

RELEVANCE OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN CREATING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN LEARNERS FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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Keywords:

Curriculum, national consciousness, transformation of the society, secondary schools, Africa

Abstract: *A feeling of love for and pride for one's country is seen in many learners in Africa. That conscious attempt to defend the course of one's country is mostly dominant in secondary school students. The school curriculum enables them to create the awareness of this national consciousness in them. Some of the secondary school subjects that enable learners imbibe national consciousness are as follows: History, Social Studies, Civic Education, Religion and National Values, and Citizenship Education. National consciousness plays an important role in the socio-economic and political developments in many nations especially in Africa. Mostly, national consciousness promotes national unity, sustainable development, peace, respect for diversity, co-existence, and patriotism. This national consciousness is one of the educational objectives in Africa, and it is being brought about by the school curriculum. National consciousness provides the basis for national integration, bonding and coalescing that reduces the differences among ethnic groups to the barest minimum. It encourages them to work together to advance the nation's political, cultural, economic, social or psychological needs. Societal transformation is the product of every curriculum. This is often fostered by the awareness of the learner in the belief of their nation. This article is solely content analysis based on literature search. It vividly brings out scholars' views on the vital position of the school curriculum in creating national consciousness in learners, hence leading to sustainable societal development.*

Introduction

The importance of the school curriculum in creating national consciousness in learners in Africa cannot be overemphasized. National consciousness plays an important role in societal transformation. Mostly, national consciousness

promotes national unity, sustainable development, peace, respect for diversity, religious tolerance, and patriotism. The curriculum is key to creating this national consciousness in the learner. The expansion of formal education in almost all societies around

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the world has necessitated the essential and appropriate definition and explanation of the concept 'curriculum.' A curriculum carries the beliefs, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and all that education is about. Consequently, it will be difficult to run a formal education without a curriculum.

There are several definitions of curriculum from renowned curriculum scholars, but there seem to be underlying elements that are commonly agreed as constituent of a good definition of a curriculum. Ughamadu (2006) listed these elements as: goals and objectives (the curriculum intent), content or subject and subject matter, learning experiences, and evaluation. These four are referred to in the studies of curriculum as curriculum components or elements or simply, pillars of the curriculum. These are what hold the discipline together and any curriculum specialist worth the name will have to understand them pretty well.

Thus, two renowned scholars despite given us their ideas in the 1980s provided an accommodating definition of curriculum as the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience, under the auspices of the school, for the learner's continuous and wilful growth in personal-social competence (Tanner & Tanner, 1980). Any definition of the term curriculum or explanation of the concept curriculum must accommodate the needs and aspirations of the learners and the society at large. Many scholars have defined curriculum in many varied ways, but the definition of curriculum according to Osuji and Oluoch-Suleh (2017) caught our attention. For these scholars, curriculum is the planned and unplanned learning experiences of the learner under the auspices of the school and society, which enables the learner to acquire sustainable skills, knowledge, values, and positive attitudes for the

formation of heart and the transformation of the society. The formation of the heart and the transformation of the society are the two main variables that this study focuses on. The inculcation of national consciousness in a learner is only possible when this learner's heart is formed. The different subjects learnt in secondary schools help to form the heart of the learner and enables them to embrace goodness which helps in being committed to the society, hence, societal transformation.

National consciousness is one of the national educational goal's projects which derives from the nation's philosophy. The national philosophy of education of Nigeria is a typical example here. Making for an operational definition of the term, Alexander (2012) opines that national consciousness is a strong patriotic feeling to one's own country. In context of this paper, national consciousness is a feeling of love for and pride in one's own country; a feeling that one's country is better than any other country in the world. It is equally seen as the act of favouring or striving after the unity and interest of the nation. It is also the conscious attempt to defend the course of one's country.

