

Foundations and Steps for Developing Educational Curricula

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Abstract:

Governments annually allocate substantial budgets to develop education, which is considered the primary tool for advancement and progress across all economic, political, cultural... and even religious levels. Despite the funds allocated and efforts exerted, most still struggle with educational randomness that has yielded economic and social crises. Therefore, focusing on the development of educational curricula is a matter that governments must heed to escape the cycle of haphazardness and experimentation, of which entire generations have been victims.

This research is presented within the framework of the **5th International Conference on Educational and Research Curricula: Grounding, Analysis, and Qualification**. It does not aim to demolish previous educational curricula or dismiss them as entirely erroneous, but rather seeks to identify and strengthen points of weakness and rectify imbalances. This is achieved: **firstly**, by establishing solid foundations for formulating change and development—ensuring these foundations account for the specific educational philosophy adopted and benefit from the experiences of countries successful in the educational field. **Secondly**, it aims to establish the fundamental steps toward building a sound educational curriculum that aligns with societal requirements, following the precise identification of objectives, strategies, educational tools, and the agreement on evaluation methods. This process maintains open channels that realize the principle of continuous development, as the evolution of educational curricula is inherently linked to the constant evolution of society.

Keywords: Educational Curricula; Development; Educational Philosophy; Educational Needs and Objectives.

Présentation Out line:

Introduction

1. The Concept of Educational Curricula.
2. Distinguishing Between Development and Change in Educational Curricula.
3. Foundations of Educational Curriculum Development.
4. Steps for Developing Educational Curricula.

Conclusion

Introduction

Educational curricula are born from the womb of educational philosophies that view education as a process of nation-building, rather than merely teaching a student arithmetic,

language, and other subjects. These philosophies engage in profound reflection, discussion, and critique of deep educational issues, such as educational systems, curriculum construction, the human nature of those within the educational environment, school activities, teaching methods, and culture¹...etc.

Thus, educational curricula serve as the practical implementation of educational philosophies on the ground. Simultaneously, they translate the projects, plans, and objectives of the Ministry of Education in every country. It is certain that all relevant ministries strive for the continuous development of educational curricula to keep pace with the social and cultural changes occurring in the respective state. Because social evolution moves according to a wheel that knows no stillness, the development of educational curricula has become a continuous and inevitable necessity, which likewise knows no stasis.

Capitalizing on this conference, profound in its objectives and robust in its themes, we have chosen to participate with a research paper titled "**Foundations and Steps for Developing Educational Curricula.**"

Through this paper, we will attempt to answer a number of questions, most notably:

- What is the meaning of curriculum development? And what are the boundaries between its development and its change?
- What are the foundations of educational curriculum development?
- What are the steps for developing educational curricula?

1. The Concept of Educational Curricula: The Concept of Curriculum:

In the dictionary *Lisan al-Arab*, under the entry *nahaj*: "A path is *nahja* and a way is *manhaj*, same as *nahaj*. To *manhaj* the path means to clarify it. *Al-minhaj* is the same as *al-manhaj*. To *anhaj* the path means it became clear, manifest, and an evident, distinct track."

Yazid bin al-Khadhaq al-Abdi said: "*The path has shone for you, and the ways of noble deeds and guidance have become clear (anhajat)*...meaning they provide aid and strength.

Al-Minhaj refers to the clear path, and to *istanhaj* the road means it became a clear track.

In the *hadith* of al-Abbas: "The Messenger of Allah—peace and blessings be upon him—did not pass away until he left you upon a clear path (*tariq nahija*)," meaning one that is evident and plain"².

Al-Fayrouzabadi concurs with Ibn Manzur regarding the meaning of *manhaj*, stating: "*Al-Nahaj* is the clear path, as are *al-manhaj* and *al-minhaj*. To *nahaj* the road means to follow it, and the road *istanhaj* means it became a clear path. To follow someone's *manhaj* means to take their path"³.

Ibn Faris stated in *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha*:

¹ For further reading on the philosophy of education, see: **Said Ismail Ali**, *Contemporary Educational Philosophies*, National Council for Culture and Arts, Kuwait, 1978.

² Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, entry (*nahaj*), Vol. 14, Dar Sadir, 2003.

³ Al-Fayrouzabadi, *Al-Qamus al-Muhit*, entry (*nahaj*), Ed: Anas Muhammad al-Shami, Dar al-Hadith, Cairo, 2008.

(*Nahaj*) The letters Nun, Ha, and Jim represent two distinct roots: the first is *al-nahaj*, the path. To *nahaj* a matter for me means to clarify it. One is of 'straight *minhaj*'. *Al-manhaj* is also the path, and the plural is *manahij*.⁴

As for the Holy Qur'an, the term appears in the Almighty's saying: ((To each of you We prescribed a law and a method (*minhajan*). Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation))⁵. This signifies "a path and a Sunnah; the address is to the Prophets—peace and blessings be upon them—or the nations, meaning that Allah established for every nation a law they follow"⁶.

