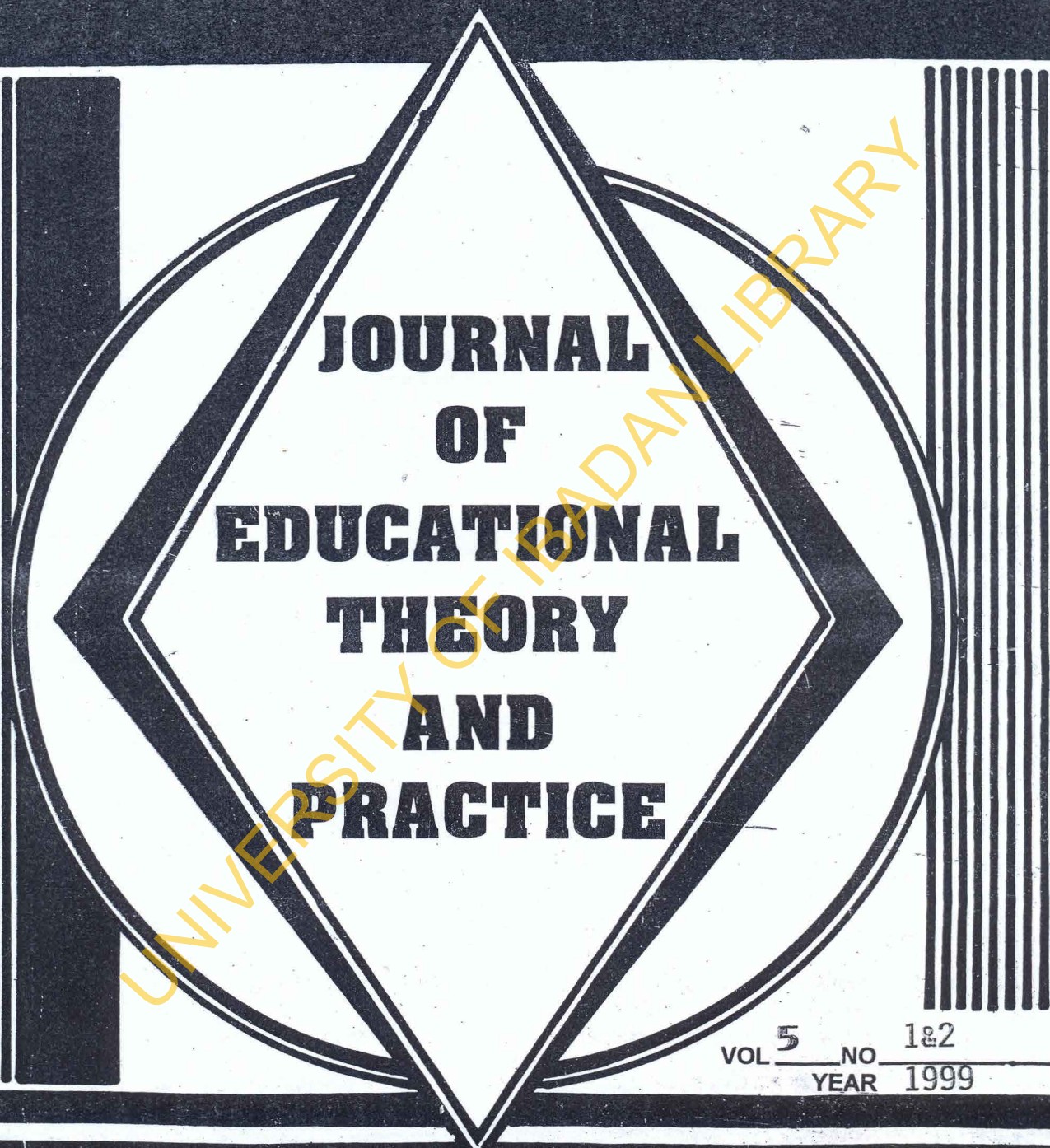


ISSN 1117 - 9910



**JOURNAL
OF
EDUCATIONAL
THEORY
AND
PRACTICE**

VOL 5 NO 1&2
YEAR 1999

JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

ISSN 1117-9910

VOL 5 NOS 1&2 1999

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THE CHILD-CENTRED CURRICULUM DESIGN: ITS
CHARACTERISTICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum has different definitions but certain basic agreements exist about some elements of the definitions of the term Curriculum has been regarded in this paper as the totality of planned, organised and intended learning experiences provided by the school for the all round development of the pupil. However, the kind of curriculum given by the British colonialists was not child centred. Many curriculum designs have been offered by experts in curriculum studies and the subject designed is one of them. Learning within this design focuses on language activities-thinking, listening, reading and writing. The earlier curriculum experts emphasised on the subject centred curriculum design. Learners' needs and interests were not considered; various school subjects to which learners were exposed were not seriously considered. The emphasis on the subject centred curriculum design has been a very serious concern to the present writers. This explains why the major purpose of this paper was the examination of the child - centred curriculum design. The implication of the design for educational practice was also examined. It was therefore concluded that the child centred curriculum design could be very effective because it centres around learners interest and needs. For the purpose of effective implementation of the design, some fundamental questions were provided which teachers, instructors and curriculum planners should consider in the teaching-learning process.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is regarded as the totality of planned, organised and intended learning experiences provided by the school for all round development of the pupil. This is a definition, apart from those offered by Taba (1962), Tyler (1949), Tanner and Tanner (1975), that is widely accepted. According to these authors, curriculum is regarded as the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience, under the auspices of the school, for the learner's continuous and willful growth in personal-social competence. Our definition implies that the learning experiences offered to pupils

should be planned, even though it does not state who is to do the planning and by what method. However, we want to regard the experiences the learner is supposed to have as our cultural heritage which we have artificially divided into school subjects such as: English language, Mathematics, Integrated science, Social studies, Agricultural science, and so on. This is probably why Lawton (1975) defined curriculum as "a selection from the culture of a society".

