Curriculum Design and Society "A Hand in Glove" Relationship

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Abstract

It is the mandate of Higher Learning Institutions to foster strategies that enhance knowledge and motivationally encourage creativeness and innovativeness for the economical growth of the Global Society. This paper comprehensively discussed the inseparable relationship between the society and the designing of Higher Education curriculum. Curriculum design follows a dynamic trend that is multi-factorial in nature. Influential factors such as environmental, political and social are seriously considered in formulating adaptable curriculum that reflects the societal needs in the field of Education. Of concern is societal factor that tends to be the most influential among others. The curriculum designers are forthwith find ways to protect cherished society beliefs not to argue against each other. The designing of curriculum should assume that certain accepted values are promoted without imposing one denomination's belief or practice. The designing process should also promote change and protect the roles of Higher Learning Institutions and the laws of the land hence the curriculum and society mirrors each other. Data was both quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed to give a clear comprehensive understanding of the importance of merging the two issues. The study will go a long way in guiding the curriculurists in formulating curriculum design policies locally, regional and internationally.

Keywords: curriculum; curriculum design; society; societal factors; societal beliefs; denomination.

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1. Introduction

It is the mandate of Higher Learning Institutions to foster strategies that enhance knowledge and motivationally encourage creativeness and innovativeness for Global Society economical growth. One of the essential strategies to this effect is a curriculum design that observes and respects the cultural rich society. Curriculum, a planned, unplanned concept, content, skills, work habits, means of assessment, attitudes and instructional strategies taught in the classroom and the variety of Educational institutions activities in and out of class that influence present and future academic, social, emotional and physical growth of students play a vital role in generating knowledge to the Global Society.

It is this comprehensive plan that fulfills the rising needs of a dynamic society. Education implies teaching and teaching implies knowledge thus knowledge is truth. Truth everywhere is the same hence education should be everywhere the same. Curriculum is the reflection of the society and the society the mirror of the curriculum hence the two factual phenomenons are inseparable. The curriculum design thus must be based on an understanding of social change. Today societal changes are experienced at a remarkable rate and expected to accelerate rather than to settle into a predictable pattern thus it is a given curriculum design.

Curriculum design follows a dynamic trend that is multi-factorial in nature. Influential factors such as environmental, political and especially social are seriously considered in formulating adaptable curriculum that reflects the societal needs in the field of Education. Of concern is societal factor that tends to be the most influential among others. The authors in [1] emphasized that Society has its own expectations about aims and objectives that should be considered when designing the curriculum thus the designers should take into account the societal considerations otherwise the curriculum become irrelevant.

2. Background

In-order to redress the inequitable and discriminatory practices of successive colonial government, the post-independence government adopted the policy of education as a basic human right and committed itself to universal and equal education opportunity for all Zimbabweans. The Zimbabwean Education process gives a leeway for every individual to access education. This is however facilitated through a societal oriented curriculum that is development with the help of teams from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, the curriculum Development Unit, the Zimbabwe Schools of Examination, colleges and Universities, industry and commerce and religious organizations representing the society. The team is responsible for developing and revises the syllabi, promotes creative teaching, organizes courses on curricular matters, tests and evaluate on curriculum and conducts research into curricular issues.

Higher education curriculum globally is witnessing a significant shift in its expectations to help address immediate and longer-term sustainable societal development challenges. Curriculum design is a key educational process for educational developers for higher education as it allows an educational course to be designed to meet both the economic and societal needs. It is the inseparable relationship between education curriculum and the entire community that matters in any area's economical growth.

In the other nations, the national demographic of education has shifted, and the curriculum in higher education has responded to and reflected changing political, socioeconomic, and cultural dynamic hence enabling people to make sense of their lives and the world around them. The Zimbabwean approach to curriculum design should mark a departure from traditional, rational approaches and embraces the view that curriculum is more societal than a mere academic process.

Existing and emergent perspectives on learning and curricular design, however, are not value-neutral and have engendered unprecedented competition and conflict. Like any other aspect of an educational institution, the curriculum is required respond to external and internal forces and reflects the identity, assumptions, and perspectives of decision makers affecting it.