Based on the preceding definitions, it is observed that the word "curriculum" (*manhaj*) pertains to two matters:

1. The path, track, and direction.
2. Clarity and manifestation.

The technical meaning of the term **curriculum** among scholars does not deviate from its linguistic root. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition is: "The set of educational experiences provided by the school for students—whether inside or outside its walls—for the purpose of assisting them in achieving comprehensive and integrated growth across all intellectual, cultural, religious, social, physical, psychological, and artistic dimensions; a growth that leads to the modification of their behavior and ensures their successful interaction with their environment and society, and their innovation of solutions for the problems they face"⁷.

John Dewey briefly defines the curriculum as: "The curriculum is a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies"⁸.

As for **Ralph Tyler**, he defines the curriculum as: "All of the learning of students which is planned by and directed by the school to attain its educational goals"⁹.

Through the aforementioned definitions and many others we have consulted, we observe that the concept of an educational curriculum is not limited to academic content alone. Rather, it encompasses all integrated elements—from content and objectives to teaching methods, tools, and other issues that ensure the success of the educational process to its fullest extent. It is indispensable for any Ministry of Education to adopt a clearly defined curriculum that aligns with the pursued educational policy. In other words, a suitable curriculum must be selected at the outset, as curricula vary according to different elements. This is because "curricula manifest specifically in their aim and purpose, in the practical procedures they adopt as a path for their work, in the principles upon which they operate... and the techniques they

⁴ Ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha*, Book of Nun, Chapter of Nun, Ha, and what follows them, Dar al-Jil, 1999.

⁵ Al-Ma'idah / 48.

⁶ Abi al-Qasim al-Kalbi, *Al-Tashil li-'Ulum al-Tanzil*, Ed: Muhammad Salim Hashim, Vol. 1, p. 329, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1st Ed., 1995.

⁷ Hilmi Ahmad al-Wakil, Muhammad Amin al-Mufti, *Curricula: Concept, Elements, Foundations, Organizations, Development*, p. 7.

⁸ Dewey, 1902, pp. 11–12.

⁹ Ralph Tyler (1957), *The curriculum is all of the learning of students which is planned by and directed by the school to attain its educational goals*, p. 79.

intend to apply as opposed to neglecting or overlooking alternative techniques¹⁰, all in service of the adopted educational philosophy and policy.

Educational curricula are composed of several elements: **content, objectives, teaching methods, and instructional tools**. These elements must fulfill a set of conditions to ensure the efficacy of the curriculum.¹¹

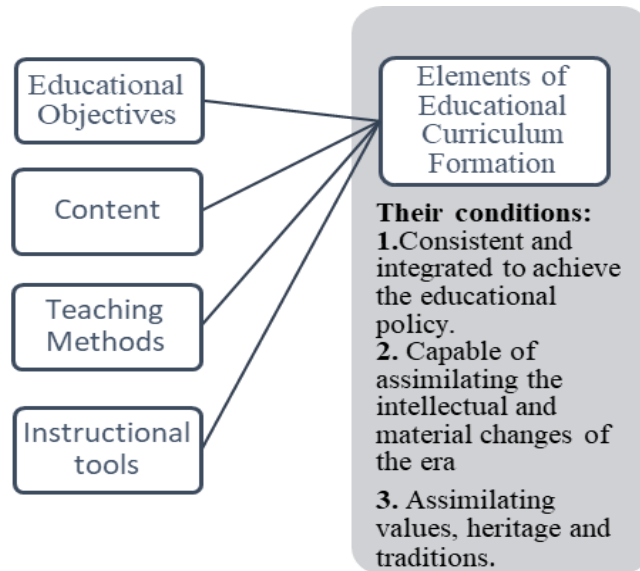
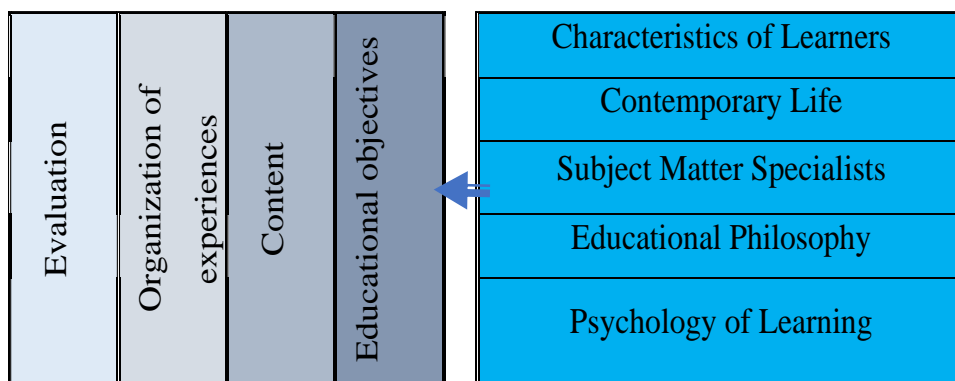


Figure representing the elements of educational curriculum formation and their conditions.

