

Basic Principles of Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is a continuous and comprehensive process aimed at creating an effective and relevant learning system that meets the needs of learners and the demands of changing times. This process involves planning and designing the curriculum by considering critical aspects such as national education goals, material relevance, flexibility in implementation, and efficient use of available resources. Fundamental principles of curriculum development include goal orientation, relevance, flexibility, continuity, and effectiveness, which serve as key guidelines in designing curricula that focus not only on academic content but also on developing broad life skills, including critical thinking, social skills, and vocational abilities. Moreover, a well-designed curriculum addresses both individual and collective differences among learners, ensures continuity across educational levels and subjects, and optimizes the use of funds, time, personnel, and facilities. The quality of curriculum development is measured based on established national education standards, with the aim of producing competent generations ready to face challenges in the workforce and society. Therefore, curriculum development grounded on these principles supports comprehensive and sustainable educational success.

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum development process plays a crucial role in the education system with the aim of creating effective learning that is in line with the needs of students and the dynamics of the times. An ideal curriculum is comprehensively designed by taking into account various factors, ranging from national education goals, material suitability, flexibility in application, to the efficient use of resources. In addition, curriculum development must also take into account the different characteristics of individual and group students, as well as ensure continuity between levels and fields of study so that the learning process flows harmoniously without causing boredom.

Fundamental principles in curriculum development, such as goal orientation, relevance, flexibility, and effectiveness, are important guidelines in designing a curriculum that not only focuses on academic aspects but also develops various life skills, ranging from self-awareness and critical thinking to social and vocational skills. Therefore, curriculum development must be able to respond to the challenges of today's education by providing quality learning and results that meet applicable national standards.

By understanding and implementing these principles, it is hoped that the curriculum design process can be systematic and sustainable, thereby producing a competent generation that is ready to face the demands of the world of work and society.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the fundamental principles underlying curriculum development. Data were collected through an extensive review of scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and curriculum policy documents published within the past ten years. Sources were identified using databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus, focusing on keywords including curriculum development, educational design, instructional principles, and learning objectives. The selection process followed inclusion criteria that prioritized relevance to curriculum planning frameworks, contemporary educational standards, and global best practices. All collected materials were then categorized based on thematic relevance to principles such as relevance, coherence, flexibility, balance, and alignment to learning outcomes.

The data analysis process used thematic analysis to identify core patterns and conceptual foundations across the reviewed literature. Each document was examined through open coding to extract recurring ideas related to design rationale, instructional alignment, and learner-centered planning. Codes were then clustered into broader themes representing universal principles of curriculum development. To ensure credibility, the themes were cross-checked against established curriculum models such as Tyler's Model, Taba's Inductive Approach, and the Backward Design Framework. The findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative that explains how core principles guide the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational curricula.

RESULTS

Understanding the Basic Principles of Curriculum Development

Principles can be understood as the basic foundations or guidelines in designing a curriculum that must be considered and implemented. These principles serve as a reference so that the curriculum developed truly meets the needs of all parties involved, such as students, parents, the community, the world of work, and the interests of the nation and state. Curriculum development can be carried out by referring to previously established principles or by formulating new principles according to the context. Therefore, each educational institution may apply different principles, resulting in various approaches to curriculum development that are tailored to the needs and characteristics of each institution (Rafi et al., 2024).

Curriculum development is a process of planning and producing better tools based on the results of assessments of existing curricula, thereby providing good teaching and learning conditions. In other words, curriculum development is an activity to produce new curricula through curriculum development steps based on the results of assessments conducted over a certain period of time. Curriculum principles can also be described as the rules that inform curriculum development. These principles aim to ensure that the curriculum designed or produced meets the demands of all parties, namely students, parents, the community, and the nation.

Curriculum development is essentially an effort to design and organize all aspects of learning, from objectives and content to the methods used. The main objective is to ensure that the learning process is in line with developments and needs, so that it can support the achievement of the desired results in an educational institution. Every teacher must understand curriculum development, as this is a crucial part of the world of education. Through the curriculum, we can see the efforts made to help students develop their potential in various aspects, including physical, intellectual, emotional, social, religious, and others.

In general, curriculum experts view curriculum development as a continuous process, a cycle involving several curriculum components, namely objectives, materials, activities, and evaluation. The curriculum in Indonesia has undergone changes over time in line with developments in science and society. The application of basic principles of curriculum development is explained by Dr. Wina Sanjaya in competency-based curriculum, where this development principle also considers several fundamental aspects of national characteristics (Surahman, 2018).

