus, not only the content selected and delivered, but also the planned and unplanned activities in which individuals’ participate as students (Khwaja, et al, 2014).

Below is the summary of the purposes served by the curriculum as illustrated by Hlebowitsh (2004);

- ✓ refer to all courses offered at a school;
- ✓ refer to a defined and prescribed course of studies;
- ✓ list course of studies which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education; and
- ✓ discuss how the sum of lessons and teachings will help students learn the basics (Hlebowitsh, 2004).

Drawing from the above exposition, in the Nigerian context, curriculum is relevant at national and institutional levels. At the former level it is prescribed by the government through the NERDC operating under the Federal Ministry of Education. At the institutional level, such as secondary school or university level, it would refer to all subjects and courses offered by the educational institutions including extra-curricula and guidance and counseling activities in Nigeria. With the issues raised above, we are predisposed at this point to further examine the meaning and content of syllabus as germane to this study.

SYLLABUS

As earlier alluded in this paper, the syllabus is a micro to the macro called curriculum. The syllabus is therefore narrower in content as it addresses specific themes and objectives of each subject area. It is also worthy of note that the design and development of the national syllabus for each subject area is usually prepared at the national level by the authorized Federal Government agency while the schools remain the implementation agency. In Nigeria it remains the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Education to prepare the syllabus for all secondary schools.

According to Okai (2010), the term syllabus refers to an outline or list of topics students are supposed study in a given year or specified period of learning. Syllabi are therefore brief outlines of lessons, or aspects of the curriculum that list topics

to be taught in a given course or programme. These outlines of syllabi guide teachers on the extent of work involved in given classes. In addition to the above, the syllabus also gives generalized information on grading policy, grading rubric, late work policy, locations and times, other contact information for teachers (phone or email), textbooks, assigned reading books, calculators, tutor locations, resource centers, important dates in course such as exams and paper due-dates, tips for succeeding in mastering course content such as study habits and expected time allotment, necessary pre-requisites or co-requisites to current course, safety rules if appropriate, and objectives of the course (Okai, 2010),.

When planning for the national syllabus, planning authorities have to consider the following and many other related factors:

- ✓ the philosophy of the nation;
- ✓ the age ability of the learner;
- ✓ learning items and content;
- ✓ teachers and other resource persons; and
- ✓ sequential arrangement of learning material (Okai, 2010).

The above identified points clearly show the specific import of syllabus, which makes it a subset derivative of the curriculum. The implication therefore is that the syllabus is subsumed in the curriculum just as the scheme of work is subsumed in the syllabus in the same continuum. At this juncture, it is imperative that we progress by looking into the next important term of this paper, which is the scheme of work.

SCHEMES OF WORK

Okai (2010) addressed the issue of scheme of work especially at secondary school level. He argues that the teacher is primarily involved at the level of the scheme of work, unit and lesson planning; whereas he is not directly involved in curriculum and syllabus preparation. The scheme of work is the starting point of the implementation process of the curriculum and syllabus whereby each subject teacher attempts to break down the broad contents into achievable and realizable topics to be covered per lesson per week with the relevant activities therein. As such, a scheme of work describes the content and learning experiences that should be treated every term of the academic year (Okai, 2010). The importance of the scheme of work to the teacher therefore cannot be over-emphasized as he guides him in planning instruction or what to teach at every point in time.

According to Okai (2010) the scheme of work is aimed at realizing these goals:

- ✓ guide to the teacher;
- ✓ organisational convenience; and
- ✓ keeping records of what is taught and what ought to be taught (Okai, 2010).

The importance of the scheme of work is that it aids in the implementation of instruction as well as in ensuring that the curriculum and syllabus are adequately covered as at when due. It also provides the needed direction on what needs to be done at any time of the week and month of the term and academic session. It is an aid to effective supervision of the teacher’s ability to cover the required topic or units of instruction. With the above in mind we now proceed to briefly

explore the last concept in the context of this paper, which is the lesson plan itself.

LESSON PLAN

In simple term, the lesson plan is generally taking to be the lowest or most specific level of instructional plans available to the teacher for effective teaching and learning outcomes. In the enlightened submission of Okai (2010) “the lesson plan is derived from the analysis of the scheme of work/unit plan. He further explains that, “when the unit plan is broken down into smaller topics and sub-topics, we have the lesson topics, which can be used to plan a lesson” (Okai, 2010). Relying on the evidences in Okai, it is apt to infer that a lesson plan is the breakdown of the subject –matter and learning experiences that the teacher will communicate to the learners with details of how instruction will take place within a lesson period. Consequently, it is absurd for the teacher to teach without first planning what to teach and how to teach it. This planning process justifies the saying that if the students have not learnt it implies that the teacher has not taught well. To teach well requires proper lesson planning.

- ✓ No wonder Taruvinga and Moyo (2000) observe that a lesson plan supplies guidance and feelings of confidence to the teacher in the art of teaching. Therefore, if lessons are well planned, both teaching and learning becomes simplified and effective. According to Okai (2010), a lesson plan is useful for the following reasons:
- ✓ the teacher follows correct steps and procedures in teaching;
- ✓ time is not wasted in the class since the period of one lesson must be used to cover the day’s lesson topic;
- ✓ meaningful objectives are pursued in the lesson;
- ✓ activities are related to the content and objective;
- ✓ instructional materials are adequately selected and utilised;
- ✓ proper evaluation procedures and tools are used;
- ✓ a substitute teacher can use the lesson plan to hold on the class; and
- ✓ the most important content is identified for learners (Okai, 2010).

In the light of the above, it has been established that there is an inevitable link among curricula, syllabi, schemes of work and lesson plans. Even though they are different concepts with different meanings, they all operate on the same continuum. The underlying significance of them all has been to aid the teacher in the realization of effective and quality teaching and learning outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION

From onset this paper set a goal, which is to expose the concepts and interrogate the linkages amongst curriculum, syllabus, and scheme of work and lesson plan as veritable resources of effective teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools. Relying on qualitative analysis of documented evidences this paper has been able to bring to the fore the meanings of these concepts. The reason for this is to eliminate the barrier of ignorance among so many secondary

school teachers in the proper understanding of the meanings of these various but inter-related concepts.

This paper has succeeded in achieving its goal by technically presenting and addressing the concepts in the order of their scope and content, from the broadest to the narrowest or most specific. In the submission of this paper, these four concepts form a continuum in actuating effective and efficient teaching and learning and making the education system result oriented to say the least. In the final analysis note must be taken concerning the central role of teachers as veritable resource in translating the curriculum and syllabus to specific learning outcomes.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper thus recommends as follows:

- ✓ There is need to revisit the existing Colleges of Education training strategies and programmes for student teachers to ensure that they produce teachers who know their subject contents.
- ✓ The need to fully professionalize teaching should be emphasized and realistic steps to that effect should be put in place
- ✓ There is need for education policy makers in Nigeria to consider incorporating the teachers input in curriculum design and formulation.
- ✓ Motivation for teaching personnel especially at secondary school level should be giving more attention to boost their general performance on the job.

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