The societal curricula in higher education should not only be seen as an academic construct, but as the repository of cultures, both national and multinational, and the historic medium for the transmission of cultural themes emphatically the core values and shared beliefs of communities.

In the face of globalization, however, critics such as author in [2] have claimed that the relationship between higher education institutions and society is deteriorating, and have identified these institutions as a service company, with society as its marketplace.

3. Literature Review.

3.1 Curriculum design defined.

The author in reference [3] described a curriculum as often means a sequence of lectures, teaching timetables, examination sessions and grading. However, a curriculum is more than just sequences of lectures and timetables. According to the author in [4], a curriculum is "a planned educational experience". Hence, the main intention of curriculum design at the tertiary level is to foster the academic development of students.

Curriculum is a fundamental matter for the "well-being and effectiveness of higher education" [5]. No matter how one define curriculum (e.g., learning experiences, contents, objectives, courses, etc.) [6], it is one of the most significant matters in higher education, however, little attention has been given to the evolution of curriculum and its review and transformation in the institutions. The author in reference [7] mentions that, in the formulation of educational policies in Zimbabwe, government uses the ideological state apparatus. Parents as part of the society are regarded as an important component of the education system and have an input in curriculum development. Like parents, employers have also an input in curriculum development because they know the curriculum that is marketable in the world of work according to the author in [8].

4. Determinants of Curriculum Design in Higher Education Institutions.

4.1 External Influences on Curricular Change

Higher education curriculum historically has been considered as the work of the education institution.

More recently, however, external influences such as society, government, alumni, and others are affecting curriculum design and the curricular change process [9]. Accreditation bodies expect more from educational institutions especially in the area of assessment of student learning. This external influence has caused a number of educational institutions to engage in curricular review in an effort to identify the desired student learning outcomes [10, 11, 12].

4.2 How Social Factors Influence Curriculum Design

Our multicultural society is a key factor that is taken into consideration for curriculum design. Some factors of diversity include religion, culture, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and also children with different kinds of disabilities according to the author in [13]. Curricular planners work to build an education that suits our multicultural society and that will help every child from every different background live, work, and go on to lead successful lives in our melting pot of a society. The role of learning institutions in society and the purpose of the curriculum have been major, closely related, issues since education institutions were first established. Society's expectations for its higher education institutions and these institutions' response to society are both reflected in the curriculum. Curriculum reflects a complex society, a society in which there is never perfect agreement on the characteristics of that society. It is usually believed that, the primary purpose of the curriculum is the acquisition of cognitive knowledge though different thoughts consider it as programs for helping individuals develop humane and rational qualities.

According to author in [14], Society has its own expectations about the aims and objectives that should be considered when designing the curriculum. It also has a perception of what the product of the school system should look like. It is therefore necessary for curriculum designers to take into account these societal considerations. If this does not happen, the curriculum becomes irrelevant. A number of religions co-exist in countries in the SADC region. The different community may include Christians, Muslims, Hindus and adherents of other religions. The views of these religions must be considered when designing a curriculum.

In Zimbabwe, for example, subjects such as sex education and political economy have proved difficult to include in the curriculum because of the resistance from some religious groups. These groups feel that including these subjects in the curriculum will undermine their belief systems. The same groups of people would not tolerate a curriculum that does not include religious and moral education. The design of curricular materials and their presentation should accommodate the culture of the society that the curriculum is seeking to serve. It should be sensitive to the fact that the curriculum design is to perpetuate inequities.

It is therefore possible for culture to have both positive and negative influences on the curriculum. Pause for a moment and consider the number of groupings in different societies individual live, these can be professional associations, cultural groups and religious organisations. These groups can bring their views to bear on curriculum design. This is so because any curriculum of value must result from the broad consultation of a wide range of stakeholders especially the community.

