

EDUCATION AND AFRICAN UNITY

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Abstract

This study advances the argument that African unity can be promoted through curriculum reforms in the educational sector. The argued that the African educational curriculum is out of sync with the goals of continental unity, and thus called for curriculum reforms within the context of the philosophy of African unity

Keywords: Education, unity, curriculum, reforms

Introduction

Education, the systematic influencing of people's knowledge, skills and attitudes (Nduka, 2006), stands out as an essential tool for the mobilization of citizens towards the actualization of set goals.

The purpose of education is to transmit from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the society... to enable the young live in and serve the society and to prepare them for the future membership of the society... it involves the active participation of the young in the maintenance and development of society (Nyerere, 1967).

A number of issues are discernible from the above reference. Firstly, it shows that education develops commitment to goals in the individual. Secondly, it posits that without education, the young (including the youths) cannot be prepared for the future society. This is crucial for African unity, as true integration would mean the creation of a new society. Equally, the future of the continent depends on the youths, the leaders of tomorrow. Education improves the mental capacity of the individual and this promotes the mobilization of people for societal goals (Okowa, 2003). It is imperative to note that the deriveable gains of education are predicated on the development and harnessing of its essential components. Ukeje (cited in Joof and Mezieobi, 1995:76) captures these elements as: What is to be taught (the curriculum), why it should be taught (philosophy of education) how to teach what is to be taught (methods of teaching) whom

to teach (educational psychology), who should teach (teacher education) as well knowledge embodied in other disciplines of education such as history of education, comparative education, sociology of education and educational administration and planning.

This study takes interest in "what to teach" component of education. It is clear that the curriculum of education must be in sync with the goals or objectives of education, if it must promote the aspirations of a society. What we teach is a fundamental determinant of what we get. Essentially therefore, curriculum deals with the objectives intended to be achieved through instruction (Mkpa and Izuagba, 2003)

It stands to reason here that national development goals can hardly be achieved if it is not part of the educational curriculum. Educational curriculum must therefore address the objectives of society. It is clear that the educational curriculum of African countries hardly address the objectives of African unity. Thus creating a gap between what we teach in our schools and the objectives of African unity. Indeed, the quest for African unity has ignored this crucial issue. Even when it is considered, it is treated as tangential. The intention of this paper is to fill this gap.

The planning/development of educational curriculum is undertaken by government through its relevant agencies – the ministry of education and its parastatals, (in Nigeria for example, the National Universities Commission, National Council on Education, Universal Basic Education Commission, etc). Examination

Bodies and interest groups such as teacher's unions/associations. The implementation of curriculum however lies with the teacher under the supervision of relevant authorities.

It is useful to note that the curriculum measures the expected standards. This explains why curriculum content is an essential requirement for the accreditation of educational institutions. According to Mkpa and Izuagba (2003), a curriculum plan has 6 components:

Planned Curriculum: All learning experiences (academic and non academic)

Syllabus: List of subjects indicating topics to be taught all through a given level of education.

Scheme of Work: Broad themes and concepts derived from the topics in the syllabus to be covered in a term.

Unit Plan: Topics exploring one theme, adequately sequenced, indicating the general objectives, order of presentation and derived from the scheme of work.

Lesson Plan: Discrete Units, teaching strategies and stating learning outcomes expected and derived from the unit plan.

The above graphically demonstrates the crucial role teachers can play in African Unity, if they are integrated into African unity programmes via the educational curriculum. This suggests that the curriculum of African schools at all levels require revision, to include mobilization themes in African unity.

From this standpoint, it is proper to argue that the low level of consciousness among African youths in relation to African unity is partly a function of gaps in the educational curriculum. African youths study very little about Africa and its people. Knowledge on Africa can be effectively acquired if the educational curriculum of individual African countries place high premium on African studies. It is crucial to note that although consciousness can be located at different levels (political, religious, cultural, etc), its development is a function of knowledge acquired through education, predicated on what education teaches. This standpoint defines the thesis of this discussion.

Colonialism and the dilemma of African unity

It has been established that the primary motive of colonialism was economic gains (Ake 1981, Onimode, 1983, Offiong, 1980, Brett, 1973). The policies, and processes which promoted this

economic interest, impacted negatively on African unity. The nature of European Scramble for Africa and its subsequent partition among European countries have had consequences for the independent states of the continent (Elaigwu, 2004).

