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Framework on Curriculum Needs for Enhancing Basic Education in Primary Schools

Udouchukwu, A. N.

Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe
Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

The study tried to development a frame work on curriculum challenging need areas for enhancing basic education. The design of the study was research and development (R&D). The study sampled 140 beginning teachers 520 veteran teachers, 108 market union executives, 6 traditional rulers, 114 senior officers from State Ministry of Education and 15 schools in the six education zones. Two questionnaires, focus group discussion and interview schedule were used for data collection. Percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test were used for analyzing the research question, and hypothesis respectively. Content analysis was used for analyzing focus group discussion and interview. The challenging needs (baseline data) were used to develop the objectives, proposed intervention, and activities in the framework. The major findings showed that curriculum content did not contain more practical and functional subjects, daily balance school meal, medical services, curriculum support materials. There were also overloaded

curriculum content; and non-availability of educational evaluation tools (Standardized tests).

Key words: Intervention, framework, curriculum, basic education, curriculum needs, challenging needs, capacity development

Introduction

For children's development to be actualized, there are certain expectations within the school environment among which is a rich curriculum to enhance quality academic achievement. Jameson, Vernon, Rabelia, Milton, Montaigne, Bacon and Comenius (1960) referred to as 'Realists' advocated that for quality academic achievement to be realized, education must be concerned with all of life's realities. They believed in practical education and that evaluation techniques need to be aligned with the stated objectives in the school curriculum. Curriculum should be seen as a means for ensuring the vision of any state. Taylor and Richards (1979) defined curriculum as the course of study to be followed in acquiring an education. Moorse (2001) defined curriculum as the skills, tests, and behaviour that school personnel wants their students to learn. Offorma (2002) viewed curriculum as organized knowledge presented to learners in a school which covers every element in the learning. Curriculum in this work is seen as all the educational or learning experiences provided to the children to enable them function effectively in the society within the limits of their capacity.

But it is sad to note that primary education in the state has been dominated by overloaded and unmodified curriculum, as a result, practical subjects are not given the right place in the school activities. The teachers perceive this overload to be the result of strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and the imperative to improve children's performance in the common entrance examinations (into secondary schools) for English, Mathematics, verbal and quantitative aptitude tests; also First School Living Certificate Examination against increasingly higher annual state goals.

Glewwe (2002) and Fiske (2002) observed that unmodified curriculum could hold back learning achievement thereby impeding the objectives of basic education. This implies that the success of the present Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in the country will be determined to a large extent by the preparedness of various governments to intervene in this and other unforeseen problems in the implementation of the scheme. However, the approach in the present study is that intervention framework is an essential

ingredient in enhancing basic education in the state. An intervention in education according to White, White and Matsakis (1998) is a deliberate process by which change is introduced in the system to ameliorate low standards of literacy and numeracy in order to increase the pace of learning and teaching. While council of the International Bureau of Education (2005) stated that framework is designed to be a living document, expected to change over time as the vision, policy goals, principles, performance measures and outcomes are implemented and evaluated. An intervention is a deliberate process by which change is introduced into people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour (White, White & Matsakis, 1998). Birmingham City Council (2006) noted that framework for intervention helps teachers tackle concerns about students' behaviour in schools, using school improvement, staff empowerment and environmental change. The framework for intervention according to Wikipedia (2006:31) is an approach to dealing with behaviour concerns in school and nurseries. It concentrates on changing the environment rather than the child. This means that all the factors that affect the student or child's behaviour in the classroom or around the school can be analyzed. Evaluation according to Wikipedia has shown that changing something in the environment for the better, almost always improves the behaviour of the child and also others in the class.

