

Towards A TALENT Model of Curriculum Delivery For Social Change

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Abstract: Education reform in Nigeria has revolved around two main concerns. One concern is to deliver educational opportunities that will engineer social change and the other concern is to allow all students to develop their fullest potential and work toward the highest level of their abilities. In this paper, the TALENT approach is introduced as a model for delivering the curriculum for social change. The paper goes further to discuss six areas of practice in talent development which are subsumed under TALENT, as an acronym. These areas are Talent, Acceleration, Learning styles, Enrichment, Novelty, and Thinking, outlining six areas of practice in talent development. The paper concluded that while providing an orientation to the development of talents in all students, the TALENT approach can also be conceptualized as an integrated model of teaching strategies to promote quality education for all students.

Keywords: Education reform, TALENT, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

The world is witnessing enormous changes in education, and this has been mirrored by the changes in curriculum. The changes as pointed out by Barcelona[1] include transitions from an industrial society to a knowledge society, the changes in production with the shift from Fordism to the flexible system of production, alterations from nation-states to global world and from modern to postmodern way of thinking. These changes have a significant effect on educational systems of several countries in that what is expected from education is no longer to enable individuals to compete with others. Education should be transformed so that learners are educated to compete with each other to challenge with the changing concepts of the world[2]. Since the curriculum lies in the heart of education as it deals with the content of learning and its organization, the learning experiences and the assessment techniques, it is no surprise that the curriculum of nations must change. It is now generally accepted that the school curriculum should provide all students with essential life-long learning experiences for whole-person development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physical development, social skills and aesthetics, according to individual potential, so that all students can become active, responsible and contributing members of society, the nation and the world. So, countries have reshaped their curriculum towards cultivating those types of people for their countries.

In line with the reshaping of the curriculum, there has been increased emphasis on curriculum delivery for social change. Social change in that the world has been radically transformed with knowledge explosion, social equalities and globalisation[3]. The sheer magnitude of human knowledge, globalization, and the accelerating rate of social change due to technology necessitates a shift in curriculum delivery from teacher centred to learner centred[4]. As Obanya[5] stated, the 21st century has witnessed greater importance being given to school curriculum on the basis that it is instrumental for enhancing the creativity, productivity and economic prosperity of the people and their nations. Curriculum contents have been restructured, reviewed and severally modified in response to social changes. Many school systems have invested in the need for curriculum reform to bring about change to meet the needs of what our students will face in the global world and work force. However, Smith[6] stated that changing the curriculum – the topics being taught – is not enough to bring about meaningful social change in secondary education; we also need to rethink the way the curriculum is delivered. It becomes imperative therefore, that curriculum delivery in secondary education should not only be functional and relevant to the learners and society, but also should be responsive to the changing needs of the society so as to equip the learner with the current and necessary training, knowledge, values and basic skills needed in the current age of significant social changes.

Curriculum delivery is the transformation of curriculum plans and materials into a course of action. The task of curriculum delivery involves implementing curriculum policies, content and innovations using several instructional alternatives[7]. Teachers are in charge of curriculum delivery. In delivering the curriculum, the teacher among other things is expected to utilize a variety of resources, materials and learning experiences that may be necessary to meet the demands of the instructional process. Effective curriculum delivery is often operationalised in terms of teaching and learning and improving student learning[8-9]. This implies that the purpose and outcomes of curriculum delivery for social change concern pedagogy; and the change process in schools needs to centre upon improvement of curriculum delivery. The issue that emerges from this proposition then concerns the curriculum delivery practices and processes that will facilitate realisation of these objectives. The TALENT approach discussed in this paper provides a model of curriculum delivery for social change.

