ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is a key educational process that can boost the innovative capacity of a higher education institution. This study sought to investigate factors that guide curriculum development in higher education in Zimbabwe. It was prompted by continuous changes in the curriculum of higher education institutions which include universities, polytechnical colleges and teachers’ colleges. The study was qualitative by nature. Open-ended questionnaire was used as the main data gathering instrument. The major findings of the study were that curriculum development in Zimbabwe is influenced by factors such as technological advancement, demands by students, society expectations, industry and commerce, globalisation, partnerships by institutions, the need for professionalism in business, academic research to revamp the economy, competition among institutions and government expectations, among others.

Key terms: curriculum development, innovation, higher education, curriculum change

BACKGROUND

Higher education curriculum around the world is witnessing a significant shift in its expectations to help address immediate and longer-term sustainable development challenges. Curriculum development is a key educational process for educational developers for schools and higher education (HE) as it allows an educational course to be designed to meet defined needs. There is now a growing realisation for the need to foster entrepreneurial education in HE institutions with the specific aim to encourage entrepreneurial development, skills, and awareness (Commission of the European Communities, 2006; Seikkula-Leino et al., 2010).

Curriculum development cycles in HEIs have in general become more rapid due to many factors including: competition between institutions; and the expectations of government, employers and students that an educational programme will provide the most contemporary knowledge in a particular discipline (Roffe, 2010). Higher education curriculum has to be directed towards meeting societal needs and aspirations in every case. It is argued that education cannot be value free and different value systems or value ideologies generate different curricula. According to
Bishop (1985: 136) curriculum development should analyse the educational situation as it exists in a particular country.

The mission statement currently displayed in the offices of the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (MHET (2011, p. 1) reads:

The Mission of the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology is to provide, regulate and facilitate tertiary education and training through the planning, development and implementation of effective policies, the provision of resources and management of institutions in order to meet the human resources requirements of the economy and equip individuals to realise their full potential.

The Legal Framework of Education

At Independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a dual education system characterised by inequities between a system designed to serve the needs of the minority Whites (whites were defined in Zimbabwe as Europeans, Asians and Coloureds) and another system designed for the vast majority who were Africans. In order to redress these inequitable and discriminatory practices of successive colonial governments, the post-independence Republic of Zimbabwe government adopted the policy of education as a basic human right, and committed itself to universal and equal educational opportunity for all. It was within this broad policy framework that the Government, buttressed by the progressive Bill of Rights in the Independence Constitution (1979), reorganised, democratised and expanded its education system. The Bill of Rights enshrined fundamental human rights and freedoms designed to guarantee equality of opportunity for all regardless of race, colour, gender, creed, place of origin, or any other considerations. Public policy thus compels the State to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all. This principle has guided all policies and strategies for the provision of education in Zimbabwe since independence. State policy has been shaped, to a large extent, by the principle of equality of treatment and opportunity for all children, women and girls. Several international conventions on human rights and equality have exerted tremendous influence on educational management and the education system. The above are the key elements in the policy framework.

Through this framework, historical imbalances in the education system were redressed and the massive expansion of the 1980s was affected in order to satisfy the nation’s thirst for education.

The Manpower Development Act of 1994 governs tertiary education and training in Zimbabwe. This Act was a successor to the Education Act of 1987 as well as the Manpower Planning and Development act of 1984. The National Council for Higher Education Act of 1990 was established to cater for higher education.

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.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lemmer and Badenhorst (1997:267) mention that a situation analysis of curriculum development should take into account the short-term and long-term needs, interests and potential of those who are to be educated. The needs of the learner are not static. To that end, ideological, political as well as economic aims are influential factors in curriculum development. Zvobgo (1994) mentions that, in the formulation of educational policies in Zimbabwe, government uses the ideological state apparatus. Parents 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 (Lemmer and Badenhost, 1997).

The vision of a country is expressed through the curriculum offered mainly through the HEIs. India’s National Education Policy (NEP) of 1968 reiterated this vision: [...] radical reconstruction of education [...] is essential for economic and cultural development of the country, for national integration and for the ideal of a socialistic pattern of society (Government of India, 1998, p. 38).