The universalization of basic education has been the prime target of educational endeavours in the whole of Nigeria from the middle of seventies – 1976 when the UPE scheme was launched in the country (Iyorchia, 1993). The programme succeeded in increasing access to basic education and doubled the school enrolment in four years (Nigeria First Organisation (NFO), 2003). Observations by the Federal Government of Nigeria/United Nations International children's Fund (FGN/UNICEF) showed dramatic increase in the number of primary schools from 20,000 in 1975 to over 37,000 in 1982/83 with the result that the nature of school curriculum and lack of implementation of practical subjects did not promote quality teaching and learning, thereby affecting negatively the success of basic education in the state. Nwana (2000) defined basic education as fundamental, foundation, bottom-line education upon which every other education whether formal, informal or non-formal can be built and without which any education structures erected will not have chances of success. FGN (2002) in line with the above definition stated that basic education is the foundation for sustainable life-long learning. It also provides reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Still eager to actualize universal education, Nigeria again embraced the UBE scheme which was launched in 1999 (NFO, 2003). UBE according to Olubodun, Uwaya and Ogbonna (2002) is a policy reform measure by the federal government aimed at reforming the basic education sector in Nigeria. Like UPE, NFO (2003) noted that UBE provides free and universal education, and is also an improvement (intervention) on UPE in a number of ways. Unlike UPE, UBE is meant to be a compulsory program for all children between the ages of six and 15 (from primary to junior secondary school (JSS) levels. The intervention program also devoted attention to producing teachers and expanding the number of schools in the country (NFO, 2003). Puddick (2005) noted that interventions are usually aimed at remedying particular weaknesses. One of the weaknesses of the past education for All (EFA) program in Nigeria had been identified by Nigeria: Report (2000) as non-relevant curriculum.

Ivowi (1999) also noted that the problems with the present curriculum are overloading of content, inadequacy in pedagogically associated issues, and curriculum invalidity in terms of teach ability and learn ability. Tahir (2001) noted that the problems associated with curriculum are inflexibility, non-availability of funds for the Nigeria Education Research and Development council (NERDC) to review curriculum on regular basis; limited capacity-building for curriculum experts; and inability to respond to the need of the immediate environment. This is supportive of NFO (2003) which noted that some aspects of the country's school curriculum are obsolete and irrelevant. Among other problems are non-availability of education evaluation tools, absence of daily balance school meal, and short term school meal. Quality curriculum is very critical to the success of any education programme.

Callahan (2000) noted that curriculum and instruction are the heart of a programme. And Fordham (1992) observed that theory, research evidence and practice suggested investing in the curriculum and pupils' learning capacity for improving learning. Also Office for Standards in Education (2002) suggested that curriculum should aim to be broad by bringing all pupils into contact with an agreed range of areas of learning and experience. It should be balanced in that it allows the adequate development of each area. In addition, each major component should have breadth, balance and relevance and should incorporate a progression in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. It implies that the success of the present UBE scheme in the country will be determined to a large extent by the

preparedness of various governments to intervene in this and other unforeseen problems in the implementation of the scheme.

A well designed curriculum is quality oriented. Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development (FMEYR) 1993:156) noted that good curriculum has the following features:

- It should satisfy the philosophy and educational purposes of the school and the nation.
 - It should be developed from “grassroots” level and include parents and community contributions.
 - It should make allowance for the special education needs of pupils.
 - It should take into consideration the culture, customs and traditions, both of the country and the region.
- It should provide practical educational experiences.

However, the approach in this present study is that intervention framework is an essential ingredient in enhancing basic education in the state. The program goal for this study is to provide a developmental appropriate curriculum that will be comprehensive, with unloaded content, and involve more practical subjects that will be implemented; nutrition and healthy living in school; extending the school year to increase instructional time and accommodate more practical subjects.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Identify curriculum need areas for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools.
2. Develop intervention framework for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools.

Research questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the curriculum need areas for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools?

2. What are the specific challenges for intervention framework for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of veteran teachers and beginning teachers on curriculum needs for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools.

Method

The design used for this study is research and Development (R & D). The study used proportionate sample of 15 nursery/primary schools from 6 education zones namely Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Ogidi, Onitsha and Otuocha, and 18 markets in the zones, all in Anambra State of Nigeria. Proportionate sampling technique was used in the study to reflect all heterogeneous subgroups in the same proportion in which they existed in the population. A total of 660 teachers comprising of 140 beginning teachers and 540 veteran teachers, 108 market union executives, 6 traditional rulers and 114 senior officers from the State Ministry of Education were sampled. The study consisted of two parts. Part I asked for some basic demographic information. Part 2 was directed at personal knowledge of the curriculum need areas.

To generate comprehensive information and facts relevant to development of the intervention program framework, the questionnaires designated “baseline data tool” (BDT) questionnaire, Intervention Framework Tool (IFT), Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and Interview Schedule (IS) were employed in data collection. The instruments were designed by the researcher to elicit information on the issues raised concerning Anambra State Primary school System. There are two questionnaires. The first designated BDT has 19 items structured on a five point weighted scale (Likert Scale) of strongly Agreed (SA:5); Agree (A:4); Undecided (U:3); Disagree (D:2); and Strongly Disagree (SD:1). The second IFT was certified by 7 experts in the field. Likert scale was used because the nature of items in the instrument has varying opinions.

