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## Education for Social Transformation: The Role of History and Government in Secondary School Curriculum in Kenya

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### Abstract:

*The development of any nation is peaked upon the type of education offered and its relevance to the needs and aspirations of the people it serves. It should not only bring up individual development, but also the desired change, while preserving the culture and values of the society. The history curriculum is well placed to contribute to societal transformation because it deals with a whole range of human and global issues. The subject is relevant in Kenya which is beset with many problems ranging from governance, health, high inflation, environmental degradation and poverty among others. This is a disturbing scenario given that history has been a subject in the secondary school curriculum since the establishment of colonial rule. This paper contends that, if the right historical knowledge is transmitted to the majority of the youth, history will not only transform the Kenyan society but the entire African continent. Its importance lies in cementing the society, giving one a sense of identity and preparation for citizenship and membership, while training in democratic principles and morality. It is recommended that certain aspects of history should be compulsory at secondary and university levels because of the subject's uniqueness and concerns with the reconstruction of the past.*

**Keywords:** History, transformation, education, democracy, development, society, Kenya

### 1. Introduction

The change inducing power of education has been widely recognized by social scientists who contend that the extent and nature of economic development in a nation and its degree of political awareness, have been found to be connected with the diffusion of education and degree of literacy in that society (Sanda, 1973). This is more so in developing countries where education is considered not only as key to self fulfillment, the ladder to personal advancement, but also as one of the main factors in the process of national modernization and development (Tran Dinhtri, 1976).

Education in Kenya is seen as an agent for shaping the society, and schools are taken as places for training in social obligation and responsibility (Government of Kenya, 1964). This became evident immediately after attaining independence from the British colonialists in 1963. The new African government identified three enemies of the Kenya nation as diseases, ignorance and poverty. These enemies were to be addressed through an educational system which could meet the needs and aspirations of the independent Kenyan nation instead of the former colonial power. One Kenyan politician commenting on the need of revolutionary education noted:

Our new system must aim at eliminating the colonial psychology and creating a truly independent psychology aimed at instilling in the minds of boys and girls, the pride that they are Africans...greater appreciation of African culture, history and the African personality (Tom Mboya as cited in Gathara, 1970, p.33)

To address this, the government appointed the first commission of education in 1964 to review education. The commission came up with six goals of education which stated that education in Kenya should promote national unity, national development (social and economic), individual development and self-fulfillment. It would also enhance social equality, respect and development of cultural heritage and international consciousnesses. Education offered was not only concerned with the development of full potential of the Kenyan child but also with the development of positive attitude towards the nation and the international community. This is imperative because the individual will be expected to live and interact with other people from varied cultures in Kenya and beyond. This calls for acquisition of values and positive attitudes towards Kenyan nation which consists of over 42 ethnic communities and who at times are at war with each other. Through education they are to learn of their common identity and a sense of nationhood.

International consciousness is synonymous with globalization. The world has become a global village where individuals will meet and interact with people across cultures, religions, nations, continents and races. The child must be prepared for his / her role in this global village.

The Government of Kenya's report of 1999 retained most of the 1964 goals of education expanded on some and added two new ones. It stipulated that education should promote nationalism, patriotism and national unity; and national development (economic, social, technological and industrial). It also stated that the role of education was to contribute to individual development and self fulfillment and enhance social equality and responsibility. A part from these, education was not only to foster respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures but also to develop international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations. Two additional objectives were to address emerging issues in the society. These were promotion of sound moral and religious values and positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection.

Specifically the concern was on deteriorating moral values which had seen an increased infection rate of HIV and AIDS related deaths; an increased drug abuse among the youth and degradation of the environment. The solution to these problems was dependant on cultivation of moral and religious values among the youth. It is believed that the youth who have sound morals will be less prone to HIV infection and drug abuse and will have the environmental ethics which will govern the utilization of the environment.

The above education commissions and those of 1976 and 1981 came up with recommendations concerning the aims and goals of education from primary, secondary and university levels. They also identified the various subjects and the content to be taught and the focus of the curriculum in an independent African nation.