It should be noted that there are curriculum construction models that differ from the aforementioned model by focusing on dedicating the fourth pillar to the evaluation process, whereas the model illustrated above includes evaluation within the elements of teaching methods. The Tyler Model (Ralph Tyler's Model) is considered one of the most prominent models in the construction of educational curricula:



Ralph Tyler model for curriculum building

¹⁰ Abd al-Jalil Murtad, *The Concise Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology*, p. 226, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2017.

¹¹ See: Mustafa Nimr Da'mas, *Strategies for Curriculum Development*, pp. 1-5, Dar Ghaida, Jordan, 1st Ed., 2011.

It is observed that this model is characterized by its inclusion of all curriculum elements and the steps for its construction, in addition to the diversity of sources from which its objectives are derived. However, it is criticized for its unidirectional progression, which hinders the success of the educational communication process. In such a process, the relationship between the model's elements is expected to be circular, allowing for mutual influence and interaction among all components—that is, it should take the following form:



The educational curriculum is divided into three main sections, which we summarize in the following figure¹²:

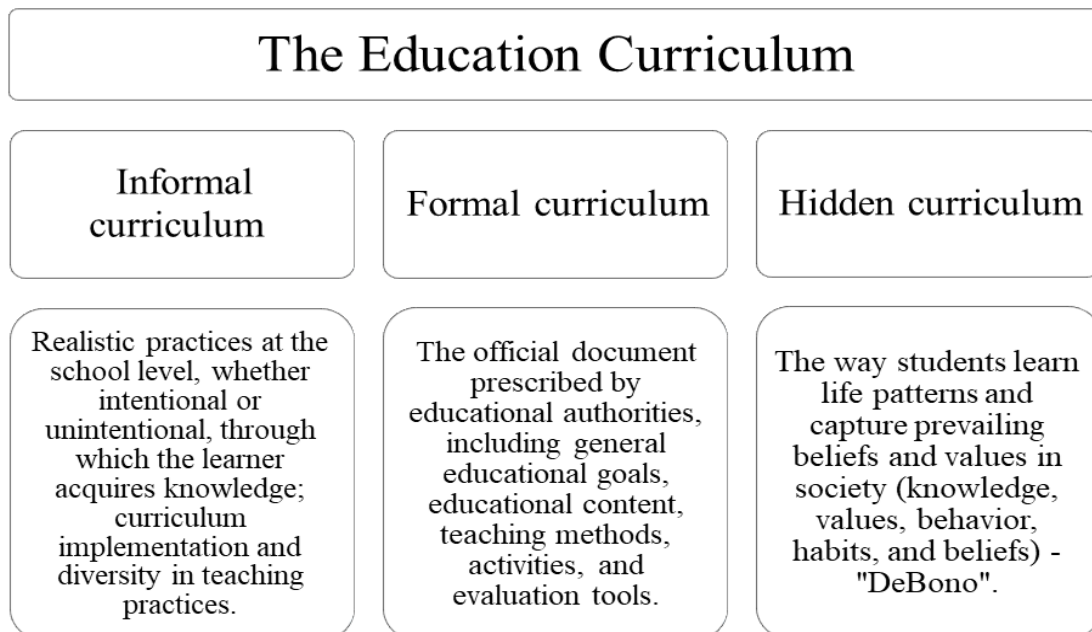


Figure representing the types of educational curricula

¹²For further details on this subject, see: **Suhaila Muhsin Kazim al-Fatlawi and Ahmad al-Hilali**, *The Educational Curriculum and Ideological Orientation*, pp. 49–58, Dar Al-Shorouk, Jordan, 1st Ed., 2006.

2. Distinguishing Between Development and Change in Educational Curricula

The discussion regarding the difference between development and change in educational curricula stems from the linguistic distinction between the two terms. The former, "Development" (*Tatwir*), originates from the root *Tawr*, which signifies "a stage or a state"¹³. Thus, development is the transition from one state to a better one. This is referenced in the Almighty's saying: ((*And He has created you in stages [Atwara]*))¹⁴, moving from a weaker stage to a more complete one¹⁵.

As for "Change" (*Taghyir*), it is derived from the verb *ghayyara*: "A thing changed from its state: it transformed. To change something: to transform or replace it as if making it other than what it was"¹⁶. Therefore, change may be toward the better or toward the worse. The differences between change and development can be summarized in the following points:

- ✓ Change may move toward the better or toward the worse, potentially leading to improvement or regression.
- ✓ Development built on a scientific basis leads to improvement, progress, and prosperity.
- ✓ Change may sometimes occur through human will, and at other times without it.
- ✓ Development occurs only through human will and sincere desire; if the will is not formed and the desire is not present, it cannot see the light of day or come into existence.
- ✓ Change is partial, focusing on a specific aspect or a limited point.
- ✓ Development is comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of the subject or the entity intended for development¹⁷.

