

THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

There is no disputing the fact that through curriculum development aspects of our cultural heritage that are no longer relevant because of their failure to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the contemporary society are discarded or modified. Also there is need to focus on aspects of our cultural heritage to enable us understand their origin, shortcomings, failures and successes, in order to have an intelligent reconstruction of the curriculum. This paper takes a look at the role of history in curriculum development from a historical perspective. It identifies that history is an instrument used in unfolding aspects of our cultural heritage that are no longer worthy, for their irrelevance to the present society among others. Suggestions are made on the need to emphasize a proper understanding of history in our advances in curriculum development.

Introduction

Curriculum has an age-long history. It has been carried on since the pre-literate times in our societies. It was done through the indigenous system of education, which is as old as man in Africa.

In traditional African societies and elsewhere, people of diverse origins evolved their own ways of training their children or wards in different arts and crafts, and in the transmission of their culture and tradition. This transmission of knowledge and skills are features that have been in a continuous handover from generation to generation, with moderations here and there, in traditional societies right from the existence of man to this day.

Education which is the transmission of the cultural heritage for a rewarding life has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history. The transmission of the cultural heritage is perpetuated through the curriculum in the school.

The continuous handover of knowledge and skills to present day with moderations here and there is what is known as curriculum development and it is what Caswell (1966), recognized when he states that;

The curriculum has been a subject of study and innovation since the beginning of organized education. Innumerable historical events and persons have contributed to its form and content. Names such as Comenius ; Pestalozzi; Herbert; Froebel; Horace Mann; William T. Harris are reminders that serious thought about curriculum and extensive efforts to achieve new and better forms have been ever-present characteristics of Western Education (Short and Marconni, 1970:26).

In Nigeria, for example, Western education interfered with the traditional education which was then functional, as it rhymed with the needs of the society at that time. Western education signaled the introduction of formal schooling with the aid of the colonialist and their missionary agents in 1842. The idea of the missionary education before 1882, was to serve the whims and caprices of the colonialists.

Their education was totally against and was not articulated with the cultural elements of the society they intended to serve. Because of the above shortcomings of the missionary/colonial curriculum, there arose a sudden need to improve and reform the curriculum at all levels of education in order to jettison the alien educational heritage and orientation. This functional inadequacies in Nigerian schools as inherited from the colonial regime which needed to be attended to with all required immediacy (Okobiah, 1988) gave a rise to the urgent need to reevaluate the educational system and the curricula of schools and colleges.

Consequent upon the foregoing identified needs, the 1969 curriculum conference on curriculum reform and development was convened in Lagos, Nigeria, under the auspices of the then Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) now, Nigerian Educational Research and

Development Council (NERDC). The outcome of the conference is the modification of the educational system and its old syllabus in order to meet the demands of the Nigerian national aims and objectives as enunciated in the *National Policy on Education* (FRN, 1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004). This is intended to fulfill the needs and aspirations of Nigerians in this age of science and technology. The policy is presently being implemented by all the states of the federation, from the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that history is a veritable instrument for understanding our past as we make efforts at improvement in the present. Contemporary society will always find value in seeing history as a road map for the present, and continue to consult it with greater regularity for educational guidance among others.

If history is to be seen to function effectively in curriculum development then the practitioners must understand their relationship. Curriculum development is a human activity that should be reported innovatively as they evolve. History provides the instrument for disseminating the evolution of curriculum improvement.

Transmitting, the evolution of curriculum improvement must be perceived as the process of addressing, identifying and analyzing the successes, failures and shortcomings of past curricula and providing curriculum practitioners with relevant information and well defined strategies for improvement in the present and for future hope:

This paper being an essential contribution to the contemporary pool of ideas in the curriculum field is interested in discussing history as an instrument of curriculum development, but not history as a discipline per se. In its bid to achieve the stated objective, the paper will answer the following questions:

1. What is curriculum development?
2. What is history? ; and also examine the relationship between history and curriculum development.

What is Curriculum Development?

It is a truism that a worthwhile curriculum is never static, but dynamic. An analysis of all the intended aims, goals and objectives; the learning experiences; the content chosen; the organization and integration of learning experiences applied, and the method of evaluation used has revealed that changes have continued to occur, as they may not be meeting the desired needs or ends of the people or nation consuming that curriculum (Okoye, 1991). These changes are expressed through curriculum development. In the words of Nicholls and Nicholls (1978), the planning of learning opportunities intended to bring about certain changes in pupils and the assessment of the extent to which these changes have taken place is what is meant by curriculum development. Curriculum development therefore implies the implementation of all the decisions reached at the planning level, in respect of the nature, organization and orientation of the curriculum (Ughamadu 1998).

