Review

Philosophical reflections and curricula development: Addressing the challenges of ethnicity and development in Kenya

Buchere P. Brightone, Joseph W. Nasongo* and Lydiah L. Wamocha

Conflict Resolution and Management at the Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya.

For a long period, Kenya has experienced relative peace in the region. However, after the December 2007 General Elections, and the subsequent announcement of the disputed presidential election results, the country plunged into unprecedented ethnic conflict that engulfed the entire nation. The conflict was characterized by murder, looting, eviction, rape, arson, burning of food and food stores, destruction of homes, schools, business premises animals and crops, emotional harassment and other kinds of human abuse. Most survivors ended up in the camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The effects of the conflict were felt not only in Kenya but the entire Eastern Africa Region and beyond. In the aftermaths of the conflict, various approaches been adopted to address the root causes of the conflict and militate against possible future recurrence. Education is considered to be one of the strategic ways through which peace, conflict resolution, and cordial ethnic relations can be developed. In this regard, curriculum development is significant. Curricula development is a professional activity that facilitates the educational process. The national education philosophy stands out as the most important factor that affects this process. This philosophy is usually a concise statement of the decision made by the government in power on the directions and dimensions of the educational programmes in the light of certain factors deemed critical. Curricula practices in most African countries are characterized by problems akin to third world countries. The uniqueness of the African environment, characterized by ethnic diversity, ethnic conflicts, rampant poverty, HIV and AIDS pandemic and the problem of development among others, present formidable challenges to curricula developers. It is thus imperative that curricula developers devise all encompassing approaches that would generate attractive, relevant and effective programmes that would address these problems. This paper examines how the philosophical foundation of curricula can be utilized to tackle the twin issues of ethnicity and development in Kenya. An analysis of factors that hamper the process is undertaken and finally recommendations to facilitate innovative strategies in curricula development are suggested.

Key words: Curriculum, philosophical foundations, ethnicity, development.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity and national development remain some of the most serious challenges facing Africa in the 21st century. These two issues will continue to pose significant challenges to the education sector in Africa. These will require serious philosophical reflections in order to grapple with them constructively. Kenya as a country is no exception to this. Indeed, the challenges of ethnicity and development have heightened after the country's post 2007 violent conflicts that resulted in the death of over 1200 people and over 350,000 internally displaced persons. This scenario has set the mood for greater public expectations for national integration, peace and development. To achieve these concerns, education is poised to play a central role.

It is against this backdrop that this paper sets out to discuss the process of curricula development at the secondary school level in Kenya, by giving primacy to the philosophical foundation of curricula as an important facet

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*Corresponding author. E-mail: jwamocha@yahoo.com.

to the process, in responding to the twin challenges of ethnicity and development. The paper will examine the relationship between curricula development and philosophy, specifically it will look at ethnicity and development as part of the national goals of education, the factors that militate against the realization of these goals in the process of curricula development and finally underscore the need of broadening aspects of African philosophy, such as "ubuntu" and the philosophical foundations of African indigenous education. These can serve as a means of evolving some curricula development strategies that emanate from philosophical reflections to enhance the process of curricula development and make it possible to achieve these two goals.

CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

In Kenya, the secondary school curriculum is centralized and the Kenya Institute of Education [K.I.E] is the body charged with the development of curricula at this level. In this paper curriculum development is conceived as a process that involves outlining programme targets (objectives), choosing what the learners should learn, organizing it (planning), translating that plan into action (implementation) and finding out to what extent the programmes have been successful or unsuccessful (evaluation) at achieving the outlined objectives (Shiundu and omulando, 1992).

This process involves a number of activities viz.: outlining of curriculum objectives, selection and organization of learning experiences, developing curriculum packages [including guides and other basic resources], creating an appropriate educational environment, trying out the developed materials and training the necessary personnel in implementation, evaluation and maintenance (Shiundu and omulando, 1992).

