Curriculum implementation: Challenges and the prospect of education resource centres to aid effective implementation

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the challenges impeding effective curriculum implementation in Nigerian higher education institutions, ranging from inadequate funding to a brain-drain crisis. Recognizing the critical role of curriculum implementation in achieving national educational objectives, the study identifies these barriers highlighted concerning the misalignment between intended and implemented curricula, underscoring the need for strategic solutions. The paper then explores the prospects of Educational Resource Centres (ERCs) as catalysts for addressing these challenges. ERCs are portrayed as multifaceted entities capable of alleviating heavy academic loads, compensating for limited school facilities, and fostering inclusive education. The discussion emphasizes the alignment of ERCs with curriculum support, the provision of multimedia resources for diverse learning styles, and the pivotal role in dynamic instruction through advanced teaching aids. Furthermore, ERCs are seen as pivotal in providing educational support services, offering professional development opportunities for educators, and facilitating teachers' involvement in curriculum planning. It concludes by asserting the indispensable role ERCs play in reshaping the landscape of education, ensuring a future where curriculum implementation is not just a challenge but a collaborative journey that aids effective implementation which fosters achieving curriculum objectives that translate to attaining national developmental targets.

Keywords: Curriculum, curriculum implementation, ERC, curriculum challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Given Nigeria's changing educational landscape, the quest for efficient curriculum implementation evolves around a backdrop of complexities given the many issues that require careful analysis and deliberate solutions. Nigeria like most other countries of the world is undergoing rapid social, economic and political reforms, the impetus for these changes is fueled by the nation's commitment to international goals of development such as the Education For All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its own home growth National Economic Empowerment and Development

Strategy (NEEDS) I and II that recognises education as a means of empowering people for the attainment of the nation's developmental targets (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, 2014).

Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on a set of beliefs that are set out in terms of their relevance to the needs of the individual and those of the society and are deeply enshrined in the curriculum process of the nation. These beliefs include:

a) Education is an instrument for national development and social change.

b) Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria.

c) Education maximises the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfilment and the general development of society.

d) Education is compulsory and right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, colour, ethnicity, background, and any peculiar individual challenges.

e) Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional, and relevant to the needs of society. (NERDC, 2014)

Curriculum is generally seen as the totality of learning experiences and opportunities, planned for the learner under the guidance of the school. Ivowi (2010) opined that a curriculum is a tool designed for educating a person to change the orientation, behaviour, actions and values of that person whose concern is not only to developing self but also the world around him. It is an instructional guide that is documented to be utilized for teaching and learning for the realization of desirable changes in the learners under the guidance and supervision of the school. According to Iboro and Nsidibe (2012), the following are the Importance of Curriculum:

i. It determines educational direction including the decision of the type of society people want to live and serve in.

ii. It determines the principles and procedures which will help educators in selecting and arranging instructional programmes.

iii. It concerns itself with the application of the chosen principles.

iv. It determines and assesses what changes have been brought about.

v. It determines the next steps to be taken.

Curriculum implementation

Curriculum implementation is one of the most critical elements of the curriculum process, yet it is the most neglected (Yang, Yang, Wu and Liu, 2013). Curriculum implementation is a systematic organisation of all the intentions in school learning and is a plan which is executed through teacher-leaner interactions in the classroom. Braimoh (2017) describes it as a deliberate plan through which learners will be made to interact with content knowledge, learning activities and learning materials to acquire expected learning outcomes.

Implementation is the process of putting all that has been planned as a curriculum document into practice in the classroom through the combined efforts of teachers, learners, school administrators, and parents as well as interaction with physical facilities, instructional materials, instructional strategies, and psychological and social environments. Obanya (2007) noted that in many cases, there would be a gap between the intended curriculum and the learned curriculum and defined effective curriculum implementation as concerned with narrowing such a gap as much as possible. The importance of teachers in curriculum planning, development and most importantly implementation cannot be overemphasized. The teacher's role in curriculum development is an important one because the teacher is tasked with executing and implementing the curriculum document through effective transfer of knowledge and breaking down the contents into teachable units.

Daily teaching, research, and community service programs are carried out in higher education institutions in which numerous study programs are being created within the faculties and departments to achieve the overall objectives of the educational programmes. The issue of implementing programs, policies, and other initiatives intended for the development of society is one of the main issues that Nigerian educational institutions, particularly higher institutions, are confronting. According to Daniel-Kalioi (2019), the inadequate implementation of educational policies in Nigerian educational institutions faces numerous issues primarily due to the inadequacies of successive governments in executing the various policies that have been implemented in which every government abolished the previous education policy in favour of a new one. Ohiare-Udebu, Jacob and Sarafadeen (2021) listed the following as the problems facing effective curriculum implementation:

1. Inadequate funding: The inadequate financial resources allocated to educational programmes at the faculty and department levels present a substantial problem as this financial constraint impedes the capacity of academic leaders to procure required human and material resources essential for the effective implementation of the intended curriculum which obstructs the execution of planned curriculum activities, encompassing curriculum development, training, and research endeavours. This limitation extends to the provisioning of contemporary teaching tools, workshops, and seminars vital for sustaining a current and dynamic curriculum.

