

The New Kindergarten Curriculum in Ghana: Critiques and Analysis on Cultural Identity and Global Citizenship as a Core Competence

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Abstract: Education has significantly contributed to an increase in expanding skills, creating a stimulating atmosphere for creativity, and constructing the human resources needed for a potentially informed economy. Early childhood education has become the world's fastest expanding field in the educational enterprise. Since the project's creation, the number of children participating in nursery programs has more than increased. Effective primary school teaching has become a major problem in many countries around the world, and most African countries, including Ghana, have made efforts to promote the accelerated development of early childhood education. Curriculum means various things to different individuals in early childhood education. It may apply to a theory, a program, or a process. The curriculum, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009), consists of the information and abilities to be learned in the school program as well as the preparations for activities from which children can learn. Epstein (2007) describes education as the expertise and abilities that teachers are required to teach and children are expected to acquire, as well as the preparations for activities that will promote learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) centers have been part of Ghana's education structure since 1843, when the Basel Mission added Kindergartens (KGs) to some of their primary schools in what was then the Gold Coast, now Ghana. By 1920, this concept had spread to other missions and a few people. The Education Act of 1961 transferred all private schools, including Early Childhood Education Centres to the Ministry of Education. Despite recognizing the value of Early Childhood Education, the government was unwilling to include it in the free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) scheme due to financial constraints. Ghana's government incorporated kindergarten education into the standard of public education in 2007. (Osei-Poku&Gyekye-Ampofo, 2017).

Early childhood education has the ability to form a nation's future by serving as the cornerstone upon which all other educational levels are developed, thus equipping children with the abilities, behaviors, and competencies needed for individual and national growth. Most countries have recently formalized early childhood care and education, allowing private and public interest in having children maximize their

potentials to supplement care from family with systematic socioeconomic, physical, cognitive, and emotional child growth (Bar-On, 2004). It is critical that public and private pre-schools have the same or comparable environments and resources for all children to completely explore their potentials in order to train children with equivalent or similar Early Childhood education to achieve the Millennium Development Goal two (MDG2) and for comprehensive national development. As a result, regardless of their social, racial, cultural, or political contexts, children in Ghana will be provided with equivalent or comparable experiences (Osei-Poku&Gyekye-Ampofo, 2017).

The new Ghanaian primary school curriculum called Curriculum for Change and Sustainable Development is standard-based (NaCCA, Ministry of Education, 2019). It went into operation in September 2019 after teacher preparation in August 2019 to provide them with the skills needed to provide lessons in the new curriculum at the basic level from kindergarten to intermediate. According to NaCCA, Ministry of Education (2019), the curriculum for growth and sustainable development is focused on all learners acquiring skills in the 4Rs of Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, and cReativity. All learners should be armed with these foundational life skills at any stage of exit from a structured education, which are also prerequisites for Ghana being a learning country. In general, the Kindergarten Curriculum aims to cultivate persons who are literate, good problem solvers, innovative thinkers, and have the courage and skills to engage entirely in Ghanaian community as responsible local and global people.

Curriculum Defined

The word "Curriculum" began as a Latin word which means "a race" or "the course of a race" which in turn derives from the verb "curere" meaning "to run/to proceed". There is no generally agreed upon definition of curriculum. However, Rhode Island Department of education asserts that Curriculum is a standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. Curriculum serves as a central guide for all educators as to what is essential for teaching and learning, so that every student has access to rigorous academic

experiences. The structure, organization, and considerations in a curriculum are created in order to enhance student learning and facilitate instruction. Goodlad and Su (1992) also defined curriculum as a plan that consists of learning opportunities for a specific time frame and place, a tool that aims to bring about behavior changes in learners as a result of planned activities and includes all learning experiences received by learners with the guidance of the school. Hass (1987) provides a broader definition, stating that a curriculum includes “all of the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice”

Stotsky (2012) adds up to the discussion by stating that curriculum is a plan of action that is aimed at achieving desired goals and objectives. It is a set of learning activities meant to make the learner attain goals as prescribed by the educational system. Generally, it includes the subjects and activities that a given school system is responsible for, and the environment within which learning activities take place. Curriculum defines what happens in any formal education setup. The curriculum for kindergarten has been designed in such a way that the experiences of the learners whether within or outside the classroom are taken care of apart from making decisions regarding content, process, issues, and topics.

