

Inevitability of Politics in Ghana's Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

The influence of politics is enormous and seemingly inevitable. Arguably, in the sphere of education, its impact is both subtle and transparent. This is a positional paper that explores the ideologies of people in power behind curriculum development and innovation in Ghana. The paper describes societies' and government's position in the documentation of learning experiences for students in Ghanaian schools. The politicization of Ghana's curriculum can be traced to the precolonial era, and this phenomenon has never ceased to suffice. Among the major tenets where politics seem evitable include the formation of educational reform committees, presentation of subject matter/content, change in the political system and external influences/global agenda. The paper concludes that politics and education, for that matter curriculum, are two inseparable entities in that the former influences the planning, design, development, implementation and evaluation of the latter. Therefore, curriculum experts in Ghana should bear in mind that politics can distort the natural order of curriculum development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arguably, it remains uncertain and difficult to capture what constitutes a curriculum comprehensively. Different scholars have viewed curriculum from diverse lenses, in which a section typically perceived the concept as a planned learning experience that learners are expected to go through under the school's guidance (Marsh & Willis, 1995). Others contend that curriculum should not be confined to the passage of learning experiences in the classroom or the school only. However, those experiences made possible to the learner outside the school setting should also be considered as a curriculum. In as much as there seems to be a clear dichotomy among the positions of curricula experts concerning how the concept should be viewed, there is a common subtle ideology that tends to operate underneath these philosophical perspectives. Throughout the various conceptualizations of curriculum, the 'process' or 'planned' component inherent in the description cannot be ignored.

This denotes a consensus that pins the phenomenon down as a process or something carefully planned for people (learners).

Every phase of the curriculum needs thorough planning. The planning stage of the curriculum influences all

pillars of the curriculum process. The choice of design, the pattern of development and implementation, and the assessment and evaluation procedures are all determined at the planning stage of the curriculum (Kasuga, 2019). Obviously, to the layman, the structures to ensure the execution of these central curricula activities and duties have already been instituted; however, the driving force(s) behind it may still not be known to him. This implies that several motivators trigger curriculum decisions at all levels of education in every country. According to Asare-Danso *et al.* (2019), factors influencing curriculum decisions are largely four-dimensional rather than one-sided. To them, the position of society (social), learning space logistics (physical), power play (political), and monetary commitment (financial) tend to be the forces beneath curriculum decisions. This presupposes that the motivators mentioned above seem inevitable regarding curriculum innovation, change and implementation. Interestingly, the severity of these factors' impact in the educational spheres varies remarkably in degree. It, therefore, appears that curriculum experts and advocates have meticulously assessed these factors likewise the influence they bring, and have unanimously identified politics as being much more inevitable



among others (Asare-Danso *et al.*, 2019; Bucciarelli, 2015; Kasuga, 2019).

1.1. Conceptualization of Curriculum

The educational sphere has numerous concerns; however, the curriculum remains the centre of attraction regarding teaching and learning. The term curriculum as a word can be traced to the Latin dialect “currere”, translating ‘to proceed or to run a course’. As envisaged in a significant line of disciplines, the concept points to a planned learning programme that offers learners a considerable learning privilege to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Kasuga, 2019). To Shen (2008), the ultimate goal of the curriculum is to ensure changes, promote lifelong learning, and maintain and enhance expected behaviours that the learner must learn. The term curriculum has not been contextualized so differently within the school setup. It is seen as the totality of what learners acquire in a more formalized learning space such as the classroom. This implies that the school curriculum can effectively and efficiently be managed. On this basis, learning has been grouped into diverse courses of study, that is, teaching syllabuses and subject curricula.

The supposition here is that there seem to be multiple curriculum descriptions. For instance, curriculum as a narrowly defined concept illustrates carefully sequenced documented learning experiences. According to Amoako (2021), a curriculum is said to be narrow when it exclusively regards classroom activities over other equally significant school programmes.

