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COLONIAL AND MISSIONARY CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA, 1880 - 1960

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Abstract

There has been call for revamping education system in Nigeria for myriad of reasons. Proponents often argues that the faulty and Eurocentric curriculum method was inherited from the Europeans; either the Christian missionaries or the British Colonial government. It is hard to ignore the deterioration of values, culture, norms and traditions within the society today, the internet may have contributed to this, but our process of imparting knowledge is foreign in ideas and the method is outdated. This study intends to investigate the origin of western curriculum development in Nigeria, whose interest and purpose was it intended to serve. What were the contents of these curriculum and what extent did it improve the indigenous people? Were there efforts by indigenous people to introduce autonomous education system or learning method to reflect indigenous culture?

Keywords: *Colonial; Curriculum; Eurocentric; Missionary; Ordinance; Socio-political*

Introduction

The introduction of Colonial and missionary curricula in British West Africa, particularly in Nigeria between 1880 and 1960, offered a significant epoch in the historical narrative of education in the region. This period was marked by astonishing transformations in the educational landscape, driven by the combined forces of Colonial government and missionary enthusiasm. The interconnection of these two influences not only reshaped the educational framework but also had far reaching impact for Nigerian society. This essay explores the complexities of the Colonial and missionary curricula, examining their objectives, methodologies, and the socio-political implications they engendered in Nigeria.

The tail end 19th century was a critical period for Nigeria, as the British cemented control over various regions. Lagos colony was joined to the Southern protectorate in 1907 and consequently amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates was completed in 1914. This Colonial enterprise was underpinned by a desire for economic exploitation and the promotion of British cultural values. Education was recognized as a veritable tool for achieving these goals. The British Colonial government sought to create a class of educated Nigerians who could assist in the administration of the colony, while missionaries aimed to convert the local populace to Christianity and instill Western values.

Missionaries were among the first to establish formal educational institutions in Nigeria. Organizations such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Roman Catholic Church played a pivotal role in the increasing population of schools. The curriculum introduced by these missionaries was heavily influenced by Western educational ideals, emphasizing literacy, numeracy, and religious instruction. Its purpose was not only to educate but also to convert; thus, subjects were often woven with moral and spiritual dimension.

The missionary curriculum was characterized by a focus on the English language, biblical studies, and basic arithmetic. This approach was predicated on the belief that education would uplift the local population and facilitate the spread of Christianity. However, it often marginalized indigenous knowledge systems and languages, promoting a Eurocentric worldview that undermined local cultures.

Missionary Education in Nigeria

Before the year 1925, the British Colonial government had no defined educational policy for her dependent African colonies. Rather, the local administrators in consultation with the local Christian missions and their home offices managed the educational enterprise as best as they could. Laissez fair was the order of the day. Since the main aim of Christian missionary endeavor in Africa (Nigeria) was evangelization and proselytization- to win African souls for Christ. To accomplish this all important task, education was seen as the major tool as reflected in the curriculum of the missionary schools. Udoh (2010), maintains that the missionaries were interested in raising pious, godly teachers who would minister to the needs of their own people. As a result of this very objective, the church and the school were almost the same thing .The two worked together and complemented each other.

Almost everything taught in the missionary schools was linked to the bible. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that the knowledge of the bible, the ability to communicate both orally and in writing were considered essential for a good Christian. Consciously or otherwise, the missionaries hoped to produce group of people who were Nigerians only in blood but Europeans in religion, thought and habit; a sort of white-men in black skin. Bakindo, Omolewa and Babalola (1994), also affirm that the development of Western education gave

rise to a new class-the westernized African elite; these were men and women who had secondary, teachers or university education. In most cases the westernized educated Africans got converted to Christianity and took European names as Christian names.

Schools were established haphazardly; at any available space, under the trees, town halls and poorly staffed and ill equipped. This indiscriminate establishment of schools according to Ogeh (2018), led to unhealthy rivalry amongst the missionaries. When Sir Clifford took over from Lord Lugard as the Governor of Nigeria, he inherited the problems of many unassisted schools. Fafunwa (2004), maintains that the earliest Christian missionary school in Nigeria was without any doubt an adjunct of the church. Schools were indiscriminately opened by missions, private Nigerians individuals and organizations.

There was unhealthy rivalry and competition among the Christian missions, as missions were determined to outpace the other in terms of the number of schools and areas covered in evangelical work. The religious rivalry led to many land disputes among religious bodies and this preoccupied Sir Clifford fom1922 to 1923. Fafunwa (2004) maintained that the number of unassisted schools continued to grow, rising from 2,432 with 122,000 pupils in 1922 to 2,584 with 162,000 pupils in 1923.Such was the educational scene in Nigeria when in 1920, the Phelps-Stokes Fund of the USA; in cooperation with the international education Board (IEB) set up two commissions to look at the educational activities in the British Tropical African colonies.