2. Shortage of Curriculum Experts: The shortage of curriculum studies lecturers and experts is a significant concern within higher education institutions. This problem arises from a lack of manpower planning, wherein institutions neglect to anticipate and address the demand for qualified educators. The absence of these experts in curriculum studies contributes to a decline in the level of expertise and may result in suboptimal curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation processes.

3. Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials: Unfortunately, many faculty and departments in various institutions do not have adequate instructional materials for the implementation of curriculum studies programmes. Teaching and learning are done in the most unconducive environment, the libraries have outdated books, new journals and publications cannot be acquired because there is no subsidy, and the

laboratories are a mockery of what they ought to be. Instructional materials are very important in the implementation of curriculum programmes has National Universities Commission listed the following as the requirement resources for the teaching and learning of curriculum in all the universities: Current basic texts, reference books, journals and other relevant textual and non-textual materials should be readily available in the library.

4. Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities: Infrastructural facilities are very important in the implementation of teaching and learning programmes. Infrastructural facilities needed for the implementation of teaching, researching and community service programmes in higher institutions include stable light, stable internet service, water, administrative offices, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, ICT facilities, hostels, etc. Unfortunately, most of these facilities are not available in the right quantities in many higher institutions in Nigeria and this is affecting the implementation of the curriculum as a programme.

5. Brain-drain: Brain-drain in Nigerian higher institutions especially the Universities is another problem hindering the effective implementation of curriculum programmes in many institutions. Many professors are leaving universities to move abroad for a better working environment. The working conditions of both academic and non-academic staff in Nigerian higher institutions are very poor pushing many out of the University system. Many faculties and departments in Nigerian universities are in shortage of lecturers because of the brain-drain programme. Ogunode and Isaac (2021) opined that Professional teachers and experienced professors are now few and limited in major teacher education institutions across the country due to brain drain which is majorly impacting the quality of education.

One significant research gap in curriculum implementation pertains to the discrepancy between the intended curriculum (what is planned by curriculum developers and policymakers) and the implemented curriculum (what occurs in the classroom). Despite the extensive efforts put into designing curriculum frameworks and standards, there is often a lack of alignment between the intended curriculum and what is delivered in classrooms. This misalignment leads to gaps in students' learning experiences and outcomes. Understanding the factors contributing to this misalignment and its implications for student learning is important therefore exploring the prospect of educational resource centres to aid the effective implementation of the curriculum is the objective of this paper.

Concepts of education resource centre

A resource could be considered as anything that will aid, stimulate and motivate learning as well as things that can simplify the process of classroom teaching (Owuamanam, 2017). This implies that educational resources are considered as anything that could be of great help in our effort to solve educational problems identified by classroom teachers. The term "educational resources" refers to a broad range of equipment, instruments, and materials intended to support and improve the processes of instruction, learning, and educational achievement. These tools are essential parts of educational systems because they help teachers and students at all levels—from elementary schools to universities achieve their intended objectives (Smith, Workman, Hartsell and Hill, 2023) According to Ekanem (2015), the essence of an education resource centre is the acquisition, storage and provision of easy retrieval of all what can be called educational resource materials to service the educational needs of a community.

The role of ERCs stands as a beacon of storage, retrieval and production of various learning resources shaping the pedagogical, technological, and developmental landscape of education worldwide. As educational paradigms shift in response to societal, technological, and pedagogical advancement, the imperative of providing students and educators with robust support systems becomes increasingly pronounced. This unravels the multifaceted layers of the significance embedded within ERCs and their influences on improving teaching and learning experiences (Pradipta, Purnamawati, Efendi, Dewantoro, Huda and Jauhari, 2020). Thus, it is crucial to highlight the key question of How can Educational Resource Centres go beyond their traditional role as educational archives to become vibrant centres that promote the transformation of the educational environment. From the traditional library of resources to the hub of innovation, ERCs emerge as multifaceted entities designed to meet the diverse needs of learners and educators in the 21st century. Which are, shaped and strategically positioned within the educational framework, to contribute synergistically to the overarching goal of fostering an enriched, dynamic, and adaptive learning environment.

According to the National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2014) states that:

1. Each state/FCT and local government Authority shall establish teachers' centres where teachers will meet for discussion, investigation, study workshops, short courses and conferences. These centres shall also be for the development and testing of teaching materials.

2. Federal, state and the FCT government shall establish education resource centres whose activities shall be multi-disciplinary (NERDC, 2014).

