An Evolving Perspective of an Educational Curriculum: A Philosophical, Sociological and Psychological Focus of the Education System

Lucky Musonda

Management Studies Division, National Institute of Public Administration, Lusaka

ABSTRACT

This article undertook to describe philosophical, sociological and psychological frameworks functional in curriculum engineering of the educational system in society. It did a synthesis method to review untampered evolutions in the philosophical, sociological and psychological frameworks that for some time been warranting the re-engineering of the education curriculum relevant to its own society. The evolutions to re-design curriculum are part of motions in educational debates that desires to model its own ideologies. The much desired evolutions to re-design curriculum spurt from societal debates that censure adherence to imported curriculums that completely unmatch industrial relevance. Debates to re-engineer curriculums have stood a taste of time and leave much to be actualized for a relevant desired educational system that would be reflective to industry or trade.

1. INTRODUCTION

Disciplines of philosophy, sociology and Psychology have greatly influenced the education system to society. Their influences throughout history have had a bearing on how the education system functions to this day. Much of these disciplines' influences may be linked to how educational instruments such as curriculums have evolved over time.

1.1. Sociology of Education

1.1.1. The Sociology of Education Concept

Sociology is a body of knowledge and a concept structured with an approach to educate society that humans are constituted in a social order. It operates on several branches and one such is the field of education. The sociology of education utilizes sociological processes based on its conceptual and theoretical frameworks to adapt to educational instruments in order to influence social change within society. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks of sociology in education have modelled most of the standards in education systems especially in curriculum engineering being a fundamental tool in the sector.

1.1.2. Curriculum Engineering in Education

Curriculum engineering in education has been an evolving process witnessed in the knowledge and civilization taking place in society as Tanner, (2020) alluded. Curriculum planning in education has been responsible to what the standards of education are now and since its origins. They are several theories and concepts that have influenced adoption of curriculums which have contributed to both its failures and successes. The greater the number of theories and concepts in sociology of education the greater the number of times the re-engineering of the curriculums have been at any level of qualifications in the education system. Banja, 2017 asserted that Zambia undertook its first major national curriculum (for only primary and secondary schools) reform in 1977, but it has since then, been an ongoing process which has seen changes in improving school curriculum.

The re-engineering of curriculum has mainly been attributed to rising needs of making education useful to society especially in higher learning institutions whose mandate is it to adopt curriculum relevant to industry. Moore and Young (2001) deliberated on the neo-conservatism ideologies which grow popular in the United States in the 1970s supporting political individualism and traditional conservatism. Neo-conservatists are inspired by maintaining that traditional values of education are valid as they command respect for authority and preserves the value of education. In as much as this idea was good, the neo-conservative concept was said to had a lacking of motivation of epistemological concerns. Such concerns of philosophical ideas in epistemology had risen in curriculum reforms especially relating to curriculum that outlived its purpose without reviews.

1.1.3. Re-designing education Curriculum

In Africa particularly Zambia, at all levels of the education systems, the society have challenged curriculum designing which part of it is based on a British Colonial system of education that had been seen to never add value once learners graduated.

Williams, (1961), promoted reforms that opposed traditional education of neo-conservatists. One of the ideologies initiated was "*industrial instrumentalists*" that promoted curriculum tailored to industry or environments. In Zambia and any other similar societies, they are few industries processing or adding value to agricultural products. Therefore, this is an area for re-designing educational curriculum; designing curriculum that may train learners how to invent machinery equipment that can process its own raw agricultural products. Such a curriculum if designed tailored to societal needs, may construct education relevant to industrial needs as eluded by Williams.

Dearing (1996) stimulated a more employability approach to curriculum design for higher education. The ideology boarders on the academic curriculum and the learning process. He urged that a curriculum design needed to have a combination of skills subjects and theory in higher learning institutions. For instance, students studying mathematics in higher education need to be exposed to practical knowledge in those studies while undertaking the training in class. Designing curriculum in that approach has been adopted in higher institutions in Zambia as well but not much has been achieved as a lot of students that graduate from such institutions continue to lack practical skills for the industry and are unemployable because of misplaced form of education acquired.

