

A review of socio-political and economic factors influencing secondary school history and government curriculum implementation in post-conflict Kenyan societies

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Abstract

History content is a panorama of character in action in every conceivable situation. It widens indefinitely the circle of people's acquaintances, provides abundant material for the analysis of motives and gives opportunity for cultivating restraint and tolerance and charity in judgment particularly in societies emerging from violent conflict. This paper undertakes a review of socio-political and economic issues influencing the implementation of History and Government curriculum in Kenya, particularly in times following the country's emergence from violent conflict outbreaks. The paper is based on a review of existing literature on the issues of concern. In this paper, it is argued that in Kenya, as elsewhere, politics occupy a central place in the daily affairs of the nation. The political class strive to control and manipulate the polity, either overtly or covertly. Education is normally a covert tool in the stratagem of the political class. History and Government as a subject suffers more from this political agenda in education than other subjects. This is because, ideally, the subject seeks to enlighten young Kenyans on the political history and memory of the nation. However, by twisting the curriculum to suit its political narratives, governments have over the years deprived Kenyans of a complete picture of the true Kenyan history. This explains why the nation does not have a single narrative that can help promote national unity and development. Incidents of conflicts partly arise due to different interpretations of the nation's history. Post-conflict History and Government education needs to focus on building one shared story; a story that acknowledges the important role that every tribe and section of the Kenyan society plays in the entire nation's development and existence. The review contributes significant approaches that can be adopted to improve performance of History and Government in secondary schools in Kenya.

Keywords: socio-political, economic factors, secondary school history, government, curriculum implementation, post-conflict Kenyan societies

Introduction

The teaching of History and Government in secondary schools in Kenya after violent conflicts is burdened with many expectations, including political, economic and social goals articulated by various stakeholders. Sadly, these goals are rarely examined for factual contradictions or tested against realities in the various communities emerging from conflict. Stakeholders in matters of academic expect teachers of History and Government to serve as social change agents, despite overwhelming pressure for them to conform to existing social and political norms. Politics frequently determines how and what history is to be taught (UNESCO, 2008) ^[23].

History and Government should be understood as an integral but underutilized part of transitional justice and social reconstruction. It can support or undermine the goals of tribunals, truth commissions and memorials, as well as other transitional justice mechanisms among societies emerging from violent conflict as attested by Stover (2011). Cole (2007) ^[2] arguably observes that teachers of History and government generally are under enormous pressure in post-conflict societies to play too many roles: from psychologist and guidance counsellors to conflict resolution experts and mediators. Yet, these teachers have to walk a delicate socio-political balance in the implementation of the curriculum.

A report by UNESCO (2008) ^[23] indicates that teachers of History and Government need strong support from parents, school administrators, and other authorities in order to

implement the curriculum of this subject effectively. Further, Stover (2010) ^[22] affirms that History and Government is an important tool for peace building particularly in societies emerging from violent conflict. The implementation of its curriculum should be the main focus since such politics are delicate and recovering from post-trauma effects of violent conflict.

However, Smith (2008) ^[21] cautions that strategies need to be put in place to cushion teachers of History and Government from possible challenges of implementing the curriculum particularly in teaching specific topics in the History and Government which may counter the peace building and reconciliatory efforts. This study seeks to critically examine the socio-political and economic realities influencing the implementation of History and Government curriculum in Kenya during the period 1992-2013. These are periods during which the country experienced post-election violence aroused by ethno-political issues.

Role of History Education in National Cohesion and Development

The teaching of History in secondary schools has been recognized all over the world as a source of enlightenment, development and national cohesion. As a collective memory of the past of a nation, the teaching of History attempts to bring to the fore the salient and significant part of events that occurred in the past, which could be utilized in building a prosperous

national future (Lisa, 2010) ^[10]. This explains why every human society, no matter the level of advancement, has placed optimum priority to the bequeathing of a "useable past" from generation to generation. For instance, in ancient cultures every kingdom had its own history laureate whose task was to remember the past (Hoffman, 2007) ^[7]. Modernity has also been influenced greatly by the enhanced teaching of History. This is assisting nations (who have placed the needed emphasis on historical studies) in their tasks of nation building, promoting national consciousness, the flowering of moral leadership and ensuring overall national development (Hoffman, 2007) ^[7].

