

INTEGRATING INFORMATION HANDLING SKILLS INTO THE CURRICULUM: A PANACEA FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) organised activities leading to the revision of the School curricula in 1997. Three years after, the implementation of the school curricula has continued to raise a number of issues, among which are low cognitive achievement of children as demonstrated in their poor performance in public examinations. In addition requests for inclusion of new materials in the school curricula have been proposed. This paper proposes the integration of Library and Information Science Education into the secondary school curriculum as the panacea for educational reforms.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, since independence, has done some work in the area of socio-economic planning. This has always been in the form of five - year development plans (Obanya, 1984). Nigeria has had five national development plans since its existence as an entity. While these plans had spelt out in some detail the development target for various sections of the economy, very scanty attention had been paid to the education sector. The introduction of national curricula into Nigerian schools came in two phases: Primary School Curricula in 1982, and Secondary School curricula in 1985. In 1997, the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), organised the first ever National Feedback Conference and identified the major practices, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of school curricula in Nigeria (1982-1997); to identify the key problems and threats to curriculum implementation in the schools and suggest ways of achieving the goals and objectives of intended curricula contents against the background of past experiences and future expectation in the schools and experiences and future expectations. This paper sets out to review curricula reforms in secondary schools in Nigeria, discuss recent trends in the international school library scene and proffer suggestions/strategies for the integration of Information Handling skills into the Nigerian secondary schools curriculum.

CURRICULA REFORMS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

The 1969 National Curriculum Conference held in Lagos was, according to

Professor Fafunwa, the first national attempt to change the colonial orientation of the Nigeria educational system and promote national consciousness and self-reliance through the educational processes (Fafunwa, 1997). It was the conference that proposed the complete departure from the erst while British system with the recommendation of a six - year primary school course followed by a six-year secondary school course divided into a three - year junior secondary course, and lastly a four-year university education, (Fafunwa, 1997) i.e. A 6-3-3-4 plan. The conference was reminded that the old system, otherwise known as the 6-5-2-3 a 6-5-4 which was in vogue in the country for over a hundred years had many defects. The old system was largely the a "grammar" school type with undue emphasis on rote learning; it was examination centred. It was devoid of technological skills necessary for industrial development; and it did not sufficiently prepare the young for industrial development; and it did not sufficiently prepare the young for citizenship roles in a newly independent nation. The 6-3-3-4 system was therefore a grand design fashioned for the effective implementation of all the principles enumerated in the decree establishing it: self-realization, better human relations, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress.

Since the production of the school curricula between 1976 and 1985 for the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools, implementation has been fraught with problems. Apart from the delay in developing all the curricular, installation in the school system was commenced for most subjects without any pilot testing. Some orientation workshop organised for teachers in different parts of the curricular to them were not replicated, as planned, at the state and local government levels to produce the multiplying effect expected. As the economy deteriorated, input into the education system became adversely affected, and in particular, instructional materials were inadequately supplied and used by teachers and learners. Among other things the curriculum became a target for criticism, particularly as learner's cognitive achievements declined from their poor performances in Public examinations: and requests and directives were made to curriculum developers to provide for new subjects and / or themes felt to be more relevant and appropriate. In 1991, a school curriculum review conference was held in Kaduna under the auspices of the implementation committee, National Policy of Education. A comprehensive review of school curricula was undertaken, based on commissioned studies. At the end of this conference, it was agreed that the next stage was the actual review of each curriculum content in schools. In response to this, NERDC made a comprehensive proposal for the revision of school curricular in 1992. In collaboration with other bodies, activities, leading to the revision exercise started in January, 1997, with a seminar organised by the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI) on redesigning school curricular in Nigeria.

The second activity of the Council in the direction of revising curricular occurred in June, 1997, when it collaborated with the Curriculum Organisation of Nigeria (CON) to host a conference of revisiting the 6-3-3-4 system in Education. In November, 1997 "An Assessment of National School Curricula" a formative evaluation was carried out of NERDC. Fafunwa at this 1997 conference rated the achievement of the 6-3-3-4 system by accomplishment 30% (Adeniyi 1999).

The Junior Secondary School is of three year duration and is the pivot on which the 6-3-3-4 system rotates. It is considered the most critical because it is the testing ground for the innovation or revolution that was envisaged in the Nigeria Education system. The specific objective of the junior secondary school education, is to develop in the children, manipulative skills, otherwise known as manual dexterity, inventiveness, respect for dignity of labour and above all, a healthy attitude towards things technical. At the same time, the children will be exposed to the usual basic academic courses.

The senior secondary level of three-year duration which is comprehensive in nature is designed to broaden the students knowledge and outlook, and should go beyond just having certificate with 5 or 6 ordinary level.

It has two components:

- (a) Core subjects such as arts and science, agricultural science and vocational subjects and
- (b) Elective which comprise a range of subjects which are vocational oriented e.g. commerce, short-hand, wood and metal work, electronics, auto-mechanics, arts, music and the like.