Similarly, Zimbabwe’s vision is to provide HE curriculum that develops the country and meets economic development needs. For education to be an effective driver of development, its curriculum changes must meet societal expectations.

The Concept ‘Curriculum’

Curriculum is defined as the sum of learning experiences offered by schools (Harris, 1991, p. 70). A curriculum is a three dimensional document and takes into account the needs of the students, the content and the instructional methodology while the syllabus is a uni-dimensional document, which lists the subjects, and contents outline with broad time allocation (Karisiddappa and Sangam, 1994). Nevertheless, even the presence of essential components in the curricula documents may not mean that they are of appropriate quality. The Quality Assurance Handbook (CVCD and UGC, 2002) comments that:

Aims should cover both the level of achievement expected of students (knowledge, understanding, intellectual and personal/transferable skills), and the effort and resources provided by the department(s) concerned to enable students to meet these levels of achievement. Curriculum development refers to the process of selecting and refining the content of an education system with an aim of implementing it in schools or educational institutions (Thungu, Wandera, Gachie and Alumande, 2008, p. 52). It involves a series of steps which include:

- Planning of learning experiences on the basis of national policies.
- Production of instructional materials.
- Trial and testing of instructional plans and educational materials.
- Implementation of the programme of instruction.
Assessment of learning outcomes

Curriculum development is, therefore, an improvement, change or modification on already existing educational programmes, as curriculum is never static.

Curriculum development is a key innovative process for educational institutions and when applied to fostering enterprising qualities among students can aid the economy. Creating and developing a curriculum though, is a process common to all disciplines. It is often described as a cyclic process (Argyris, 1993; Kolb, 1984; Roffe, 2004) comprising of four stages:

1) The identification of needs;
2) The design of a course of study;
3) Delivery of the learning programme; and
4) The evaluation of the outcomes in relation to the initial objectives.

Philosophical Bases for Curriculum and Instruction

John Dewey (1938) viewed education from another perspective. He points out that philosophy is the general principle of education and that education is the laboratory of education. Philosophy plays an important role in deciding the aims of education, teaching content and organisation. Hence, its impact on curriculum design cannot be over-emphasised. Dewey stresses that education should equip children with the ability to solve social problems to promote their growth. It is important that they develop continuously to meet the ever-increasing challenges of the world. In accordance with this, Dewey deems it necessary to design a curriculum based on children’s experiences and let children be involved in interesting and challenging problems (Dennis, 2002). This is the basis of curriculum design even at tertiary level because curriculum has to address the needs of students and society.

THEORETICAL MODEL OF CURRICULUM DESIGN

The Objectives Model

The objectives model of curriculum design contains content that is based on specific objectives. These objectives should specify expected learning outcomes in terms of specific measurable behaviours. This model comprises four main steps:

- agreeing on broad aims which are analysed into objectives,
- constructing a curriculum to achieve these objectives,
- refining the curriculum in practice by testing its capacity to achieve its objectives, and
- communicating the curriculum to the teachers through the conceptual framework of the objectives (Gatawa, 1990: 30).

You will note that in this model:

- Evaluation is done at each stage of the curriculum design.
- Content, materials and methodology are derived from the objectives.
This model was seen as a relevant model in discussing the determinants of the curriculum since it spells out the need for meeting certain objectives by a country or institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive survey design. The research employed the descriptive survey design. It is argued in educational research that: “…descriptive survey is a method of research that describes what we see over and beyond” (Babbie, 1997: 62). Thus the researchers chose this method as it allowed respondents to say exactly what they conceived of as the factors that determine curriculum development in Zimbabwe’s higher education system (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Instrumentation

Open-ended questionnaire was used as the main data gathering instrument. It is argued that: “questionnaires and surveys can be used to gather either quantitative or qualitative data” (Best and Kahn (1993: 202). Open ended questionnaires gave respondents an opportunity to elaborate on issues asked (Cohen and Manion, 1994). 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 (Burton, 2000). It is suggested that open-ended questions allow for more detailed expression of respondents’ views (Sander & Stevenson, 1999; Fung & Carr, 2000) and that qualitative information on the respondents is far more helpful than aggregated statistical data.