Colonial Educational Policies

The British Colonial government recognized the importance of education in consolidating its rule and began to implement formal educational policies in the early 20th century. The 1882 Education Ordinance marked a significant turning point, as it aimed to establish a framework for education in Nigeria. The ordinance facilitated the establishment of both primary and secondary schools, many of which were run by missionary organizations. Colonial curricula were designed to serve the interests of the Colonial state. They emphasized subjects that were deemed useful for administrative purposes, such as English, mathematics, and geography. The curriculum often excluded African history, literature, and cultural studies, reflecting a Colonial mindset that viewed indigenous knowledge as inferior. This educational approach was aimed at producing a subservient class that could assist in the governance of the colony while remaining disconnected from their cultural roots.

The Intersection of Colonial and Missionary Curricula

The collaboration between Colonial authorities and missionary organizations created a unique educational landscape in Nigeria. While missionaries laid the groundwork for formal education, Colonial policies provided the necessary framework for expansion. This partnership was often fraught with tension, as missionaries sought to promote their religious agenda, while Colonial officials were primarily concerned with administrative efficiency.

The intersection of these two curricula resulted in a hybrid educational system that was both beneficial and detrimental to Nigerian society. On one hand, it facilitated increased literacy rates and introduced new ideas and technologies. On the other hand, it perpetuated a system of education that marginalized indigenous cultures and languages.

The Phelps-Stokes Commission was noted for the initial failure to help in matching education to the needs of Nigerians. The major reason for this was the excess attention given to the academic curriculum. Generally, Nigerians at the time favoured the academic

curriculum above the agricultural or technical curriculum owing to the fact that some of the previous sets of students had used it in gaining admission to higher institutions of learning including the Universities. Besides, it had proved effective as a guaranty towards securing high-paying white-collar jobs. And so, the Phelps-Stokes Commission eventually made a move intended to match education in Nigeria to the actual needs of Nigerians. Going by this move, it was agreed that considerable attention should not be on European countries but on African countries in teaching subjects like Biology, Geography, and History (Fafunwa, 2004).

Subsequently, the Colonial government made efforts towards the provision of agricultural and technical education and these apparently resulted from the veritable acceptance of the recommendations put forward by the Phelps-Stokes Commission. In actuality, Nigerian indigenes constantly demanded Western-style academic education. Having made a similar observation, the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa suggested that the teaching method, as well as the content for the respective subject in the school curriculum, should match the African environment and lifestyle.

In addition, the Education Ordinance passed in 1926 laid emphasis on Nigeria's curriculum development at various schools. Some of the provisions of the Ordinance were the registration of teachers and constant assessment of the subjects offered in schools to quicken the development of school curricula. The Ordinance also maintained the `payment by results' principle that had been in existence before the Ordinance was formulated.

WAEC to Independence (1952 to 1960)

WAEC (fully known as West African Examination Council) came into inception in 1952 after Dr. G.B Jeffrey, the Director of the Institute of Education University of London, suggested its establishment. In 1953, the Council [WAEC] launched its Lagos branch in Yaba (Barkindo, Omolewa and Babalola, 1994).

At the point of establishment, WAEC was expected to usher in curriculum development through the monitoring and regular inspections of schools – a process that would eventually lead to the approval of schools as well as the acceptance of their students for the West African School Certificate Examination formerly known as Cambridge Overseas School Certificate Examination.

Consequently, Nigerian grammar schools would be interested in teaching the subjects usually considered in the examinations set by WAEC. Meanwhile, the coming of WAEC has played an authoritative role in Nigeria's curriculum development.

In addition to the contributions of WAEC, the development of curricula at Nigerian schools was stimulated by several other factors including the moves made by several ministries of education at the regional level. The defunct Eastern Region, in 1959, conducted a revision of its curriculum for primary schools. This move was effected on the First School Leaving Certificate Examination as well as Secondary School Syllabuses in subjects like Geography, History, and English.

Other major moves were centered on revising the curriculum for training teaching staff. Significantly, all of these moves were carried out in preparation for the impending independence of 1960. At the time, it had already been declared that Nigerian would gain political independence by 1960.

Meanwhile, the defunct Eastern Region observed that it was necessary to discard some portion of the British-style academic curriculum and replace it with something that would adapt to the needs of the eastern populace. Also in other regions of Nigeria, attempts were put forward to ensure significant changes were introduced in the country's education system (Agada, 1991).