THE TALENT APPROACH

The TALENT approach was proposed by Chan [10] based on the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development, developed under the Programmes for the Gifted and Talented at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Essentially, the University-School Tripartite Model of Talent Development has three interrelated components: university-based programmes and activities, university-school interface programmes and activities, and school-based programmes and activities. Under the university-based component, students identified as gifted and talented using a multi-criteria procedure participated in a variety of programmes, including summer programmes, Saturday programmes, mentorship programmes, and international student exchange programmes. Specifically designed programmes and activities and effective teaching strategies were continuously developed. Thematic developments were in three areas: developing innate abilities, nurturing creativity, and reversing underachievement [11]. The university-school interface component coordinated the transmission of knowledge, skills, and experience of the gifted and talented approach to principals and teachers through consultation, teacher training workshops and seminars, and newsletter networking such that school-based programmes and activities were established in individual schools. Thus individual schools participating in the project developed their own programmes and activities to meet the specific needs of their student populations under the school-based component. Different types of extracurricular programmes provided challenging learning experiences to what Chan [12] called the "talent pool" or 5 to 20% of the school population, or to all students. On the other hand, peer support and counselling programmes

provided opportunities for peer leaders trained under the university-based programmes to support students in their own schools especially in areas of developing leadership, nurturing creativity, and reversing underachievement. Chan[11] noted that since the success in enhancing quality education for all students depends critically on the implementation of the "gifted and talented" approach in schools, an integrated model called the TALENT approach has been developed to form the basis of teacher training for quality education under the University-School Tripartite Model.

The TALENT approach has been developed on the basis of effective approaches from gifted education, and can be conceptualized as an integrated model of teaching strategies that can be readily acquired by teachers for enhancing quality education in schools. Specifically, TALENT is an acronym embodying six areas of practice. TALENT refers to Talent, Acceleration, Learning styles, Enrichment, Novelty, and Thinking. Chan [11] outlined the basic areas of the TALENT approach as follows:

- 1) Talent: Teaching to Develop Students' Talents, Strengths, and Interests
- 2) Acceleration: Teaching to Allow Accelerated and Advanced Learning
- 3) Learning Styles: Teaching to Accommodate Students' Learning Styles
- 4) Enrichment: Teaching to Promote Enriched and Extended Experiences
- 5) Thinking: Teaching to Develop Thinking Skills and Increase Metacognitive Awareness

By capitalizing on the experiences of teaching gifted learners, the TALENT approach is ideally suited for talent development in all students. The TALENT model concerns enabling the learning and intellectual growth of students in contrast to instruction that treats students as the object of curriculum implementation. More importantly, apart from being an integrated model of teaching strategies, the TALENT approach is an orientation that suggests the importance of profiling students' talents, identifying talents above and beyond those assessed using traditional achievement scores, and programming to accommodate individual students' characteristics, needs, and learning styles for accelerated, enriched, and creative learning.

Application of the TALENT Model in Curriculum Delivery for Social Change in Nigeria

The talent model could be applied to the Nigerian situation to facilitate curriculum delivery for social change. The adoption of the TALENT approach in curriculum delivery for social change parallels the pursuit of excellence and the promotion of quality education for all students. Such an emphasis is also in line with the worldwide movement in talent development that focuses on developing the varied and

unique talents of all students, including highly able or gifted learners, in academic, artistic, vocational, and personal-social areas[13]. This is more so when Nigeria, like Hong Kong, is striving, through curriculum reforms or innovations or changes, to make her educational system responsive to her needs. In Nigeria, there is growing concern about appropriate teaching /learning for the twenty-first century. The application of the TALENT model in secondary schools could facilitate the emergence of a new order where learning is an approach rather than a technique and where the needs of the student rather than the interests of teachers are predominant; where students are given considerable control over what, when, where and how they learn. This could be achieved in the following ways:

1) Talent: Teaching to Develop Students' Talents, Strengths, and Interests

Education reform in Nigeria has revolved around two main concerns. One concern is to deliver educational opportunities that will engineer social change and the other concern is to allow all students to develop their fullest potential and work toward the highest level of their abilities. Focusing classroom interaction on identifying and developing students' talents is useful in achieving both concerns. Chan [11] assumed that the majority of students in regular classrooms have some talent areas that can be discovered and developed. These talents represent innate abilities in several fields-Science, Technology, Arts, Humanities and Vocational. Akinboye [14] noted that each individual has a wide range of ideas, perceives things in a personal way and, at times, shows insight and inventiveness. Some learners demonstrate high levels of creativity in particular areas such as music, fashion, science or problem solving, or in maintaining positive relationships.