In every curriculum, there are goals, and these goals are standard-based sequence or expectations for teaching and learning. Skills, behaviors and attitudes expected to be achieved by children are addressed explicitly. A good curriculum outlines the instructional decisions, approaches, procedures, and routines that teachers use to engage all students in meaningful learning. The concepts governing curriculum are dynamic in nature because of the changes that occur in everyday life.

II. THE NEW GHANAIAN KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

The rationale for the Kindergarten Curriculum is to provide through play and use of creative learning and teaching approaches, a positive learning experience to learners at this level so as that they are ready for school (NaCCA, MoE, 2019). Research has shown that the first eight years in the lives of children are considered to be formative and the most critical among the years in the lives of children. In view of this, it is important to make sure that the learning to which they are exposed to are appropriate in enhancing their curiosity, creativity and critical thinking (NaCCA, 2019). The environment within which children live and interact with adults; whether teachers, parents, or peers are known to have lasting influence on their growth and development. At this stage, the child requires basic needs like nutrition, warmth, health, security, interaction and stimulation for social, emotional psychological, physical and cognitive development

(NaCCA, 2019). Within the first eight years in the life of the child, he or she establishes learning patterns, attitudes, personality and a sense of being. Learners generally learn by practice; and this is done naturally and best through play. In light of this, the basis for designing teaching and learning programs for young learners should be based on the natural tendencies of these learners.

Philosophies Underpinning the New Kindergarten Curriculum

The Kindergarten learning curriculum is informed by three main philosophical ideas, namely the Brain research, Developmental theory and the Social Constructivism.

Brain Research (Brain-based learning)

Memory and learning are inseparable concepts in education. Memory influences learning, at the same time, Learning influences memory. This shows how Memory and Learning are strongly linked. The brain of a Child can be likened to a well-organized instrument. The brain is composed of systematic and well-coordinated structures. This implies that teaching and learning process, to be successful, should take into consideration the brain structures and how it functions. Simply, teaching and learning must also be systematic and well-organized to allow the memory to encode and retrieve information. Jean (2019) posits that teaching and learning are meaningfully influenced and guided by brain-based and learning theories relevant to teaching and classroom practices. Learning theories have significantly impacted teaching strategies and they are relevant to learning in the classrooms. The learner’s ability changes over time as a result of both maturation and experience. One of the most important information processing capacities a child develops is the ability to organize information. This, in turn, is influenced by the child’s ability to categorize. As is the case with other information-processing capacities, this ability changes with both maturation and experience. The level and stages of children are different. Children’s levels and stages should be considered when preparing and delivering lessons in terms of content, strategies, and teaching materials (Jean, 2019).

The child’s brain from birth to ages eight undergoes maximum development. During this developmental period, the young child’s brain is extraordinarily active, developing very fast, and this is the optimal time for learning and development for life. Early years are critical and very important because the experiences a child encounters at that period have a decisive impact on the development of connections in the brain. During this critical and “sensitive period” of the early years, the child develops language and literacy skills, physical, psycho motor, cognitive, emotional control and interpersonal social skills. It is therefore important for every growing child to be exposed to learning experiences that are positive, appropriate and holistic instead of fragmented and sectionalized.

Developmental Theory

Developmental theory presents systematic ways of thinking about how human beings grow from babies to adolescents to adults, and to elderly people; and the various changes they undergo as they make this passage. Different developmental theories describe different types of changes. Jean Piaget's influential theories describe how people's intellectual development evolves over time (Piaget, 1970). Lawrence Kohlberg's theory describes moral development over time as people grow (Kohlberg, 1981), and Eric Erikson and Robert Kegan have created theories that describe how identity and the nature of the self-change with increasing maturity. Though progress towards development is most certainly happening all the time, the changes that occur are generally gradual in nature.

