Curriculum relevance in Zimbabwean Primary and Secondary Schools: Circuitous search for lasting solutions

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Curriculum relevance is perceived as one of the most contentious issues world over. While it is time and socio-political-economic bound, the process of curriculum relevance is construed to be reflective of the people’s attitudes. It is a key process that determines the learners’ destinies. In that regard, it is an integral element of a nation’s curriculum development process that any nation with a progressive developmental focus of its citizens should never take lightly.

This write-up is one of the first ones among many articles that will be presented to open debate on curricula relevance in the Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools. The paper was published in The Sunday Mail dated 15 February 2015 under the heading 'Crafting a Curriculum Relevant to meet our Needs?' In the related previous papers of this series, you might have read that curricula relevance in the Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools has been with us since the colonial times up to the present day. Since the 1950’s, almost the same questions have been directed at curriculum relevance in this country. Some of these questions are:

1. How relevant are the curricula in the schools of this country?
2. If yes or no, why are they relevant or irrelevant?
3. If no, how can they be made relevant?
4. If yes, how can the relevance be further enhanced?

The above questions and opinions regarding curriculum relevance may be coming against the background of six concerns that can be raised against the quality of learners produced by an education system before and after independence. First, lack of acceptance of school leavers in the labour market is one strong indicator of an irrelevant curriculum on offer in the schools (Zvobgo, 2000). The school leavers will lack market value. They are rendered untrainable and unemployable, thereby increasing social costs in the country through unemployment and high tax bands charged on the employed.

The second concern is about lack of acceptance of school leavers by the society which defeats the whole purpose of why schools exist in the first place. If ever the curricula are to be relevant, they should address the immediate and long-term needs of the societies they serve. Also, the curricula are said to be relevant if they are to shape and mould the learners into citizens that the country needs. In fact, such curricula have the capacity to produce school leavers who fit in their societies well. Such school leavers will neither be social malcontents nor socio-psychopaths.

The third concern focuses on curricula that are devoid of application. These curricula are not meant for a country like Zimbabwe. Pupils who are exposed to theoretical learning at the expense of practice find it difficult to perform functional roles effectively and efficiently in their societies.
It is my conviction that such learners eventually become national liabilities rather than assets when they leave school.

The fourth concern is lack of an informed electorate in most developing countries. This is even confirmed by economists like Todaro and Smith (2005) who have argued that the existence of uninformed electorate(s) in a given country is a reflection of the degree to which a country’s curriculum is failing to meet its people’s needs. It is my belief that a relevant curriculum is rated among the best weapons that enable electorates to exercise their votes wisely. School leavers and citizens would have been exposed to relevant curricula in both primary and secondary school levels tend to have a propensity to vote freely and wisely without being brainwashed and coerced. They also possess the knowledge and capacity to know who to support and vote for, and why they should do so. Above all, such citizens are fully aware that their destiny regarding whatever they endeavour in the country lies in their hands.

The fifth concern borders around the nature of people’s behaviour patterns in a country, which is also an indication of the extent to which curricula offered in that country’s primary and secondary schools are relevant. In spite of differences in contextual realities between rural and urban school environments, it is common knowledge that learners who are exposed to the same character-building curriculum exhibit similar behaviour patterns. This will show that while schools are different, they will be imparting similar relevant curricula in search of fostering acceptable behaviour patterns in the learners.

The sixth concern is based on the contention that it is true that all of us belong to the 21st Century (current era). Computer literacy in most of our schools remains a dream rather than a reality. Our primary and secondary schools’ curricula appear to no longer have an option regarding the need to offer computer literacy if they entertain any hopes to produce learners who are compliant with the demands of the 21st Century (current era) in terms of trainability, employability, pursuing further studies, informed decision making and research among other benefits accrued from computer literacy.

It can be seen from the preceding presentation that curriculum relevance is a deliberate dynamic process rather than a single-shot event. It is here that this process can be defined in simple terms in order to put the arguments in the forthcoming articles into their proper perspective. Therefore, one among other acceptable definitions of curriculum relevance in the context of curriculum review on the basis of the present article’s focus is:

Curriculum relevance is an aspect of curriculum review that seeks to ensure that all the learning experiences that learners obtain from the Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools under the guidance of their teachers are realistic, engaged in active and quality learning, culture-bound, technologically-based, and application-based.

The implication of this foregoing perception is that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should ensure collective participation of all possible key stakeholders in the curriculum review. It is common philosophy that collaborative commitment by all stakeholders in the curriculum review in search of curriculum relevance enables the country to make sure that it provides:
1. Education for progress rather than education for doom.
2. Education for civilisation rather than education for barbarism.
3. Education for development rather than education for backwardness.
4. Education for peace, amity and harmony rather than education for tribalism, ethnicity, factionalism, crime, war and strife.
5. Education for disaster management rather than education for fuelling disasters of all kinds.
6. Education that makes societies rather than that destroys them. 

The above six points are informed by one of my papers entitled ‘The efficacy of education in community development: The Zimbabwean experience,’ which was published in the International Research Journal of Library, Information and Archival Studies in 2012.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education might need to consider the following facets of the curriculum which will be discussed in light of curriculum relevance in Zimbabwe in the future papers of this series. The facets under consideration are meritocracy, utilitarianism, equity (positivism), equality (egalitarianism), durability, malleability, pragmatism (application) and heritage, among other facets.

Bibliography