Vargas-Rodrigues et al, (2021) hypothesized on the influence of adopting curriculum that promoted teaching methods such as the Problem Based Learning (PBL) to reflect real life benefits to learners. The PBL approach has been adopted in several learning practices such as

medical fields of study. Its application requires that the learner learns with real life problems. Such problems are depicted in learning sessions for students to find solutions. Therefore, adopting such methods has been beneficial as it exposes students to real life learning and them to fit easily in society upon completion of studies.

1.1.4. Relationship Between Society and Curriculum Design

There is a relationship between how society evolves and the state of curriculum design that is more "*organized and evaluated*" (Weis, 2013). Sociologists of education have continued to search and give feedback to raising concerns and needs to curriculum policy and development (Halpin, 1990). However, it could be noted that regions of society are presented with different environments of educational systems that sociologist have to understand and trade in before undertaking review of curriculum policy and development. In most African countries, school curriculum has a background of pre-colonial history which lays a basis for sociologists reforming curriculum (Blakemore, 2017). Such curriculum continues to exist and not much has been done to help these societies (Halpin, 1990).

1.1.5. Knowledge and Curriculum Design

The controversies have continued about the development of curriculum and the outcome of producing unemployable graduates (Blakemore, 2017). Sociologists of education therefore are challenged with understanding the philosophy of epistemology. As young and Muller (2015) alluded that sociologists would have to position a curriculum that cannot only utilize skills and work routines but intellectually based. The sociology of knowledge postulates that knowledge evolves and offers opportunity for learners to grasp and for them to compete at a global level.

Knowledge has in the past been used in curriculum and taught to learners. This however has been recently opposed as that kind of knowledge was said to had been designed to lead learners to acquire entry or acceptance to different levels of educational qualifications in the education system. Such knowledge is measured in form of assessments in examination. However, such knowledge, even when the learner acquires it, it has no use to society if the students who graduate cannot be employed or be in self employment.

Consequently, curriculum redesigning has been essential in order that knowledge is planned for learners to be equipped with skills that would be applicable once they graduate. They are already controversies in Africa that focus to tailor curriculums with knowledge that is relevant for both local and international application. The re-design of the curriculum would need both the educator and the learner positioned to a capacity of acquiring knowledge based skills. For instance, if the adoption of ICT learning skills in schools around Zambia has been implemented fully, then that may ease the process of adopting e-learning methods at almost all levels of the education system (Simamuna and Mulenga 2017).

2. THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The philosophy of education dates back in times of the greater philosophers such as Socrates and Plato and many others. Philosophers are great thinkers and currently society seems not to have quite a number of them. Philosophers do not create knowledge but provide interpretation of already what society is familiar with (Woods and Barrow, 2006).

2.1. Adoption Methods in Curriculum Design

Adopting methods in implementing and designing curriculum has had philosophical implications as the pedagogical models have mostly been imported ones. As Maclaren, (1994) asserted that if influences of education are to be modeled based on a multi-cultured factor, then, a radicalized approach to curriculum planning should incorporate a society's indigenous features to have an impact on the learners than an imported based curriculum that has continued to dominate in certain societies.

The influence of adopting a radicalized approach grew popular in the 20th century with the works of Freire Pualo (in Barr, 2004) who promoted the basis of a critical pedagogy. He postulated that the lack of modeling indigenous knowledge in curriculum has consequences to such societies. His assertions had proven true in certain situations. For example, the emergence of covid-19 pandemic has proved that radicalized approach to designing curriculum is important in each society.

2.2. Adoption Methods in the Covid-19 Pandemic Era

During the covid-19 pandemic era, it has revealed an Africa gap in the lack of adopting existing herbal therapies into its education curriculum designs. Most of Africa's herbal remedies prove effective in remediating viral infections but such had never been adopted in their curriculum and taught in classrooms to equip students for the industry. Medical schools for example in Zambia have pharmaceutical schools whose curriculum does not have multi-cultured or radicalized approaches despite its society having indigenous herbal therapies. Pharmaceutical students after their graduation can only handle secondary stage conventional medicines that are procured out of the country. Among other fields of study, the Pharmaceutical faculty also has records of student graduates who aren't employed since their curriculum is designed with imported ideologies which cannot help them transform its society with available indigenous herbal therapies.

Ivan IIich (in Boyars, 2002) was also one of the philosophers of education who embraced the de-institutionalization and de-schooling approach of the then existing educational curriculum. Such curriculum had no impact on society because they were not owned or designed by such societies. The philosophy promoted an educational system that could model its own system that would reflect reality of its society.