Developmental theories affirm that learners go through distinct and unique stages in development as they move through their early years. Every child is very unique and develop at his or her own pace. In language and cognitive skills development, learners go through different stages that are unique. This curriculum identifies the individual differences and variability in a child's development and affirms that the differences would not be seen as deficit or weaknesses, but rather rich and appropriate developmental experiences to help them bridge home and school experiences. This curriculum ensures that classroom experiences are made rich and activities are developmentally appropriate to cater for the different and unique stages (NaCCA, MoE 2019).

Social Constructivism

The current kindergarten curriculum relies on social constructivist philosophical notions which emphasize that learners learn better when they are actively involved in their own learning: Also, social constructivist theory sees learning as a social and interactive process. Learners learn better when they interact and share ideas with adults and other knowledgeable peers around them. The typical characteristics of the learners at the early years is that they are active, explorers, builders, extremely curious and thus learn best when they are involved actively in their own learning process. For such learners, learning and play are inextricably linked; and as learners play and interact with their friends, they learn better. In order to promote high quality learning that is functional, meaningful, and authentic, the growing child needs a safe, warm, nurturing, and welcoming Physical, social, emotional and psychological environment. This is vital because research affirms that the type of environment created for children is key to their successful development and a brighter future.

Critique on the Rationale of the New Ghanaian KG Curriculum

The rationale for the Kindergarten Curriculum is to provide through play and use of creative learning and teaching approaches, positive learning experiences to learners at this

level so as that they are ready for school. The phrase "so as that they are ready for school" as captured in the rationale for the new curriculum seeks to create the impression that the kindergarten is not part of the formal school system. However, kindergarten was considered as part of the formal school system before the introduction and implementation of the new curriculum. Emphatically, two years of kindergarten education was formally added to Ghana's educational structure under the 2007 Educational Reform. This educational reform of 2007 which was chaired by Jophus Anamuah-Mensah included two (2) years kindergarten education into the Universal Basic Education System in Ghana.

Core Competencies in the New Kindergarten Curriculum

The Core Competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, social and emotional proficiencies that all students need in order to engage in deep, lifelong learning. Students develop Core Competencies when they are actively involved in the activities within a learning area. As such, core competencies are said to be the integral part of the curriculum. While children manifest themselves uniquely in each area of learning within or outside the classroom setting, the Core Competencies are often interconnected and are foundational to all learning.

The new curriculum dubbed - curriculum for change and sustainable development seeks to develop certain core competencies among learners. It defines core competencies as a body of skills that teachers at all levels should seek to develop in their learners. The competences presented here describe a connected body of core skills that are acquired throughout the processes of teaching and learning. Core competences include the following:

Critical thinking and Problem solving (CP), Creativity and Innovation (CI), Communication and Collaboration (CC), Cultural identity and Global Citizenship (CG), Personal Development and Leadership (PL) and Digital Literacy (DL)

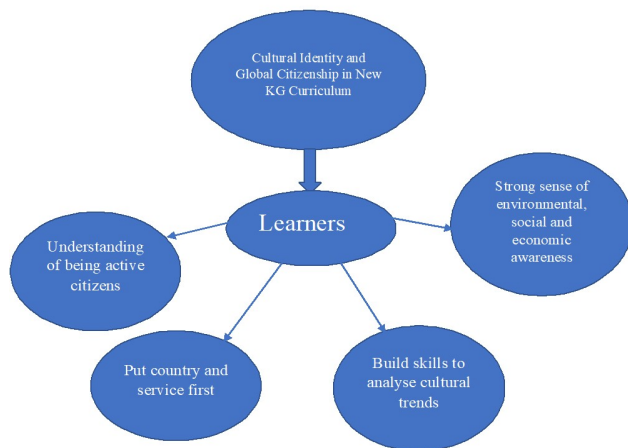
The main interest of the authors was to look at how cultural identity and global citizenship (CG) as a core competence captured in the new kindergarten curriculum is addressed, and to indicate specifically how this concept is captured in what is taught at both levels of the KG.