In spite of the Government's efforts and recognition of the role of education in societal transformation, five decades after independence, the nation is beset with many challenges threatening to tear it apart. Poor leadership is one such challenge. Leadership at all levels is characterized by lack of patriotism and integrity, greed and corruption. Personal interests and egos reign supreme. This is evident in the management of public institutions such as schools, universities and hospitals; elected political posts, government appointments; promotions and awarding of tenders. Poor management skills and values have caused untold sufferings to Kenyans both physically and psychologically. For instance, the falsification of the 2007 elections and declaration of losers as winners by the disbanded election commission resulted in protests and violence leaving over 1000 people dead and thousands misplaced. Even the last general election (2013), was characterized with malpractices such as double registration and voting, faulty tallying and lack of integrity with the Independent Election Boundaries Commission (IEBC). All these anomalies point at the failed leadership.

The issue of leadership is made worse with lack of democratic institutions to put in place democratic processes and ideals. Although there is much talk about democracy in Kenya, in practice this concept remains a dream because there is a limit to how far people can express themselves freely without fear of victimization or intimidation. This is true both in academic circles and in the political arena. Those with descending views are harassed and threatened. At the same time, the electorate is manipulated in electing corrupt and inefficient leaders. People are elected not because they are the best but because they have bribed and even intimidated the electorate to vote for them.

Democracy is further limited with high level corruption in most government institutions and parastatals. In December 2010, the Kenya Government said it could be losing one third of the national budget on corruption which is equivalent to \$ 4 billion annually (Mwachiro, 2010). It is further alleged that an average urban Kenyan has to pay 16 bribes a month to get services (Kenya- advisor, n.d). A recent report indicates that Kenya is one of the fraud prone countries in Africa; 4<sup>th</sup> to South Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe (Oelofse, 2013). Impunity is so entrenched in these systems that perpetrators of such practices rarely face justice. Even with the new constitution and establishment of Kenya Anti- corruption Commission, the future looks grim. The Government seems to have failed to put an end to the pervasive culture of corruption. Many a time efforts to stamp out this evil is overshadowed by ethnic and political rivalry.

The emphasis on ethnicity at the expense of nationalism is another form of corruption which has affected democracy. Kenya is made up of 42 ethnic communities besides people of Asian, European and American origins. This poses a big challenge of integrating them into one nation, Kenya. This is more serious when some communities feel that they are superior to others, causing suspicion and tension thus making unity elusive.

Kenya is experiencing both internal and external insecurity. This is partly attributed to Al Shabaab menace, the arms proliferation, the availability of young desperadoes who are ready to cause havoc so long as they are paid. The insecurity has taken the form of grenade and bomb attacks in churches, vehicles, to armed militia attacking and killing thousands of people. *Mungiki* has been the worst of these groups causing untold suffering to people in Central province, Nairobi and some parts of Rift Valley.

Diseases such as HIV & AIDS, T.B, malaria, cancer, diabetes have killed millions of people and some are threatening to wipe out the entire human race. The Government is spending colossal amount of money to maintain a health nation.

Finding solutions to the above problems will go a long way in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowering women. They also include reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating of HIV & AIDS, malaria

And other diseases and ensure environmental sustainability.

The same is true with the Kenya vision 2030 which envisages the transformation of Kenya into middle- income economy in 2030, sustained annual growth of 10 per cent for 15 years, creation of a just and cohesive society and an accountable political leadership.

### *1.1. Justification of History and Government in the School Curriculum*

History or and Government as a subject in the secondary school curriculum can help meet the above challenges. History has been recognized worldwide as an unavoidable element of education since time immemorial. In Europe, laws of Charlemagne (800 – 814 A.C) and Alfred the Great (871-899 AC) were used to train young people in character in the first century of the Christian era (Nasibi & Kiio

2005). The same source further notes that during the Middle Ages (400-1500 A.C), the church in Europe taught church history in order to reinforce the doctrines by which it lived. Literature reveals that American history has remained part and parcel of education transmitted to all those who pass through its education system at all levels of education.

In Africa, education consisted of learning the history of one's community based on legends, heroes, wars, social customs and taboos. The last two formed the basis of laws which governed people's behavior. With the introduction of western education in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, history became one of the subjects being taught as illustrated in Were, 1967, p.13: "Throughout my school career, I noticed practically all the history taught was foreign and European, albeit with American, Canadian and Indian (and Arab) sprinklings."

History has been recognized as an important subject in the curriculum worldwide because it creates a sense of identity among individuals and groups of people. This happens when the learners are taught about their own origins and how their communities' and nation came in to being. They are able to see themselves as part and parcel of the nation. This gives students an understanding of their own cultural roots and shared inheritance.