Sources of curriculum development principles

Oliva explained that there are four main sources in curriculum development, namely empirical data, research results, folklore, and common sense. These sources are divided into two categories, namely scientific and non-scientific sources, where scientific sources include research results and factual analysis, while non-scientific sources include folklore and myths that contain cultural values. Sukmadinata also mentioned that there are other sources that play a role in curriculum development, namely (Mudrikah et al., 2025):

- a. The demands of life and the world of work in the future, so that the curriculum must be designed to equip students with the readiness to face the realities of life and profession when they grow up.
- b. The culture of society, which includes all knowledge, norms, behavior patterns, cultural products, and various other elements of social life that play a role in shaping and influencing curriculum formulation.
- c. Students as the center of learning, so that the curriculum needs to be designed to encourage the optimal development of children's abilities and potential.
- d. Lessons learned from previous curriculum formulations, which can be used as a basis for evaluation to produce a better curriculum that meets needs.
- e. Values in society, which will be used as guidelines in determining the material to be taught in the education curriculum.
- f. The influence of socio-political power and government policies, such as applicable laws, which also influence the direction and development of the curriculum in education.

Types of curriculum development principles

The types of curriculum development principles are the levels of validity and reliability of the principles used for curriculum development. This is related to the source of the curriculum development principles themselves. There are facts, data, concepts, and principles whose credibility is unquestionable because they have been proven through repeated research tests. However, it is possible that there is data that has been proven but is still limited in certain cases and cannot be generalized. There is also data that has not been proven by researchers but has been proven in real life and, according to common sense, is considered logical, good, and useful.

Broadly speaking, the principles of curriculum development can be grouped into three main types (Ndari & Chandrawaty, n.d.):

1. Whole truth

Whole truth refers to facts, concepts, and principles that have been obtained and tested in rigorous and repeated research, resulting in generalizations and challenges or criticism because they are believed by those involved in curriculum development.

2. Partial truth

Partial truth refers to facts, concepts, or principles that have been proven successful in a number of situations but cannot yet be applied universally. Nevertheless, they are still considered valuable and useful.

3. Beliefs that require further verification (hypotheses)

Hypotheses are assumptions or temporary principles whose truth is not yet certain, which arise based on logical considerations of common sense.

4. Types of Curriculum Development Principles

The five principles of curriculum development, as proposed by Wina Sanjaya, are: relevance, flexibility, continuity, practicality, and effectiveness. These principles were also proposed by Abdullah Idi and Asep Herry Hernawan et al. in Rahmat.

Various Basic Principles of Curriculum Development

Etymologically, the word principle has many meanings, such as basis, guideline, and perspective. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, a principle is a fundamental truth that forms the basis for thinking and acting. In other words, a principle is something essential that guides consistent action. In curriculum development, principles serve as the main reference for designing and developing the curriculum (Suyyirah et al., 2025).

There are many principles that can be used in curriculum development. These principles can be divided into two categories: general principles and specific principles. General principles are usually used in almost every curriculum development process everywhere. In addition, these general principles refer to principles that must be considered in curriculum development as a totality of the components that make it up. Specific principles also refer to principles that are used in the development of individual curriculum components. For example, principles used to develop other curriculum components. The principles of development between one component and another will vary (Sumampow, 2024).

Sukmadinata categorizes curriculum development principles into two categories: general and specific.

1. General principles include

- a. Relevance

The curriculum must be in line with internal and external demands, including science, psychology, and community needs.

- b. Flexibility

The curriculum needs to be adapted to regional conditions, timing, and student characteristics, while also giving teachers flexibility in designing their learning programs.

- c. Continuity
The curriculum must ensure continuity between levels of education and study, preventing tedious repetition.
- d. Efficiency
The curriculum needs to maximize the use of resources to achieve predetermined goals.
- e. Effectiveness
The curriculum must include efficient teaching approaches for teachers and learning strategies that motivate students to achieve learning targets.

2. According to Sukmadinata, specific principles include:

- a. Determining Educational Goals
This is done based on government policy, community survey results, and international experience.
- b. Selection of Educational Content
This includes translating educational objectives into specific learning outcomes, covering aspects of knowledge, attitudes, and skills in a structured manner.
- c. Selection of Teaching and Learning Processes
This involves determining appropriate and diverse learning techniques to accommodate individual differences among students.
- d. Selection of Teaching Media and Tools
Regulating the use of learning media and tools in an efficient and effective manner.
- e. Assessment
Includes planning assessment instruments, preparing tests, and managing evaluation results using appropriate standards.