The basis of philosophy of education cannot be ignored as it helps to identify gaps in the world that would want to improve and develop effective systems such as to model an education that can influence society to social change. Philosophy of education has several avenues to interpret the world around it and its existence cannot be denied even when it is less utilized. Burbles (2000) reminded philosophers of education that even when the world has ever been evolving with adoption of new concepts, the roots of philosophy cannot be abandoned.

A lot of what the earlier philosophers postulated has never been achieved. For example, society continue to be divided on race, gender and power even when philosophers promoted intercultural ideologies that would help educational systems transform societies. Societies continue to see curriculum of only a certain society seeking to dominate its ideologies and others have to struggle to be identified even though societies are owned by them.

3. PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Psychology as a Humanist Learning Theory (said to have been authored by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow) posited that much of what goes on in the field of psychology is to design instruments that can be transformed into reality for the purpose of measuring the component of behavior that is desired to be achieved. This is also appealing to educational systems to be involved in the process of learning to understand the science of behavior in order to achieve desired goals (DeCarvalho, 1991).

The entry point to desire achievable goals of behavior modeling would be at the stage of curriculum design or planning. This stage has to be planned by the stakeholders relevant in the process who would want to see desired behaviors. Stakeholders in the process of curriculum design have involved almost all levels of sectors of society so that the implementation of curriculum has ideas that are representative. The critical stakeholder to this process is educators as they are well versed in the knowledge of how behaviors in learners are modified for benefit of society. A lot of concepts and theories have been adopted in effecting change in learners in the learning process to that end.

3.1. Humanistic Learning Theory

Psychologists of education in the Humanistic learning theory posited that the identification of objectives of learning in the process should be established before the educator ventures in the activity of educating or teaching learners. It would be vital to also understand the goal of educating learners. The idea of learning seeking only to pass an examination or a test is secondary in education even though most learners are made to believe that passing an examination was their main goal of attaining an education. The idea is to learn for human development and personal growth.

The human learning theory as alluded by Johnson (2014) is a handful theory to grasp for most educators. Most of what is advocated for has hardly being adopted by educational systems in its curriculum. Its framework opposes the view of school that has been portrayed as dehumanizing. To most learners, school is viewed as a battle field for them to compete for grades. They learn mainly subjects or courses that have no impact to their life. For instance, they learn about Ape Men in class even when the digital world can run documentaries on Cable Television than such being part of a curriculum content whose usefulness can never be for industry or environment.

The theory further posited that learners are viewed as passive in class when they enroll to study courses or programmes they have no interest but because it is a value of society to study a course at a college or university, they have no choice over it. Hence, once they graduate, they are likely not to have any use for it but fulfilled what society wants but not them.

3.1.1. Objectives of the Humanistic Theory

The humanistic learning theory however, presents what the learning process aims at;

- First, it believes that education is an intrinsic value in humans. The inclination of humans is to want to learn. Carl Rogers referred to this value as an *"intincstic inner core"* that humans have, to want to achieve goals to fulfil their potential need to grow and achieve success.

Therefore, if humans are inclined to learn, then things are to fall in place, in that, an enabling environment should be a pre-requisite. The human learning theory further posited that it is needed for the learner's learning environment to be in such a condition to make learning interesting. In this regard, educators are informed in their training as educators or teachers to adopt different methods or styles of teaching which would contribute to making the learning possible in an enabling environment. The curriculum then has to be designed in such a way that the learners are engaged, explorative, problem solving, critical thinkers and socially interactive.

However, in some regions of society especially Africa, learning environments are at a lower level standard which challenges the learning process to be achieved. Educational reforms have been introduced to create alternatives such as public schools to run with private schools. However, such alternatives come at a cost for learners and only those that may afford, access private schools. Hence, those with no means to access private school, continue to learn in poorer environments and affects their learning negatively.

If environments are poorer, they may affect the normal teacher-pupil ratio, in that, a teacher or educator has to attend to a high number ratio of pupils as opposed to the normal one. This happens in most levels of education especially in public learning institutions in developing countries even when education reforms have been undertaken. Poor learning infrastructure continue to contribute to poor delivery of learning which the human learning theory envisioned to be effective in a good environment. It is also impossible for the educator to accommodate all methods or styles of teaching due to such challenges hence affecting the learning outcome.