Cultural Identity and Global Citizenship (CG)

Cultural identity and global citizenship is a core competence at the heart of the new Ghanaian Kindergarten curriculum that seeks to develop learners to put country and service first by making them understand what it means to be active citizens; Inculcating in them a strong sense of environmental, social, and economic awareness, with emphasis on protecting the environment. Learners make use of the knowledge, skills, attitudes acquired to contribute effectively towards the socioeconomic development of the country and on the global stage; build skills to critically analyze cultural trends, identify and contribute to the global world (NaCCA, Ministry of Education, 2019). The Cultural Identity and Global

Citizenship as a core competence is further presented in the figure below.

Figure 1.0



From figure 1.0, it is seen that after learners have successfully gone through the new curriculum, the competency “Cultural identity and global citizenship” will develop learners who will put country and service first; build skills to analyse cultural trends; develop a strong sense of environmental, social and economic awareness; and develop an understanding of being active citizens.

Critique of the Core Competence ‘Cultural Identity and Global Citizenship’

According to Moha (2005), cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. On the contrary, Patriotism is the feeling of love, devotion and sense of attachment to a homeland and alliance with other citizens who share the same sentiment. If the new KG curriculum seeks to develop learners to put service and country first; making them understand what it means to be active citizens, then the curriculum is rather seeking to develop patriots, which is contradictory to the heading captured as a core competence. Also, this core competence is overly ambitious since it seeks to develop among learners a sense of responsibility to put country and service first. The question that arises from this assertion is that, how can children at the kindergarten level who still find it difficult to mention or write their names, learn to put country and service first? That is phenomenal! On the contrary, Children at that level need to acquire certain basic skills that will enable them to function effectively and cater for their personal needs. They need skills that will help them to communicate, listen, manipulate objects and learn turn taking. Now, if there is a demand for them to put country and service first, then we can only say that it is overly ambitious and unattainable as children at that level are not developed or ready socially, physically, psychologically, emotionally and mentally; talk less of putting country and service first.

III. WAYS IN WHICH CULTURAL IDENTITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AS CORE COMPETENCY IS ADDRESSED IN THE NEW CURRICULUM

The new KG curriculum is organized under key headings and annotations. These are Strands, Sub-strands, Content Standard, Indicator, and Exemplar.

Strands are the broad areas/sections or the thematic content to be studied. The strands/themes include; All About Me, My Family, Values and Beliefs, My Local Community, My Nation Ghana, All Around Us, and My Global Community.

Sub-strands are the sub-themes or sub-topics under each strand around which the content is organized.

Content standard refers to the pre-determined level of knowledge, skill and/or attitude that a learner attains by a set stage of education.

Indicator is a clear outcome or milestone that learners have to exhibit in each year to meet the content standard expectation. The indicators represent the minimum expected standard in a year.

Exemplar refers to support and guidance, which clearly explains the expected outcomes of an indicator and suggests what teaching and learning activities could take to support the facilitators/teachers in the delivery of the curriculum.