Arguably, development at all levels (personal or national) in human society is a multi-faceted process. At the level of the individual, it implies multiplied skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being (Oyo, 2008) ^[17]. It must, however, be noted that the achievement of any aspect of personal development is strong tied to the state of the society as a whole. At the national level, development will naturally mean the pulling together of the above-stated personal virtues for the benefit and well-being of people within such a nation.

More often than not, as Rodney (2009) contends, development is used in an exclusive economic sense, the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features. A society develops economically and socially as its members jointly increase their capacity to deal with their system and content of education (particularly in History) (Osuntokun, 2009) ^[16]. Ajayi (2011) ^[1] affirms that for any nation to develop and to attain internal cohesiveness, the collective spirit of the people must be well nurtured and propagated through the teaching of the content of History. Here lies the significance of teaching History to students in high school.

The teaching of History, in the words Fafunwa (2004) ^[3], is so significant that "A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to shape their course even after a lethal conflict." Writing on the intimating interaction between Nation and History, J. F. Ade Ajayi (2011) ^[1] has stressed that:

... The teaching of History makes individuals interact with the nation. For the nation is a product of history in the sense of historical circumstances and events; and therefore the nation cannot escape from its past. At the same time, the nation is shaped by the effort of historians, among others, who try to establish the history of the nation, influence its group memory and seek to define its nationality-that is, the essence of what binds its people together, what constitutes their identity, what makes them a people distinct from other peoples.

Indeed, what the teaching of History does essentially for any nation is to place its reconciliatory and cohesiveness predicament within rational time perspectives of human evolution. This is the utility value of teaching History. The teaching of History also helps people not to undervalue what they are and overvalue what they are not. It in turn provides confidence building strategy to any prostrate nation that is striving to grapple with present problems (Sandburg, 2009). The teaching of History, therefore, is a key factor not just in fostering national development but in the training of minds for national cohesion. Similarly, it is a duty for any nation that is desirous of development in all its ramifications to always delve

into its past achievements as well as those of other lands. With this, the nation will be able to learn from the past errors, to draw inspiration from worthy past efforts, and to strategize for the future development (Wakio, 2013) ^[28].

The point of emphasis here is that skills attained in other disciplines should be accompanied by appropriate moral values acquired through the teaching of History, without which the society will return to the Hobbesian state of nature of battle of all against all. Hallward (2011) ^[6] contends that the teaching of History tends to produce thinking men and women who are imbued with curiosity, who will not accept any view hook, line and sinker, who through questioning and reasoning will be able to come to their own conclusion, who have become full of knowledge, and who by that means would be able to contribute to the development and cohesiveness of their society.

Pedagogical Approaches and Content of History

Controversy, as a vital principle of democracy, plays a central role in the teaching of History for critical democratic global citizenship. Controversial issues in History, however, raise pedagogical challenges for teachers in that they are not only explicitly political, but also potentially threatening to the reproduction of status quo ideals and embedded national narratives; themselves keystones of citizenship education.

Recent research in the teaching and learning of History advocates instructional approaches that engage students in the process of "doing History," including building historical knowledge through the use of primary sources, conducting historical inquiry, and encouraging students to think historically (Stake, 2009). Historical thinking, as described in by VanSledright (2002) ^[25] involves chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research, historical issues-analysis, and historical decision-making.

Essentially, this approach involves teaching students to analyse historical evidence, to consider perspective and context, and to go beyond the written word and examine the intention, motive, plan, and purpose of the content in History curriculum. In order to teach students how to "do History" in this manner, teachers themselves must understand the "knowing how" of History; in other words, teachers must possess a deep understanding of what History is and how historical inquiry is conducted in addressing controversial content that can compromise national cohesion in the long term (Miller, 2007) ^[11].