RESULTS

The Need for Entrepreneurial Skills

The small entrepreneurial firm is often referred to as the driving force of economic development as a result of their diversity, flexibility and the fact that they account for a large portion of the gross domestic product and employment in the Zimbabwean situation determines the direction of HE curriculum. Learning and the opportunities to learn are at the centre of entrepreneurial practice, as learning influences the recognition of opportunity (Baron and Ensley, 2006; Hinrichsetal., 2004), the development of soft skills, processes and cultures that are all necessary in order to sustain innovative practices (Spicer and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Studies suggest that studying both the nature and conditions of learning in the context of the entrepreneur is essential in order to understand how these actors, innovate, survive, and grow in what are highly dynamic environments, characterised by changing trends, globalisation, and sustainability (Macpherson and Holt, 2007).

Technological Advancement

Curriculum development should accommodate technological advancements. These may be related to pedagogy, such as open learning where learners can tune in to the lesson and access
information via satellite. They may be advances that are unrelated to pedagogy but which influence knowledge.

Demands by Students

Needs assessment is done to determine how well the curriculum meets the needs of the learner and society. The Zimbabwe Open University carries out needs assessment to introduce a new programme. The findings from needs assessment and the results of policy decision are collated into a report which is presented to the course panel for discussion and approval. The Senate meetings are there to approve the courses and programmes. Students have become more discriminating in their selection and more demanding with the courses and universities they choose (Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010:141). It is argued that:

...the key to achieving the organisation’s goals depends on determining the needs and wants of target markets and by delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than the competitors (Kotler, 2003, p. 13).

Students are the target markets for institutions of higher education. A curriculum that fails to meet their expectations is deserted right away.

Political Ideologies

Respondents raised that:

*Any curriculum in any country is directed by the political ideology.*

*The politics of the day has a lot to answer.*

*The ideological stance of the country influences curriculum design.*

Educational policies are subject to influence from politicians and political groups. This is because education can be used to further political ideologies. This, in turn, influences power structures in the society. Any changes in policies or political ideologies influence the education system.

Special Interest Groups

It was raised by the respondents that organisations such as religious bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), professional organisations and trade unions have an interest in education. They pursue policies with the aim of improving the quality of curriculum content and implementation based on their ideologies. The Catholic Commission of Peace and Justice resisted the introduction of sex education on the grounds of violation of religious rights. Parents Teachers Associations contribute substantially to curriculum improvement through monitoring procedures and providing instructional resources. The schools are the training ground of teachers colleges.

Society Expectations

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. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes imparted to learners are expected to prepare them to fit in society. The issue of increasing access to university education in Zimbabwe has resulted in the opening up of several programmes like the parallel programme, block release programmes and distance education over and above the opening of many universities. Emphasis has been laid on guidance and counselling in Teacher Education curriculum as a way of preparing teachers to cope with diverse behavioural disorders which have resulted from social problems.

Parents are regarded as an important component of the education system and have an input in curriculum development (Lemmer and Badenhost, 1997). Society expects that curriculum addresses its philosophies and its expectations for the future.

**Authority**

The state has a moral responsibility to define the content and purposes of education. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education has the authority that is backed by formal acts of parliament to determine the direction and constituents of the education process. The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) quality assures all programmes and gives direction of the curriculum. The board is there for accreditation purposes of all programmes offered in universities.

**International Influence**

Membership to various international organisations has influenced curriculum reform. Membership to the Commonwealth, United Nations and its specialized agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNFPA, and the Organisation of African Unity (African Union), has led to the introduction of programmes such as HIV/AIDS Education, Environmental Science Education, Culture of Peace, Reproductive Health Education and Population Education, into the curriculum. As such, a number of universities have introduced degrees in Peace, among others. Where donors have had interest in certain areas of the curriculum, they have managed to influence government to institute curriculum reforms.

**Mode of Curriculum Development**

Curriculum development should be a participatory process in which all key stakeholders are involved. These stakeholders form panels and academic boards which approve all curriculum development before it is implemented.