An adequate design of the school curriculum should, therefore, identify the important elements of that curriculum and justify their inter-relationships. The elements include: objectives, content, learning activities and evaluation. Such a design provides a consistent framework of societal and cultural values, priorities and their educational significance in the teaching-learning process. This probably explains why Herrick (1965), defined curriculum design as "... a statement of the pattern of relationships which exist among the elements of curriculum as they are used to make one consistent set of decisions about the nature of the curriculum of the child".

Various curriculum designs have been offered by several experts in curriculum studies and these designs reflect the elements indicated above. For instance, Dill (1982) identified and described six curriculum designs which include: (a) the subject design; (b) the problems and societal activities design; (c) the specific competencies design; (d) the individual needs; and interests design and, (e) the core-design. Taba (1962) has, however, emphasised that the central problems of curriculum design are to establish the scope of expected learning, to establish the sequence, to establish a continuity of learning, to provide for cumulative learning and providing for integration. It appears that the earlier curriculum experts focused on the content or subject matter. And for this, Ehindero, (1994) pointed out that one of the characteristics of the subject design is that emphasis is on the processes of absorption and memorisation. Drill is a methodology used to establish the content in the learner's mind.

Many experts in curriculum studies have criticised this design as it portrays knowledge as fragmentary, that is, not interdependent and integrated. The effect of this is that teachers can not be confident to cope with the rate at which information is being added to each of the subjects. Some educators such as Oliver (1977) and Ehindero (1994), have also observed that the subject design does not pay adequate attention to the needs and interests of the learner. Too much emphasis on the subject matter tends to fragment curriculum.

It should be obvious from this background that the earlier curriculum experts emphasised on subject-centred curriculum design. They hardly considered the learners and their needs. The stress was on the various school subjects to which learners were exposed. This is probably why the 6-3-3-4 system of education was introduced to allow the learners to be involved in the curriculum designing. On the basis of the foregoing, the major issue on which this paper addresses itself is to examine the child-centred curriculum design as an approach to a more effective curriculum design that could modify the subject-centred design which has been regarded by Ehindero (1986), as deficient and ineffective. It is also the purpose of this paper to consider the implication of the design for educational practice.

