

CURRICULUM INNOVATION OR RENOVATION: FEASIBILITY IN ZIMBABWEAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe has for the past decade gone through sharp macroeconomic challenges which have left people concentrating on bread and butter issues only for survival. This economic situation is a hindrance to meaningful renovations and innovations that might be necessary in impacting vocational and technical education in Zimbabwean secondary schools. The education sector has therefore suffered stranded growth while the world over technology is improving every day in leaps and bounds. This is increasingly reducing marketability and employability of our vocational and technical secondary school products. Due to advancement in technology, the Zimbabwean school curriculum should go in line with what is happening elsewhere today. This qualitative study employed questionnaires, observation and document analysis as means to collect data. The research has established that curriculum renovation in Zimbabwe is an uphill struggle, given the Zimbabwean economic situation. Renovations and innovations have been very difficult in Zimbabwean schools. The study also established that the content in most subjects has not changed since the Nziramasanga commission except for a few non-technical subjects like History which have changed a little bit. The study has also revealed that some technical subjects are still using the syllabi that were used some twenty years ago. The study established that renovations might be difficult under the current Zimbabwean economy. The study recommends that the government looks into the curriculum and consider seriously infrastructure, material resources and human resources to prepare for the nation's future. Technocrats (local or foreign) should be employed to look into the curriculum for either innovations or renovations depending on what is feasible to Zimbabwean schools currently. The government should also take into consideration input of teachers since they are the policy implementers. Innovations by teachers are very possible aided by other stakeholders.

Keywords: Curriculum, Innovation, Renovation

INTRODUCTION

The attainment of independence in 1980 started a wide range of reforms in the socio-economic, political and educational realms. The aim was to start a democratic and egalitarian society. The government strongly believed that “education is a basic right not a privilege for only a few and should be designed to meet the needs of every citizen and the nation” (Zvobgo, 1986). Thus as the Zimbabwean education system was divided on racial line before independence, it was imperative that “the state would maintain a uniform educational system” (Zvobgo, 1986). Education was to be oriented to national goals. Education as shown in the government policy was given a special role at acting as “major instrument of social transformation.” This means that education reforms, or curriculum innovations were needed in order to translate these national goals into the school curriculum.

The socio-economic, socio-political order stressed a non-racial society. Education was declared a human right for all citizens. National and educational leaders embarked upon a revolutionary path to bring about innovation in education. Some innovations were not good and relevant as they should have been. Some of these innovations include Education with Production. Nziramasanga (1999) points out that the education and training was democratized, access and provision of education was made available to all school going age children in the country. There was great expansion and new secondary schools were opened up country wide. Government policy emphasized education for self-reliance, that is, technical education was to be part of the curriculum. The government introduced Zim-Science in the newly opened secondary schools. Zim science project was a project that had an effect which goes beyond the school it increased in the science curriculum development. According to Vere (1986) national science syllabus panel has been formed; they include education officers, university representative, teachers and college and Zim science writers. Innovations in the new science syllabus include the use of appropriate equipment these are in expensive locally manufactured. This innovation in curriculum was very successful.

There are also significant changes in mathematics education the major changes in mathematics education in Zimbabwe have been the democratization of locally produced syllabuses. Zimbabwe has decided to localize all school syllabus and examinations. The innovations to the mathematical syllabus include options A- C. option A. was to be for students with the ability to proceed to a level mathematics, option B was to be for students likely to engage in training beyond the 'O' level and option c was to be for those not mathematically inclined however option c was never implemented.

However, the policy of provision of practical and academic subjects at secondary level was marred by large numbers of pupils that put pressure on infrastructural, financial, human, teaching and learning resources.

The large portion of pupils who completed 'O' level could not be absorbed into senior schools and institutions of higher learning or the labour market. This was due to the fact that most of the 'O' level graduates did not have relevant practical training since the curriculum was mainly academic and theoretical. In an effort to redress the situation, the government through a memorandum of the Working Party of the Cabinet, September (1985) proposed a reform of educational policy. The reform proposed six significant reforms. The most significant one was the modification of form one and two into offering general education with compulsory technical component requiring a learner to do at least two technical subjects which are related to the economical and developmental needs of the nation (Nziramasanga, 1999). However, this innovation did not take off due to inadequate funding.

Today, secondary schools are under-resourced, textbooks are in short supply, inadequate equipment in school laboratories. Above all, specialist room's equipment for practical and technical subjects is inadequate. This is mainly due to the economic situation of the country. Curriculum innovation and renovation need adequate funding. The innovation which failed to take-off lacked funding.

It is against this background that the researchers embarked on the research to find out whether curriculum innovation or renovation is feasible in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Curriculum innovation or renovation is not a matter of supply of appropriate technical information, rather, curriculum innovation or renovation involves changing attitudes, values, skills and relationships. Gatawa (1999) argues that to occur "renovation requires expertise, if there is no motivated force to introduce and direct change, the status quo is likely to persist."