**Industry and Commerce**

Respondents raised the issue industry and commerce as a major determinant of the curriculum. They raised the following issues:

*It what industry and commerce want that must be taught.*
*If a student graduates without the requirements of industry and commerce the he or she becomes a misfit, and thus jobless.*
Institutions of higher education certainly follow the demands of commerce and industry otherwise they produce large numbers of loafers of the streets.

Like parents, employers have also an input in curriculum development because they know the curriculum that is marketable in the world of work (Lemmer and Badenhost, 1997). The demands placed on education by the knowledge-based economy are best encapsulated by the educational theorist, Abby Riddell:

> Changing trade patterns influence the productive possibilities of the economy and thereby the demand for education, the uses put to education, and the demands made on education for tailoring the workforce to those demands.

(Riddell, 1996, p. 1363)

Globalization

Curriculum development is done to meet the needs of the global village. With globalization there has been increasing pressure on tertiary education institutions in the region to move towards the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to widen access to their 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 (Law, 2010: 64). Globalization has provided a rationale for restructuring the Higher Education systems worldwide, 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 privatization, marketization, commodification, managerialism and performativity (Blackmore, 2002; Peters, 2004).

Policy Decision

At the policy decision stage, a formal request is made for the development of a new curriculum, revision of the existing curriculum or adaptation of the existing curriculum to address the special needs to be effected. Input from stakeholders such as industries, trainers and educationists is needed so that the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values included are marketable and match of the needs of industries and society.

The Need for Professionalism in Business

Respondents were of the opinion that one factor that contributes towards curriculum design is the need to gain professionalism in business today. After going through an economic decline, Zimbabwe needs to revamp its business and certainly the skills to run the businesses. They had this to say:

> Higher education is the key to successful business.
> Students need business skills which can revamp the economy that faced a melt down in 2008.
> The operation of business needs a sharpened range of knowledge and skills.
Research on education as key to successful entrepreneurship has shown that there is a positive correlation between university education and success in business.

Academic Research to Revamp the Economy

In Zimbabwe, curriculum reforms have been instituted in response to commissions of inquiry, task forces and various stakeholders. In Zimbabwe, Commissions of enquiry are usually set out to look into curriculum issues at all levels of education. The Nziramasanga commission (1999) is a case in point. The commission recommended an outcomes-based curriculum, which is broad-based in terms of subjects offered, and which focuses on learning areas, employment related skills and other essential skills to be developed across the curriculum. It was set up by the government or Act of Parliament to look into the education system and make recommendations for any curriculum changes required.

Competition among Institutions

Respondents pointed to the idea of completion among institutions as a determinant factor in curriculum design in Zimbabwe. They had this to say:

We see that many universities are competing for students by introducing new programmes all the time.

Is it not competition for high enrolments, U-u-mm, yes it is.

Competing to meet the needs of students, yes it’s a determinant factor we see.

Institutions of higher education compete for student enrolment and this results in the introduction of new programmes all the time in a bid to attract students.

Government Expectations

It was noted by the respondents that institutions of higher learning change their curricula in order to meet government expectations. Respondents highlighted the following:

There is no such thing as an apolitical curriculum.

Government’s policy directives are a contributory factor.

Some institutions of higher learning are private by nature and government directives are given so that there are no wide gaps in the curricula offered.

Zvobgo (1994) mentions that the government uses the ideological state apparatus in the formulation of educational policies in Zimbabwe. Political influences include regulations that stem from the legitimate role of state and national political institutions. States have the authority to set minimum essentials of the curriculum (Tanner and Tanner, 1995).
CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that several factors determine curriculum development in the Zimbabwean situation which include student demands, societal expectations, commerce and industry as future employers, politicians, government expectations, technological advancement, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above conclusions, the study recommends that curriculum development should be based mainly on the trends of globalization. Products of higher education should fit well in society and without the requisite skills and knowledge needed by the market, they will not survive. It is also important to base the curricula on the needs and expectations of the students. Curriculum designers should keep in mind that gone are the days when institutions of higher learning come and take what we offer but to say we offer what you want to take.

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