Change and development may converge at several points; indeed, they may overlap such that change becomes a means for development and development becomes a result of change. This is because "development is the deliberate change to achieve specific goals; thus, development necessitates conscious change, whereas change may lead to development"¹⁸. The intent here by "conscious change" is the "will to change," as change might occur without the will of educational actors due to external factors that are difficult to control. Consequently, change is partial, while development is more comprehensive.

Perhaps the most pressing issue forcing governments toward curriculum development rather than mere change is the social reality saturated with mindsets fearful of the very idea of change, regardless of its details. Foremost among these are teachers, who constitute the primary obstacle to educational change. In addition to the fear of change, relevant ministries often

¹³Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, entry (*tawr*), Vol. 9.

¹⁴ Nuh / 14.

¹⁵ It is stated in *Tafsir al-Tabari*: "Bishr related to us, saying: Yazid related to us, saying: Sa'id related to us, on the authority of Qatada: ((And He has created you in stages)): one stage as a drop (*nutfā*), another as a clot (*alaqa*), another as bones, then He clothed the bones with flesh, then He brought it forth as another creation, causing hair to grow. Blessed be Allah, the Best of Creators." Ibn Abd al-A'la related to us, saying: Ibn Thawr related to us, on the authority of Ma'mar, on the authority of Qatada: ((And He has created you in stages)): "A drop, then a clot, then a creation stage after stage."

¹⁶ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, entry (*ghayr*), Vol. 11.

¹⁷ Mustafa Nimr Da'mas, *Strategies for Curriculum Development*, p. 11; and Ahmad Amara, <http://shof.co.il/?mod=articles&ID=21390>.

¹⁸ Abd al-Ali Debleh, *Arab Educational Curricula Between Development Requirements and Change Demands*, p. 110, Notebooks of the Laboratory of the Educational Issue in Algeria under Current Challenges, University of Biskra, Algeria.

marginalize teacher training, failing to ensure their psychological, cognitive, and technical readiness as the cornerstone of the change process. For instance, in 2016, the Ministry of Education in Algeria implemented a series of educational reforms that resulted in failure, prompting the ministry to reconsider its actions. The primary reason for this failure was the lack of serious attention to training teachers and inspectors to internalize the new curriculum. Most of the training received by supervisors was superficial, with an entirely insufficient hourly volume. The ministry should have dedicated a full academic year to training teachers and all supervisors before beginning implementation. Furthermore, field studies revealed that parents also required this training to comprehend the changes occurring in their children's educational curriculum.

Resorting to development is a clever solution; it does not instill fear in the stakeholders of the educational process and allows for the smooth, phased introduction of a new vision. This is achieved by identifying points of weakness and strength, subsequently working to bridge existing gaps and develop identified advantages.

Following this brief overview of the difference between change and development, we consider the meaning of **educational curriculum development**. We agree that it "encompasses school life in all its dimensions and everything associated with it; it does not focus solely on information itself but extends to methods, tools, textbooks, school administration, and evaluation systems"¹⁹—essentially everything that influences the student within and outside the school environment. Others define it as "correcting or redesigning the curriculum by introducing innovations and updates into its components to improve the educational process and achieve its goals. For the development process to proceed correctly, its objectives must be clear, comprehensive of all aspects of the educational process, based on scientific foundations, continuous, and collaborative"²⁰, allowing all parties in the educational process to participate. Perhaps the most significant error noted by scholars in past curriculum development was the exclusive focus on content. In reality, "the curriculum development process is linked to development processes as a whole and not just specific school subjects or teaching methods; it is a process that requires great cooperation in planning. Quantitative aspects of education are not isolated from qualitative aspects, and political and administrative decisions have a significant impact"²¹, making curriculum development linked to the current cultural and political context of the region.

Based on the preceding definitions and many others not cited here, we conclude that the process of curriculum development is an organized process requiring a specific strategy. It is a comprehensive process for all curriculum elements: content, teaching methods, objectives, and evaluation. It takes into account all internal and external environmental data affecting education. Development may be partial or total, and it always seeks to reach the most complete educational model, achieve pre-set goals, and implement state policy and its action plan.

¹⁹ Hilmi Ahmad al-Wakil, *Curriculum Development*, Dar al-Fikr, Cairo.

²⁰ Shawqi Hassani Mahmoud, *Curriculum Development: A Future Vision*, p. 57, Arab Group, Cairo, 1st Ed., 2009.

²¹ Mansour Ahmad Abd al-Mun'im and Salah Abd al-Sami' Abd al-Razzaq, *Curriculum Development: An Ethical Approach to the Future of Education*, p. 30, Zahraa al-Sharq Library, Egypt, 1st Ed., 2004.