This curriculum narrative does not put into perspective any unplanned school activities such as those often identified within the hidden curriculum; they are not considered educationally worthwhile in this curriculum perspective. Conversely, broad definitions of curriculum generally place a premium on all learning experiences in and outside the classroom. Curriculum is understood from this domain as a set of intended educational goals and programmed learning activities to realize such long-term objectives. It is a uniquely merged set of planned academic and non-academic episodes that a learner is ushered into under the strict supervision of the institution (Marsh & Willis, 1995). This encompasses learners’ and staff’s internalized patterns of behaviour and dispositions and all the school culture’s elements.

The beginning of the twentieth century moved people to perceive curriculum as a course of study or an outline of disciplines designed by course instructors for learners to teach. This curriculum definitional position leaves Osaki and Pendaali (1991), contemplating the exact role curriculum leaders and educational entrepreneurs played in the past and continue to play today. These writers contend that in a centralized system of education, curriculum designing, development, and innovations have consistently hovered around people in power and handed down to a group of specialists, usually consisting of teachers, representatives from governmental agencies, school leaders, experts from curriculum innovation circles among others (Osaki & Pendaali, 1991). The resulting document, infamously known as a syllabus or subject curriculum as adopted in some countries, is certified by the powers that be in the sphere

of education, mimeographed in all forms of prints, and proportionally allotted to all the schools in the school system, state (regions) or nation to accept and utilize it as the recommended curriculum. In Ghana, for instance, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) remains the agency mandated by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act to design and document subject curricula (NaCCA, 2020). Their activities are usually overseen and approved by the Ministry of Education (NaCCA, 2018).

They are responsible for drafting and putting into a comprehensible perspective uniquely planned learning experiences (both official and recommended curricula) that embody what learners must learn throughout their stay in school. This presupposes that the curriculum innovation, change, or enhancement process should consider including writing this course of study by taking out or changing contents from time to time when and where necessary or by causing a complete overhaul in the breadth and depth of a particular discipline. For example, in Ghana, the pre-tertiary education curriculum witnessed several remarkable changes in which disciplines such as Civics and Our World Our People were introduced as replacements for Citizen Education and Social Studies, respectively (NaCCA, 2017). Many times, curriculum users need answers to major and sensitive educational reformations. They often search for reasons behind curriculum re-designing. Studies indicate curriculum implementers are usually ignored during curriculum development (Dwamena & Quansah, 2020). Arguably, this often leads them to think that curriculum change is necessarily not the antecedent of scientific research and evaluation outcomes.

Approaching the contemporary age, it became increasingly difficult to identify a more simplistic description of the term curriculum. It was instead assumed to be “experiences” designed for learners in the school setting. According to Kasuga (2019), there are seemingly driving motivators behind the change in modern curriculum conceptualization. He believes that the paradigm shift that has taken place concerning curriculum users’ understanding of who the learner is is one sure determinant of the change that is happening to curriculum reconceptualization presently. In furtherance, knowing that curriculum principles rally on three main domains of knowledge (content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge) (NaCCA, 2018), any change that targets the way we conceive knowledge also stands a good chance of influencing how we perceive curriculum in today’s social context. Education and society are two inseparable entities. This is why Kasuga (2019) argued that it is essential to establish a linkage between school experiences and real-life experiences that occur outside the school’s boundaries. Consequently, one’s insight into the interplay between these two distinct learning events similarly shapes one’s course of understanding the term curriculum from modern-day lenses. These diverse standpoints concerning curriculum conceptualization presuppose that any advancement that emerges from particular fields of study equally tends to give us a new perception of the entirety of the term.

Typical evidence can be traced to the happenings in psychology. It seems that developments in this field of study have succeeded in using child-centred learning to explain what should constitute the educational process. By extension, advocates operating within this sect of knowledge tend to have a somewhat different curriculum orientation.

Caswell and Campbell's (1935) argument echoes a more psychological conception of curriculum. They contend that curriculum is the embodiment of every single learning event that children go through under the strict supervision of facilitators and the institution.