The subject educates learners on principles which shape and mould people and governments of the world. These principles and related concepts are essential to individuals and societal development. They include unique concepts like democracy, revolution, morality, equality, justice, human rights, civilization, nationalism, patriotism, cause and effect, continuity and change. Some of these concepts can only be transmitted by history or its sister discipline political science/government.

History integrates people in the society by enhancing unity, harmony and security. The learners are exposed to forces which bind and wield the society together. This creates a spirit of togetherness and interdependence among people of a given nation. Existence of a society is tied to its history as remarks by one historian "without history a society scarcely exists."

As a discipline it offers extensive evidential base for the contemplation and analysis of how societies function (Stearns, n d). This is important for humanity so that individuals know how to organize their lives for their success and the good of the society.

It helps to modify and improve the society by pointing out strengths and weaknesses of peoples' deeds. This is realized when the students are exposed to the achievements and failures of historical personalities. The learners are equipped with knowledge on what they should do for their success and progress and the pitfalls they should avoid in order to lead a rewarding life.

A study of the past enables the young people to acquire wisdom and values which have been accumulated over the ages. History ensures that the younger generation is exposed to peoples' discoveries; inventions, principles, laws, morals among others. This exposure incites a spirit of virtuous emulation which inspires them to walk in the footsteps of those who demonstrated such genius and talent. One historian summarizes this point when he remarks:

....by reading history, young men acquire wisdom of age, history promotes high deeds and great discoveries; it also works through glory for history is the only pledge of the immortality of noble act. History is of special worth to the prince who can gather from it the home truths a friend dare not give him (Tillyard, 1961, p.56).

History inculcates critical thinking skills in the students who learn to be critical of the present and the past. They learn to ask the why question. This is important in a society where people make decisions based on their personal or ethnic interests. They learn to weigh issues, considering the pros and cons before making decisions.

The study of the subject provides standards of reference by which to criticize our own age. It also inculcates moral values such as tolerance, sympathy and responsibility. According to Stearns (n.d), it does not only contribute to moral understanding but also provides a terrain for moral contemplation.

It is the only discipline which deals exclusively with time and the reconstruction of the past. There is nothing to relate to if there is no history because it is the origin of everything.

Our understanding of the present is based on the past and the future is dependent on both the past and the present. This statement is supported by Chin who remarks:

By understanding history, you can understand why things are the way they are right now. By understanding what has happened in the past and the current situation today, we can better understand what can happen in the future. By looking at what has happened, we can understand what we should avoid and what we should make better.

Therefore history contributes to the shaping of the present through the knowledge of a known past.

### *1.2. Teaching and Learning of History and Government in Secondary Schools*

Although history is a key subject in Kenya education system, its impact has been minimal. Kenya's present plight could be attributed to the failure of the subject to assert itself in the curriculum. M'Bow (1981) assertion about problems facing Africa remains true today, thirty -one years later:

Africa's efforts to strengthen the hard- won independence; to fight neo- colonialism: racialism, ethnicity, gender bias; to secure sustainable development and assert its cultural characteristics must be rested in historical awareness, renewed and taken up by each succeeding generation ( p.xvii).

The state of History as a discipline in Kenya could be understood if one looked at factors affecting its teaching and learning in secondary schools. History as a subject was weakened when it was combined with Political Science to form a new subject called History and Government in 1981. Many important topics were removed from the syllabus to accommodate the Government content. This was the genesis of the present problems facing the subject. The political aspect which focused on only Kenya was overemphasized.

The Government policy which made the combined History and Government an optional subject at secondary school level did not ameliorate the situation. This has resulted in low enrolment with majority of the students dropping the subject in form three before

adequate coverage of Kenyan and African history. In some private schools, it is not taught at all. This is the reason why majority of the youth are unpatriotic and strive to glorify ethnicity at the expense of nationalism. Some have even denounced their citizenship to become citizens of European or American countries because of financial benefits.

The above notwithstanding, History has been given not only as an alternative to Geography and Religious Education at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) but also to pure sciences like Physics, Chemistry and Biology. In the arts category, many students end up choosing Geography out of the three because it is categorized as a science. Therefore, clustering of subjects has further affected the dismal performance of History as a secondary school subject.