3. Foundations of Educational Curriculum Development

It is axiomatic that establishing solid foundations for curriculum development allows it to be built on a firm ground that ensures long-term success, stability, and viability. Although studies on curriculum development have presented various models and suggested several foundations, they generally agree on a set of indisputable foundations. These foundations consider the learner and their environment and keep pace with global changes. In the following points, we shall define these foundations:

A. Planning

Any rigorous scientific or executive work stems from sound planning. A "plan" is a **written account** of the intended future course (the plot) aimed at achieving a specific goal (objectives) or purpose (ends) within a specific timeframe. Every planning process is subject to general conditions related to essential factors such as time and evaluation. Below, we clarify the stages of developing a plan:

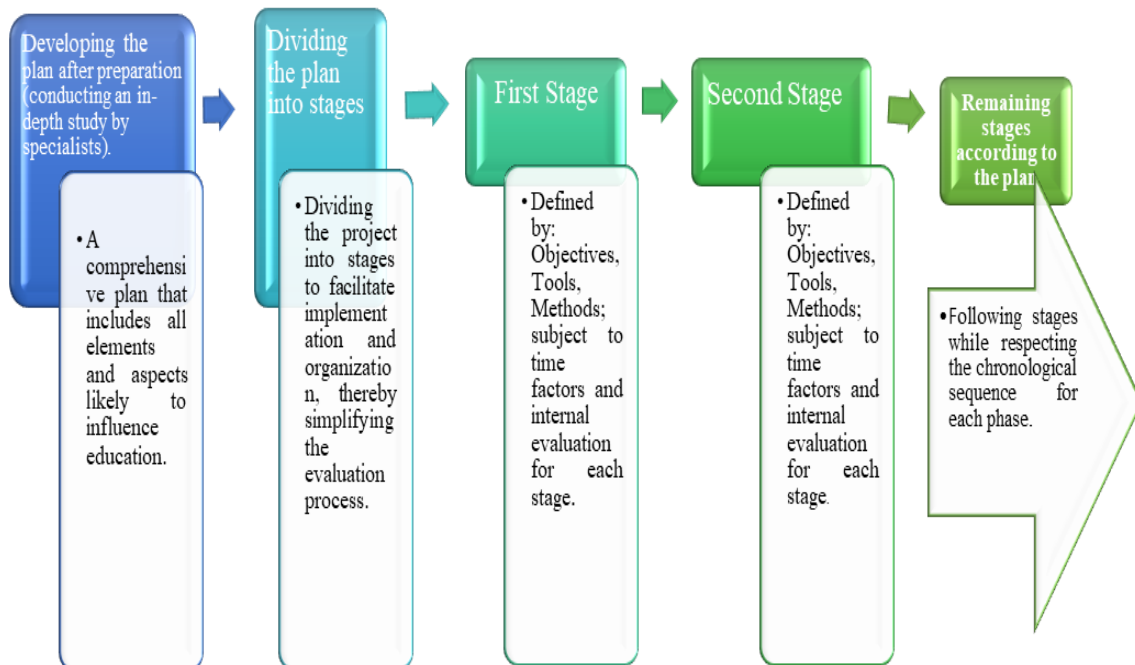


Figure representing the planning steps for educational curriculum development

In planning for educational curriculum development, it is essential to adopt a phased approach that allows for the execution of work in chronologically organized stages with integrated objectives. Consequently, evaluation must be of two types: **Internal Evaluation**, specific to each stage, which monitors its objectives and chronological progression and intervenes for adjustment or improvement if necessary; and **External Evaluation**, which is comprehensive and holistic, monitoring the interconnection and integration of the stages. This ensures that if a flaw occurs in a previous stage, subsequent stages are not built upon that flaw, thereby providing a sound foundation for constructing the curriculum development phases. Thus, internal evaluation is "phased" (specific to each stage), while external evaluation is "comprehensive"—the former being partial and the latter holistic. We illustrate the relationship between them in the following figure:

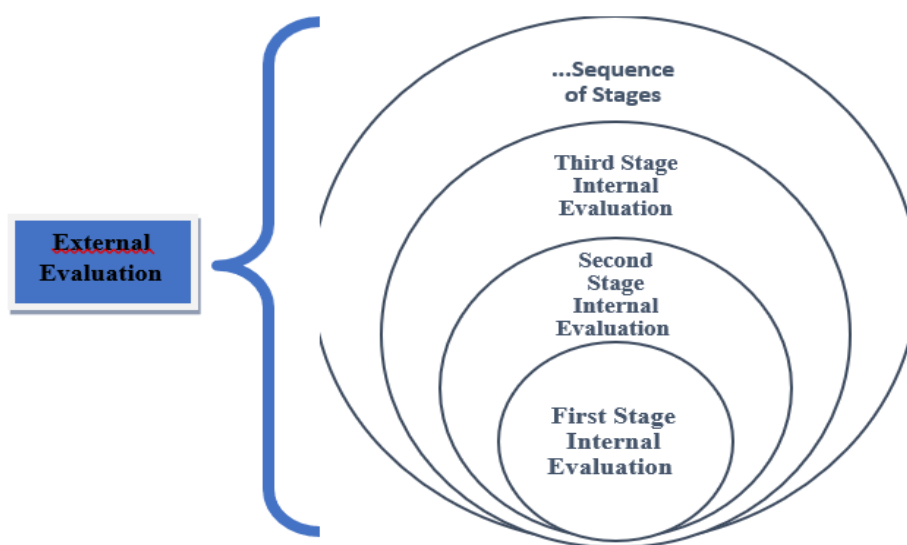


Figure representing the internal and external evaluation of educational curriculum development stages.