THE CHILD-CENTRED CURRICULUM DESIGN

This design is also called the learner-centred design and it is based mainly on the needs and interest of the learner. In this design, we first identify the need and interests of pupils as they grow and develop. The next thing is to organise learning around these needs and interests. This design is in sharp contrast to the subject-centred design which centres around subjects and emphasises intellectual development. The child-centred design seriously considers the needs and interests of the learner and which is probably why Maslow (1968), identified some basic needs of all human beings. The needs include: psychological (survival), safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-

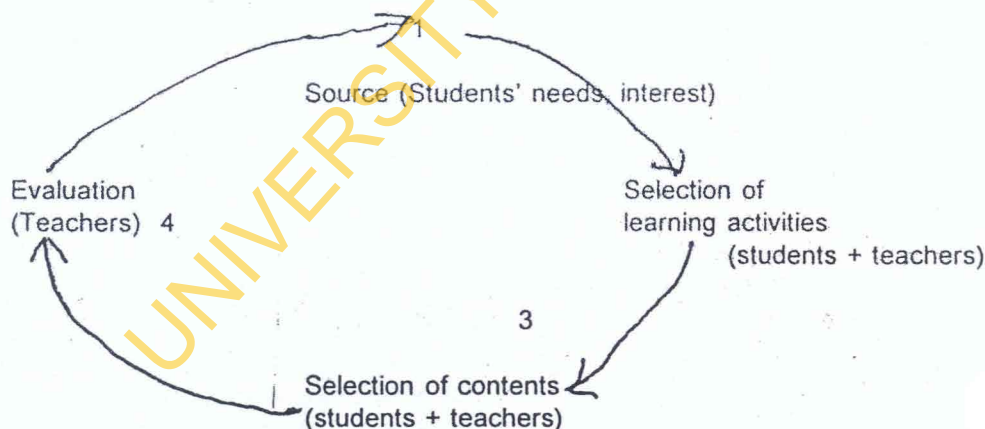
actualisation. All these needs are very necessary for the all round development of the learner and for the ultimate development of his society.

The child-centred curriculum design is based on the fact that if education is to meet the needs of children, it must also concern itself with the societal requirements. As Ehindero (1994), put it, "children are our most important resources and to help them realise their fullest potentials, curriculum design must focus on their present, persistent and changing needs. The curriculum must seek to provide experience that will not only stimulate full growth of individual's capabilities, but will also point each individual's life toward the improvement of the social order". The design also views education and life as intimately related and since life is not static there could be no fixed curriculum. It is therefore on the basis of the needs and interests of the learner that the child-centred curriculum design places emphasis on activities, first-hand experiences and on discovery as a method of learning. The activities are built around social and psychological problems. It is flexible, diversified and democratic rather than rigid and authoritarian.

The interest and needs approach to curriculum, according to Oliver (1977), assumes that children and youth learn those things that are related to their purposes. He pointed out that the design is identified with the following:

- (a) it starts with everyday concerns and experiences of learners;
- (b) it deals with those aspects of persistent life situations appropriate to the learner's background and maturity;
- (c) it helps learners to deal with the one more persistent situations which are a part of the immediate situation and most closely related to their needs; and
- (d) Provide opportunities for learners to share in the selection and development of experiences.

Our child-centred curriculum design is diagrammatically shown below:



The child-centred model we present here adopts some of the earlier models presented by Taba and Tyler (1962). The source of this kind of model was derived from the students' needs, interests and learning styles. It should be pointed out that the source of any curriculum includes the need of

the society and that of the child. This model strongly believes that the needs of the child should be given a very serious consideration because the success of any society depends largely on the successful performances of the learner. For instance, it is for the recognition of the potentialities of social studies for inculcating the right type of skills and virtues through unified and integrated interdisciplinary studies of man, that the planners of the New National Policy on education give it a pre-eminent place in the 6-3-3-4 system of education which was first implemented in 1982. In other words, the learner's needs as well as that of the society are considered which explains why it is fully integrated in the curriculum.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHILD-CENTRED CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Having considered the general characteristics of the child-centred curriculum design, we can thus conclude that it is most likely to be more effective in the teaching-learning situation. We can also assert that since the design centres around the learner's interest and needs, it makes the programme flexible, diversified and life related. It is totally committed to the all round development of the child. The design, however, has many implications for educational practice.