It is evident that curricula development is a value – laden process, that is systematic and it entails informed decision – making at various levels. Consequently, this implies that the philosophical foundation must be given primacy in guiding the above process and unifying the other foundations such as historical, sociological and the psychological. This is because the philosophical foundation permeates all the foundations. Aggarwal (1985) articulates this relationship clearly by quoting Dewey when he observes that,

> " …….. If education is a set of techniques for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes, philosophy is the foundation to vitalize these. Philosophy is the foundation and education is the superstructure: Without philosophy, education would be a blind effort and without education, philosophy could be a cripple".

One can validly assert that philosophy of education is the

cornerstone of the foundation of education. Education is a practical activity of philosophical thought, in which every educational practice is illumined with a philosophical basis as observed by Njoroge and Bennaars (1986) who posit that philosophy plays speculative, normative, rational and critical functions to education. A similar view is held by Aggarwal et al. (1992) when they assert that:

> The need of philosophy of education is felt very seriously in the field of curriculum planning. The philosophical approach to life is the guiding factor in the choice of studies to be included in the curriculum.

The preceding argument clearly shows the existence of an intimate relationship between philosophy and curriculum development. To appreciate this, we now look at the value of the philosophical foundation to the process of curriculum development.

THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION TO CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT

Curricula development as a process is premised on various foundations, such as the historical, sociological, psychological and the philosophical foundations. The latter foundation entails the values and beliefs that make up the philosophies of life and education.

According to Shiundu and Omulando (1992), the philosophical foundation, "enables the curriculum developer to critically examine societal values, derive meanings from facts, organize experiences in a manner meaningful and useful to educational practitioners and students, justify one or some educational beliefs over others and develop new proposals of educational practice for translation into action."

This indicates that philosophical reflection is an integral component of curricula development. Moreover, it implies that every decision made in the process must be informed by this foundation. This view is enforced by Abagi and Olwenya (1992) when they assert that:

> "As we approach the 21[st]century, we Kenyans have to be critical enough of the Western type of schooling. We have to clearly reflect on our Indigenous African systems, institutions and values. This will help us re-discover our roots (rich past) and forge ahead. We should not be pushed into globalization without our roots. The only way we can tackle our problems and develop for the benefit of Kenyans is to be sober.''

Apart from underscoring the value of philosophy to education, a strong case for the incorporation of aspects of African philosophy as part of the philosophical foundation is advanced. This paper is in agreement with this position, as one of the most important and urgent reform

needed to transform our education so as to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the Kenyan people making it a powerful tool of social, economic, political and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals.

Using the Tyler (1949) approach, the philosophical foundation will enable a curriculum developer to answer the following questions:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences ought to be provided to attain these purposes?
3. How should the educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How should we know that these purposes are being attained?

In answering the first questions, the philosophical foundation would enable the curriculum developer to establish and formulate relevant, realistic and achievable aims, goals and objectives of education. This is only possible after philosophical reflections on understanding man, his life, actions, ideals and problems.

Choosing and selecting the right experiences is another area that will considerably draw from the philosophical foundation. Before selecting these experiences and organizing them, philosophical reflections in the area of epistemology, methodology and pedagogy are necessary. This entails reflecting on and making judgments about learning and teaching the subject matter. Thus the subject matter theories of subject matter for its own sake, subject matter for use and subject matter for teaching life process skills come in handy.

The question of how we organize the selected experiences for maximum effect also demands philosophical reflection. The curricula developer should be able to unify a diversity of interests of individuals, family and the community and synchronize them in a logical manner to both the learner and the teacher.

Finally, a curriculum developer also grapples with the following questions: to what extent have the targets set out been attained? What is to be evaluated? How should it be evaluated? Using what method? Why?

These evaluative questions are value laden and entail significant amount of philosophical reflections. These reflections will include aspects seen below.

This paper maintains that the need for philosophy of education is to be more seriously felt in the area of curriculum development. Thus, the philosophical foundation of the curriculum must be given primacy. According to Chukwu (2002) this would enable the curricularist to:

1. Re- assess postulation, principles and theories in other disciplines.
2. Have a clear understanding of curricula problems.
3. Appreciate the interrelations of principles in various disciplines.

4. Employ philosophical functions such as analytical, speculative, rational in the process of curriculum development.

The above will then guide the curricularist in the tasks of curriculum investigation, analysis, criticism and proffering postulations or solutions.