Thus, teachers of History face challenges in teaching students the "knowing how" of History as well as instructional approaches that foster historical thinking abilities to bolster controversial content (Gold, 2008) ^[5]. Effective pedagogical skills in the teaching of History involve fostering a deep knowledge of discipline and an understanding in students of historical thinking. And, according to Shulman (1986) ^[20], teachers of History need to emphasize the blending of content and pedagogy, which he refers to as pedagogical content knowledge, or "how particular controversial topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction. VanSledright (2009) ^[26] argues that research-based pedagogical approaches that foster the development of historical thinking include the use of primary source documents, historical empathy exercises, development of

critical thinking skills, and conducting historical inquiry and research.

Main Problem

History content is a panorama of character in action in every conceivable situation. It widens indefinitely the circle of people's acquaintances, provides abundant material for the analysis of motives and gives opportunity for cultivating restraint and tolerance and charity in judgment particularly in societies emerging from violent conflict (Viadero, 2007) [27]. In societies recovering from violent conflict, questions of how to deal with the past are acute, especially when the past involves memories of victimization, death, and destruction so widespread that a high percentage of the population is affected. Kenya has historically experienced post-election violence incidences since the advent of multi-party democracy, particularly in general elections held between 1992 and 2008. These incidents of violence have left thousands of Kenyan citizens dead, scores of others badly injured, millions worth of property destroyed, and livelihoods destroyed.

Communities that were at logger-heads during that period are in the transitional process of healing, averting the anarchy that was and embracing national cohesion. Transitional justice processes, such as the establishment of truth commissions and legal tribunals, were constituted in Kenya to help try to construct new historical narratives. Those who establish these processes, however, generally pay little or no attention to what is encountered in the teaching of History and Government in secondary schools.

Teachers of History and Government have to consent with socio-political and economic realities and ensure that the curriculum is fully implemented. What is ignored is the fact that some of the teachers of History and Government may have been directly affected as much as the students they teach by the trauma that comes with post-election violence. The question that begs then is: how do such teachers contend with socio-political and economic pressures in implementing the History and Government curriculum?

Ma in discussion

Curriculum development may be generically conceived as an amalgamation of various processes employed in the pursuit of certain set goals in a school system. It covers the entire spectrum of curriculum construction. This ranges from initial conceptualization and planning to design and implementation to evaluation and revision. A number of factors influence curriculum development. The main factors discussed are social, political and economic factors.

Socio-Political Factors

In *The Politics of the School Curriculum*, Lawton (1980) observes that curriculum development is about selecting "the most important aspects of culture for transmission to the next generation. One of the crucial questions to ask then is: who makes the selection? In Kenya, as elsewhere, politics occupy a central place in the daily affairs of the nation. The political class strive to control and manipulate the polity, either overtly or covertly. Education is normally a covert tool in the stratagem of the political class (Rugut & Osman, 2013) [18].

The influence of politics in curriculum development in Kenya is best seen through the formation of various education commissions, committees and working parties. Since

independence, there have been seven major presidential commissions on the school curriculum. The composition of these commissions is largely oblivious of expertise in curriculum; rather, it mostly exhibits political connectedness. Moreover, the findings and recommendations of most of these commissions are implemented at the discretion of the ruling elite. In most cases, these commissions end up being just grand academic exercises since their recommendations are never adopted (Ntarangwi, 2003) [14].

Due to the centralized, all powerful nature of the politics in Kenya, most decisions on education are top-down. Such a power-coercive approach does not augur well especially for curriculum development which should ideally be a deliberative, consultative, and participatory exercise (Mutch, 2001) [13]. It must be noted here that the government of Kenya, through the ministry of education, has devolved some powers in the education sector to the grassroots. These include the hiring of teachers and, to some extent, the financing of educational infrastructure through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) (Ministry of Education, 2004) [12].