The nature of the syllabus is an impediment to the success of the subject. The history syllabus is very wide and lacks coherence and consistency (Were, 1999). A broad syllabus forces teachers to use teacher-centered methods which facilitate wide content coverage. This makes the subject not only difficult for the learners but also boring because of lack of interesting learning activities which are favored by child-centered approaches. At the same time, learners are not able to relate what they are learning to their lives and therefore fail to internalize and identify with the historical events.

The content is neither systematically arranged nor coherent. In most cases each topic is independent and has little or no relation to the one preceding it. For instance, after the first topic on Introduction to the course, the second topic is Early Man. This is followed by Early Agriculture and then Urbanization. It is not easy for the students to see the connection between these topics and the teachers rarely explain and justify the sequence.

Apart from this, the subject is unnecessarily difficult and uncoordinated because it fails to apply the theory of learning which advocates for learning starting from simple to complex. Research by Were and Kiio (1999) show that students find form 1 content difficult and abstract, especially the topic on Early Man. The teachers too complain that the topic is difficult to teach and comprehend. This has contributed to both low motivation and enrolment among students. The majority of students drop the subject before they have an in-depth study of Kenya's and Africa's history.

The syllabus has adopted both spiral and thematic approaches which makes it repetitive and boring. Each of the themes taught is repeated at different levels (local, national and international levels) and in each class. This makes the content boring, affecting further the motivation of the students.

The emphasis on science and technology as a means of realizing industrialization in 2030 has relegated history to a subject of no consequence. Science has infiltrated even in careers which traditionally required history. For instance it is no longer mandatory for a student to study History in order to pursue a career in law yet, this is a profession which exclusively requires historical thinking and therefore knowledge of history. A study by Osoro (2006) shows that majority (54%) of students did not attach much importance on history with 95.3% of parents advising their children concentrate on sciences.

Limited job opportunities have been used to relegate history to oblivion. The potential students of the subject are made to believe that the subject is unmarketable and limits chances of employment for its graduates. Students and their teachers are oblivious of the truth that History opens a wide field to its students, such as working in museums, archeological sites, media centers, historical research, and consultancies and enhances development of good leadership, research, writing and speaking skill (Stearn in [www.historians.org/pubs/free](http://www.historians.org/pubs/free)). Osoro (2006) indicates that only 13.3% of the students perceived history as helping them to secure jobs.

The incompetence and insufficiency of teachers is another factor affecting the success of the subject. The number of teachers being trained to teach History in secondary schools has been declining at an alarming rate. For instance, classes which in the 1990's used to have more than six-hundred students (600+) in Kenyatta University the then leading teacher training institution country-wide have been reduced to between 45 - 50 students in the early 2000's. However, this trend is drastically changing under self-sponsored program at present, Kenyatta University is producing between 500 -600 teachers of History in regular, school-based and open-learning programs.

To bridge the gap between demand and supply for History teachers, the schools have been forced to employ untrained instructors who lack instructional methodology, experience and confidence of handling students of almost their age and level. Research abound on poor delivery of history content. For instance, about 27.5% of students in Were (1999) cited poor methodology as one of the factors affecting their learning of history. Kiio's research in the same year shows that 90% of teachers use lecture method while Osoro (2006) records that over 50% of the methods are transmission in nature with dictation of notes scoring 76%.

Poor methodology further affects the mastery of the content and the motivational level of the students. Use of expository strategy makes the subject boring, uninspiring, abstract, difficult and irrelevant. It breeds negative attitude towards the subject making it impossible to train in moral values, social skills, and tenets of democracy, nationalism and citizenship. Lack of application of collaborative approaches in classroom sessions is what ails the teaching and learning of History.

Effective teaching further requires that there are adequate resources. Although there is a wide range of resources for teaching history; from print to audio to audio-visual and community resources, many schools have only print media and basically the text book as the main resource of teaching the subject. Teachers neither have reference books nor other teaching materials, which would engage learners' senses for optimal learning. Resources like newspapers, maps, charts pictures, videotapes, and radios are none-existent in many schools. In were (1999) resources related problems featured most among students with 56.8% of them citing it as the main problem they faced in learning the subject. A study by Kiio (1999) indicates that about 80% of students shared a textbook among two or four. About 82.7% of teachers in this study singled out resources as a major factor affecting their teaching. Osoro (2006) records 66.7% of History students not having a single textbook. Given the importance of resources in learning, such as motivational role, bringing reality to history learning and high retention capacity, their exclusion from teaching and learning is a major shortfall.

