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Decolonization of Nigeria Education System: The Place of Local Content for Sustainable Global Competitiveness

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Abstract

The Nigeria education system cannot grow or develop on the operationalization of foreign educational principles in her education curriculum as cultural norms and traditions are destroyed limiting social productivity. This development defeats the importance of education in the development of individuals and society at large; therefore, this paper is centered on decolonizing the Nigeria education system, the place of local content. The paper is qualitative and highlighted the importance of local content for sustainable global competitiveness; noting that just as a fish draws its strength from the water so also everyman can only be productively effective within the confines of the environment that suits his nature and reality. The paper therefore recommends a curriculum review that must incorporate cultural norms and traditions that are relevant for sustainable creativity and innovativeness that can compete with the rest of the world.

Keywords: *Education, Curriculum, Decolonizing, Local content, Creativity*

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Background of the Study

The importance of education cannot be over emphasized in the development of any nation Nigeria inclusive. However, the Nigerian education system is greatly influenced by the white man's culture thereby relegating the long-standing indigenous knowledge systems that form an integral part of our culture to the background. The goal of the educational system then was to fulfill the interests of the colonial masters and not to empower the indigenous populace. Yusuf, (2023) opined that the education system in Nigeria was British dominated; designed to serve the interests of the colonial government instead of meeting the requirements of the native population. Also, Obiagbaosogu and Nwosu (2023) opined that education was an effective tool for domination and ideological warfare for the colonial masters; hence, they introduced their kind of education aimed at raising willing servants that will continue to work for them. Hence, the content of education was to discourage resistance and provide local support staff that could communicate effectively in the required European language in order to promote understanding amongst them.

Furthermore, Adebisi (2016) noted that the quality of colonial education was intentionally poor; emphasizing that expenditure on the colonial education was very low. For instance, in 1935 in Nigeria, only 3.4 % of colonial tax was spent on education. Criticizing their dubious intent, he further observed that the distribution of schools reflected the areas exploited for agricultural produce. What this means is that the qualification to have more schools cited in a particular area was to be rich in some agricultural produce and natural resources.

Back memory lane before colonization, the Nigeria education history was fun filled; such that elders and children come together in the cool breeze of the night under the shining moonlight; stories and plays, that aided knowledge were told, including proverbs, music and poems. Children were taught about culture and traditions of the land and efforts of societal development put in by present and past heroes of the land. This act of learning shows connectivity, continuity and community preservation; unity, love and respect for tradition that needs to be sustained though with some reforms for global competitiveness.

In this light, the colonial masters planned to silence our history, our knowledge and autonomy by controlling the human mind through the control of education in Nigeria and Africa at large. This has caused a lot of damage in the Nigeria education system as observed by Adebisi (2016), "despite post-independence attempts to reverse this, vestiges of post colonialism in contemporary education remain and perpetuate a myth of inferiority of indigenous knowledge and methods". It is more than a century since Nigeria came out of colonial rule yet the impact of colonization lingers up till now. While some of these impacts are good and desirable some are in conflict with the African culture.

This calls for reform in Nigeria educational system as the psychological damage caused by the colonial masters can be undone through mental redirection by decolonizing the education system.

Literature

Decolonization of education in Nigeria

According to Abiri (2005) the demands for decolonization of education emerged first on the African continent in the context of decolonizing struggles against colonial rule during the 1950s and 1960s. The reason for decolonization stems from its ability to support a deep sense of self-empowerment and reclaiming indigenous identity. It provides a strong force that allows marginalized cultures and communities to reconnect with their heritage and reclaim a sense of belonging and pride. Aslam (2018) stated that the aim was the nullification of modern colonial education whose organizing principle centered on shaping the colonized into colonial subjects, in the process, shedding them of their humanity and full potential. Therefore, by decolonizing education the lingering impact of the brutal force of slavery and colonialism will be destroyed. A case of low mentality and inferiority complex such that Africans do not believe in their capabilities will fade away.