Therefore, teachers should organise opportunities for talent development across the curriculum, so that students would be more likely to find and develop their talents in particular areas. Developing students talents in diverse areas will lead to the production of skilled personnel who will be creative, productive, self reliant and enterprising. Talent recognition and identification is a prerequisite for teaching to students' talents, strengths, and interests. Unfortunately, curriculum delivery processes in several secondary schools in Nigeria inhibit rather than develop these talents[15]. In many cases, there is high emphasis on paper certifications rather than knowledge acquisitions and only the gifted are recognised and empowered while the underachievers are labelled and their talents untapped[16]. No positive social change whatsoever will be made with a system that promotes theoretical knowledge, places emphasis on paper certification rather than stressing the development of

innate abilities in a learner evolving through training or practice.

Both teachers and students have to work together to identify where talents of students lie. Given the diverse talents of students in a class, it is obvious that no one set of teaching strategies will work best for all students at all times. Thus, it is important for teachers to employ a broad spectrum of teaching strategies addressing the different talents of students such that each student will have his or her most highly developed talents actively involved in learning. Armstrong[17], for example, has presented teaching strategies such as storytelling, problem-solving, drawing, role-playing, singing, group projects or cooperative learning, and thinking strategies that could be used to develop students' talents.

Acceleration: Teaching to Allow Accelerated and Advanced Learning

Acceleration may be used to denote both models of service delivery and of curriculum delivery[18]. Service delivery acceleration essentially offers standard curricular experiences to students at a younger-than-usual age or lower-than-usual grade level. In this connection, acceleration usually refers to early entry to kindergarten or to secondary school, grade skipping, or partial grade acceleration in which students enter a higher grade for part of the school day to receive advanced instruction in one or more content areas. Chan[11] stated that as a curriculum delivery model, acceleration involves speeding up the pace at which material is presented or expected to be mastered. Such acceleration of content may occur in a regular classroom in the form of up-graded text books, group works and self-paced studies. Lesson modules can also be used to accelerate learning. There is some evidence that grade-skipping and content acceleration may help prevent or reverse underachievement in highly able students who do not perform well in schools that do not provide the appropriate challenges[19].

Viewed in this manner, even though grade skipping does occur in limited instances in Nigeria, content acceleration appears to be feasible for students working at their own pace in their areas of strengths. Teachers could accelerate learning by presenting students with learning content superior to their grade levels. They could give students challenging learning tasks as assignments and encourage them to read ahead of lessons. Recognising that not all students are willing to go extra mile in their learning, acceleration suggests that one should guide and motivate those who are less likely to work extra hard and preserve towards a goal. In this context, it is a teacher's responsibility to motivate and cause students to learn but students are required to take responsibility for their learning.

Acceleration would require resourcefulness from teachers. For example, to make students of different ability levels learn, retain and use information and materials better, the subject topics should be taught by combining presentation with activities and interaction. This requires that teachers design relevant materials/activities for students' participation that will lead to dynamic and interactive exchanges in the classroom environment[20]. The use of graded assignments, hands-on-experience and improvised materials may be useful in this respect. Students should be given the opportunity to re-do learning tasks after the teacher provides them with more guidelines. Challenging and stimulating students need to be done vigilantly because if the task is too easy the students will get bored, and if it is too difficult they will be discouraged. Providing such challenges outside of the curriculum and/or classroom setting shows the students that the teachers care, which is very important to the talent development of students.