He goes on to emphasize that basic conditionings for change, is the existence of school structures which can accommodate and accelerate change. It is important to note that there must be readiness to accept this change, which is curriculum innovation or renovation.

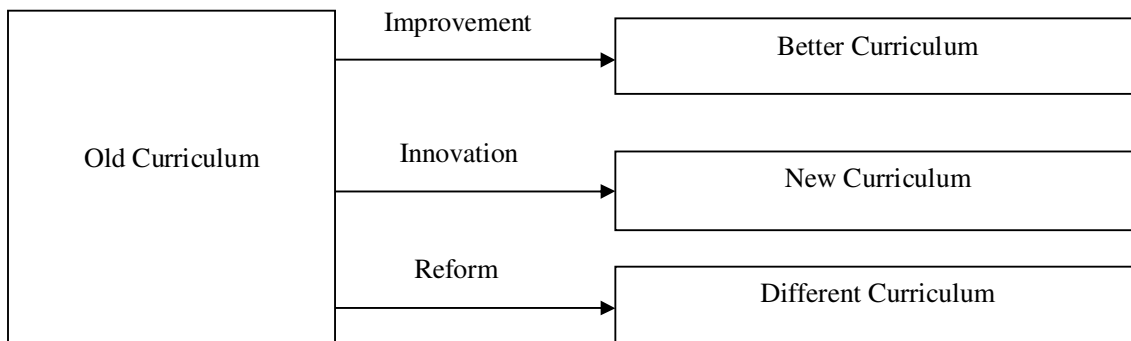
There are reasons for curriculum innovation, some of the reasons are: knowledge, individual, societal and political needs. Knowledge is a powerful agent for curriculum innovation; frontiers of knowledge are ever expanding. Curriculum should accommodate new funds of knowledge (Gatawa, 1999). The second reason for curriculum innovation is the need to make the curriculum relevant to individual, societal and national needs. National needs can either be: a) political, social, or b) need to produce own skilled manpower.

From what has been discussed so far, one can see that curriculum innovation or renovation has far-reaching implications. Curriculum innovation means changing some of the fundamental elements of the curriculum. The fundamental elements are: aims, content, (what is to be taught) methodology, (how it is going to be taught), and evaluation. This implies change of the internal organization of the school relationship, change of relationships between schools and government agents which control education. This permeates to what success or failure is, and the examination itself.

Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011) stress that curriculum innovation of any scale is always complicated than anticipated. This is due to the reason that changing any one component of interrelated systems precipitates a chain reaction of other changes.

According to Bishop (1986) innovation is an activating force within the system to alter it. To a large extent, innovation and renovation has to be introduced by voluntary action and not experts or government decrees.

Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011) says that generic term for both curriculum innovation and improvement is curriculum change, curriculum change may bring in something new (an innovation) or improve the curriculum an improvement. Thus change and innovation are synonymous. The model below is by Ndawi & Maravanyika (2011). It helps to clarify the concept of curriculum innovation or renovation.



Curriculum innovation in Zimbabwean secondary schools or elsewhere has faced problems due to cost implications. Curriculum innovations tend to be more expensive than the programmes they replace because of the cost of research, development of material and re-education of personnel (Gatawa, 1999) It is also affected by time variables and “inertia” within the education system itself. Qualified teachers are sometimes conservative and they see change as a threat. Students and the society also are part of the interested parties. Curriculum innovation or renovation becomes proper only when adopted in the classroom.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Arts, sciences, technical and practical subjects are vital components of the general curriculum in Zimbabwean secondary school. They are in line with the government policy of education for national development. However, the curriculums for these subjects have not been in alignment with the currently global trends of technology and innovation. Most schools are still using old syllabi and outdated tools and equipment. This is largely attributed to lack of curriculum innovation or renovation by both stakeholders in the education sector and teachers of respective subjects.

OBJECTIVES

The research was guided by the objective to establish the feasibility of innovation or renovation in the secondary school curriculum post Nziramasanga report.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is defined as the plan and structure of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research questions (Cooper, 2003). In this case, a qualitative paradigm was preferred. It allows the study of things in their natural setting (Best & Khan, 1993). Hence qualitative research allows an accurate profile of persons, events and situations. The descriptive approach is relevant to the study because it gathers data explaining the extent to which curriculum innovation in Zimbabwean secondary schools could be hindered.

Leedy (1995) describes a population as a large group which consists of all the defined members to be studied and the target group is the population. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools to be included in the study. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to include only those schools believed to offer arts, sciences, practical and technical subjects. A sample of twenty teachers, from five schools was selected using stratified random sampling. One hundred and twenty pupils and five heads of the targeted schools were randomly selected

Data collection instruments consisted of questionnaires, document analysis, observations and interviews. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and pupils; interviews were conducted with seven school heads. Document such as the current 'O' level and junior secondary syllabi were analyzed.