To ensure sound and successful planning for educational curriculum development, some researchers²² suggest adhering to the following rules:

First Rule	Priority Setting	Starting with the most critical objectives followed by the important ones, while considering available human, material, and moral resources.
Second Rule	Realism and Available Resources	Maintaining realism in execution by analyzing the current situation and the development opportunities it provides.
Third Rule	Comprehensiveness and Integration	Planning must account for all curriculum components without overlooking any aspect, while studying the relationship between elements to achieve interaction and integration.
Fourth Rule	Accuracy of Data and Statistics	Planning relies on data and figures; therefore, precision is required in defining the quantitative (numerical) data of the educational process.
Fifth Rule	Flexibility	The ability to introduce modifications to the plan in alignment with new developments in the sector.

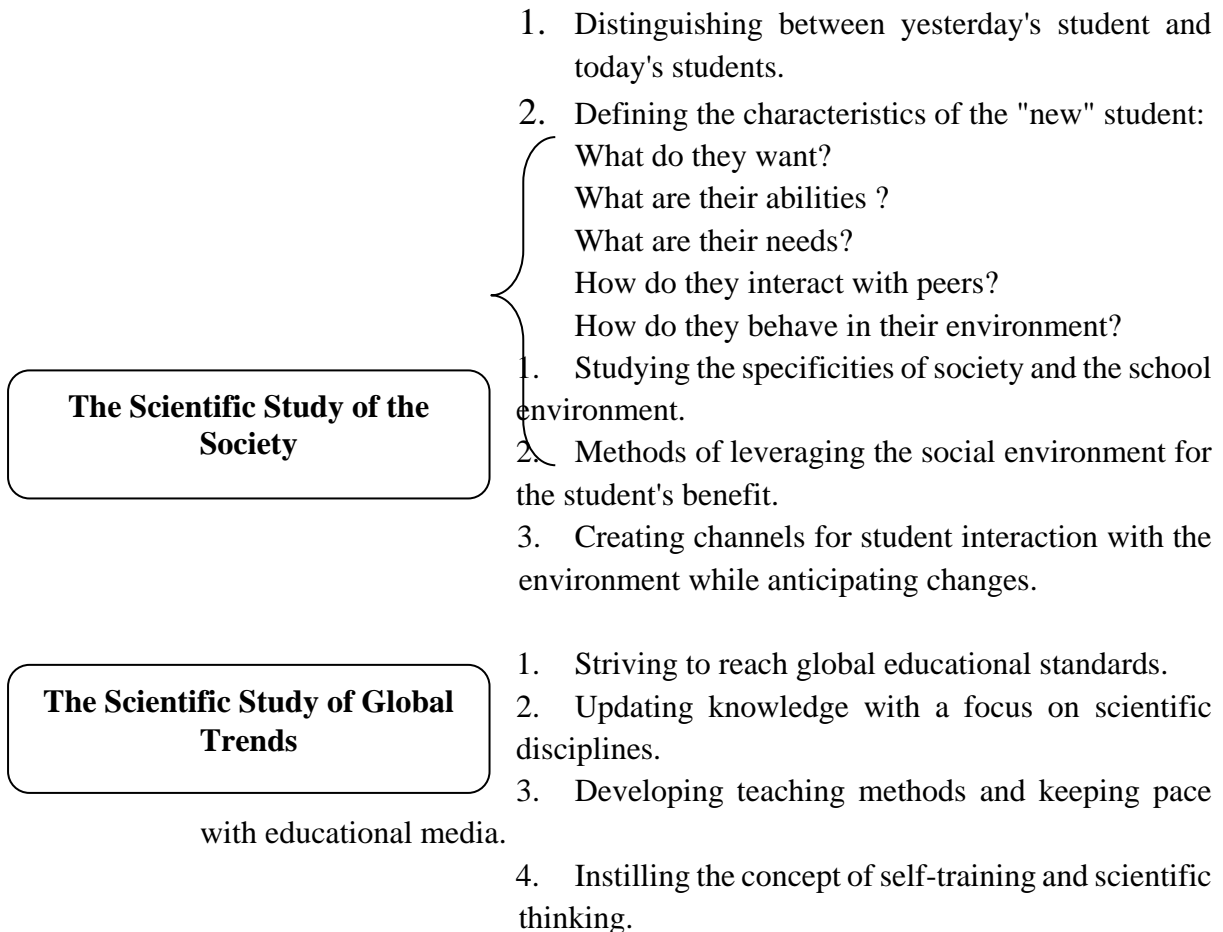
B. Grounding Development on Scientific Research