One of the reasons why education is financially supported by governments is to improve the country's economy. This is so because the students who are taught need to be employed and work for the betterment of the economic development. The skills needed by industry should be translated into the content and learning experiences of these learners. The skills, knowledge base and attitudes required by industry should be developed in the lecture. Employers have basic requirements. Educational institutions find themselves working to meet these basic requirements academically and professionally thus acquiring higher academic or professional qualifications hence enhance individual upward social mobility. The market forces dictate what should be included in the national curriculum. It also subtly determines the quantity of learners at different levels.

4.3 Role of Culture in Curriculum Development

Education reform requires re-culturing rather than restructuring [15]. Simply changing the course offerings or content or adding pre-requisites will not lead to solid educational change. Culture plays a major role in curriculum development. Few topics of discourse have caused as much controversy in higher education as the topic of curriculum [16]. The challenge with the concept of culture is that it is not easily understandable or apparent to organizational participants because people define culture differently. In addition, cultural impediments are often more difficult to identify than structural impediments and therefore, more challenging to overcome [17]. Culture influences the educational change process at the institutional and departmental levels.

4.3.1 Institutional Culture - A curricular change process is in large part affected by the institutional culture and whether that culture welcomes change. In looking at institutional culture, it is important to examine institutional identification and administration's role in the curriculum design process. Higher education administrators have a critical role to play in creating an institutional culture that welcomes change. Strong institutional leadership recognizes the need to create a culture of trust within the organization. Administration must also dedicate institutional resources to the curricular change effort during both the development phase and the implementation phase. Administrators must also be active participants and leaders in the process by showing support for the change agents and the change process [18].

4.3.2 Departmental Culture - Departmental culture is the second type of culture affecting educational collaboration and change. Departments are the major unit of organization in higher education. Department loyalties tend to lie with their discipline and not necessarily with the educational organization, which can make organizational change a challenge [19].

4.3.4 Faculty Culture (University level) - Faculty culture also influences curricular change. Educational beliefs and the disciplines of faculty are critical factors that must be considered in a curriculum design process [20]. Faculty operates in four interdependent cultures that influence their beliefs and attitudes: the culture of the institution; the culture of the national system of higher education; the culture of the academic profession; and the culture of their discipline. These issues of culture make it difficult for faculty in higher education institutions to engage in "true" curricular revision. The cultural forces in higher education push against a shared vision, shared learning outcomes for students, and shared goals for a coherent curriculum [16].

The existing body of research on the process of higher education curriculum review focuses primarily on the role of faculty in the change effort. Faculties are encouraged to have shared governance over the curriculum in order to have ownership at the degree program level. However, no current body of research exists on the shared governance of faculty and administration over the curriculum

4.4 How Values Can Influence Curriculum Design

Social forces that can influence curriculum design come from everywhere. The ideas and values of various groups of people may include their social goals, ideas about cultural uniformity and diversity, social pressures, ideas about social change, their plans for the future, and their concepts of culture [12].

4.5 How Political Factors Influence Curriculum Design

The experience as a student and teacher may open up an individual's mind to notice how politics influence education. This is why education is regarded as a political activity. The society through political behaviour has a bearing on the education curriculum. National ideology and philosophy have a tremendous influence on the education system because;-

- Politics determine and define the goals, content, learning experiences and evaluation strategies in education. Curricular materials and their interpretation are usually heavily influenced by political considerations.
- Political considerations may play a part in the hiring of personnel.
- Funding of education is greatly influenced by politics.
- Entry into educational institutions and the examination systems are heavily influenced by politics.

4.6 How Environmental Factors Influence Curriculum Design

Over time, people have become insensitive to their surroundings and natural resources. This has affected the sky, the land and the sea. The end result is that humanity is being adversely affected by these in-considerations. Industrial wastes have polluted the world. For example, the ozone layer in the atmosphere, which protects us from harmful radiation from the sun, is being depleted. People want this redressed. It is through education that remediation can be effected. Consideration for the environment must of necessity influence curriculum design to ensure the survival of future generations.