1.2. *The Inevitability of Politics in Curriculum*

Ideally, politics may be referred to as an interplay of power or the centre when differences in standpoints are either implicitly or explicitly brought to bear. Traces of this view can be found in the argument of Joseph (2015), who posits that politics is a set of procedures by which some people try to dominate others formally, informally or through social processes of influence. He conceptualizes politics from the context of group dominance. To Posner and Young (2007), politics should be thought of as a process adopted by a certain society to determine how power, wealth, opportunity, status and other social goods are distributed to members of that society. They view the concept from the lenses of social class management and control regarding resource allocation. Based on these broad definitions, Kasuga (2019) deduces that the power of a single person or a group to be more influential in decision-making is an aspect of politics. Political influence plays a major role, as it can rule in the decision on all of the subjects within the school curriculum when setting education objectives, developing content, teaching strategies to use for provided contents, learning materials, assessment of education outcomes and evaluation (Kasuga, 2019; Wahlström, 2018).

Levin's study on curriculum policy and what should be learned in schools concluded that since political influence is usually unequal, people with low or disadvantaged status appear to have the least influence on political decision-making (Connelly *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, curriculum politics should be assumed to be a crucial component of the entire government process in which relatively meticulous decisions are taken about the curriculum regarding what curriculum content, knowledge and learning experiences ought to be considered, ignored or altered (Joseph, 2015).

Various scholars and curriculum experts advocate that systemized curriculum inquiry should not conform to any form of dictate arising from the political enclave. However, Wahlström (2018) quizzes whether this view on education is possible. In his view, such a viewpoint largely relies on what one refers to as being 'political'. Drawing from the work of Carr and Hartnett (2010), Wahlström (2018) contends that educational policies hardly ignore the effort and quest to tackle crucial political issues. This has usually been the case, especially because public controversies on education inevitably consist of options and, to some extent, opposing standpoints on good education and good society. According to Carr and Hartnett (2010), as cited in

Wahlström (2018), 'the political' ingredient in the curriculum and, for that matter, education rests on the following four conditions:

1. First, the educational system continues to be an integral part of society because it reproduces a particular group's culture, lifestyle and economy.
2. Second, education seems to conflict with societal reproduction and transformation.
3. Third, the changes to education relate to conflicts and disagreements between individuals and community groups about their views on how educational attainment affects a good society.
4. Lastly, there is a debate on what questions to ask in the field of education and how they might be dealt with.

Political influence in education and curriculum remains vast and unavoidable, as it informs the preparation of curricula from initial planning to evaluation. In Ghana and perhaps many parts of the world, politics takes charge of a central place in the daily affairs of the nation. Apparently, the political class aspires to commandeer and navigate the policy, either visibly or subtly. Freire (1972), therefore, sees education often as an implicit tool in the trick of the political class. Lo (2017) similarly described the politics of a curriculum as what is legitimate and valued and what is not. The inevitable intrusion of politics in curriculum development across major areas of the globe, especially in Africa, is best seen in the next subsections.

1.2.1. *Formation of Various Education Commissions, Committees, and Working Parties—Who Decides What to Whom?*

Before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa, no form of formal education existed. Formal education, institutionalized instruction for that matter, began to suffice in many parts of the continent when the Europeans arrived in the 15th century. A clear instance is the establishment of Castle schools in Ghana as the first formal education system devised for both mullato children and certain sects of Africans in 1742 (Adu-Gyamfi *et al.*, 2016). Interestingly, although scanty literature exists as to why such schools were not established in other parts of Gold Coast app, ardently, it was because of the close ties the Europeans had with the people living on the coast. As a result, the body which was mandated to ensure that this educational system ran was entirely composed of individuals (mainly Christian missionaries and colonial administrators) who shared not only the vision and aspirations of the people living on the coast but were also bent on fulfilling the mission on the coast (Aissat & Djafri, 2011). Since the objective of colonial education was to provide an impulse to the economy at home through commerce and expand churches through evangelism, the subtle ideology found in the system was exposure to arithmetic, reading and doctrinal studies (Aissat & Djafri, 2011). Such was the politics of the curriculum in the colonial education system. This led to the Enactment of the Education Act of 1870, which spelt out that the education system was solely to be in the care of both missionaries and the representatives of Britain or the colonial administrators since their ideas

and positions on education reflected the purpose of their arrival.