Most often schools and teachers are criticized for the education they are providing and teachers are being encouraged to make some changes because we live in a changing society in which new knowledge is constantly being discovered and in which old knowledge is being proved wrong (Nicholls and Nicholls, 1978). With the realization that pupils must be prepared to cope with the demands of a society, which is changing so quickly, teachers need to reappraise what they are offering to pupils.

Curriculum development has manifested itself in such attempts as curriculum revision and innovation. Curriculum revision is manifested whenever any change occurs in any stage of the curriculum process, or the entire curriculum and new life is injected into the existing curriculum. As Onwuka (1981), posits when there is dissatisfaction with an existing system or curriculum, there is always need for change or modification. For instance, as earlier mentioned, the colonial curriculum which failed to meet the aspirations of the Nigerian society was revised to reflect the present philosophy of education in Nigeria, with its aims and objectives being to attain the broad national goals (FRN, 2004). The implementation of the decisions reached at revising the curriculum signifies curriculum development in that direction.

What is History?

Indeed the word "history" originated from the Greek word "historia", meaning inquiry, learning by inquiry or the result of inquiry.

According to Collingwood (1976), history is the study of society in the past, in all its aspects in relation to present developments and future hopes. It can be inferred from Collingwood's definition that history is an inquiry into the various developments that took place in the past, in lives and works of the various individuals associated with such events about the past and the present. This was why Ashaolu (1991) contends that history is the memory of human race, which enables us to draw up the past experience and thereby become wise. From the definition given above, one will find that history enriches humanity in its bid at unfolding the ethical values of society.

Relationship Between History and Curriculum Development

Education, as earlier noted, is the transmission of the cultural heritage of a people. The objective of education in any country is derived from the culture of that society education is to serve. Those cultural aspects to be taught, and learned by learners in schools, are enunciated in the objectives of education and reflected in the philosophy of life of the nation .

A reflection on the philosophy of life of a nation demands that the life of the nation in the past should be considered before the new curriculum emerges. Since history enriches humanity in its bid at unfolding the ethical values of society in the past, as earlier noted, it is necessary to consider the relationship between history and curriculum development .

Borrowing-from Abelson (1982), history is a part of philosophy. This is because history offers us an idea of the ideals and values of our society in the past as we relate it to present so as to build a future brighter society. Acting in its function as a road map into the ideals and values of our society, history automatically blends with curriculum development in the effort of transmitting the desirable content of the culture derived from the national philosophy of education.

Curriculum development is intricately related to history in the sense that any consideration of its relevance borders on its sensitivity to the values, beliefs, norms, tradition, aesthetic, science and technology, art, religion, and customs of the people. Curriculum's sensitivity to the totality of the ways of life of a people signifies that no curriculum can be considered relevant to the development of a people unless it is deeply rooted in their cultural milieu. Be that as it may, one may infer that curriculum, which is the transmission of the cultural heritage, derives its inspiration from history.

For instance, it is held that modern civilization with all its splendour has its roots in ancient cultural and traditional practices of the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, (Africans) and the Babylonians(Maduewesi,2005). To amplify this point, culture is viewed as the way of life of a people exemplifying their accumulated wisdom, knowledge and skills which are passed from one generation to another (Fafunwa, 1974). Education which aims at perpetuating the culture of the society from which it emanates, mandates a thorough knowledge of its rooting. Against this backdrop, history comes in closely with curriculum development. Both history and curriculum development meets at this point, since the perpetuation of the culture of a people from generation to generation is an integral part of what is imbibed by the learner, through the curriculum.

Those cultural aspects that are considered unworthy of preservation and to be discarded for their failure to rhyme with the needs of the contemporary society, through curriculum development are only understood through the knowledge of their history. Therefore, the important relationship between history and curriculum development is that of connecting what has gone in the curriculum past to the reconstruction of the curriculum present.

Since curriculum development has become a vital educational enterprise in most parts of the world today, it is pertinent to look at it from the historical standpoint. This is necessary, because "many curriculum development efforts in recent years have deep historical rooting" (Tanner and Tanner, 1975) Because most recent curriculum reforms are focused on pervading social problems that have their genesis on past curricula according to Tanner and fanner, one can suppose that efforts at improving quality of education, as well as attaining the goals of education in any particular country are not new. They have benefited from the lessons that might have been learnt from the perspective of historical experience.The points made so far in the preceding paragraphs does not however, suggest that contemporary problems in the curriculum field can only be solved by simply turning to the past. The argument here is that history as it relate to curriculum is a big prop in curriculum development.

This is so, because, an understanding of the curriculum present, according to Tanner and Tanner (1975), requires an understanding of the curricula past.

