

INTERSECTION OF POLITICS AND EDUCATION: NAVIGATING POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

As educational institutions increasingly become battlegrounds for ideological conflicts, the impact of political beliefs on educational content and pedagogy becomes more pronounced especially for the achievement of sustainable development goals. This paper investigates the complex relationship between politics and education, particularly how political ideologies influence curriculum and instructional practices in modern classrooms towards sustainable development. The paper examines education, politics and curriculum frameworks, and their implications for curriculum design, teacher autonomy, student engagement, and sustainable economic development. The paper looked on one hand, at how politics affects curriculum content, teaching strategies, and resource allocation, and on the other hand how education influences civic engagement, policy-making and social equality. The paper concludes that rather than attempting to eliminate politics from education, we should promote transparency, inclusivity, and critical thinking within the curriculum and instructional practices. Such an approach will empower students to navigate complex issues and become better informed and engaged citizens that will drive the economy forward towards the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Politics, education, political ideologies, curriculum and instruction, sustainable development

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, with countries and all stakeholders acting in collaborative partnership to implement this plan. The Agenda also seeks to strengthen universal peace and provides a common vision for peaceful societies. It is a unanimous call for ‘a people-centred and planet-sensitive agenda to ensure human dignity, equality, environmental stewardship, healthy economies, freedom from want and fear, and a renewed global partnership for sustainable development’ (UN General Assembly 2014). In his report to the UN General Assembly, A Life of Dignity for All: Accelerating Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and Advancing the UN Development Agenda beyond 2015, the UN Secretary-General recommended the development of a universal, integrated and human rights-based agenda for sustainable development, addressing economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship, and highlighting the link between peace, development and human rights (UN General Assembly, 2013). The UN Secretary-General reiterated much of this in his synthesis report on the post-2015 Agenda,

The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet (UN General Assembly, 2014). The debate over political ideology in curriculum and instruction has long been a contentious issue in education (Apple, 2004). As a reflection of society's values and beliefs, educational content often mirrors the prevailing political climate, raising questions about objectivity, bias, and the role of schools in shaping students' worldviews (Freire, 1970). In line with this, this article explores education, curriculum and instruction, politics and sustainable development as follows:

Education

Is a continuous process by which a society makes its members to understand and imbibe its acceptable culture and values for their constructive development and to make laudable contributions to their societies and its sustainability in future. Education is critical in shaping individual and collective knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable people to move along pathways towards sustainable development, and as a catalyst for development itself. It is a key determinant of social and economic transformation, and an essential precursor to peace, tolerance and sustainability. It equips learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to be responsible global citizens, such as respect for human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability. According to UNICEF (2015), In addition to increasing economic growth and reducing poverty, quality education provides numerous other human development outcomes, including improved health and wellbeing, a lower likelihood of conflict and improved socio-economic prospects for future generations. So also Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals vision 2030 signals the need to ensure that individuals contribute to sustainable development through enhancing their competencies across the learning phases of education. It states that: 'By 2030, ensure that all learners should acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development'. As such, education is both a goal in itself and a key enabler for ensuring the achievement of the other 16 Sustainable Development Goals.' this knowledge and skills required for sustainable development can only be achieved through education and the curriculum specifically designed and implemented towards the realization of these goals.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to the formal and informal content, experiences, and knowledge that students encounter in educational settings. It encompasses planned and unplanned learning experiences, including explicit and implicit messages, values, and beliefs that shape students' understanding of the world. The curriculum includes not only the formal syllabus but also the hidden curriculum, which consists of the unwritten rules, norms, and values that influence student learning. Education for sustainable development is a pedagogical approach that aims to make sustainability relevant to all students; no matter what subject they study. It prioritizes active and applied learning and takes a holistic definition of sustainability, incorporating social, economic, and environmental concerns as set out by the United Nations sustainable development goals.

Politics

Politics refers to the social and economic structures, institutions, and processes that shape power relationships, resource allocation, and decision-making within society. In the context of education, politics influences what knowledge is valued, whose perspectives are represented, and how students are prepared for citizenship. Easton (1981) described politics as the authoritative allocation of values for a society, while Fabunmi (2005) defined politics as any power-structured relationship or arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. These definitions give insight into the issues of power, control and values and their relationship in terms of what people will get. It is thus clear that politics is centred on power acquisition for the control of a group of people as well as their resources to achieve set goals. The idea of power acquisition, which is a central issue in the definitions, signifies that it will be characterized by struggle. This is the reason why politics at all level is considered as a struggle. For instance, Nwolise (1997) considered politics whether at the national or international level fundamentally and ultimately as the struggle for the minds and resources of men and nations. The definition of politics put forward by Fabunmi and Alimba (2005) as “the power to allocate powers between individuals, communities, and nations” signals the fact that the essence of getting power is to ensure the proper organization of a society by ensuring that powers are equitably distributed among the competing units to better the lives of people in a society. Politics can therefore be described as the process through which power is acquired with the concerns to improve the welfare and well-being of people for sustainable development. From the above illustrations, one can confidently argue that politics connotes power, authority, control and influence acquisition of resources which can be used effectively for sustainable development through provision of free and compulsory education, access to free books and writing materials, good schools and formulation of favourable education policies that will gear the nation towards economic growth and achievement of sustainable development goals.