4.7 How Technological Factors Influence Curriculum Design

The computer is the latest technological innovation that will have a significant impact on education and society. If you are not computer literate, you may feel that you are not up-to-date. In your area, you may have noticed that a number of schools have introduced computing as one of the subjects. The intention is to equip the learners with the requisite computer skills and knowledge. In addition to computers, other forms of electronic media are being used in teaching. These have provided a variety of learning experiences and have facilitated individualised learning. Curriculum designers cannot afford to ignore technology and its influence on the curriculum.

5. Developmental Process of Curriculum Design in Higher education Institutions.

If a curriculum is to be "a planned educational experience", then curriculum design and implementation should follow a sequence of steps that operates like an upward and downward spiral with a robust feedback system for the adjustment of each step. Curriculum planning can be divided into 6 steps [4].

5.1 Identification of the Institution's mission and the needs of its stakeholders

This is the crucial first step as it is important to understand the mission of the Faculty for which the curriculum is designed. For example, the mission of a Faculty of Medicine is to train doctors to deliver health care services to society. Consequently, curriculum developers must know and understand the needs of curriculum stakeholders (i.e. students, faculty members, university administrators, professional bodies, government, etc.) that will determine the type of graduate profile the Faculty wants:

- possesses a sound scientific basis to practice Medicine;

- possesses high clinical competence;

- possesses critical analytical skills;

- is capable of self-directed & life-long learning;

- possesses good communication skills;

- is compassionate and ethical.

5.2 Needs assessment of the learners

This step is often neglected. Once the potential students are identified, their needs must be assessed, because curriculum developers must be aware of the learners' strengths and weaknesses. Therefore data on student characteristics are needed (e.g. entry level of competence, ability to meet the prerequisites of the programme, individual goals and priorities, personal background and reasons for enrolling, attitudes about discipline and assumptions about the programme).

5.3 Establishment of the curriculum's goals and objectives

This is an important step as goals and objectives determine the instructional philosophy and thus guide the selection of the most effective learning methods. Moreover, the learning objectives will also determine the design and selection of assessment instruments and procedures. As clear and well-written objectives are absolutely necessary to define the focus of the curriculum, faculty members in charge of curriculum design must be formally trained in writing instructional objectives.

5.4 Selection of educational strategies

The selection of educational strategies must be based on three main principles.

First, the educational methods must be congruent with the learning objectives. Second, the use of multiple educational methods is preferable to a singular method, as the curriculum should respond to the challenges of the multitude of students' learning styles and varied educational objectives. Finally, the curriculum designer and implementer must verify the curriculum's feasibility in terms of material and human resources.

5.5 Implementation of the new curriculum

Designing the curriculum is the most exciting and creative part of curriculum development. However, the ultimate goal is not to design the best and ideal curriculum, but to put it into practice successfully. The many conditions and requirements for successful execution include the promotion of faculty members' ownership of the process of curriculum implementation and the allocation of adequate resources. Unequivocal support from the highest academic authority must be secured before starting to put a new curriculum into operation. Following the first phase of implementation of the new programme, a formal assessment must be carried out in order to adjust the process and to establish a link between institutional goals, courses and curriculum.

5.6 Evaluation and feedback to improve the curriculum

Although evaluation of the curriculum is the last step in this practical approach, it is not necessarily the final action. The evaluation data collected must serve as criteria for adjusting the curriculum to the goals of the programme or the mission of the Faculty. The most important message here is that a curriculum must be evaluated, corrected and go through repeated levels of innovation because it is not a static system. Feedback from teachers, tutors and students must continuously be taken into serious consideration so as to enhance the learning outcomes for the students.

In conclusion, a curriculum is an academic plan. It is a total blueprint for actions where:

a. the objectives, aims and outcome of the curriculum are clarified;

b. the processes to achieve these are identified;

c. the ways to measure whether success has been achieved; and

d. systematic review and adjustment are also part of the plan.

6. Curriculum Development, Principles and Assumptions

The quality of the national curriculum is based on the extent to which it meets individual attributes, the requirements of the national economy, the needs of society and the future challenges and aspirations of the nation. It seeks to promote individual and national achievement through the recognition of the different abilities and needs of learners. The current curriculum requires strengthening in terms of developing values and catering for needs and aspirations for self-reliance and entrepreneurship, in order to produce a responsible, productive and self-sustaining citizen.