ETHNICITY AND DEVELOPMENT AS GOALS OF EDUCATION

The development of education has been a long standing objective of the Kenyan government. Since independence, various commissions, starting with the Ominde commission of 1964, evolved various goals of education. Currently the goals of education in Kenya are to:

1. Foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity
2. Promote the social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development
3. Promote individual development and self fulfillment
4. Promote sound moral and religious values
5. Promote social equality and responsibility
6. Promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied culture
7. Promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations
8. Promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection
(Government of Kenya, 2003)

The above goals can be termed as a statement of our national philosophy of education. From this it is evident that ethnicity and development are critical concerns to the Kenyan people. It shows that Kenyans appreciate the fact that through education, the two goals of national development and national unity can be realized. Also, aspects of ethnicity like land clashes, ethnic based political parties, negative ethnic prejudices and stereotypes can thwart the purpose of national unity and development. What then is ethnicity?

Ethnicity can have several connotations and it is a major concern of studies today. Chukwu (2000) notes that ethnicity is a legitimate topic for philosophical appraisal by African philosophers because of the destructive tendencies emanating from it. An all-inclusive concern is getting a solution to our ethnic problems in view of the millions of lives we have lost as a result of ethnic based armed conflicts in recent times.

On the other hand Chukwu (2000) notes that development demands a commitment to those social values that foster and facilitate nation building. In this regard, a positive response to effective political leadership and governance, patriotism and civil liberty, peace, order and democratization is imperative. It is also clear that negative tendencies arising from ethnic consciousness can wreak enormous havoc on our nation and

unity.

Chukwu (2000) defines ethnicity as the 'awareness of the existence of real socio – cultural differences among several groups of people with different territorial and ancestral origins. The awareness of these differences is also referred to as "tribalism" But tribalism seemingly bears some negative or discriminative tenderness when used interchangeably with the term "ethnicity" by some people.

From the above, it is evident that ethnicity is a real complex phenomenon that entails a group of people who have a common identity in terms of culture , common territorial origin, language , territory and destiny. Consequently this implies the existence of an active sense of identification with discriminatory relationships among peoples and cultural forms, and perception of group differences and the social boundaries between segments of the population of a country.

William Mnewman (2000) adds that prejudice and discrimination arise in the competition and conflict for the scarce resources such as power, wealth and prestige in the modern pluralistic society. These are critical concerns to the process of curriculum development. They require philosophical reflections so that aspects of ethnic diversity should not degenerate into negative ethnicity in the form of tribal clashes, or the recruitment of people in the public service on the basis of ethnicity and not merit.

There is need for developing curricula on the principle of unity in diversity and continuity in variety so as to constructively utilize Kenya's rich ethnic diversity for national unity and development Ogot (1996) comments that:

---- Ethnicity and cultural differences are not bad in themselves, nor can they be obliterated: all nations in the world today posses a vast assortment of different peoples, customs, languages, traditions and lifestyles. This means that every nation is multi-ethnic and   Multi-lingual in its make up and hence multi – culturalism is destined to be one of the distinctive features of the world of the future. This diversity is needed to enrich and inspire contemporary life as well as to protect it from the dulling and deadening effects of modern technology.

The reality and complexity of ethnicity poses some philosophical questions to a curriculum developer. For instance, which principles should be used in the process? What objectives as far as ethnicity is concerned should be outlined for the secondary school level? What curricula policies and activities should be put in place in order to realize these objectives? And what pedagogical strategies should be used in teaching ethnic related issues without creating impressions of subjectivity?

CURRICULA EFFORTS SO FAR MADE

The Kenya Institute of Education, as the centralized agency for curriculum development at levels below the university, has made several strides in tackling the issues of ethnicity and development at the secondary school level. However, more needs to be done. Some of the objectives put in place with regard to ethnicity include:

1. To enhance understanding and respect for own and other peoples culture and their place in contemporary society
2. Promoting a harmonious co-existence among peoples of Kenya
3. Promoting patriotism.
(Government of Kenya, 2003)

To realize these objectives, various curricula efforts have been made; these include the teaching of Kiswahili as a national language. Various initiatives like the 2000 National Language Board Legislation; and the inception of the 8-4-4 system of education that made Kiswahili compulsory and examinable, have contributed immensely in attaining these goals. The recent syllabus changes (2003) in which elements of oral literature will be taught as an integrated aspect of the Kiswahili language will enhance these goals. However, the scarcity of oral literature text books published in Kiswahili urgently needs to be addressed.