The artificial boundaries that were created and policies such as the French policy of Assimilation created and deepened consciousness of separate identity among Africans. Worse, colonialism engendered this same feeling among citizens of the same country. Nnoli (1978) has argued that the colonial urban setting constitutes the cradle of contemporary ethnicity in Nigeria. It is widely known that ethnic consciousness and the resultant ethnic politics undermines Nigeria's unity.

Similarly, the partitioning of Africa balkanized several ethnic groups into two or more countries. Elaigwu (2004:) has noted that the artificial boundaries of the States which emerged from the European imperial expansion have salient implications for political development in these States. After independence, one saw the Hausa of Nigeria with members of their family living as citizens of the Republic of Niger. The Ewes are split between Ghana and Togo; the Yorubas are found across the borders of Nigeria and Republic of Benin; the Somalis found themselves in

Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia; and the same situation goes for the Masai in Tanzania and Kenya... These artificial boundaries created culturally diverse States as they brought together strange ethno cultural groups into one political territory.

A significant outcome of this is ethnic based political domination, and the resultant struggle for recognition and identity, separatist agitations, and civil wars. It is discernible here that African countries have problems with national integration. It is proper to argue that countries that lack internal cohesion, can hardly integrate with others. Perhaps of more significance is the psychological dimension of separate identity among Africans, and the stereotypes and prejudices that have been created. This impedes integration, but can be corrected through education. However, the colonial education inherited by Africans inhibits this. Because colonial education was designed to further economic exploitation, the curriculum prepared Africans to think like Europeans. For example, Africans were taught European History, as against African History.

The theory, concepts and subjects that were taught did not capture the African reality. The different languages imposed on us were strengthened by the curriculum. In British West Africa for example, the Secondary School curriculum was Grammar centered. The importance of other subjects was tied to English language. Failure in English meant failure in other subjects. Thus the slang, "Fail English, fail all" (Alapini, 1984)

This curriculum was inherited after independence, but concerns led to reforms, which in addition to addressing the curriculum to national development goals, recognized the importance of language as a vehicle for national integration. It however neglects the use of the curriculum for regional integration. At the tertiary level, the curriculum Europeanises and Americanises the African, as the theories and subject issues handed over to us are not located in the African setting or condition.

In the particular case of the social sciences, Ake (1979) has demonstrated that Western Social Science is imperialism. His contention is that the interests of imperialism are laden in it. Thus, the values passed on to us promote imperialist interests and this includes the division of Africans to enhance domination and exploitation. Significantly, our curriculum is predicated on these western theories and models. Highlighting the case of political science for instance, Ojo (1983) has noted that The curriculum, the teaching and the research in the discipline of political science in Tropical African Universities have like most other aspects of life, unquestioningly followed the western pattern. The colonial tutelage and heritage may be factors in this phenomenon.

This situation has not changed, as evidenced by the current curriculum used in Nigerian universities. The dependence on western models and theories have created a crisis of irrelevance that hampers the development of critically rigorous thought in our curricula teaching and research (Nzimiro, 1986). This probably explains the limited African content in our curriculum. The political science curriculum for example, has very few courses that teach African Affairs – International Relations of African States, Politics and Law in Africa, African Political Thought, Traditional African Institutions, and themes on African colonial experiences.

These courses, as few as they are, are treated in isolation; more importantly, they are not predicated on the philosophy of African Unity. This yawning gap makes the mobilization of the African youth towards African unity, very difficult.

Uniting without the people: the gap in African unity

The end of colonialism necessitated the need for African unity. In response to the dictum, "united we stand", and "divided we fall", African leaders sought to strengthen African brotherhood, with a view to retaining the continents independence, resisting imperialism, and promotion of its development. The search for African unity was predicated on the Pan Africanist ideology, which

sought to restore and retain the dignity of the black man.

Despite their different ideological dispositions, African leaders shared a consensus that self-determination can be achieved through continental unity. This thinking gave birth to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in May 1963. It had the following objectives.