7. Research Methodology theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the existing theory to explore the phenomenon of the inseparable relationship between the society and the curriculum design guided the research. The study employed the descriptive survey design. The research employed the descriptive survey design because it is argued in educational research that: "…descriptive survey is a method of research that describes what people see over and beyond" [21]. Thus, the researcher chose this method as it allowed respondents to say exactly what they conceived of as the factors that determine curriculum design in Zimbabwe's higher education system [22].

7.1 Data Instrumentation.

The study used most common types of data collection for qualitative and quantitative research, document analysis and interviewing [23,24]. Primary data were collected through interviews with experienced individuals in curriculum design. Interviewing such experienced individuals assisted in identifying what was going on during previous curriculum design process and how societal, political, economical, legal and technological factors influenced the design of educational curriculum.

A semi-structured interview guided by a list of open-ended questions was used and each interview was approximately (30) thirty minutes in length. Open ended questionnaires gave respondents an opportunity to elaborate on issues asked [25].Open-ended questions provide a response format that gives respondents the freedom to provide answers which they care to make. The researcher then has to make sense of all the responses given, construct appropriate categories and then code the categories so that the data can be analysed.

Open-ended questions are the most important questions on the survey by offering important and unpredictable insights into human behaviour [26]. It is suggested that open-ended questions allow for more detailed expression of respondents' views [27,28] and that qualitative information on the respondents is far more helpful than aggregated statistical data.

8. Results and Discussions.

8.1 Adaptability to change

The national demographic of education has shifted, and the curriculum in higher education has responded to and reflected changing political, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics. Growing recognition of professional fields and the attendant expansion of professional education have also fostered curricular adaptation and evolution. As these developments have changed expectations for higher education, they have also transformed perspectives on the meaning and designing of curricula. It is the influence of the surrounding environment on curriculum design that determines the overall development of the community. The skills and experience acquired by the learners guided by a society-centered curriculum have an impact on the adaptability of economical development of the community in particular and globally at large. Because members of the society are involved in the curriculum design, they feel empowered and honored hence become committed to the economical development proposal according to the author in [29].

The production of skilled and experienced learners from Higher Learning institutions into the society has a positive bearing on the Global development. Ninety percent of the respondents emphasized the need of Higher education to involve the society in their curriculum design as at the end the society will benefit.

8.2 Change of standard of living.

Curriculum enables people to make sense of their lives and the world around them hence the standard of leaving positively change. Individuals use curriculum with varying degrees of intentionality to interpret events, to deepen their understanding of what they learn and who they are as learners, and to create a shared experience for developing and learning. In simplest terms, any curriculum presents an academic plan, a designed progression of coursework framing a student's experience in higher education. Consonant with emerging conceptions of curriculum, contemporary perspectives on the curriculum in higher education in Zimbabwe consider the necessity of such academic plans and planning as representative of both educational and social experience, as a way of being in, understanding, and assessing a constantly changing world.

8.3 Society Needs

Society has its own needs about the goals and objectives that should be considered when designing a higher education curriculum. The society additionally has a perception of what the product of the education institution system is suppose to look like. Thus, it is necessary for curricularits to take into consideration these societal issues because if this does not happen, the curriculum becomes irrelevant. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes imparted to learners are expected to prepare them to fit in society.

Parents, as the major part of the society are regarded as an important component of the education curriculum and have an input in curriculum design [8]. Society expects that curriculum addresses its philosophies and its expectations for the future. Fifty percent of the heads of the Higher education institutions concurred with the author in [30] where these institutions play a crucial role in bringing positive change through social diversity that influence types of topics to be discussed which usually brought about positive developmental change in the community.