Scientific studies have made great strides in analyzing variables within the educational curriculum: the student, society, and global trends. Relying on these studies is an absolute necessity for launching development on a solid, objective scientific

The Scientific Study of the Student

²² See: Hilmi Ahmad al-Wakil, *Curriculum Development*, pp. 108-111, 2000; and Muhammad al-Amin al-Mufti, *Foundations of Curriculum Construction*, p. 352, 2005.

foundation, far removed from guesswork or emotion. These elements are in constant flux, to a degree that renders old data obsolete. Development requires updating knowledge and maintaining real-time awareness of these variables. In this context, it is essential to benefit from multidisciplinary sciences such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, communication, and technology. We summarize this as follows:



C. Experimentation (Piloting)

Most sciences rely on experimentation before generalization. This requires selecting a sample that represents the characteristics of the target population to test a scientific proposal before judging its success or failure. This means that "samples allow for obtaining required information with significant savings in human and economic resources and time, without deviating from the reality intended to be understood"²³. Since the sample shares the characteristics of the studied population and is often random, results can later be generalized. Researchers define the objectives of experimentation in curriculum development as:

- ✓ Proving the validity or invalidity of the subject being tested.
- ✓ Identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Providing an opportunity to identify problems encountered during implementation.
- ✓ Understanding how one aspect influences others.²⁴

²³ Al-Fadil Dalio, *Sampling Techniques in Human and Social Sciences*, p. 19, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2015.

²⁴ Al-Mufti and Al-Wakil, *Foundations of Curriculum Construction*, p. 352.

Questions on Experimentation:

✚ **Can experimentation have a negative impact?**

Yes, if the flaw lies in the experimental method or its efficacy; in this case, the fault lies with the experimenter, not the concept of experimentation itself.

✚ **What are the conditions for selecting experimental samples?**

They must be representative, meaning they carry the characteristics of the study population.

✚ **What are the fields of experimentation?**

All elements of the educational curriculum are subject to experimentation.

D. Integration

Integration is required between the various elements of the curriculum and within the types that form a single element. Every element is linked to others in an interactive equation: the student is influenced by the teacher, the teacher by the textbook, the textbook presents content, and content requires tools, which in turn require supervision.

- **Theoretical Content + Practical Content = Integrated Content.**
- **Evaluation by Questionnaire + Observation + Interview = Integrated Evaluation Tools.**

These foundations are subject to scholarly discretion and development. Some researchers add "continuity" and "balance" between elements, as well as "flexibility" to adapt to changes in the educational environment.

4. Steps for Developing Educational Curricula

Educational curriculum development follows a series of organized steps that ensure the success of the enhancement process and prevent the recurrence of errors found in previous curricula. We define these steps as follows:

Step 1: Studying the Previous Curriculum

It is an established principle that any curriculum development starts from a previous curriculum to move toward a more complete version; starting from a vacuum would constitute "constructing" a curriculum rather than "developing" it. Therefore, the developer must thoroughly review the current curriculum and conduct a series of studies to determine:

- Strengths and weaknesses.
- Details to be retained and those requiring reconsideration.
- The alignment of objectives, methods, and instructional tools with the requirements of the new era.
- Evaluating the outcomes of institutions implementing the previous curriculum: student results, teacher performance levels, graduates' field competence, labor market fulfillment, and school environment ethics.
- The curriculum's standing relative to global educational standards: comparing results, international rankings in scientific research, global quality of education classifications, and educational technology integration.
- Results of various evaluation processes and realistically presented statistics.

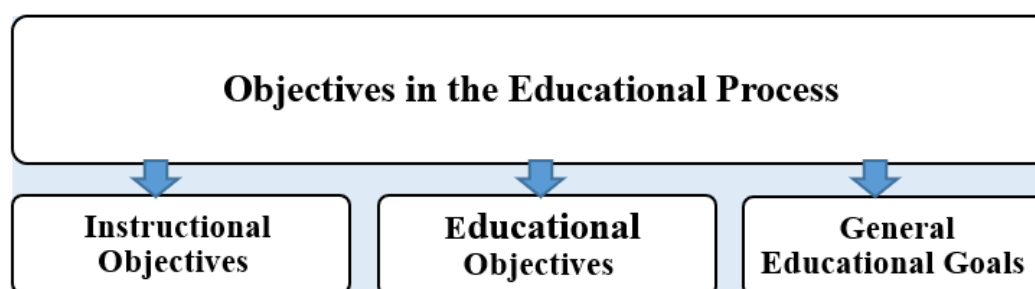
- Consulting specialists, stakeholders, and parents: taking their feedback into account and recording their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current curriculum and its outcomes.