Learning Styles: Teaching to Accommodate Students' Learning Styles

A student's learning style is his or her typical way of taking in, processing, internalizing, and retaining information and skills[21]. Chan [11] assumed that a student learns best using his or her preferred learning style. There are different classifications of learning styles based on studies of cognitive styles and research on brain lateralization[22]. A student may have preference in field-dependence or field-independence, global or analytical processing, configural or linear processing, extraversion or introversion, feeling or thinking, intuition or sensing, or some combinations of these variables[23]. The importance of recognising learning style in curriculum delivery is emphasized when it is recognized that a great proportion of students are not identified as gifted because of their unconventional learning styles[24]. Studies have found that there were significant improvements in academic achievement, school attitudes and behaviours when students' learning style preferences were accommodated[21, 25]. Therefore, Chan [11] recommended that as an integral part of the TALENT model, teaching with intention to accommodate the diverse learning styles of students becomes important for all students when the enhancement of their academic attainment and learning is emphasized.

The fact that teachers have almost full control over every major element in the curriculum delivery process such as subject (spoken words, depth of topic, making changes, jokes, illustrations), and style (mode of delivery, tone of voice, facial expressions, movement, actions, using groups, discussion or debate), makes them even more responsible for their students[26]. So knowing these factors, the challenge is to immediately recognise any learning problems and

then implement the corresponding solution with the correct and appropriate use of the subject, style and technology.

The important consideration is to design appropriate and effective teaching strategies for specific learning styles, and to plan instruction that intentionally includes opportunities for students with dominant strengths in diverse learning styles to succeed. Ricca [21] found that teaching games, independent study, programmed instruction, projects, simulation, peer teaching, discussion, lecture, and drill and recitation were useful teaching strategies that accommodate students' learning styles. By intentionally varying the teaching strategies corresponding to diverse learning styles, all students will have opportunities to learn and work from their strengths.

Enrichment: Teaching to Promote Enriched and Extended Experiences

Enriched curriculum delivery refers to richer, more varied, broad and in-depth educational experiences. Chan [11] noted that enrichment activities are generally good for all students especially when they are tied to knowledge goals and thinking skill development. It should be noted that additions or modifications to the regular curriculum for enrichment have to be supported with teaching strategies designed to accommodate the characteristics of the students. To enrich curriculum delivery for social change, teachers need to get feedback and listen to students to see what we may need to change to become more effective –e.g., changed lesson plans, style, appropriate humor, gently confronting problem students.

Enriching classroom experience can also reflect students' higher motivation for learning. Research on academic motivation showed that motivation can play an important mediating role in students' academic commitment[27]. Students with higher academic motivation devote more time and energy to their academic learning tasks. Where students perceive their learning tasks as parts of the group's goals which are thus at the same time their own goals, they are more likely to complete their own task and their group's task in order to be successful. Teachers could achieve group interdependence and their individual accountability by monitoring students' progress in class and group work and by granting special bonuses if the group presentation was excellent.

Classroom interaction is central to the enriching classroom teaching and learning. Appropriate classroom interaction ensures that students involved in the learning process are assiduously meeting their learning requirements, and gaining satisfaction from their educational experience. Some examples of the learning requirements can be more personal attention; using more multimedia and visual applications rather

than all teacher-talk, more teacher-student interaction; having more interesting, meaningful and practical or real-life lesson content that is presented with the latest technology; marking and returning all student submitted assignments quickly; teaching materials at the students' level; giving more demonstrations or hands-on approaches to certain topics; timeliness and accuracy in the provision of information and services; and more group activities. Chan [11] recommended that enrichment activities can be implemented in after-school, Saturday, or holiday programmes or other extracurricular programmes. Other enrichment activities may include mentoring in schools or mentorship programmes outside schools. Mentorship programmes offer enriched and possibly crystallizing experiences for students who might make the connection between what they would like to become and their talents.