8.4 Problem Solver

The focus of the Society-centered Curriculum is the group and group action hence it is a problem-solving curriculum and these problems are to be solved through the participation and efforts of the whole society. Students work to find the social relevance of their efforts and the way they can improve their citizenship by the projects undertake. The experiences that the students participate in the real world are alive, organic, real, and life changing. Students are consistently working to make the world a better place through the guide of the society-centered curriculum. "Young people are at a formative, idealistic stage of their life, and they need to learn that they can and should make a difference in the world" [14].

In the Society-Centered curriculum, there is a strong emphasis on introducing learners to the idea of leaving the world a better place than they found it through collaborating with others in real life situations.

Because of this, learners are encouraged to explore their communities and determine issues of importance, and then work with their other mates and the community members towards finding a solution.

8.5 Employers need

An employer generally refers to an organization, institution, government entity, agency, company, professional firms, small business, or individuals who employs or put to work on employees. Usually employers want higher education institutions to train students in a set of skills they need, and if the curriculum does enable them to meet their demands, they pressurize curriculum redesign. Curriculum is usually determining the learners how to be after completion their studies. However, employers value people with a set of diverse experiences and skills set with greater understandings of change and innovation. Globalization, due to ongoing globalization the employers found themselves that the curriculum that exists does not respond to their demands hence they influence curriculum change. For example due to the ongoing globalization the employers like companies, government entity, professional services firms and individuals want workers who are computer literate, but the existing curriculum does not emphasis much on computer studies. Changing of job markets, this has influenced curriculum redesign because the employers now want employees with current demanded skills.

8.6 Globalization

Curriculum design is carried out to address the needs of the global village. Globally, there has been increasing pressure on higher education institutions in the region to move towards the use of new information and communication technologies to widen access to the programmes. Higher education systems for many countries have been undergoing fundamental reforms, especially in recent years, to respond to the trend of globalization and to meet the ever-changing expectations of the respective communities in their development into knowledge-based societies [31]. Higher Education systems worldwide transformed mainly to meet the need for a workforce that is equipped with not only the traditional discipline knowledge and skills, but also a broad range of generic capabilities.

The restructuring has in fact resulted in a shift that emphasizes the idea that equips the students with "operational competence" for the world of work, and a trend that favours the discourses about socialization, privatization, marketization, commodification, managerialism and performativity [32,33]. Cross-cutting issues like HIV/AIDS, child abuse and gender violence has also affected the development of a curriculum. The higher education curriculum became as an important vehicle in promoting and consolidating the new values and attitudes of the society. It has moved away from gender to stereotype where females were portrayed as being passive and males as active aggressive and leadership oriented and they would follow appropriate occupations.

9. Limitations

The Zimbabwean economical meltdown and political instability for the past decade jeopardized the much-needed involvement of the society in the Higher Education curriculum design process. The biased regional and international relations has also contributed to the neglecting of the society in the crucial curriculum design process.

10. Conclusion

The exact degree that a society and its culture should influence the education system through the curriculum is a more debatable issue. Curriculum developers should not forget that they are a product of their own culture and that every decision made is culturally related. Curriculum design process is often accompanied by various opinions. Some are supportive, defensive, resistant, and some stay neutral. The diverse opinions of different stakeholders form the social environment in which the curriculum design resides, bringing social pressure to Higher Education Institution leaders and teachers/lecturers in curriculum decisions making. Primarily, the academic direction of curriculum design in professional field also directs public opinion. Overall, curriculum design is not exclusive in the curriculum field, but goes far beyond the boundary of educational system as a social construct. As the author in reference [34] reminds us, success is only the measure people take with regard to the ever-changing problems. Therefore, the research on the inseparable relationship between curriculum design and the society is only a brief glance of Zimbabwean experience and a reflection of our perspectives.

11. Recommendations

As the conclusion denoted, the study recommends that Higher Education curriculum, as the life guide of the community should critically involve the society in its design. All Higher Education curricula should be society-centered to influence positive global economical development. The society should acknowledge their crucial role in the curriculum design and immensely contribute to the curriculum development process for the betterment of their day-to-day living. The curricularists should know with no terms that gone are the days internal Higher Education Institutions stakeholders had a lion's share over the society in curriculum design.

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