Smith (2012) defined decolonization as the renaissance of the traditions of existence and perceptive proceeded to colonization, while finding the method in which colonization was achieved. Obiagbaosogu and Nwosu (2023) see decolonization as a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the mind of the Africa which already has been stuffed with strange and unfamiliar ideas and categories, and eroded by white supremacy syndrome, occasioned by the impact of the centuries of slave trade, colonialism and missionary enterprise. Decolonization therefore means a drift from the colonial mindset to the pre-colonial era when customs and traditions of natives are held in high esteem. It is the process of removing colonial elements from the mindset and embrace indigenous elements.

When people decolonize education, they bring marginalized cultures and identities to the fore (Yusuf, 2023). Therefore, decolonization of education means a redirection of education away from colonial features to indigenous based education that has the capacity to empower indigenes and help reinstate age long cultural and traditional values relevant for societal growth and development. This is possible because the pre-colonial era nurtured learners with creative mindset and innovative skills. Hence, decolonization has the capacity to create opportunities for long-term sustainable development by strengthening local capacities and autonomy to govern and manage resources in ways that are consistent with cultural values and environmental sustainability. Also, it provides opportunities to reshape economic systems, education, healthcare, and governance structures by valuing and incorporating indigenous perspectives, resulting in more inclusive and equitable societies (Yusuf, 2023).

To decolonize Nigeria education system will require transformation and reestablishing links with traditions and cultural understanding; this will aid in the dissolution of colonial influence in today's educational system and empower the students in this dispensation. Policy reform is necessary at this point prioritizing decolonization and supports African-led initiatives and partnerships to implement context specific solutions that provide unique requirements of each African country. Therefore, local content is very crucial as this paper advocates for curriculum review that aims at elevating Africa's knowledge systems, values,

beliefs and technology while abolishing all that remained of so many unproductive foreign and colonial ideologies.

Curriculum review and local content

Yusuf (2023) affirms that the variety and richness of pre-colonial education in Africa were significantly influenced by the continent's robust linguistic and cultural diversity. Pedagogical methods based on oral customs and communal enlightenment ensured inherited knowledge, life skills, ethical precepts, and communal responsibilities. The medium, predominantly indigenous languages fostered the retention and relaying of cultural identity. In the same vain, Lawrence (2009) observed that the curriculum of indigenous education during the pre-colonial period consisted of traditions, legends and tales and the procedures and knowledge associated with rituals which were handed down orally from generation to generation within each tribe. This process was closely incorporated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious and recreational life of the indigenous peoples. The pre-colonial curriculum of indigenous education reflected unity, trust, strength, skillfulness and the likes. Unfortunately, all these eroded away because of colonization and by the introduction of foreign curriculum in the education system.

The curriculum was a veritable tool in the hands of the colonial masters; it reflected their customs and ideals, as such it was used to destroy native languages because English became the language of instruction. It is therefore necessary to use the same curriculum not only to revive local languages but also to restore our cultural heritage. Vygotsky in Cherry (2022) believed that parents, caregivers, peers, and the culture at large are responsible for developing the brain's higher-order functions. He maintains that human development relies on social interaction and, therefore, can differ among cultures. He further contended that children are born with basic biological constraints on their minds and that culture, however, provides tools of intellectual adaptation to their respective cultures. Furthermore, Akindele (2026) reiterated the relevance of the curriculum in re-engineering education in Nigeria. He said "Learning should no longer be abstract or detached from national priorities. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as other subjects and courses, must be taught alongside climate education, digital literacy, financial education, civic responsibility, and entrepreneurship".

Unfortunately, this is far from been achieved due to the fact that the Nigeria's education curriculum is shaped after the structure of the British colonial education era. That is, the curriculum is basically Eurocentric with theoretical knowledge that is "white-collar" oriented, designed to produce clerks, interpreters, and teachers and this have created a big gap in the society as it relates to practical and agricultural needs. It is on these bases that this paper calls for a curriculum review or reform which must reflect decolonization.