The post-independence era has witnessed several remarkable major education reforms and commissions in the school curriculum. Due to the centralized system of education in some African countries and the powerful nature of the politics in the country, most decisions on education, especially those that result in innovations and changes, are top-down (Kasuga, 2019). The good reason might be that good and sound policy decisions can only be made through political processes. This explains why Connelly *et al.* (2008) maintained that politics governs almost every aspect of education about what schooling ought to be provided, how, to whom, in what form, by whom and with what resources.

In Ghana, the first educational policy change after independence was witnessed in the era of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, a policy infamously known as The Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 and the Education Act of 1961. This Act was placed before the Legislative Assembly (Parliament) in January 1951 by the first Minister of Education and Social Welfare, Mr. Kojo Botsio, but was approved in August 1951. Subsequently, the Kojo Botsio Committee, which Kwame Nkrumah ideologists flooded, was formed to effect, and implement this policy.

After the overthrow of Dr Kwame Nkrumah, his proposed Act appeared to have gone down with him. Subsequently, new governments initiated several education policies through the recommendations of appointed education committees. For example, the regime of The National Liberation Council in 1966 appointed a new Education Review Committee to undertake a comprehensive review of the entire formal educational system (Kadingdi, 2004). Similarly, The National Redemption Council (NRC) led by Col. Ignatius Kutu Acheampong in 1974 formed the Dzobo Committee to review the educational system and recommend appropriate measures to recover to salvage any education-related crisis (Antwi, 1992). The Rawlings government also initiated the 1987 Education Reforms under the leadership of Evans Anform (Inkoom, 2012). Subsequently, in 2007, the New Patriotic Party led by John Agyekum Kuffour inaugurated a presidential committee to review the existing education system in Ghana under the chairmanship of Professor Josephus Anamuah-Mensah (Adu-Gyamfi *et al.*, 2016).

Njabili (1999) argues that Parliament is responsible for setting education reform's social and political goals in a centralized system, which constitutes part of larger policies to transform society. In Parliament, where it is assumed that the respective members of Parliament fully represent the members of the public, policy issues likely to impact education at all levels are discussed. In this case, MPs will consult widely with their constituents on issues to be considered in Parliament. We forget that these MPs only consult their voters thoroughly with a heavy program, while they humbly seek votes just before the election and only return right away before the next election with more promise than the first (Njabili, 1999). Moreover, it is heavily criticized that various education committees, be it parliamentary-select or presidential-inaugurated, are almost always composed of right wings whose ideologies

are often not far from the ruling government's intentions for education. Recently, educational reform is Ghana's new standard-based curriculum, where some section of curriculum experts lamented that the process of innovation, development and change lacked a clear-cut descriptive approach. They believe that the committee's composition was one-sided not only by political affiliation or alliances but also in terms of subject specialism. This allegation tends to surrogate the argument of Fiske (1996), who maintains that change in curriculum brings discussion, conflicts and political resistance because it has political consequences, including affecting who gets hired and promoted and educators' status and professional life. These experts further argue that those serving on the committee have comparatively made way for their ideas to be accepted through certain proposed contents, which should not be the case on their own.

1.2.2. Selection and Presentation of Subject Matter/Content—What is Good to Learn?

Arguably, one aspect of curriculum innovation, development and implementation where decisions are often politicized can be found in subject matter choice. Deciding on the appropriate content to select at any time poses a challenge for curriculum designers. However, in many cases, the intentions of curriculum developers to subtly present their ideologies, beliefs, ideas, constructs, and beliefs become obvious. More often than not, these standpoints or worldviews not only turn out to be the positions of the curriculum developers but also seemingly correspond to the views and visions of the government in power. Consequently, these political beliefs are translated into learning experiences and contents or subject matter considered appropriate to harness such learning experiences are chosen to serve these purposes. Kiwia (2000) also supports that there has been politics in adding or removing the content of subjects by the power of political leaders. They know and believe that knowledge is nobody's property and should not be identified with a single person.