Data from this study were presented in narrative form as discrete data with verbatim statements to substantiate the emerging themes. The responses of teachers, heads and pupils were compiled to establish themes related to research problems. Interpretations were based on the frequency of similar responses and this was related to research questions and objectives that guided the study.

FINDINGS

Curriculum Innovation at Secondary Level

The study found out that curriculum renovation is an uphill struggle in Zimbabwean secondary schools. Four out of five school heads indicated that curriculum renovation was not feasible in Zimbabwean secondary schools at the present moment due to lack of funding, but innovation is possible if all stakeholders are seriously involved as established in the study.

The study revealed that the schools have no capacity to buy expensive tools, equipment and textbooks required by different subjects. For technical and practical subjects, the practical fees charged by schools are too low. Teachers will have to resort to the areas of the syllabus which they feel have not changed, those areas they are comfortable with. Those areas of the

syllabi they know have the same content, equipment and materials from time to time. Teachers also cited lack of specialist room to carry out practical. Other teachers have not held the so-called new syllabuses which is said to have been published five years ago, are still using the 2000 syllabus document. This further reveals that content of the different subjects has not changed since the Nziramasanga report except few non-technical subjects like History.

The information gathered from pupils' questionnaire revealed that 95% of the pupils indicated that in subjects like Building Studies they have always acquired one skill, that is, English bond, and nothing else. 80% of the pupils indicated that there is not much change on what they learn in form one and two and that which they learn at 'O' level. Nearly all pupils agreed that their schools lack infrastructure and equipment which are in line with the current trends in technology.

Documents such as different subject syllabi, new and old textbooks, exercise books, schemes of work, record books were analyzed to get an impression on what was, and what is, in view of the innovations and renovations made. An analysis of textbooks and syllabi was done to give an insight into their responsiveness to national needs and technological advancements. Most schools (90%) do not have the current syllabi. Hence the innovations are not at all being implemented. (Gatawa, 1986), argues that "closed -school climates are opposed to change. Under pressure they put up a show ...when forced they engage in innovation without change." This is what is happening in most Zimbabwean secondary schools today. This is mainly due to lack of commitment by stakeholders and the downward trend of the economy.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that curriculum renovation is an uphill task in Zimbabwe due to the economic condition but innovation is quite possible if whole nation is educated on the importance of innovation in the secondary school system, especially in as far as new technological advancement is concerned. Content of subjects have not changed status since the Nziramasanga report of 1999 that is thirteen years ago. This leaves a lot to be desired on the secondary school curriculum. There are issues that need to be attended to; these include school infrastructure, personnel and equipment that can accommodate and spearhead innovation. Funding of schools should be improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The government should look into the secondary school curriculum and consider seriously infrastructure, material and human resource shortages and engage other stakeholders in the funding of education in general.
2. Technocrats, local and foreign should be involved in curriculum innovations so as to come up with a document that is in line with national needs and global trends in current technology.
3. Technical subjects are taught using the hands-on approach.
4. Examination driven approaches can be replaced by experiential learning which develops desirable skills and competences.
5. Curricular designers to include commerce, industry and relevant professional bodies so that national needs and desired competency are realized.

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In Zimbabwe, the government, through the president donated computers to most rural schools in a bid to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban schools. This phenomenological study purpose was to understand the experience of using computers for Advanced Level students at two rural boarding Catholic High Schools in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by two research questions: (1) How do Advanced level students in the rural areas use computers at their school? and (2) What is the experience of using computers for Advanced Level students in the rural areas of Zimbabwe? By carrying this study, it was possible to understand from the students's experiences if computer usage was for educational learning or not. In Zimbabwe what tended to define the standard achieved at each level of study at school was revealed by the subject content, examination paper and grade scored. The introduction of continuous assessment with a teaching community not seeming to understand what they are doing will make the grades ultimately scored questionable. Without that the students's qualifications will stand the risk of not being accepted in several institutions of higher learning internationally. Teachers are one of the most critical components of a well-functioning educational system. Obtaining their buy-in on new curriculum development and equipping them with the necessary tools and skills to enable successful implementation should be at the fore. Independent Zimbabwe has made great strides in racial integration in schools, with the exception of a few private institutions. Private schools continue to receive government subsidies, while former European schools continue to charge fees and are zoned only in certain geographic areas. These schools mainly cater to the children of elite families who can afford to pay high fees. Enrollment: The 1979 Education Act was amended to change the standard model of education from 8+4+2+4 (eight years in primary school, four years in secondary school, two years in high school, and four years in university) to a new model of 7+4+2+4. It reduced elementary primary education by one year, with other time periods remaining the same.