The issue of national consciousness in Nigeria for example has posed a big challenge as tribes are bent on remaining separated. This is the main problem of this study. In exploring more on the problem of this present study, Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2017) expressed that national consciousness in Nigeria has become a fragile travesty of what it might have been, leading to a situation in which the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the State. Any meaningful move to consolidate Nigeria as a nation, for them, must consider the psychological forces of pride and shame in play in ethnic nationalism. It is therefore, a call to the stakeholders in Nigeria politics to find a way of consolidating the unity of their country amid signs of failure evident in the emergence of

dissident and oftentimes violent groups calling for self-determination. Examples of such groups include: Boko Haram in the Northern part of the country, and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the Southeast Nigeria.

The emergence of dissident groups notwithstanding, there is need to promote national consciousness. National consciousness therefore, can be promoted by so many ways such as: Tolerance for each other irrespective of religious and ethnic group or affiliations, and showing hospitality especially to strangers. We can also promote national consciousness by living a life devoid of discrimination against other tribes, and encouraging inter-tribal marriages. These are undeniably some of the objectives of the school curricula. Hence, the curriculum is a veritable tool for national consciousness and societal transformation.

School Curriculum and National Consciousness: Scholars Perspective

The very need and aspiration of a society over a curriculum is to create national consciousness in every learner. Therefore, national consciousness relates to the state of awareness of one's environment and the necessary feeling of collective identity, unity and bonding among the people within a particular country. Indeed, when History was first introduced as a school subject, patriotism was one of its main objectives (Oppong, 2019). According to this scholar, people educate their young ones about a nation's past to equip future generations with the knowledge and skills they need if the life of the society is to be carried on.

Every generation encourages its youth to emulate the patriotic features of the founders of their nation-states by exposing the wonderful deeds of great heroes and heroines who contributed significantly to the defense and development of their societies. Such training or education prepares people to 'die' for their nation in one way or the other. It also compels people to

contribute to nation-building since the lessons in history unearth the enormous contributions of their forefathers (Cobbold & Oppong, 2010).

National consciousness provides the basis for national integration, bonding and coalescing. This reduces the differences among ethnic groups to the barest minimum. It encourages them to work together to advance the nation's political, cultural, economic, social or psychological needs. Adjepong and Kwarteng (2017) emphasize that one of the strongest bonds uniting large social groupings is the members' consciousness of a common history, without which people could not easily acknowledge the claims on their loyalty of large abstractions. The curriculum has played a major role in forming national consciousness in students, apparently leading to the transformation of the society. History, Social Studies, Civic Education, Religion and National Values, and Citizenship Education are some of the subjects and courses that help learners imbibe national consciousness. Some of the benefits of the school curriculum in creating national consciousness are as follows:

Patriotism: The main intent for the introduction of History in secondary schools in Nigeria for example was to encourage the people to think of themselves as Nigerians, and not as differing and unrelated ethnic groups. The long-term objective was to promote national consciousness after colonial rule. It is worthy to mention that the introduction of a nation's history as a school subject is intended to promote national consciousness in learners. The knowledge of one's history helps to bind the person together with his social grouping. It also offers the person the opportunity to be loyal to their nation. When the citizens are patriotic, they become conscious about their nation, ensure national integration, and assist in advancing the course of national development. When people are conscious of their nation, they contribute to its survival, growth and development. Adjepong and Kwarteng

(2017) have rightly maintained that the study of History is the playground of patriotism. They further argue that the great statesmen of past societies were successful in their careers because they thought historically and appreciated that History was the most important discipline for the citizens of every free republic, due to its inculcation of the spirit of patriotism in students. *Unity and Bonding*: National consciousness relates to the state of awareness of one's environment. It is also the necessary feeling of collective identity, unity and bonding among the people within a particular nation. National consciousness implies that individuals see themselves as part of a particular group (Oppong, 2019). This means a communal understanding that a group of people shares common ethnic, political and cultural background that reflects national consciousness. Thus, within the concept of 'national consciousness', there is a belief in the existence of national awareness of a collective will of a people claiming that without "them" there is no "us." This awareness permits people to have a "collective identity" of not only who they are, but also how others around them are significant for nation-building.