To review the curriculum that must reflect decolonization requires that it must be indigenous knowledge based with critical thinking, and over 70% emphasis on science, technology, and entrepreneurship. Recall that in the pre-colonial days and early days of post- colonialism

students were creative, they were taught different crafts and how to make things like baskets, bags, mats etc. but today such school "hand-works" had faded away as everything is now monetized. Therefore to foster sustainable creativity and global competitiveness, Nigeria must not only integrate local languages in their curriculum reform but must of necessity integrate practical vocational training, and modern technology with the aim of transforming education from a theoretical knowledge based to a driver of local problem-solving tailored to local economic realities.

Materials and methods

This study centers on decolonization of Nigeria education system; the place of local content for sustainable global competitiveness and therefore adopts a qualitative research method; that is, data are not in the form of numbers rather data or the information is practically from what was experienced or observed. This method was adopted because the study primarily wants to describe situations, phenomenon and problems surrounding the Nigeria education system as a result of colonization; and therefore requires that data or information be generated through the use of variables that are measured on a nominal or ordinal scale (i.e. qualitative measurement scales) in order to establish variation in the phenomenon, situation, problem or issue without any quantitative application.

Conclusion

The place of local content is very crucial if the curriculum must speak decolonization. By local content, the writer means a curriculum that is rooted to the soil; that is, a curriculum that is indigenous based. Integrating local content in the curriculum will reform the curriculum such that emphasis will be more on indigenous knowledge, African perspectives, and vocational skills that will ensure sustainable creativity and innovation that can compete with the rest of the world.

Studies from early philosophers like Plato and Aristotle who attempted to answer the question of how people learn shows that, for Plato as a rationalist truth and knowledge is to be found within us while Aristotle an empiricist advocated that truth and knowledge was to be found outside of ourselves (the environment) by using our senses on the world around us. This holds true and guides the African thought pattern that entails more of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in explaining realities. This was also observed by Ngara (2007), positing that African traditional thought process uses personal idiom of spirituality centered wisdom to explain reality. He explained that these personal idioms are philosophical ideas that stands the African spirit and commands her thought pattern.

It is also worthy to note that every creature draws its strength from the environment it is most familiar with; just as the fish draws its strength from the water. No matter how big a fish is, it will be useless and powerless on dry land because that is not the environment that suits its nature. But if inside the water, it will not only survive but very productive. The same applies to the eagle in the sky. The same way nature has provided for everyman natural born abilities to be effectively productive within the confines of the environment that suits his nature and reality.

Recommendation

Natural born ability according to Obiagbaosogu and Nwosu (2023) is Africa's areas of strength. This explains why you will not only be frustrated if you send your dog to eagle's school, you will also frustrate the dog and the eagles; because dogs can easily learn how to swim in water but not in air where eagle's sower. Both the dogs and the eagles are unique by their nature and are very capable to perform at optimum only in their different unique areas of strength; the same applies to human beings, they can go out of their comfort zone but not out of their strength zone. Therefore, the study recommends that;

1. Africa can do well when she concentrates on her areas of strength. Thus, the Nigeria education system should concentrate on her peculiarities such that cultural norms and traditions of natives are held in high esteem so that students can be creative due to the peculiar nature of teaching that is capable to foster sustainable creativity and global competitiveness.
2. The Nigeria education system should to a large extent limit theoretical based knowledge and embrace practical vocational training through the application of modern technology with the sole aim of transforming education to the point that education becomes a driving force for local problem-solving tailored to local economic realities.
3. A curriculum review with strong emphasis on local content is strongly recommended for decolonizing Nigeria education system for sustainable global competitiveness, otherwise Nigeria and Africa at large will continue to produce unemployable and unproductive graduates that are only good for "white collar" jobs but not creative and innovative enough to compete with the rest of the world.

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