Novelty: Teaching to Value Novelty and to Nurture Creativity

In curriculum delivery for social change, novelty or creativity are highly valued. Creative attitudes, abilities, and skills can be strengthened in all students in the course of involvement in activities that intrinsically require creative thinking and problem solving. Renzulli & Reis [28] recommended independent projects in language arts, science, or art areas may help all students develop creative problem-solving attitudes and skills along with valuable technical skills. Other creativity exercises can also be readily integrated into class work for all students. In order to develop the competencies for engineering social change: knowledge, skills and values, teachers should combine different kinds of work with students: lectures, practical work and classroom discussions [29]. Lectures cover the basic developmental concepts and theories important for students, different modes of learning and their effects, factors that are influencing students' achievement, individual differences in students, their special needs and the basics of student assessment. During practical work students might work in small groups, analyse different examples, discuss topics in small groups, simulate different classroom situations and problems and practice life-coping skills (i.e. conflict resolution, communication skills, classroom management skills, learning and self-regulative skills).

The classroom discussion and small group works are useful in stimulating as much students' activity as possible. The aims of the classroom discussions and small group works are as follows: students have to connect theory (which they read and listen to) with experiences in the past schooling the extent of newness of the strategy in terms of the number and extent of new processes, new technologies, new products and concepts.

Thinking: Teaching to Develop Thinking Skills and Increase Metacognitive Awareness

Teaching thinking skills has to occupy a special place in curriculum delivery for social change because the development of thinking has been identified as a major problem facing students' ability to adapt to social changes [5] and the development of thinking is considered to be a core competency in this era of social change [14]. Thinking skills reflected in the ability to compare and classify, analyze and plan, see cause-effect relations, and make good decisions and inferences is a core feature of educational reform for all students [11].

Thinking skills can be taught indirectly through practice and exercise, or taught directly through helping students learn conscious and deliberate strategies for reasoning, problem solving, and critical thinking [30]. Another approach to teach thinking is to increase students' understanding of their own or others' thinking, or to develop metacognitive knowledge and control [31]. Students' metacognition may involve their mental capabilities and talents, their learning styles, their sources of ideas, viewpoints, attitudes, and values. The improvement of metacognitive skills in all students help them plan and monitor more effectively their learning [23]. Thus, by enabling students to monitor and regulate their cognitive performance, metacognition constitutes a crucial component of effective learning for all students in this era of social changes.

Teachers can integrate or infuse thinking skills instruction into existing content areas or subjects. Metacognitive awareness can be promoted through self-reflection using written daily journal, summaries, expectations, and self-evaluations, along with debriefing and closure sessions. Teacher thinking skills will help to develop students who would be reflective practitioners, through constantly relating theoretical concepts to practical experience, analysing past experiences, observing and analysing experiences gained during practical work, constantly reflecting and critically judging their competence achievement with colleagues, teachers and mentors in all subjects [32]. Students could also learn with the experiential learning approach, with a combination of lectures, exercises, seminar work, presentation simulations and practical work in schools under the supervision of mentors.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions on the possible applications of the TALENT approach to curriculum delivery, the following recommendations are made:

1. Careful selection of learning tasks, emphasis, and replication of such tasks should be implemented by secondary school teachers to develop talents, accelerate learning and nurture creativity in students.
2. The teachers should use various teaching strategies that aid discovery of talents, creates opportunities

for thinking, and accommodate students' learning styles.

3. Curriculum delivery processes that encourage memorization should be demystified or jettisoned. Skill acquisition for talent development should be giving a priority.
4. Secondary school teachers should be trained through seminars and workshops to adopt the Talent as a model of curriculum delivery for social change.

CONCLUSION

Appropriate curriculum delivery ought to be promoted as the harbinger of social change and the salvation of schooling. The notion of the TALENT model is proposed as model of curriculum delivery for social change which requires that teachers understand how students learn according to their different talents and have the autonomy to design, implement and assess educational activities that meet the needs of individual and all students. This involves recognizing the diversity of students' talents, using acceleration to accommodate their learning styles, implementing enriching classroom interactions, introducing novelty and fostering creativity in students' learning experiences and empowering students to think. The adoption of the TALENT approach in curriculum delivery for social change is an educational ideal that promotes talent development and quality education for all students.

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