The use of literature is another initiative that has contributed to the realization of these goals. Currently, Kiswahili literature embraces the idea of African philosophy of "ubuntu" as advocated by Mkobelo and Luthuli (1997) and Kuniej (2000). They all underscore the need for educating humanity for humane reasons "utu". This is powerfully demonstrated in one of the Kiswahili literature set book, "walenisi" by Prof. Katama Mkangi , in which humanism is given primacy.

The teaching of social sciences such as history and government and social ethics education also play a significant role in achieving these goals. However, the recent curricula changes (2000) that made them electives have continued to see them attract fewer and fewer students. This undermines the process of achieving these goals.

Another factor that hampers the process of achieving national unity is the policy requirement that secondary schools admit 85% of her students from the local area. Although this had its intentions, its long term demerits outweigh its merits. This denies the students an opportunity to experience and interact with other cultural groups and forms from his or her place.

Finally, lack of a clear policy for development in general and particularly in relation to education, IPAR (1999) contributes to the inadequate realization of these goals in our education system. In addition, inadequate or inefficient management and supervision mechanisms over issues such as posting and promotion of teachers, have enhanced negative ethnicity where protection of ethnic interests is the chief criteria and not merit. As a result, the external forces such as open tribal cries from politicians,

leaders' stakeholders and the general public, become too strong for the school curriculum to overcome.

It is from the above context that this paper proposes the following recommendations to improve the process of curricula development in addressing ethnicity and development in Kenya.

THE WAY FORWARD

There is an urgent need to develop and define a Kenyan based (indigenous) vision and mission for development in general and education in particular. The following are some measures that would go a long way to promote development.

The new philosophy of education should aim at producing a mass of well rounded literate Kenyans who are multi-culturally functional and "humane". This implies the enhancement of African philosophy in the process of curricula development, so that the principle of unity in diversity and continuity in variety forms the pillar of our curricula development.

In addition, it is important to undertake the following measures.

First, there is need to re- visit the curricula policy where social sciences such as history and government and Christian Religious Education are currently electives within the Kenyan educational curriculum. The two subjects ought to be compulsory up to a certain level.

Two, there is need to encourage teachers and students to form study action groups to openly and positively discuss ideas on ethnicity in relation to real life issues. These can include clubs and organizations of all sorts, which operate on and off schools

Three, it is important to build real grass roots unity among students of different ethnic groups by expanding curricula opportunities that would allow them to work together on the completion of these projects as a family

Four, there has to be a review of the policy of student admission to secondary schools to allow for greater flexibility so that students can easily join secondary schools away from their homelands.

Five, it is important to hold forums, lectures, workshops and rallies countrywide to expose and neutralize ethnic ideas that are negative and a danger to national development and unity. This will employ the use of all available media.

Six, there is need for fundamental changes in teacher education, as a way of preparing them to teach in a multi-ethnic or cultural setting. A pluralistic, problem centered approach to teacher education and training could be helpful to educate students to respond humanely to diversity. This would work better in a harmonized teacher training curriculum.

Seven, there is need to learn from the experiences of successful countries in terms of social integration such as Tanzania. Focus here, should be on Nyerere's social

philosophy that laid a solid foundation for Tanzania' nationhood.

Finally, there is urgent need to educate all stake-holders on the importance of having mutual political goodwill in order to surmount the challenges we face as Africans.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the intimate symbiotic relationship between philosophy and curricula development. Emanating from the discussion is the fact that when curricula development is directly drawn from the African philosophy of "ubuntu" and "communalism", this will go along way in overcoming the present challenges of ethnicity and, therefore, influence development positively in Kenya.

Finally, it has given recommendations that would go along way in enhancing the right attitudes to all stake-holders in secondary school education. This is in pursuit of the policy of embracing unity in diversity and focusing on the different African ethnic groups as an embodiment of African philosophy.

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