Cultural identity and global citizenship as a competency is addressed in various ways in the new curriculum. For instance, in KG 1, term 2, strand 4 talks about My Local Community and sub-strand 2 talks about Knowing (Who) the Important People/Occupation in My Community. This seeks to address cultural identity and global citizenship as learners are expected to use the community circle time strategy to talk freely with the teacher and their peers about the people in their neighborhood and the work they do. Learners are first of all, expected to talk about the occupation of their parents. For instance, my parents are both farmers. Teachers are also expected to ask leading questions and use work terminologies to guide the discussion on the theme (teacher, nurse, doctor, police officer, trader, fisherman, fishmonger, among others). However, our observation is that the exemplar rather seems to be developing communication skills in children than cultural identity and global citizenship as it talks about giving learners the opportunity to talk freely with the teacher and their peers about people in their neighborhood and the work they do. The exemplar also suggests some occupations such as teacher, nurse, doctor, police officer, trader, fishmonger et cetera that people do but these are not related to cultural identity. Anybody in Ghana with the requisite qualification can become a teacher, nurse, doctor, police officer and the rest because they are not the preserve of any cultural group. Given the culturally diverse nature of our communities, one would have expected the exemplar that seeks to establish cultural identity and global citizenship among learners to expose children to traditional and/or cultural occupations such as butchering, weaving, fishing, hunting and farming. This

means that only the global citizenship aspect of the core competence is catered for. Whereas strand 4 (My Local Community), sub-strand 2 (Knowing (Who) the Important People/Occupation in My Community) on page 54 of the new curriculum seeks to address cultural identity and global citizenship of KG 1 pupils by helping them to use the community circle time strategy to talk freely with the teacher and their peers about the people in their neighborhood and the work they do, the old curriculum is talking about helping learners describe the areas in which they live, identify the important places in the community and the uses of those places on page 86 under the broad topic 'My Community' in third term of KG 2.

Cultural identity and global citizenship under the new curriculum and still under strand 4 (My Local Community), KG 1, term 2 is addressed in sub-strand 3 (Knowing the Special Leaders in My Community) on page 57. The indicator under sub-strand 3 seeks to help learners talk about and describe the traditional and religious leaders in our community using poster and/or pictures depicting special leaders in the community. Teachers are also expected to have learners talk about the religious leaders in their various religious groups. (Example, Muslims – Imam, Christian churches-Pastors) and their roles. Learners talk about the traditional leaders and the role they play to support the community. Learners role play some activities these leaders do to support the community. The old curriculum has a similar topic on page 88. The topic is 'Leaders in My Community' and it is taught in kg 2, term 3; and it also seeks to address cultural identity and global citizenship by helping learners mention key leaders in the community, identify the authority and roles of leaders in the community and to talk about what they can do to help leaders in the community. Both the new and the old curriculum talk about the roles of leaders in the community except that, the new curriculum is placing emphasis on what leaders will do to support the community and the old curriculum placing emphasis on learners helping leaders in the community.

Another way by which the new curriculum attempts to address cultural identity and global citizenship is captured under strand 2 (My Family) on pages 122 and 124 under sub-strand 2 (Types and Members of My Family) which is taught in kg 2, term 1. The indicator under sub-strand 2 (Types and Members of My Family) seeks to have pupils say a poem about the family, talk about and discuss the rights and roles of the members by following basic procedures of the community circle time (as in K2.1.1.1.1) and introducing the theme for the discussion. Then, a conversational poster (Extended Family) and some concrete materials related to the theme are displayed. After this, learners are engaged in active discussion on the theme. The teacher is expected to model how to use cultured and polite language in answering questions for learners to see and do likewise when needed. Learners are called on randomly to answer questions or contribute to the discussion. Teachers encourage learners to use think-pair-

share with peers as they discuss the theme. Learners name the members of their family and discuss the rights and roles of each of the members. For example, learners have a right to education and a role to be obedient and help their mothers/parent with the household chores. The old curriculum also has the same topic 'My Family' on page 74 which is taught in KG 1, term 3. It also seeks to address cultural identity and global citizenship by helping learners identify members of the family and talk about roles of the family members. Learners are also expected to describe what they can do to help the family. The old curriculum seems to be addressing the concept of family better than the new curriculum as all activities pertaining to the topic 'My Family' in the old curriculum are geared towards helping learners to identify family members and their roles unlike the new curriculum which seeks to have learners follow basic procedures of the community circle time to introduce the theme 'MY Family' to learners and display a conversational poster (Extended Family) and some concrete materials related to the theme.