- The achievement of a better life for the peoples of Africa
- The defense of the sovereignty of African States
- The eradication of all forms of colonialism from Africa
- The promotion of international cooperation having due regard to the charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For purposes of achieving the objectives stated above, the OAU leadership committed themselves to the principles of equality of member States, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other member States (Akinbobola, 1999). The objective of continental unity was pursued at governmental levels. This “unity” existed at the level of leadership. Policies of the organization encouraged the movement of Africans across borders, essentially in pursuit of economic interests.

This is also true of the African Union (AU), which replaced the OAU, and sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Coordinating Committee (SADCC). These efforts appear not to have achieved desired results as the alien-national divide blocks integration. The point is that efforts geared towards continental unity appear to have left out the individual African that should be the object of integration.

The African citizen was not mobilized towards the achievement of the desired unity. The neglect of education as a mobilization tool for continental unity has created a gap that has resulted to a dilemma for African unity. The point has been made earlier that the African

educational curriculum has no provision for the teaching of the Pan African Philosophy that drives African unity.

Following this, the young African youth has lost recognition of the brotherhood that holds us together. The perspective that we are a monolithic whole has been undermined. Thus, despite the fact different nationals of African countries live together in one African country or the other, the ‘we’ and ‘them’ syndrome remains. Nnoli (1978), has noted that the competition for socio-economic resources engenders ethnic consciousness among different groups. This deepens the recognition of separate identities, and weakens integration efforts.

This is exacerbated by the failure of development, and the resultant harsh socio-economic realities. Reflecting on the Nigerian situation, Nnoli writes that: Under...conditions of intensified scarcity of essential goods and services, the existence side by side of the most conspicuous extravagant affluence and squalid poverty...which reflect a deep and fundamental inequality in social relations...communal groups have become more salient for the amelioration of individual's insecurity than before. The government's apparent abdication of its responsibilities, and the consequent disenchantment of the population, have created a large vacuum filled by the communal groups... in the process, the communal factor in national life has been reinforced (1978).

The Nigerian experience captures the reality in several African States. The implication is that as communal groups tighten its grip on members, national unity is impaired, and this extends to continental unity. Experience has shown that majority of African aliens in Africa live in the fringes of society where they are either despised or harassed.

Significantly, due to the obsession with power by African leaders (Ake, in Alapiki, 2004), and failures of transparency and accountability in governance, education has suffered neglect, and citizens have been alienated from government. The results is the loss of faith in government, and difficulties in mobilizing citizens to pursue governmental goals. This suggests that the

redesigning of educational curriculum to pursue African unity must be accompanied with a re-orientation in governance, if the desired results must be achieved.

This calls for a new leadership in Africa. A leadership that is patriotic, honest, and disciplined. A new style of governance that is predicated on consultation with the people, that which tries to actualize the aspirations of the people, that which is development oriented. (Okoko, 1999)

Towards African unity: revamping and redesigning the educational curriculum

Essentially, this section of the paper calls for reforms in the educational curriculum of African countries, to situate it within the context of African unity. It is crucial to note that curriculum reforms are based on established philosophies (Alapiki, 1984). This raises a logical question, what is the philosophical basis of African unity?

Following the experiences of Slavery and Colonialism, Pan Africanism emerged as a mobilization tool for self-determination and the restoration of the dignity of the African. This philosophy gave push to the nationalist movements that facilitated the end of colonialism, and the subsequent attainment of independence by colonized African States.

At independence, this Pan Africanist philosophy became the driving force for unity. This is predicated on the “mind of Africa” (Okadigbo, 1985). This mind makes African’s to see themselves as one, sharing a common destiny and identity. For this reason, any part of Africa should be home to any African, irrespective of nationality. The colonial experience, and the resultant underdevelopment, demonstrates that we share a common destiny. The necessity of liberating Africa from the embrace of imperialism and underdevelopment became a crucial reason to put African’s under a single umbrella.

The objectives and policies of the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its successor the African Union, recognized these ideals and issues. This explains why African

unity, development and liberation constitute the primary goals. In my view, this should be the basis for curriculum reforms. Some questions need to be clearly addressed at this point – What kind of unity do we desire? Is it political, cultural, or economic? What level of education should the curriculum reforms capture.

The search for unity should be total, while the curriculum reforms should be limited to the secondary and tertiary levels of education. Again, another question arises, what should be the elements of the curriculum reforms?