There have been incidences in Ghana where individuals get credit for introducing changes and innovations. For example, the standard-based curriculum for basic schools in Ghana has certain contents which are believed to have been altered to suit the long-standing philosophy of the ruling government. Specifically, History as a subject matter in the new curriculum has allegedly been identified to have distorted information regarding the founders of Ghana. Some believe that the so-called distorted information is deliberate by the government in power to document and celebrate certain legacies. Also, the rejection of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the new curriculum was done to win political points in Ghanaian societies but not necessarily as an endorsement of societal values to remain.

1.2.3. Change in Political System

The transformation of countries' political systems from a one-party state system to a multi-party system tends to bring about change and innovation in school curricula. For example, under the one-party system in Tanzania, there is a subject called Siasa, which means political studies, which aims to teach political ideologies and praise the

ruling party (Kasuga, 2019). He believes that the advent of the multi-party system has clearly impacted school curricula, especially civic education. From a similar perspective, Komba and Mwandaji (2015) argue that the adoption of multi-party politics led to the renaming of the subject from Elimuyasiasa to civic education, which bears different names depending on the level of education. It was renamed Elimuyaaauraia for the Certificate of Primary School and Teacher Training, Citizenship for the Ordinary Level, General Studies (GS) for the Advanced Secondary Education Level and the Certificate of Education Qualification and Development Studies at the degree level. According to Kasuga (2019), renaming these school subjects as a result of the newly adopted political system and altering educational periods and curriculum time frames shows that curriculum change, and innovations are a political activity as the school curriculum is used to impart political ideologies and values.

Likewise, in Ghana, changes in political systems have virtually not given enough room for the curriculum to operate. Countless disciplines have been renamed across curriculum phases. Recently, the case of 'Our World Our People', a thematic discipline crafted from several subjects and merged as a single subject, has come to light (NaCCA, 2018). Not only has the education system met degrees of instabilities in content and subject matter naming, but the entire educational or curriculum periods have also suffered setbacks. A typical situation can be traced to the Ghana government's attempt to reform the teacher training system. It made the political decision to upgrade from a three-year teacher's degree to a four-year bachelor's degree in education for those who want to enter the teaching profession. According to Joseph (2015), such a political decision necessitates a review of the entire curriculum to focus on new content and pedagogy for prospective teachers. Because there is a specific need for appropriately trained teachers to effectively teach content through specific phases of the curriculum, curriculum managers have embarked on the process and developed extensive curriculum using tailored curriculum design in general areas to meet government needs for a particular type of trained professional (Joseph, 2015).

1.2.4. External Influences and Global Agenda

Not only does the politics of the specific country influence the curriculum, but there are other international agenda and economic policies such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, the World Declaration on Education for All of 1990, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Dakar Framework of 2000. In response to the UDHR and EFA, education, elementary education was made a right of everyone, free and compulsory regardless of any differences. Towards achieving the MDG goals, Ghana, like other parts of the world, had to implement the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) and Free Senior High School Education Policy (FSHS), Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) in phases for improving quality of education and access (Kitta & Fussy, 2013; NaCCA, 2020). In 2002, UNESCO developed a framework for

developing countries in Africa to address gender disparity at all levels of education, harness ICT, and combat HIV/AIDS through education programmes (UNESCO, 2002). In response to this, in 2003, Tanzania established a national ICT policy, followed by introducing TEHAMA in primary schools and computer studies subjects in secondary schools (Lawrent, 2012). In a similar fashion, Ghana recommended introducing ICT as a course of study at the pre-tertiary level (President's Committee on Review and Education Reforms, 2007).

2. CONCLUSION

Apparently, it appears there are politics in everything, and the educational sphere is not spared. The curriculum, which is the backbone of every single education system, seems not to be autonomous in many respects. Ranging from its innovation to its implementation, the influences exerted on it through diverse ideologies (politics) of agencies in power are enormous and inevitable. This presupposes that no matter how appropriate curriculum designers anticipate the curriculum design to appear, there will still remain traces of political manipulations in almost every component of the curriculum innovated, developed and implemented.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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