By applying these principles, the curriculum development process becomes more focused and effective in achieving the expected educational goals.

Oemar Hamalik divides the basic principles of curriculum development into eight types, including (Surahman, 2018):

- a) Goal-Oriented Principle
Curriculum development is directed toward achieving specific goals rooted in national educational objectives. The curriculum serves as a manifestation and means of achieving goals at specific educational units and levels. Curriculum objectives cover knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Furthermore, the curriculum aims to foster changes in student behavior that encompass these three aspects and are in line with national educational goals.
- b) Principle of Relevance
Relevance means harmony or compatibility. In its application, the curriculum must consider internal and external aspects. Internally, there must be compatibility between curriculum components such as objectives, materials, organization, and evaluation. Externally, these components must be relevant to the demands of science and technology (epistemological relevance), student potential and needs (psychological relevance), and community needs and development (sociological relevance). The curriculum must also adapt to the needs of the students' and community's environment in order to benefit students in facing competition in the future workplace. In reality, this principle is very important to consider because it has a direct impact on the quality of education and must be in line with technological advances in order to support national development (Rafi et al., 2024).
- c) Principles of Efficiency and Effectiveness.
Curriculum development needs to consider efficiency and the use of resources such as funds, time, energy, and facilities so that the results achieved are maximized. Limited funds must be allocated carefully to support the learning process. Students' learning time at school is also limited, so it must be used optimally in accordance with the curriculum structure and required materials. Educators, whose numbers and quality are limited, need to be utilized effectively in the implementation of learning. Similarly, limitations in space, equipment, and reading materials must be managed appropriately by students so that the learning process runs effectively and educational goals can be achieved (Surahman, 2018).
- d) Principle of Flexibility
A flexible curriculum can be easily adapted, changed, added to, or reduced according to needs, environmental conditions, and local capabilities, so that it is not rigid or fixed. For example, a curriculum may include industrial and agricultural skills programs. In cities, due to limited agricultural land, the programs implemented focus more on industrial skills. Conversely, in rural areas, the focus is more on agricultural skills.

In implementing the curriculum, the surrounding environment, social conditions, and the availability of personnel and facilities are key considerations (Surahman, 2018).

a. Principle of Continuity

The principle of continuity in the curriculum emphasizes continuity both vertically and horizontally. The learning experiences outlined in the curriculum must take into account the continuity of material, starting from the grade level, between education levels, and the relationship between education levels and the world of work. Continuity here means that there is a close relationship between the curricula at various levels of education, thereby preventing repetition of material or disharmony that can cause teachers and students to become bored. In addition, the curriculum also needs to be integrated across subject areas so that one subject complements another. Meanwhile, the principle of flexibility requires that the curriculum not be rigid, but rather give teachers and students the freedom to choose learning programs or materials, so that there is no compulsion in following the learning process (Prasetyo & Hamami, 2020).

b. Principle of Balance

In determining educational materials or policies, differences between the individuality and collectivity of students cannot be ignored. Therefore, balance is needed in curriculum development and the determination of learning materials. This balance does not mean absolute equality, but rather a proportional distribution according to the needs of each aspect (Susanti & Hasmiza, 2025).

c. Principle of Integration

Curriculum development must reflect horizontal connections between learning experiences, thereby helping students gain comprehensive and integrated experiences. This means that learning experiences do not stand alone, but can be applied in various other fields. Therefore, the curriculum needs to develop various life skills. These life skills include not only technical and work skills, but also five main categories, namely:

- a. Self-awareness or personal skills.
- b. Thinking skills.
- c. Social skills.
- d. Academic skills.
- e. Vocational skills (Hanafi, 2014).
- d. Quality Principles

Curriculum development focuses on improving the quality of education and its outcomes. Quality education refers to the implementation of a good learning process, while the quality of education emphasizes the achievement of superior educational outcomes. The quality of education is determined by the level of teacher competence, teaching and learning activities, and the quality of learning facilities and media. Meanwhile, the quality of educational outcomes is measured based on established national educational objectives (Lillah, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Curriculum development is a continuous process designed to produce effective learning that is relevant to the needs of students and the times. Basic principles such as goal orientation, relevance, flexibility, and efficiency are important foundations in developing a curriculum that focuses not only on academic aspects but also on developing various life skills. A good curriculum must pay attention to continuity between education levels and fields of study, as well as optimize the use of resources to achieve quality results in accordance with national standards. With the application of these principles, it is hoped that the curriculum can support the creation of a competent generation that is ready to face the challenges of the world of work and social life.

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