Once the results of this study are obtained and the flaws and deficiencies are identified, the developer can begin establishing the subsequent development steps based on these findings.

Step 2: Establishing a Strategy and Work Plan

Curriculum development is inherently linked to social development as a whole, as education is a primary tool for social advancement. Consequently, the development plan must align with a comprehensive growth strategy by identifying societal needs—human, material, and moral—and the overarching goals of development. This involves establishing a strategy and a specific work plan for curriculum development, a complex task that requires a collective and participatory framework. Key characteristics of this stage include:

- Strong political and social will and long-term perseverance to ensure success.
- A focus on innovation²⁵: Ensuring that change is deep and carries genuine renewal rather than being superficial. This renewal affects two areas: first, the mindsets of teachers, parents, and all educational actors to ensure they can internalize new changes; and second, the renewal of content and instructional tools, allowing space for the application of scientific research results.
- Developing a plan starting from objective setting: Defining objectives is the first and fundamental step for any successful project. It is the most critical operational act in the development process, as the achievement of these objectives serves as the criterion for the curriculum's success or failure.
- Educational objectives are classified into three types, as illustrated in the following figure²⁶:



Types of Objectives in the Educational Process

Step 3: Implementation and Follow-up

Most professionals in the educational field consider implementation and follow-up to be the most critical stages in curriculum development. This is an indisputable fact, rooted in the absolute certainty that successful implementation is the result of successful planning. In other words, it must be preceded by rigorous planning and study to guarantee the integrity of the execution phase.

²⁵ See: Hilmi Ahmad al-Wakil, Curriculum Development, pp. 158–159.

²⁶ Suhaila Muhsin Kazim and Ahmad al-Hilali, The Educational Curriculum and Ideological Orientation, p. 63.

Implementation begins incrementally through **experimentation (piloting)**, as previously discussed in the principles section. At this stage, a suitable sample is selected to test the curriculum and assess its reality in the field, allowing for the rectification of errors and gaps before full-scale deployment.

Generalized Implementation, on the other hand, is the application of innovations across all educational institutions targeted for development, following the selection of an appropriate commencement date. However, "the start of implementation does not mean the task is finished or that the final stage of development has been reached; this is a misconception, as the **follow-up process** is no less important than the steps preceding it"²⁷.

The importance of follow-up lies in recording the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses to leverage them, with the possibility of adjusting through additions or deletions to ensure the effectiveness of the development. This allows for **remedial action**, which is a technique that economizes effort and time. Furthermore, follow-up assists in future development processes, as educational development is a continuous process that never stops due to education's direct relationship with society.

All the aforementioned steps of educational development can be summarized in the following concise diagram:

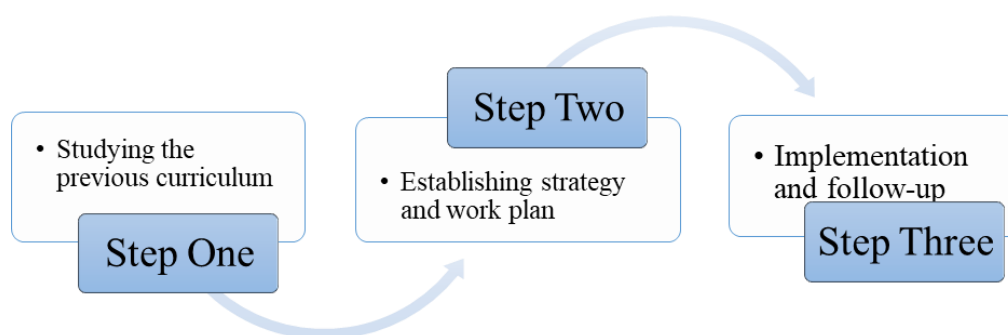


Figure: Stages of the Educational Development Process

Conclusion

Governments that possess a genuine desire to develop societies believe in the necessity of developing educational curricula. Indeed, both thought and counter-thought are forged within schools; desire and ambition, creative talent and dependency, moderation and extremism, the productive individual and the consumer—all are concepts that emerge within society, while schools determine their trajectory. To ensure the success of educational development, a commitment to several key points is required:

- ✚ Educational curriculum development is a continuous, never-ending process.
- ✚ This type of development requires political will and social flexibility.
- ✚ Educational development is not merely a political decision, but rather a social and scientific necessity.

²⁷ Muhammad al-Amin al-Mufti and Hilmi Ahmad al-Wakil, *Foundations of Curriculum Construction and Organization*, p. 359.

- ✚ There is no room for favoritism in development; the assignment of tasks must be granted to those with expertise and competence.
- ✚ The foundations of the curriculum must be defined in advance: educational philosophy, policy, and established objectives.
- ✚ Development requires a synergy of efforts from academics, educational stakeholders, and even parents, media, communication outlets, and all social elements.
- ✚ The success or failure of development is not judged from the outset; instead, specialized committees are responsible for continuous monitoring and evaluation.

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