In what follows, the paper will focus on identifying the role of history as an instrument for curriculum development.

1. History Plays the Role of Connecting the Curricula Past to the Curriculum Present as Our Society Changes in Time.

Continuity is a feature that plays dominant role in the reconstruction of knowledge in history. Because of the dynamic nature of life, to understand the essence of our contemporary curriculum, we must surely have a sense of its historical evolution. This is because history has shown, that everything was connected to everything else, believing that the nature of everything is entirely understood in its development (Barracough, in Marwick, 1981). The narration of our curriculum history will go a long way in enabling us to understand and improve our efforts at curriculum development in the contemporary scene. As Agina-Obu (2003) say, modern curriculum should be a reflection of the past, the present and the future so that knowledge of the past can help us operate the present better and give shape to the future. The contemporary society will find value in history as a road-map for the present and continue to consult it with greater regularity for educational guidance, among others.

2. History Plays an Important Role in Illuminating the Cultural Heritage and Experience, Which the School Transmits Through the Curriculum in the Various Fields of Study.

A consideration that is given to the sense of history in our efforts at curriculum development is necessary because it helps in illumination of human experience. The essentialist Burke's view that the perpetuation of a given value over a long period of time is the strongest possible argument in favour of its permanent worth (Adewole, 1988), made people to uphold the principle of transmission of values from one generation to another in the areas of politics, economics, religion and of course education. This nature of human experience is the totality of the cultural heritage, as earlier mentioned, which the school transmits through curriculum content. This is where history and curriculum development meet.

3. History is Relevant in Implementing the Developed Curriculum.

Knowledge of the curriculum history enables the curriculum developers to be abreast with the trend, and identify the shortcomings, failures and successes of curriculum development efforts in the past, in their bid at an intelligent reconstruction of the curriculum field in the present. In this regard, Chaffer and Taylor (1973) contends that history enables us to use the lessons of the past in order to make some predictions for present actions or future developments. It is therefore, evident that history helps in reconstruction of parts of the curriculum past, which have relevance for the learners who undertakes it, and contemporary significance for the entire society. A knowledge of the inadequacies in the content area of our curricula will enable us fashion out new learning experiences that will rhyme with the needs and aspirations of contemporary learners in particular.

Marwick (1981) argues that, by truly understanding periods of change in the past as they were understood by contemporaries, can we make legitimate and fruitful contrast with change in our time. In support of this submission, Agina - Obu (2003: 37) advice that:

For effective implementation of any new curriculum, it is imperative for us to know what had been in existence in the system, its merit and demerits and so fashion out how the new curriculum envisaged could be operated effectively without slumping back into the old system unduly.

4. History Plays the Role of Assessing and Analyzing the Worthwhileness of the Curriculum.

No curriculum can be considered relevant to the development of a people unless it is deeply rooted in their cultural milieu. Any consideration of curriculum relevance borders on its sensitivity to the values, beliefs, norms, tradition, aesthetics, science and technology, art, religion and customs of the people (Maduwesi, 2005). Be that as it may, the knowledge of history will surely inspire curriculum developers to take account of changes in the social

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order in their curriculum development effort. From the much discussed, it is obvious that the knowledge of history will enable us determine the worth or relevance of the curriculum developed for a people. It is therefore, very important in curriculum evaluation process. History enables us to apply its exercise of thought in assessing evidence, to critically examine, in an objective manner, the extent to which the desired change has taken place in the new curriculum. This position is held by Anene and Brown (19X1), when they opined that the purpose of studying history as a discipline is that of enlarging students capacity to deal with problems by the exercise of thought in assessing and reaching conclusion. Invariably, history as a discipline is an instrument which can be employed in the intelligent and critical evaluation of any given developed curriculum, be it at the stage of revision, or implementation, through evidence and objective analysis of the existing or past curricula.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It is concluded from the submissions in this discourse that:

Curriculum development is the transmission of certain cultural values and experiences in our society, that have been considered to be worthy.

Without a thorough understanding of history (of education) efforts at reforming education in any nation may rather be dull and without direction.

History is among other fields that are intricately related to the curriculum scope, and serves it better in its functions. It is suggested that:

1. Curriculum developers and practitioners should be abreast with the past and origin of curriculum and be current in developments in curriculum field in the present.
2. The use of persons or groups vast in curriculum theories affecting different areas of knowledge should be emphasized for effective development of curricula in the different fields of study.
3. History should be made compulsory at the senior secondary level, because its study may contribute in widening our horizons in respect of the fundamental questions that may arise when curricula issues are to be considered in our future educational development endeavours. Without a proper understanding of history, advances in curriculum development may rather be dull

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