The administration of the questionnaires was personally done, with two assistants. The respondents were given time to fill the questionnaire since the administration was carried during working periods. The researcher with the assistants went back and collected them to ensure high return rate. The

number of administered questionnaires was 700 but 660 was collected showing return rate of 94.3 per cent.

The instruments were subjected to face and content validation. The first questionnaire used to collect baseline data was validated by five experts and the second one by seven experts. Some items during validation were modified. The final scale consisted of 19 items for B.DT which was originally 25, and 5 items for IFT which was originally 8.

Data were analyzed using percentage, mean scores, standard deviation, and t-test. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance. The challenging needs (baseline data) were used to develop the objective, proposed intervention, and activities in the framework that will mitigate the identified problems. The Likert-type scale was assigned numbers ranging from 5(SA) to 1(SD). Thus, the mean score is

$$\frac{5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{5} = \frac{15}{5} = 3.0.$$

The mean was taken to be 3.5 which is greater than the lower limit of 4 which corresponds with agree. This means that any factor or variable in the BDT questionnaire with a mean of 3.5 and above was regarded as positive or accepted, while others with mean below 3.5 was regarded as negative or not accepted for the research questions.

The second questionnaire (IFT) has 5 items structured on a three point weighted scale of appropriate (A:3), undecided (U:2), and inappropriate (IA:1). Thus the mean score is

$$\frac{3 + 2 + 1}{3} = \frac{6}{3} = 2.$$

But the mean was taken to be 2.5 which is greater than the lower limit of 3 that corresponds with agree. Any mean below 2.5 was regarded as negative or not appropriate.

The hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance at 658 degree of freedom (df). The null hypothesis (Ho) was accepted when the calculated t-value was equal or greater than critical value at .05 level of significance at 658 degree of freedom. On the other hand, the Ho was rejected when the

calculated t-value was less than critical value at the same level of significance and degree of freedom.

Focus group discussion was held to elicit qualitative information from parents/guardians (ages 20 – 40) of school children who did not participate in filling the questionnaires. There were 18 markets visited from the 6 zones. The participants were 6 in each group, and there were 18 groups totaling 108 participants who have school aged children to supply adequate information on the areas that need intervention in primary schools. These were market traders' executives who were informed in person (personalized invitation) before the actual discussion. The discussion questions which were open-ended were based on the research questions, which were partly set questions and free discussion.

Interview was used to collect data from 114 State Ministry of Education Staff on grade level 12 and above; 6 traditional rulers – one from the headquarter of each zone through a face-to-face interview focusing on a specific issue. The interview schedule was based on the research questions. Interview permits flexibility or adaptability and allows for the collection of in-depth information from the respondents on any issues especially issues that ordinarily the interview would not supply in a questionnaire.

The data on table I showed that Onitsha zone has the highest percentage of respondents (26.1%). The table also showed that veteran teachers have greater percentage of respondents (86.4%) in Awka education zone as against the beginning teachers with 13.6 per cent. Results from the table showed that 350 respondents have NCE as their highest educational qualification (50.0%) while 7 (1.1%) have Ph.D as their highest.

Research question I

What are the curriculum need areas for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary Schools?

Looking at the data on table 2, items 6(4.4) and 9(3.98) have the highest and least mean scores respectively which are above 3.5. This shows that the whole respondents agreed on the curriculum needs for enhancing basic education in the nursery/primary school system. There is need also for intervention in those areas.

Qualitative analysis on research question I

Focus group discussion and interview question guides and results

1. What are the curriculum needs necessary for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary Schools?

Results from the respondents

The people developing the curriculum should make it more explicit and simple for the implementers (teachers) for proper articulation. On the other hand, implementers should be involved in the development for it will help them understand better. Teachers are not properly guided. Therefore, teachers' guide should be incorporated in the development of curriculum. Children lack respect for elders, so curriculum should include cultural heritage of the people such as manner of dressing, greeting, how to address and obey the elders. Curriculum should also include manner of dressing, practical agriculture, preparation for marriage, craft of the locality, medical services, and nutritional services. Curriculum should be rich in content, with quality teaching materials for effective teaching and learning. The language for children's and teachers' books should be simple for easy understanding.

2. Who are involved in the curriculum development or design?

There were various answers such as governments, teachers, and few of them answered professionals from National Education Research Development Council (NERDC).