However, all matters pertaining to curriculum are still centrally controlled by the Ministry of Education and its agencies, mainly KIE, the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards and the Kenya National Examinations Council. Obviously, in such a scenario, teachers feel left out. Their voice is seldom heard since their participation in the whole process is superficial. The teachers' role is narrowed to implementation of curriculum. However, as Fullan (1991) [4] notes, the implementation of curriculum innovations is bound to be unsuccessful if teachers are not involved in the entire process of curriculum development.

Economic Factors

The current population of Kenya is estimated at 36 million with an annual population growth rate of 2.3% of the total population, 60% are youth under 30 years (UNESCO, 2009; World Bank, 2009). This necessitates that the government allocates over 30% of its annual budget to education (Kinuthia, 2009) [9]. Despite such a seemingly huge budgetary allocation to education, curriculum development is still poorly funded (KIE, 2006) [8]. This is because most of the funds in the education sector go for recurrent expenditure at the expense of research and development.

In the last seven years, the government has embarked on Education for all (EFA) initiatives by introducing free primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and free Secondary Education in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2004; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007) [12, 15]. Ideally, these are two giant steps in the right direction. Realistically, however, achieving both is giant challenge of the county. Kinuthia (2009) [9] outlines four factors that illuminate this challenge and its implication on curriculum development. When FPE was introduced, the enrolment significantly rose from 5.9 to 7.2 million. However, most schools were not equipped to handle such large numbers in terms of number of teachers, physical classroom space, and learning resources. This scenario replays itself in the Free Secondary Education programme. Obviously, it jeopardizes effective curriculum implementation.

In 1998, the Kenya government instituted structural adjustment programmes recommended by the World Bank and IMF. A direct consequence of this was a freeze on the employment of teachers by the Teachers Service Commission. This resulted in

a significant shortage of teachers. Since 2003, the government has made efforts to address this shortage. However, to date, there is a need for over 60,000 teachers to fill the gaps in the school system.

The government's reliance on donor funding means that local priorities are not necessarily dealt with. As already noted, research and development activities are less funded than administrative and recurrent costs. Thus, for instance, teachers are paid salaries to implement the same old curriculum.

Some socio-cultural practices and absolute poverty in many areas in the country affect full participation of learners in the school system. Although enrolment rates have improved, especially for girls, many communities still hold back their children either due to cultural reasons - like the presumed vanity of educating the girl-child, or economic reasons - like engaging the children wage learning activities to supplement the family income.

Conclusion

In Kenya, as elsewhere, politics occupy a central place in the daily affairs of the nation. The political class strive to control and manipulate the polity, either overtly or covertly. Education is normally a covert tool in the stratagem of the political class. The influence of politics in curriculum development in Kenya is best seen through the formation of various education commissions, committees and working parties. Since independence, there have been seven major presidential commissions on the school curriculum. The composition of these commissions is largely oblivious of expertise in curriculum; rather, it mostly exhibits political connectedness.

History and Government as a subject suffers more from this political agenda in education than other subjects. This is because, ideally, the subject seeks to enlighten young Kenyans on the political history and memory of the nation. However, by twisting the curriculum to suit its political narratives, governments have over the years deprived Kenyans of a complete picture of the true Kenyan history. This explains why the nation does not have a single narrative that can help promote national unity and development. Incidents of conflicts partly arise due to different interpretations of the nation's history. Post-conflict History and Government education needs to focus on building one shared story; a story that acknowledges the important role that every tribe and section of the Kenyan society plays in the entire nation's development and existence.

Moreover, teachers and educators in general should occupy the primary position in educational deliberations. Political interests, despite their importance, must not take precedence over genuine and quality education.

Similarly, scholars agree that education is important in promoting economic development and prosperity of nations. The problem is that poor funding for education inhibits its contribution to this end. However, Kenya needs to understand that it is never too much too costly to invest economic resources in the education sector. There is need to revamp investment in research to generate knowledge to foster peace and human understanding and the cure for serious pandemics that threaten the human species. These objectives are also in line with the economic agenda.

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