The difficulty in performing the balancing act of broadening the student's knowledge and outlook has been some of the short-comings of the curriculum, but none of the inputs towards curricula evaluation since 1967 has considered the Library media factor and inculcation of information handling skills in secondary school children as a strategy to enhance children's ability to learn, acquire knowledge, assimilate it, analyse critically appraise and come up with an appreciation and understanding of the knowledge acquired.

EMERGING TRENDS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LIBRARY SCIENCE.

Two studies have attempted to look at recent developments in school libraries from an international perspective. The first, recent advances in school librarianship by Carroll (1981) reviewed the decades of the 1960s and 70s, while the second, School Libraries: International Developments, a Second edition edited by Lowries and Nagakura (1991) continues the review through the 1980s. In looking at the profession as it developed in the 60s and 70s Carroll (1981) identified three significant advances:

- (a) the tremendous development of school librarianship during the period, both in terms of the growth of school libraries and recognition of their role.
- (b) the trend towards involvement of school libraries in co-operation and networking, and
- (c) a role change for school librarians, with increasing attention to the educational role of the school.

Lourie (1989), summarizing the findings of their international study a decade later, found many of the achievements cited by Gilman of Carrol (1987) to be so. These include the legislation implementing school libraries, development through funding, advances in library education, setting of standards and guidelines, expansion of collections to include audio - visual media and the concept of source centre. The library therefore became an integral part of the total school curriculum and educational programme. At the same time the development of new technology, especially computers, had a profound input on library services. Emphasis on library education became tailored towards inculcation of information handling skills, reading guidance and literacy support. This became necessary because studies showed that secondary school children need expose to a variety of materials for them to read the fourth stage in learning required for secondary education. Secondary school education requires a variety of sources of knowledge, and formats necessary for knowledge, variety of media presentations and formats necessary for knowledge acquisition.

The library is the only learning agency that makes this variety of information and access to them available in an organised form. The main purpose of this method of education is the acquisition of independent learning skills (Ogunsheipe, 1993).

THE INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION HANDLING SKILLS INTO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

Knowledge is now presented in various complicating formats and packages-books, films, filmstrips, slides, compact disc and many other storage devices available in modern libraries and information centres. It has therefore become necessary to give a user education programme to children in secondary schools to equip them with the different information handling skills. Researches (Palsson, 1987; Wallen 1987; Lowrie 1988) have shown that access to and interaction with the library system improves the child's learning skill and academic performance. This paper thus posits that the inculcation of Information Handling skills in secondary school children is the panacea for educational reforms in secondary schools. This is because the National Policy on Education 1998, 3rd edition has the main curricular objectives of secondary school education as "to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves." The acquisition of Information Handling Skills is the only curriculum input that can cater for the varying learning styles or correct learning deficiencies in students and thus making them emerge as self-reliant Nigerians.

This paper proposes a thematic approach to curriculum content selection for library and Information Science which Bajah (1997) argued could solve the problem of overloading of content, inadequacy in pedagogically associated issues and curriculum invalidity in terms of teachability and learnability.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION.

Library and information science education is the study of organised collections of books and other non-book materials. Through this study, a person acquires an

approved skill, standard or level of attainment for maximum utilization of information resources in skill with which a learner, student, pupil or researcher of information must possess before being considered information literate. The Information Handling skills include correct perception of information; knowledge of information resources; knowledge of search strategies, ability to evaluate information; ability to make useful notes and ability to make meaningful representation of information acquires.

General Objectives

The general objectives of the secondary library and Information Science Education Programme would be to:

- a) provide a meaningful and relevant knowledge of library and information science.
- b) foster the ability to apply the Information Handling Skills to everyday life.
- c) Enhance the development of acquiring and independent research.
- d) Encourage the development of good reading habits.

Theme 1

The Library in Education Concepts

- i) What is a library?
- ii) Libraries and National Policy on Education
- iii) Library and Educational Process
- iv) Need for Instruction in the use of the library
- v) Use of library and the National Curriculum

Theme 2

Types of libraries and their functions Concept

- i) National Libraries
- ii) Public libraries
- iii) Academic libraries
- iv) Special libraries
- v) Family and special libraries

Theme 3

Library and Information Resources

Concept:

- i) Books
- ii) Serials
- iii) Audio-visual materials
- vi) Electronic storage devices
- v) Reference materials.

Theme 4

Organisation of Library and Information Material

Concept:

- i) Physical Organisation
- ii) Grouping and Description of information materials
- iii) The catalogue
- iv) Introduction of classification schemes

Theme 5

Information Handling skills and Reading Habits

Concept.

- i) Perception of information
- ii) Information search characteristics of users
- iii) Information search strategies
- iv) Notes making techniques
- vi) Evaluation of information

Theme 6

Information Technologies

Concept

- i) Components of a computer
- ii) Communication technologies
- iii) Electronic storage devices
- iv) The internet

CONCLUSION

The integration of Information Handling skills via library and information science education into the secondary school curriculum would provide the much sought after reforms in the secondary school education and launch Nigerian children into the 21st century.

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