3. Which area of curriculum intervention do you have need for?

The responses were that curriculum content should be in consonance with the aims and objectives of basic education. It was specified in some responses that one of the implications of basic education is its special attention to special groups (the gifted, handicapped, street children, etc), therefore the need to provide rich and balanced curriculum for such groups. There is also the need for provision of textbooks alongside the curriculum; special learning equipments and facilities, co-curricula activities, recreational services, referral services, guidance and counselling, etc. Only one stakeholder at State Primary Education board (SPEB) was in opposition towards intervention program in the system, but his argument had no base.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of Veteran Teachers (VTs) and Beginning Teachers (BTs) on curriculum needs for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools.

Table 4 showed that the null hypothesis is upheld, because at the 658 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance the critical/table t values is 1.9 which is greater than the calculated t value of 1.36. Accordingly, the veteran teachers and beginning teachers did not significantly differ in their mean ratings of curriculum needs for enhancing basic education in nursery/primary schools.

Discussion

A positive finding was made concerning curriculum needs. The findings advocated for quality curriculum that is rich in content, in practical and functional subjects with curriculum support materials. It also advocated for longer school year to improve instructional times, accommodating more practical and functional subjects and provision of daily balanced school meal, among others, and as much as possible avoid over loaded content. The findings confirmed the results of (Adeniyi, 1999; Ivowi, 1995, 1997, 1999; Onugha, 1999) who noted that over loading of curriculum content is one of the issues or serious problems facing primary education. The findings of Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb and Wishner (1994), and Moorese (2001) also maintained that comprehensive curriculum should address the needs of children in both acquisition of basic academic skills and adaptive behaviour.

There was a consensus opinion on the need for adequate framework developed from the challenging needs/problems facing primary education system in the state. This is supportive of Alberta Government (2005:1) whose framework objectives were to promote the adaptation of content to include universal concerns in curricula; and also to strengthen national capacities of different protagonists at the national, local and classroom levels. Alberta Government noted that the framework is designed to be a living document expected to change over time as the vision, policy goals, principles, performance measures and outcomes are implemented and evaluated. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the framework will help stakeholders identify their role in helping the state and learners achieve their educational goals and will help guide planning and evaluating learner programming. This is in line with the observation of Birmingham City Council (2006) that

framework is responsible for major improvements in schools' approaches to behaviour and the environments schools create to ensure order, discipline and good relationships. The findings also showed inadequate child-centred curriculum and advocated for child-centered curriculum among others, to involve varieties of activities and reducing number of curriculum content to a manageable size.

Conclusion and recommendation

Understanding the importance of intervention framework on factors affecting primary school teaching and learning is critical for improving the quality of basic education in the state. The overall success of basic education scheme depends on the attainment of its stated objectives. An attempt has been made in this work to raise some issues in such an important factor as curriculum. A clarification of what was covered is important.

1. Primary school curriculum should provide enough practical and functional subjects and avoiding overloading of the content.
2. Short term school year affects instructional time, therefore school should be prolonged to eight years for accommodation of more practical subjects that will enable the children acquire enough skills for its application.
3. Government should provide daily balanced school meal, medical services will go a long way to improve children's general performance.
4. There should be production of curriculum along with teachers' guide and children's text books by the Ministry of Education to enhance teaching and learning.
5. Curriculum production should also contain tools for assessing the development attained (standardized tests); values of the people's culture, instructional devices and techniques.

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Table 1: Distribution According to their Education Zones, Highest Educational Qualification and Experience

Characteristics	Aguata		Awka		Nnewi		Ogidi		Onithsa		Otuocha	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No. of Respondents	113	17.0	147	22.3	146	22.1	128	19.4	172	26.1	98	14.8
Veteran Teachers	90	79.6	127	86.4	120	82.2	107	83.6	139	80.8	77	78.6
Beginning Teachers	23	20.4	20	13.6	26	17.8	21	16.4	33	19.2	21	21.4
Highest Educational Qualification Obtained	NCE		(B.A, B.ED, B.SC),				(M.A,M.ED,M.SC),				Ph.D	
Frequency	350	18			222	31			10	20	2	7
Percentage	50.0	2.7			33.6	4.7			1.5	3.0	0.3	1.1
Years of Experience	1 - 5		6 - 10		11 - 15		16 - 20		21-25		26 & above	
Frequency	64		108		126				149		153	
Percentage	9.7		16.4		19.1				22.6		23.2	

N = 660

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Curriculum Need Areas.