ERCs, under their multifaceted attributes, emerge as essential partners poised to provide the required resources and support systems to seamlessly integrate educational plans into the fabric of instructional practice to aid the effective implementation of the curriculum. The benefits of the ERCs are further highlighted in their ability to aid the effective implementation of curriculum as follows:

i. Heavy academic loads/Limited supply of school facilities and equipment: the ERCs are facilities that develop, produce, design and implement various types of learning resources ranging from visuals to audiovisuals, prints to non-prints, computer-generated to projected media across its statutory coverage areas or the country, in general, can simplify teaching contents to its barest minimum without reducing its qualities, develop various academic programs which are individualized thereby providing unified content to students, breaking down the curriculum contents to teachable units and bridging the gaps left by limited supplies of school facilities and equipment.

ii. Quality and quantities of teaching staff/Teaching strategies and methodology: These centres, as specified by the national policy on education are to serve as meeting places for teachers to network, have professional group discussions, investigate trends in education, and partake in workshops, short courses and conferences which in turn build teachers' capacities, develop a relevant methodology which suits every type and form of learning disabilities, foster inclusive education, develop mass educational learning resources such as the radio and television programs to cater for the number of available teachers and produce students/learners with the appropriate skills in the 21st-century workplace that drives national development.

iii. Resources Aligned for Curriculum Support: The foundational pillar of ERCs lies in their extensive collections of library resources, meticulously curated to align seamlessly with prescribed curricula. Within these repositories, educators and students find a rich array of reference materials, textbooks, and supplementary resources that directly correlate with the subjects and learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum. This alignment ensures that ERCs serve not only as repositories but as strategic partners in fortifying the foundation for effective curriculum implementation.

iv. Multimedia Resources for Varied Learning Styles: Recognizing and addressing diverse learning styles is imperative for effective curriculum implementation. In this context, ERCs play a pivotal role by offering a spectrum of multimedia resources, including audiovisual materials and educational software. This diverse array caters to different learning preferences, fostering engagement and understanding among students. By strategically incorporating multimedia elements into the curriculum implementation strategy, educators can enhance the overall effectiveness of their teaching methodologies, thereby accommodating the diverse needs of the student population.

v. Teaching Aids and Equipment for Dynamic Instruction: A cornerstone of effective curriculum implementation lies in dynamic instruction, a facet where ERCs contribute significantly. The provision of state-of-the-art teaching aids and equipment, such as interactive whiteboards and projectors, transforms traditional classrooms into hubs of interactive learning. This not only enhances the learning experience but aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches. The integration of these tools into the curriculum implementation process promotes active participation, knowledge retention, and the achievement of curriculum objectives.

vi. Educational Support Services for Students: In the trajectory of curriculum implementation, students often require additional support beyond traditional classroom instruction. ERCs, through their provision of educational support services such as tutoring and workshops, become integral components in the holistic development of learners. These services bridge gaps in understanding, reinforce key concepts, and provide supplementary guidance, ensuring that students are well-equipped to meet the demands of the implemented curriculum. ERCs, in this capacity, serve as dynamic hubs fostering not only academic growth but also holistic development.

vii. Professional Development Opportunities for Educators: The symbiotic relationship between ERCs and educators extends into the realm of professional development. By providing educators with access to the latest research, workshops, and training initiatives, ERCs empower them to align their teaching practices with evolving curriculum objectives. This continuous engagement ensures that educators remain at the forefront of innovative teaching methodologies, pedagogical trends, and subject-specific advancements which are in line with the realities of the present brain drain the Nigerian educational sector is facing by making sure that the necessary experience required is not lacking. The result is an elevated capacity to effectively implement curriculum changes, infusing instructional practices with contemporary insights and approaches.

viii. Teachers' involvement in curriculum planning: The Network of Educational Services Centres in Nigeria (NESCN) coordinates the activities of all ERCs in Nigeria. The NESCN is under the supervision of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) which is responsible for developing the curriculum in Nigeria. The education resource centre serving as a hub for teachers gives them a voice during the curriculum development stages which in turn improves the effectiveness of the implementation of the curriculum.

ix. Inadequate funding: Education resource centres cannot provide additional funding for education, but the centres can produce learning resources and train teachers to appropriately develop their improvised instructional materials which will mitigate some of the problems of inadequate funding concerning the use of resources in the classroom to curriculum implementation in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the essential role played by Education Resource Centers (ERCs) in overcoming the multifaceted barriers to effective curriculum implementation cannot be overstated. As hubs of knowledge and innovation, ERCs stand as

transformative partners in bridging gaps created by inadequate funding, a shortage of experts, and limited teaching resources. Through strategic alignment with curriculum goals, provision of cutting-edge multimedia resources, and fostering technological innovation, ERCs emerge not only as essential partners in education but also as architects of an efficient and inclusive learning environment. The symbiotic relationship between ERCs and educators, coupled with their unwavering commitment to professional development and effective curriculum processes position these centres as essential in the pursuit of educational excellence. In essence, the enduring impact of ERCs resonates not just within the walls of educational institutions but extends far beyond, shaping a future where curriculum implementation is not merely a challenge to overcome but a collaborative journey towards holistic, transformative education.

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