Still under strand 2 (My Family), sub-strand 3 (Family Celebrations and Festivals) on page 129 of the new curriculum which is taught in KG 2, term 1, learners are expected to discuss the importance of activities we engage in during festivals and family celebrations and sing folk tunes and religious songs. This is to be achieved by a teacher displaying a conversational poster on celebration and letting learners discuss the activities that go on during their family celebrations. Learners display concrete materials and costumes they wear and why they wear them. They also talk about the activities they do with their families during the religious celebrations and traditional festivals and also engage in active discussion about the religious festivals of their families for instance Christmas, Eid -al fitr, Eid-ul- Adar, Easter and so on. This will allow learners to identify themselves as belonging to various religious groups and their celebrations. Learners also get to acquaint themselves with some traditional festivals in their communities which helps to foster cultural identity. The old curriculum has a similar topic 'Festivals and other Celebrations' on page 87 which is taught in KG 2. It also attempts to help learners mention some common celebrations in the home and community and also identify some of the ethnic groups and the festivals they celebrate. Both the old and the new curricular seem to be addressing the issue of cultural identity and global citizenship effectively.

The strand 5 'My Nation Ghana', under the sub-strand K1.5.1: 'History and Celebration of Ghana's Independence' on pages 61 to 63 of the new curriculum which is taught in KG 1, term 2 attempts to address cultural identity and global citizenship by teaching learners to locate their home regions on an outline map of Ghana and talk about the history behind their festivals. It also seeks to have learners retell the story about Ghana's independence and demonstrate respect for the symbols and songs of our nation. This indeed is a good attempt to make

learners know their history as Ghanaians, retell the story about Ghana's independence, demonstrate respect for our national symbols and songs, know the festivals they celebrate in their various communities and why those festivals are celebrated. This will instill among pupils, a culture of identity, a sense of belonging and patriotism. Where we have a challenge with the new curriculum is where it said that learners (KG 1) should locate their home regions on an outline map of Ghana as this is seen to be above the level of the learners. The old curriculum attempts to address cultural identity and global citizenship under the topic 'Festivals and other Celebrations' on page 87 which is taught in KG 2. It captures Ghana's Independence Day celebration as part of the celebrations in the community which means, no prominence is given to our Independence Day celebration as it is done in the new curriculum.

The last strand that seeks to address cultural identity and global citizenship is strand 4 (My Local Community), sub-strand 2 (Knowing (Who) the Important People/Occupation in My Community) on page 150 of the new curriculum which is taught in KG 2, term 2. The content standard seeks to have learners demonstrate understanding of knowing the important people/occupation in our community. This, learners can do by talking about and discussing the various occupations in our community. Teachers are to show pictures of various occupations and discuss each occupation and what they do. Learners are also to indicate their preferred and aspired occupation. Interestingly, there is no any topic in the old curriculum talking about occupations in my community.

IV. CONCLUSION

The new curriculum dubbed - curriculum for change and sustainable development – is arranged under broad themes or strands around which the content of the curriculum is woven. These themes are as follows; All About Me, My Family, Values and Beliefs, My Local Community, My Nation Ghana, All Around Us and My Global Community. Among these themes that seek to address cultural identity and global citizenship as a core competency are; My Family, My Local Community and My Nation Ghana. It is interesting to note that there is no cultural identity and global citizenship as a core competency under the theme/strand, Values and Beliefs. Most of the sub-strands in the new curriculum that seek to address cultural identity can be found in the old curriculum as topics. For example, strand 2 (My Family), sub-strand 2 (Types and Members of My Family) on page 122 of

the new curriculum is the same as the topic 'My Family' page 74 in the old curriculum which basically talk about the same thing. Sub-strand 3 (Family Celebrations and Festivals) under the same strand 2 (My Family) on page 129 of the new curriculum is the same topic 'Festivals and other Celebrations' on page 87 of the old curriculum. This suggests that the new standard based curriculum is a direct replica of the old curriculum. This is because the choice of words in some cases may differ but the themes of both curricular are the same.

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