National consciousness provides a specific core of values for nation-building. To be nationally conscious, therefore, is to encourage citizens to think of themselves as Nigerians as a nation first for example, and members of their ethnic group second. For instance, the fostering of national unity for a common national development agenda is achievable through the study of History. Indeed, when people study History they should recognize their common bonds within a nation (or even as belonging to the global human community), and not see themselves as significantly different from other families, tribes, religions or different from the nation. That is, they should all consider themselves as citizens of the nation to which they belong.

National Identity: National consciousness provides a sense of national identity. Tate (1996) observes that a society that is not passionate about its history is in danger of losing its identity. This validates Low-Beer's (2003) claim that creating and sustaining national identity have always been important reasons for the inclusion of History in the school curriculum. National identity reflects in citizens' actions, thoughts, aspirations and behaviours (Ozumba, 2014). The identity awakens patriotic sensitivities, and the sensitivities, in turn, strengthen the consciousness of the citizens. The teaching of Social Studies, History, therefore, inspires students with a sense of patriotism to their motherland. Of course, patriotism is the positive extreme of nationalism and so its development on the part of citizens of the nation-state is an important element in the progress of every country; thus, societal transformation.

Civic and National Values: The relevance of Civic Education and Citizenship Education in creating national consciousness in the learner cannot be overstressed. These subjects enable the learners to acquire the essential values needed to transform the society. These subjects help learners to learn some values such as honesty, hard work, cooperation and collaboration for the good of one's nation. Drawing from this assertion, it is worthy to note that the introduction of Civic Education in schools could go a long way to build civic and national values that could assist students to function well and contribute meaningfully to the society. Iyamu and Obiunu (2010) suggested the need for inculcation of desirable values and national consciousness in the youth for effective living. Civic Education in the schools is an urgent task considering the violent and militant nature of the current crop of youths in Africa (Akinola 2011).

In his submission, Akinola (2011) noted that among the objectives of Civic Education are

moral and civic virtues such as concern for the welfare, rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance, respect for elders and believe in the capacity to make a difference. He further stressed that effective Civic Education programme is needed to build responsible citizens among the youth. This is because Civic Education is required to develop in learners those values and skills that will make them responsible. In the light of Akinola's submission, Adetoro and Omiyefa (2011) advocated inculcation of the right kind of values through effective teaching of Civic or Citizenship Education. Agu (2010) also asserted that it is necessary to re-visit the process of inculcation of Civics or Citizenship Education in primary and secondary schools in the face of fast dwindling national consciousness, human values and societal norms and attitudes. Adetoro and Omiyefa (2010) also acknowledged that Social Studies classrooms are places for teachers and students to rub minds together to re-examine ungrounded beliefs and values and find ways of changing them.

Civic Education is a vigorous attempt to teach morals, social and societal values, skills, knowledge, legal rights, honesty, norms, qualities expected of good and responsible citizens towards nation building. To produce good and responsible citizens, there is need for the educational system to lay emphasis on civic training and citizenship education (Falade, 2008) Civic Education according to Shetu (2011) aims at ensuring the participation of well-informed and responsible citizens, skilled in the arts of effective action and also to develop the skills to use knowledge effectively. According to Nasir (2011) Civic Education is a form of education which is specifically designed in content and function to produce good, useful, responsible and informed active citizens of our great and dynamic nation. Ekwonwa (2010) saw Civic Education as aiming towards educating

students to work towards the achievement of their country's national goals and sharpening of peoples' values. Corroborating the opinions above, Oladiti and Wahab (2013) mentioned that Civic Education incorporate some of the objectives of Social Studies such as respect for the worth and dignity of each person, civility, integrity, self-discipline, tolerance, compassion and patriotism.