The monolithic view of Africans

The perspective that Africans are one should be taught in our schools. The essentials of this is captured by Okadigbo (1984) as follows: African exists in the minds of its people, from Tangier to Cape town and from Darkar to Tannarive. They consider themselves brothers and sisters, sharing the same heritage and the same destiny... There is African art, clearly distinguished from all other alien forms of art... There is an African sense of community, founded on kinship or extended families, in a proportion unequalled and unrivalled elsewhere outside Africa. There is an authentic African experience of colonialism with its peculiar, alien racist overtones. With this there is a basic and peculiar form of African alienation, and a corresponding strife to overcome them, in a style that has come to be known as “the African search for identity.

Teachings on African colonialism should move beyond “how Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, to the necessity for unity to restore the losses of that period. The African world, view that what concerns one is the concern of all, that when one finger brings out oil it soils the other, should be themes in our educational curriculum. Interestingly, the African Union Act recognizes this fact. In addition to all objectives of the OAU, with the exception of the objective of eradicating colonialism, the AU intends to achieve the following goals.

- (i) Promotion of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance.
- (ii) Promotion and protection of human and people’s rights.

- (iii) Promotion and defense of common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people.
- (iv) Promotion of sustainable development at the economic, social, and cultural levels, as well as the integration of African economies (Background Paper on African Union, 8/1/2002).

Of significance are the provisions of principles 'h' and 'j'. Principle 'h' provides the AU, the rights to intervene in the affairs of members, on cases of war crimes, genocide, and crime against humanity. Principles 'j' enables members to request intervention from the union in order to restore peace and security (Background Paper on African Union, 8/1/2002). The objectives of the AU, and the principles cited here, clearly thrusts to the forefront, the "Mind of Africa". These issues should be taught in our schools.

Linguistic unity: The educational curriculum should be redesigned to promote integration by language. The study of African languages will enhance integration efforts. Presently, the curriculum only teaches the inherited colonial languages. Although this facilitates communication, it has limited impact on African unity. Walters (2006) has noted in this regard that: A foreign colonial language such as French simply will not do; first of all, ordinary people do not speak. The major part of the population in any territory is still totally without knowledge of French. The 'high strategy of the French...was intended to atrophy national consciousness, to reduce it and render it assimilable of all sorts of mixes... As for the English language, the language of Free trade, we must remain circumspect about subtle efforts to Anglo-Americanise African... Linguistic unity based on a foreign language, however one may look at it, is cultural abortion... one might say that it makes no difference to a Wolof – speaking African whether he adopts Zulu or English or Portuguese. This is not just so...

A number of issues are discernible from Walters assertion. Firstly it posits that French, English and other Colonial languages inherited and spoken in Africa are instruments of imperialism. Secondly, these languages cannot promote our unity. Even if one disagrees with the first point,

it is clear that one of the significant outcomes of colonialism is division of Africa on linguistic lines – French speaking and English speaking Africa for instance.

One of the obstacles to Africa unity is language barrier. To solve this problem, one is not suggesting the use of foreign languages, but African languages. This appears impossible, given the multiplicity of languages in individual African countries and the resultant lack of lingua franca. However, the understanding of each others language will surely promote unity. It is widely known that language (not foreign language) binds people together.

The educational curriculum of African countries should therefore promote the teaching of indigenous languages. Similarly, Africans should include the languages spoken by their neighbours into their curriculum. The Technical Aid Scheme in Nigeria, and related programmes can be used to provide personnel/manpower for the teaching of African languages. The balkanization of different ethnic nationalities into two or more countries, by colonization, can be exploited to promote this goal.

Excursion/exchange programmes

The educational curriculum should be redesigned to enable students of African universities visit and study in African countries other than theirs. For example, graduating students can be made to spend a Semester in another African country. Industrial Attachment (IT) and Teaching Practice (TP) can fill this gap.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that African educational curriculum is out of sync with the goals of continental unity. For this reason, it has not adequately mobilized the youths for the pursuit of African unity. The paper calls for curriculum reforms within the context of the philosophy of African unity. Essentially it seeks for the type of education that will develop the "Mind of Africa" in the African youth.

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