- The learner is required to have a choice of what they want to learn according to the human learning theory. This has been well documented especially in higher learning institutions where learners are offered choices of programmes and counselling them and this enables the learners to make informed decision when they decide to enrol to study.

  Biehoff and Prais, 1997 espoused on the human theory of learning that encourage learners to become generalists than specialists. This allows the learners to have a choice to choose whichever subject they feel they can maximize their knowledge or potential for the industry than restricted to being specialist that can limit their choices for the vast industry.

- Carl Rogers also postulated the need for learners to achieve their purpose of learning if teachers respected them. The teacher has to respect each and every learner in class which was referred to as *"the unconditional positive regard"*. This process no matter how difficult, psychologist relate that even when the learner's behavior has been bad, due to the respect shown to them by the teacher or educator, it has led to them changing behaviours and they start to feel to belong and part of group in class.

3.1.2. Key Elements of the Humanistic Learning Theory

Key to understanding the theory to improve curriculum design is that;

1. Learning to learners is natural and as such environments should enable them achieve this.
2. Education should be designed to influence growth of that natural tendency than shutting it.
3. Curriculum planning should be done identifying activities that are related to the needs of the learner. They should be effectively implemented, correctly to enhance the purpose of achieving the goal of learning.

3.2. Cognitive Learning Theory

This theory was first authored by Jean piaget in the 1800s and was there after developed by others such as Bandura, A. B.F Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, Vygotsky and others among them. The understanding of this theory in psychology of education is based on the learner and the educator. The word cognitive may imply the process of putting the mind to processing information in order to give it meaning. Cognitive is the thinking process that both the learner and the teacher or educator has to go through mentally.

The educator is required to know how learners learn and think, two of these things. This is the source of instruction that curriculum planning must emphasize otherwise failure to establish this may affect the process of delivery of lessons. Therefore, the level of the learner should be established too, in order to know what resources could be adopted in the process of delivery of learning. These resources such as content, tools, methods should be applicable and relevant to the level of the learner. In situations that learners are adults and such are not taken into consideration, have resulted into learners rejecting the educator which is usually poor feedback to the system.

When educators design curriculum tailored to learners' needs, they give help to their processing information and understanding it. The theory of cognitive requires a reciprocated process that the educator need to measure if possible, through assessments in class. Mayer, 2002, asserted that psychologists in education are to prepare curriculum based on cognitive levels of the learners. The education has to be relevant to this process as this would help in explaining process or instructions to learners in order for them to understand and relate these to their life experiences. The learners and educators put their minds to thinking in order to find solutions to presented problems and tasks.

The educator according to Vygotsky in Kazulin et al, 2003, has before them the classroom of learners who have characters of multi-cultured beings. They are multi-cultured as they have different paces of understanding what is taught in class. Therefore, it is for this reason that a curriculum designed should equip the educators that learners have this nature. This gives rise to have cognitive set of skills that can engage a cadre of learners. Subjects particularly with the need to think are mainly in science, mathematics, literature and these should have a set of strategies that should aim to help students understand and process information easily. In some levels of education of learners, psychological set of tools are encouraged to be used as much as possible so that the learning could be easy. This may depend on the availability of the needed tools and if not, it affects the process of learning on both the educator and the learner as learning is likely not to occur.

3.2.1. How to Enhance Cognitive Learning

The following may be considered in curriculum planning to enhance cognitive learning:

1. Planning for the learning were the educator may pose problem solving questions which may be ideal to help learners process meaning.
2. To enable learners experience making mistakes during the process of answering questions that are challenging. This process will help them learn to reflect through the process and see how they can do it better.
3. Group and team working may be planned for. Learning to work in groups to foster relationship and relay on others which can help them even after they enter the workforce.

4. They can undertake to tutor fellow learners in class presentations or seminar tasks. This can help them face challenges and address them and improve their thinking process (Western Governors University, 2021).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Debates on educational curriculum redesigning are unrelenting simply because the overhauling of an enduring curriculum based on colonial era system has not at all been easy or simple task. The processes of redesigning curriculum have been conducted across societies with not much of the desired results of a needed fit to the trade. It could therefore be understood that it is an immense task, something that requires complete team of experts who will have to embrace every angle of desired need than just focusing on just what may be viewed necessary to a few and those sponsoring the processes. Those experts should never be limited at a local or nation level, but beyond boundaries because education is now globalized which necessitate that any plans to redesign has to engage a broader perspective of any such initiatives.

