

Curriculum Development in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum is one of the most frequently used terminology in the context of education. It is a vital part of education. It can be conceptualized as a well-organized plan for conducting educational activities in a school, college, university or in a specific course or program which helps the students learn effectively and efficiently. The process of curriculum development incorporates four major processes: need assessment, planning and design, implementation and evaluation. Curriculum implementation is the phase of putting the prescribed curriculum in action in the classrooms. The availability of adequate and trained human and material resources are the essence for the successful implementation of curricula. As curriculum is an ever-changing and ever-evolving process it needs to be evaluated time and again to ensure it meets academic standards, societal needs, and evolving educational trends. Even though teachers are the major implementers of curriculum however most of the teachers are not familiar with the process of curriculum development. The aim of this editorial is to clarify the concept of curriculum, to understand various strategies that has to be considered while designing a curriculum, steps involved in curriculum implementation and importance of curriculum evaluation.

Key words: *Curriculum; development; education; evaluation; implementation.*

BACKGROUND

The curriculum plays a crucial role in the field of education. The term curriculum originates from the Latin word 'currere', which translates to 'curriculum' or 'course of study'. [1] It refers to the educational program pursued by institutions within a designated timeframe. Numerous

definitions of curriculum exist, and the term has been interpreted in various ways throughout history. The notion of curriculum is continually transforming, responding to the evolving demands of students, educational institutions, and society at large. Consequently, it is challenging to identify a universally accepted,

definitive concept of curriculum. Based on my extensive experience as a higher education teacher, my initial interpretation of curriculum was that it serves as a blueprint outlining what will be taught, learned, and experienced in a classroom over a specific duration. I still struggle to provide a concise definition of curriculum, as it encompasses both explicit and implicit elements, extending beyond the confines of the classroom. This complexity reflects the multifaceted nature of curriculum. [2]

Curriculum is of great importance in the field of education. Based on the curriculum teachers plan their classroom activities. Likewise, curriculum also determines what and how will be the learning experiences of the students. Hence, it would not be inappropriate to think of curriculum in a wider dimension which may include different aspects of education such as goals and objectives of the school, content, teaching pedagogies and evaluation criteria. Essentially, curriculum is what the school is attempting to teach, which is not just confined to books and copies but also includes social behaviors, attitude and thinking skills.

Without any doubt teachers are the major implementers of curriculum however most of the teachers are not familiar with the process of curriculum development. The aim of this editorial is to clarify the concept of curriculum, to identify different components of curriculum

which is not just restricted to content, to identify a number of ways to involve students in self-driven learning, to understand various strategies that has to be considered while designing a curriculum, steps involved in curriculum implementation and importance of curriculum evaluation.

DEFINITION OF CURRICULUM

Curriculum is one of the most frequently used terminology in the context of education. In a simple way, curriculum can be conceptualized as a well-organized plan for conducting educational activities in a school, college, university or in a specific course or program which helps the students learn effectively and efficiently. To effectively support instruction and learning, the curriculum must include the desired goals, techniques, materials, and assessments. Curriculum guides the educators in what is to be done and how is it to be carried out. Depending on how broadly educators define the term, curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning objectives they are expected to meet; the lessons that teachers teach; the assignments and projects that is to be prepared by the students; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and reading resources used

in a course; and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student's learning.

The definitions provided by different scholars over different times will prove to be useful for better understanding of the concept of curriculum. In the words of Cunningham, curriculum is a tool in the hands of the artist (the teacher) to mold his material (the pupil) according to his ideal (objective) in his studio (the school). Curriculum is the platform which allows the complex interactions between the educators and learners to achieve the learning goals. One of the convincing analyses of curriculum is of Schwab's, where he has evaluated the curriculum from five dimension and it is popular amongst the educators as the famous five common places of curriculum. [3] All of the common places for example teacher, student, content, context and curriculum making must be treated equally.

DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM

Curriculum development should be viewed as a process by which meeting the needs of student leads to improvement of student learning. [4] The emphasis of curriculum should be on what students can do with knowledge, rather than what units of knowledge they have. In order for curriculum development to be effective and

successful, it must incorporate four major processes: need assessment, planning and design, implementation and evaluation. Need assessment is the critical first step to maximize the benefits of curriculum. A well-designed and effectively developed need assessment provides the foundation upon which curriculum design and development will be built. [5]

Improved student learning is always the goal sought while designing the curriculum. The controversy lingers on whether subject centered, learner centered or problem centered curriculum design model is superior over the other. All of the curriculum design models have their own strengths and limitations. I think all three designs are to be incorporated in the curriculum of higher education as for example students need to be guided when they have just enrolled in the course and are not familiar with the content, herein the teacher will help them build their foundations and concept so that they don't feel lost and prepare them for learner centered approach as they spend more time in the course/ program. The ultimate goal will be to prepare them to deal with the problem-based learning (PBL) in which students engage and improve their independent learning and critical thinking. PBL offers a great tool in which students can develop independent thinking, cooperation skills, and improved communication. PBL is gaining growing interest in medical and dental education these days. [6]

The principle of adult teaching and learning has to be used so that the learning is internalized only then the educationist will be successful in creating a curious and self-motivated learner. For the curriculum to be successful the content, learning resources, teaching aids and methodologies, ways of evaluations such as summative and formative evaluations, the learning experiences of the students within and outside the classroom; the details of which must be worked up in details by the experts involved in developing the curriculum in advance.

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Curriculum implementation is the phase of putting the prescribed curriculum in action in the classrooms. Teachers are pivotal in the curriculum implementation process. During this phase learner acquire knowledge, skills, attitude and behavior. [7] It is important to note that curriculum implementation cannot take place without the learner; while at the same time parents and school administrators can be directly or indirectly involved in the implementation process. Curriculum implementation therefore refers to how the planned or officially designed course of study is translated by the teacher into syllabuses, schemes of work and lessons through the use of specified resources provided in a curriculum. [8] Basically it refers to the act of carrying out the plans and suggestions that have

been made by curriculum specialists and subject experts in a classroom.

The availability of adequate and trained human and material resources are the essence for the successful implementation of curricula. The physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, equipment, workshops, libraries, adequate resource materials such as textbooks and teaching aids are essential for the purpose of successful and satisfactory teaching and learning. In the absence or lack of these resources there can be variation in written and taught curriculum. Importantly, teachers must have in-depth knowledge of the curriculum so that he/she can deliver it to the learners as prescribed in the official document without any discrepancy. Understanding the beliefs and concerns of teachers can also provide insights into whether curriculum implementation will meet with success or failure.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION

Curriculum evaluation plays a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process within the classroom. [9] The curriculum is a dynamic and continuously evolving entity. How long can one effectively teach a curriculum unit before necessitating changes and adaptations? The curriculum planner faces the challenge of determining not only what should be included in the curriculum but also what may be omitted.

This process entails a thorough analysis of various elements, including objectives, content, teaching methodologies, assessment techniques, and the overall influence on student learning outcomes. A meticulously structured evaluation enables educators to enhance the curriculum, ensuring it aligns with academic standards, addresses societal demands, and adapts to changing educational trends.

Formative Evaluation is carried out during the development and implementation of a curriculum; it offers continuous feedback aimed at enhancing instructional strategies and resources. This process guarantees that the curriculum adapts to immediate challenges.

Summative Evaluation occurs after the completion of a curriculum cycle, where it evaluates the overall effectiveness based on metrics such as student achievement, engagement, and performance.

Norm-Referenced and Criterion-Referenced Evaluations compare student performance against set benchmarks or predefined standards to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Quantitative methods utilize statistical data to assess learning outcomes, whereas qualitative methods depend on interviews, observations, and surveys to evaluate experiences and levels of satisfaction.

Despite its importance, curriculum evaluation encounters various challenges. A significant issue is the resistance to change, as educators and institutions may hesitate to alter traditional teaching practices. Furthermore, insufficient resources such as funding, training, and technology can obstruct the evaluation process. Additionally, creating valid and reliable assessment tools that effectively measure curriculum success necessitates meticulous planning and expertise.[10]

CONCLUSIONS

Curriculum development and the educational reform process continually undergo review, revision, and constant change. Curriculum is a living document that is in constant flux. It must be adaptable to changes in the educational community and in society in general. Only then will it be able to be an effective change agent in the educational process.

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