Awareness of Society, Culture and Tradition: The Social Studies, Civic Education, Religion and National Values curricula for example helps learners to learn about values and different ethnic groups, their values and traditions. According to Adedayo (2019), if somebody from the South knows the way people from the North behave, and their values, he or she will appreciate them more. Civic Education teaches how to appreciate other people, their religion, and culture. When you know how other people behave, you can easily relate with them, then contribute in the national development with conviction. Some of the subjects mentioned earlier enable the learners to know about their immediate environment and the culture of people they live with. This invariably creates national consciousness in them for societal transformation. It creates in them that consciousness to lead a crisis-free life and a life devoid of hatred, corruption, discrimination, hooliganism, and all other forms of vices in the society. In addition, the knowledge of culture and tradition of different parts of the country would ensure more tolerance among the youths, thereby reducing youth restiveness, ethnic and religious crisis, which are threats to a peaceful society. Crisis-free Africa could only be possible when the young ones who would take over the mantle of leadership from the elders tomorrow, know what could lead to crisis and the best ways of avoiding and resolving crisis.

Implications of the School Curriculum on Learners

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As earlier mentioned, the school curriculum has the capacity to create national consciousness in the learners. Social Studies, Civic Education, Citizenship Education, History, Religion and National Values are some of the secondary school subjects that create national consciousness in the learners. Curriculum as both planned and unplanned learning experiences aim at creating a change in the heart of the learner and that of the society. Some of its implications on the learners include the following:

Provision of Knowledge and Information about National Culture and Concepts: Curriculum of a school provides learners with relevant information about one's national culture and identity. For example, the study of History curriculum in schools helps the learners to get acquainted with the culture of the country as well as instilling the love and respect for such cultural identifies (national consciousness).

Development of Personality: Part of what curriculum does to the learner is the formation of the heart. It makes one who has passed through it and allowed it to pass through them to behave in a civic and learned way. But we realize that one's personality cannot be taken outside the culture and society in which one lives in. As a result, it develops one's personality to love and defend their country, respect it as well as value it more than others. For example, in school curriculum, Civic Education has objectives that build up such qualities that develop the wanted personality.

Attainment of Educational Objectives: In Nigeria for example, the curriculum in use is derived from the philosophy of a nation, national policies and educational goals of a country. That is why curriculum differs from one country to another. In the light of this statement, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) identified the following national educational goals: The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; the inculcation of the type of

values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigeria society; the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies in order to live in and contribute to the development of the society. Attainment of these educational goals concretely would create enough national consciousness in the learner for the transformation of the society.

Opens Doors for Collaboration: Curriculum is not one man's affair but brings specialists from different areas together. In the curriculum planning, development, implementation and reform, people/educationists from different tribes, geo-political zones, religion, just to mention a few are brought together and collaboration is achieved by their concern on national goals. For instance, given the menace of Covid 19 and its expectations in the educational sector, if a review is to be done, curriculum specialists, teachers and other stakeholders would emerge from different corners of Africa and in looking for a way forward, national consciousness is to be kept in view. They would also come up with different tribal needs to be harnessed into a national programme. Another example to buttress collaboration comes from the fact that teachers and students come together to get this curriculum realized.

Raising the Knowledge about one's Country's Regulations: Every nation has rules and regulations guiding it in order to achieve progress. These national regulations are made open and available in the developed curriculum used in schools. For example, the study of Social Studies would expose and raise one's knowledge about the nation's regulations or constitutions as well as encourage children to respect such regulations. In doing this, it shows that school curriculum enhances national consciousness.

Conclusion

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It has been the concern of this work to explore the relevance of the school curriculum in creating national consciousness in learners. The curriculum at each level of education is tailored towards ensuring responsible citizenship. This is because it affords students the opportunity to know about positive aspects of national life, such as unity and faith, peace and progress, national identity, national security, and above all, national consciousness. Social Studies, History, Civic Education. Citizenship Education, and Religion and National Values are such curricula that help to enhance learners' national consciousness. The curricula afford learners the opportunity to be aware of their basic rights, obligations and responsibilities for societal transformation.

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