Curriculum development since Independence

Shortly after the Ashby Report was submitted, Nigeria attained independence from British rule on October 1, 1960. The Ashby Commission drew specific attention to Nigeria's curriculum development particularly by suggesting the establishment of compulsory manual projects in Nigerian secondary schools.

More so, it recommended that various types of curricula should be provided at secondary schools. Meanwhile, it was suggested that the curricula should include agricultural, vocational and commercial courses.

Members of the Ashby Commission further suggested the establishment of Advanced Teachers' Colleges (to be affiliated with Universities) and the integration of the pre-service and the in-service training given to teachers. Other recommendations implied that there should be a new undergraduate course described as B. Ed (alternatively B. Sc. Ed and B. A. Ed) in the Universities. There are several citations to clarify that the recommendations of the Ashby Commission have been completely carried out. Some of these citations are:

1. The commencement of B.Ed. courses in the Faculties of Education of various Nigerian universities including the ones in Nsukka, Lagos, ABU, Lagos, Ilorin, Ife, and Ibadan.

2. The establishment of Advanced Teachers' Colleges in various Nigerian areas among which are Ilorin, Ondo, Ore, Ikere-Ekiti, Ilesha, and Ondo.

Since the independence of 1960, some of the other notable according to Aisiku (1987), bodies which have played key roles in Nigeria's curriculum development are:

1. The National Curriculum Conference

2. The Nigerian Educational Research Council –NERC

3. The National Policy on Education

Curriculum development under the BritishColonial Government

The curriculum of the missionaries and the British Colonial government focused on producing clerks, messengers, interpreters and skilled workers. The curriculum was designed after the British education system. The curriculum features such subjects as Latin, Greek and Religion in the grammar school curriculum before Science later featured in the schools. It is 'bookish' in orientation. Also, in 1890, Henry Carr (Chief Clerk in the Colonial office and Her Majesty's sub-inspector of schools of the colony of Lagos) recommended that teachers should be trained in content area, methodology and school management (Amaele, Wosu and Ejire, 2011).

Contributors to curriculum development in Nigeria

1. Henry Carr proposed the setting up of Government Model Schools and the use of mother tongue as language of instruction.

2. Lord Fredrick Lugard, C.M.S under Bishop Tugwell (1898), Dr. W.R.S Miller Han Visher initiated the Western (non-secular) Education in northern Nigeria.

3. The Baptist Mission set up the Phelps-Stokes Commission to report on education and the needs of African society. The commission's report made useful influence in curriculum development in Nigeria.

4. The Ashby Commission helped to establish universities and polytechnics in Nigeria.

Socio-Political Implications

The introduction of Colonial and missionary curricula had profound socio-political implications for Nigeria. As education became more accessible, a new educated elite emerged, often referred to as the "Western-educated class." This group played a crucial role in the political landscape of Nigeria, advocating for social change and independence from Colonial rule. Figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo emerged from this educated class, using their knowledge to challenge Colonial authority and promote nationalist sentiment.

However, the educational system also fostered divisions within Nigerian society. The emphasis on English and Western values created a rift between the educated elite and the largely uneducated masses. This disparity would later manifest in the struggle for independence, as different groups vied for representation and power within the newly emerging nation (Ehindero, 1994).

Critiques of the Colonial and Missionary Curricula

Critics of the Colonial and missionary curricula argue that these educational systems were fundamentally flawed. They contend that the curricula were designed to serve the interests of the colonizers rather than the needs of the local population. Coleman (1986) submitted that the marginalization of indigenous knowledge and languages led to a loss of cultural identity and heritage, as students were taught to view their own traditions as inferior. Moreover, the focus on rote learning and standardized testing stifled creativity and critical thinking. Students were often trained to memorize facts rather than engage with the material in a meaningful way. This approach produced a generation of individuals who were ill-equipped to address the complex challenges facing their society.

Conclusion

The legacy of the Colonial and missionary curricula in Nigeria is a mixed one. While they contributed to increased literacy and the establishment of formal education, they also perpetuated a system that marginalized indigenous cultures and created social divisions. The impact of this educational framework is still felt today, as Nigeria grapples with issues of identity, cultural preservation, and educational reform. In conclusion, the introduction of Colonial and missionary curricula in British West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, was a complex process that shaped the educational landscape of the region. The interplay between Colonial policies and missionary objectives created a hybrid system that had both positive and negative effects on Nigerian society. As Nigeria continues to navigate its post-Colonial identity, it is essential to reflect on this historical context and strive for an educational framework that honors indigenous knowledge and promotes social equity. The lessons learned from this period can inform contemporary educational practices, ensuring that they are inclusive, culturally relevant, and responsive to the needs of all Nigerians.

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