Assessment in History teaching and learning is another factor contributing to its poor performance. Both its formative and summative evaluations focus on learning at cognitive domain at the expense of social relating and affective domains. The learners are asked to describe, explain, discuss and even recall events but little attention is paid on critical analysis of issues or changes in attitudes as a result of lessons learnt or values inculcated in the learners. This has resulted in high scores in examinations with little change in behavior on issues related to ethnicity, corruption, democracy and morality.

All the above factors have contributed to students, teachers, administrators, the government, the parents and the public in general developing a negative attitude towards the subject. A study by Osoro (2006) indicates that 86.6 % of the students are negative about the discipline with over 77% of them being discouraged by peers from continued study of History. An earlier study by Were (1982) shows that 72% of the head teachers had expressed an opinion that their students were not interested in the subject.

## 2. Conclusion

The above analysis has underscored the importance attached to History world-wide. In a great nation like United States of America, it is taught to all students at all levels of education cycle. Africa's survival depends on accepting the contribution of history in the curriculum and in giving African identity to the youth. Kenya cannot achieve both the millennium goals and the vision 2030 when history is held in disrepute by its citizens. Its transformational nature must be recognized by all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and social/ economic / political background and level of education. Addressing the factors affecting its teaching and learning would go a long way in re-establishing its place in the curriculum. In-line with these factors, the following are recommended.

First, History should be recognized as an important element of the curriculum and made compulsory at secondary school level. This will ensure that young people coming out of schools are equipped with information about themselves, their community, their nation and their African origin. Such knowledge is imperative in a changing and uncertain world where individuals have to shape their destiny based on a known past.

Second, at the university level, a specific aspect of Kenyan history must be taught to all students regardless of the careers they are pursuing. This will keep them informed on who they are, where they are coming from and where they are going. The knowledge will prepare them for their effective participation in societal transformation and development.

Third, the secondary History curriculum has to be reviewed to reflect the challenges Kenya is facing. Issues of corruption could be addressed by involving students in projects where they will be required to analyze real cases of corruption in Kenya and how they have impacted on the society. Incidents of ethnicity would also be studied considering the pros and cons for Kenya and other countries of Africa. The need for peace and security could be handled by studying the devastations caused by wars such as 1st and 2nd World Wars and how their effects are still being felt today. Such exposure if handled well will educate on the evils of war and therefore encourage people to strive for peace.

The syllabus should focus more on regional and continental history drawing a balance between Kenya, East Africa, Africa and the wider world. This will give the learners a wider perspective of History and thus prepare them for the world citizenship. A component of the syllabus ought to concentrate on morality, culture, religion and science. The history of women should also be included so that all aspects of human development are put in place.

Fourth, the teacher training institutions should encourage more of the trainees to specialize in History teaching by use of incentives such as provision of scholarships, assurance of immediate deployment upon graduation and flexible mobility from one promotion grade to another.

Fifth, the untrained teachers should be equipped with pedagogical skills through sandwiched courses during the holidays. Those in the field could be in-serviced frequently in the field of methodology, and up-dated on new research findings in History and education. This will keep them at pace with changes taking place in their subject.

Sixth, the older and more experienced teachers could mentor newly employed teachers and those who are untrained so that they can make History meaningful and relevant to the lives of learners. Mentoring will require the mentees to sit in the classrooms during the lessons of experienced teachers. Similarly, the latter could supervise and advise the newly recruited instructors on how to handle the subject.

The use of teaching methodologies that put the child at the center of learning with adequate resources and varied learning activities which allow for the development of social and decision making skills and democratic ideals among others should be at the core of instruction.

Seventh, there is need to revive historians' association which could disseminate the latest historical research findings through its journal and other publications. This will keep the teachers informed of happenings in their field such as new methods of teaching, integration of technology in teaching, new discoveries through archeology and theories of learning.

The society should also be enlightened on the importance of the subject through open discussions and debates in the media, and publication of articles in magazines and newspapers among others. This would be essential because many people are ignorant of the role of History to individuals and to the nation as a whole.

Last and not least, the assessment in the teaching and learning of the History should focus on both affective and cognitive domains of learning. The present emphasis on examination performance at the expense of change in attitudes, acquisition of values and morals should be reconsidered. Behavioral change should be seen as an indicator of effective learning.

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