First, with the child-centred curriculum design, education is seen as a continuous intelligent process of growth. We see what education is all about in the child or learner. This is a process by which anybody born into a human society learns the ways of life, that is, values, skills and beliefs consciously and unconsciously through the older generation, for the purpose of becoming a useful member of the society. This is exactly what the child is expected to be as against a situation where his education is solely considered as schooling. And, of course, education is more than schooling. Regarding education as schooling implies that any society without college or universities has no education. This could thus be tantamount to viewing education in a very myopic way.

The child-centred curriculum design implies that the kind of education received with this design will go a long way in helping the learner to be socially creative and thinking individual. In the learner centred curriculum design, the child's need is seriously considered. The education of the child does not conform only to the patterns set by the curriculum and its various associated instruments but also to other aspects of education. Since the child is given a prominent place in this design, the type of education he receives helps him to be creative, self-reliant and thoughtful. This is evident in the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Moreover, in the child-centred curriculum design, there is a full co-operation among the learners. The design implies that the content should be selected and organised co-operatively by all learners during the learning situation. The design is based on the fact that if education is expected to meet the needs of children, then it must also concern itself with the societal requirements. Learners are the most important resources and in order to help them realise their potentials, curriculum design must seriously consider their persistent and changing needs.

The child-centred curriculum design emphasises on understanding and improving through the use of the process of learning. Therefore, as curriculum planners and teachers, it is necessary to ensure that our views, about our society, its culture and people, are rich and broad enough to accommodate and reflect the contemporary social and cultural realities. This implies that the learners should understand our cultural traits and these are expected to improve them for the ultimate improvement of the society. For instance, the Nigerian popular slogan-unity in diversity-should be vigorously pursued with a realistic curriculum which could afford both urban and rural children the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the social and economic development in the society.

The learner- centred curriculum design also implies that it is controlled and directed co-operatively by learners, teachers, parents, supervisors, principals and others in the learning situation. This runs

contrary to the subject-centred curriculum design which is controlled by the teacher or someone representing authority external to the situation. With this, learners can learn on their own if the necessary instructional materials are made available by the teacher. If content is controlled and directed by all learners, it implies that the structuring of the curriculum should involved the subject specialist, the examining bodies (WAEC, JAMB, NECO etc), the society, teachers, students and community where both the school and the child are located.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have tried, in this paper, to state the characteristics of the child-centred curriculum design and its implications for educational practice. We have also briefly considered the subject centred design. Thus far, we should be able to see that the child-centred design is likely to be more effective in the teaching-learning process.

It is our contention that the child -centred curriculum design can be very effective in the teaching learning situation because of its emphasis on activities, first-hand experiences and on discovery as a method of learning. The design, centres around students' interests thus making the programme unstructured, diversified and tied to the apron string of the growth and development of the learner. It stresses the building of habits and skills as integral parts of large experiences as opposed to the subject-centred design which centres on teaching specific habits and skills as separate and isolated aspects of learning. It builds a programme on students' interests and needs and so provides a motivation that may be lacking in conventional patterns of curriculum organisation.

For an effective implementation of the child-centred design, the Federal Government has introduced the 6-3-3-4 system of education which gives learners many educational opportunities. The system of education centres around the learners' needs and interest. For an effective implementation of this design, many states now have personnel and instructional materials in the core and pre-vocational subjects. At the secondary school level, the system identifies two broad aims of education, that is, preparation for a useful living within the society and higher education.

As résumé, therefore, we would conclude this paper with some fundamental questions which the teachers, instructors, curriculum planners, as well as supervisors should consider if a child-centred curriculum design is to make lasting and positive effects on the learner. Such a design must resolve the following questions relevant to the teaching-learning process:

- (1) How can we understand the learner, create and manage the classroom environment in order to promote his potentials for optimum learning?
- (2) How can we define, identify and use instructional objectives to determine the relevance, needs, scope, sequence and emphasis on the learners curriculum?
- (3) How can we select, plan and organise these potential learning experiences in order to assist the learners achieve prescribed and worth while educational ends?
- (4) How can we manage the teaching-learning process such that the prescribed learning experiences are most effectively maximized by the learner to achieve desirable ends?

- (5) How can we evaluate the totality of the effect of prescribed learning experiences on the qualitative development of the learner?

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