The debates to redesign curriculum have been as clearer as louder because people or societies perceive education as universal right and with more understanding being achieved, societies may have to embrace universal belief to model curriculums that reflect reality and owned. The existing mismatched curriculums between the abstract and real worlds, is so visible to imply that the education system has also been a contributor of high levels of unemployment in society due to unemployed graduates.

The immensity of concepts and theories of sociology, philosophy and psychology run ahead of actual systems of education which in themselves remain the responsibility to model reality of the abstract. The struggle to have a relevant education to society is a global issue as every region has had to deal with it. It informs all to act and be relevant to re-engineer reality of an education curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

[1] Bandura A, 2004, Social cognitive theory for personal and social change by enabling media.
[2] Biehoff, H. Prais S, J. 1997, From School to productive work, Britain and Switzerland compared, Cambridge university press
[3] Blakemore, K. and Cooksey, B., 2017. Sociology of education for Africa. Routledge
[4] Burbules,C. 2000"Philosophy of Education." In Routledge International Companion to Education. E dited by Bob Moon, Miriam BenPeretz, and Sally Brown, 3–18. New York: Routledge.
[5] Dearing, R. (1996) Qualfications for 16-19 year olds (London, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority). DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1998) The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain (London, Department for Education and Employment).
[6] Vargas-Rodríguez, Y. M., Valdivia A.E.O., and Rodriguez G.I.V, 2021, Problem Based Learning, Barrow and Bloom Taxonomy, International Journal of Education (IJE), Vol.9, No. 4, DOI:10:5121/ije.2021.9402
[7] DeCarvalho, R. (1991). The humanistic paradigm in education. The Humanistic Psychologist, 19(1).
[8] Encyclopedia of Education. Retrieved 14 Sep. 2021, from
[9] https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1037

[10] Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Translated by Robert R. Bar r. New ed. New York: Continuum, 2004

[11] Halpin, D., 1990. The Sociology of Education and the National Curriculum. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *11*(1), pp.21-35.

[12] Illich, Ivan. Deschooling Society. London: Marion Boyars, 2002.

[13] Johnson, A.P., 2014. Humanistic learning theory. *Education psychology: Theories of learning and human development*, pp.1-10.

[14] Kazulin A U., Kozulin A, Gindis B, Ageyev V S., Miller S M. 2003, Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context Cambridge university press

[15] Mayer, R.E., 2002. Cognitive theory and the design of multimedia instruction: an example of the two-way street between cognition and instruction. *New directions for teaching and learning*, *2002*(89), pp.55-71.

[16] McLaren, Peter, and Colin Lankshear, eds. Politics of Liberation: Paths from Freire. New York: Ro utledge, 1994.

[17] Moore, R. and Young, M., 2001. Knowledge and the curriculum in the sociology of education: Towards a reconceptualization. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *22*(4), pp.445-461

[18] Peters, R.S. ed., 1973. *The philosophy of education,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[19] Simamuna, M.L. and Mulenga, I.M., 2017. Curriculum Re-Engineering and Development in Zambia: The Sociology of Education in the Face of Globalization, *Selected Readings in Education*.

[20] Tanner, D., 2020 History of Curriculum Development in Schools. Oxford Research

[21] Weis, L., Dimitriadis, G. and McCarthy, C., 2013. *Ideology, curriculum, and the new sociology of education: Revisiting the work of Michael Apple*. Routledge

[22] Western Governors university, https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-is-cognitive-learning2003.html (25.09.21.), Millcreek, Utah

[23] Williams, R. (1961) The Long Revolution (London, Chatto and Windus)

[24] Woods R and Barrow, R, 2006, *An introduction to philosophy of education*, Routledge, London.

[25] Young, M. and Muller, J., 2015. *Curriculum and the specialization of knowledge: Studies in the sociology of education*. Routledge.

[26] Young, M.F., 2002. *The Curriculum of the Future: from the 'new sociology of education 'to a critical theory of learning*. Routledge.