S/N	Curriculum	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	Adjusting the curriculum content to involve more practical subjects	4.47	.7	Agree
2	Unloaded curriculum content	4.38	.80	Agree
3	Production of curriculum along with teacher' guide	4.12	.94	Agree
4	Production of curriculum along with children's text books	3.98	.94	Agree
5	Contains tools for assessing the development attained	14.16	.90	Agree
6	Curriculum that is clear of strategies to be used such as demonstration, film show, field trips, projects.	4.24	.93	Agree
7	Curriculum that is broad and challenging	4.19	.94	Agree
8	Curriculum that will meet children's individual needs	.94	.86	Agree
9	Curriculum that is planned and organised in separate subjects	4.10	.92	Agree
10	Provision of nutritional services	4.24	.87	Agree
11	Provision of medical services	4.08	1.06	Agree
12	A safety week involving police, fire and ambulance services	4.37	.83	Agree
13	Curriculum to include decisions about teaching methods and teacher preparation	4.26	.90	Agree
14	Child development knowledge	4.21	.92	Agree
15	Value of our culture	4.18	086	Agree
16	Knowledge children need to function competently in our society.	4.10	.91	Agree
17	Curriculum that involves method of instruction (that is, teaching devices and techniques	4.20	1.00	Agree
18	Extension of school year to eight years	4.37	.80	Agree
19	Curriculum to take account of parents' desires	4.24	.91	Agree

Key: N = Total Number (Population) = 660

\bar{X} = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

Table 3

Means of Responses and Standard Deviation on Intervention Framework on Curriculum Needs Facing Basic Education in Nursery/Primary Schools in the State

S/N	Challenges/Problems Facing Basic Education	Intervention Objectives	Proposed Intervention Content	Activities	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	<p>CURRICULUM: insufficient activity-based or functional curriculum content.</p> <p>Overloaded curriculum content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote practical and functional subjects. - Provide farm land to schools - Equip children with skills and knowledge for practical work. - Provide basic tools for further educational advancement. - Prepare children for trades and craft of the locality - Integrate related subjects - Accommodate more functional and relevant subjects. -Reduce number of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adjusting curriculum content to involve more practical subjects and stress on practicalizing them, such as practical agriculture, home economics, -Dismantling and assembling simple machines, carpentry, sewing /tailoring, hair dressing, barbing weaving, wood work, auto-mechanics, computer education. - Including in the curriculum content protection of the environment spread of aids, sex education, drug abuse., 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and retraining of curriculum developers to take up to challenge through workshops, seminar, conferences. This to be arranged by the Government - organizing weekly practical farming by the teachers. - providing grant in aids by the government for best children in the practical subjects who will not further their education. - giving scholarship by the government to the best and interested children in each field. - organizing excursion for the children to observe some popular factories/industries and farms. - providing learning and 	3.00	.00	Appropriate

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3	Poor teaching of culture of the people	-Provide daily balanced school meal for the children to help the less privileged ones.	- launching a school-based health and nutrition services or program	- using increased instructional time maximally in practical subjects by the teachers and children.	2.86	.38	Appropriate
4		- Reduce the prevalence of malnutrition, anemia and parasitic infection. - provide mobile doctors and nurses to schools for inoculation Provide schools with safe drinking water, latrines/toilet -Promote cultural heritage. -Inculcate discipline in children.	- providing health-related school polices - providing healthy learning environments - providing skills-based health education -Including norms and values of the society – respect, greetings, communal living, local food preparation. -Including sex education in the primary school curriculum content. -stressing the evils in sex outside marriage, and problems in single parenthood. -Preparing the child for marriage -stressing the evils in cultism, prostitution and	- organizing better school management and more effective teaching strategies by the head teachers - looking into a range of educational components by curriculum planners, such as content knowledge, method of instruction, students' learning outcomes through alteration of materials and program - arrange for school meals, dewarming and other services by the government and the community. - addressing issues of health, harassment and violence by education policy			Appropriate

Table 4: The t-test Summary Examining Differences in the Mean Ratings of Veteran Teachers (VTs) and Beginning Teachers (BTs) on Curriculum Needs for Enhancing Basic Education in Nursery/Primary Schools

Variables	Number of Cases	Mean of	Standard Deviation	t Ratings
Veteran Teachers	140	4.20	0.85	1.36
Beginning Teachers	520	4.05	0.96	
df	=	658	$P > 0.05$; $t_{cal} (1.36) < t_{cri} (1.96)$	H_0 upheld