The Politics of Education

Education has always been political, as it involves decisions about what knowledge is valued, whose perspectives are represented, and how students are prepared for citizenship (Kumashiro, 2009). Political ideology influences what knowledge is deemed essential for students, with some approaches emphasizing critical thinking and student-centered pedagogues, while others focus on rote memorization and standardized testing (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Babalola (2005) also posited that politics is the protection of domain, acquisition of power, support building, influence gathering and self-service. Equally, politics has been defined as the process of conflict resolution.

This diverse opinions shows that politics is solemnly an activity that is centered on human beings. However, the basic elements deduced from the above is that: politics involves the allocation of values (Alimba, 2017) and use of legitimate authorities (Fabunmi, 2005) on human beings and how it can be used as a tool to improve the welfare of people in a particular place. Sustainable development is an approach to growth and human development that aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The aim is to have a society where living conditions and resources meet human needs without undermining planetary integrity. Education for Sustainable Development requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change behaviours and take action for sustainable development.

Curriculum development is also a critical site for political ideology, as it determines what knowledge is deemed essential for students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Political leanings can influence the selection of texts, historical narratives, and scientific theories, potentially marginalizing certain perspectives or promoting a dominant ideology (Oakes, 2005). This shows that variations exist in the way curriculum activities are designed and determines what the society values in-terms of education. This was pinpointed by Ijaduola, Odunaike and Ajayi (2012) who posited that no educational system can escape from the political community in which it operates. The system must reflect what the political community wants it to do. The idea and orientation formulated by the political community will be imparted on the populace by the educational system to moderate their behaviors and attitudes to reflect the acceptable way of the people. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) also, which is the political document that gives direction to how education should operate in the country, stipulates in section 1 sub-section 9 (f) that “efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs”. The document further indicated, in the same section, that “a nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool” (p.1). This explains the importance of politics in education as well as the significance of education in politics. The contribution of one will influence the way the other will behave.

Curriculum Development: The Framework for Sustainable Development

In the light of the global adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the mandate of the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers and the priorities of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, Curriculum Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals to support countries in addressing all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and their 169 targets, through education. This framework reinforces the connections between the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and education through a holistic life course approach (early childhood care and education (ECCE), primary education, secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET)/skills development, tertiary education, and adult education and learning), taking into account the Sustainable Development Goal targets and the relevant indicators. The Curriculum Framework focuses on relevance to enable the delivery of the SDGs; which is integral to quality of education. A relevant curriculum provides space for learners to explore, analyse and engage with their environment and the world around them and, in the process, strengthen the knowledge and skills that will enable them to understand and deal with complex issues that affect the environment and society now and in the future. The Curriculum Framework will articulate this vision of learning for sustainability. The Curriculum Framework is intended to be a flexible, non-prescriptive tool that follows a competency development model through a combination of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It also aims to enable the delivery of the SDGs by ensuring that each population has the relevant skills, knowledge, values and attitudes for social, economic and environmental development, and to work in partnership to create peaceful societies.

By serving as a guide for member countries to review or develop their national curricula, the Curriculum Framework aims to ensure that all citizens of the Commonwealth develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to flourish in life, learning and work through education, and to appreciate their place in a diverse world, while building and

strengthening pathways to peace and tolerance. It aims to help all those involved in planning and delivering education and learning, across all sectors and settings, to bring about the transformation changes needed for people to lead fulfilling lives. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes identified are relevant from the early years right through to adult learning, and they set the foundation for a holistic, values based participatory and action oriented education system, which is essential for generating positive change and sustainable development.

The Curriculum Framework can support the design, delivery and evaluation of national curricula across the Commonwealth, set the foundations for research and development, provide consistency across programmes for achieving the SDGs, and support the creation of learning and evaluation tools to align with the framework. This framework will guide countries in defining their contextual needs and the basic requirements related to competencies that must be demonstrated or acquired in order to achieve the objectives of the SDGs through education, and within the current or evolving policy contexts. The framework is therefore necessarily broad and can be applied to diverse learning contexts, including formal, informal and non-formal learning. It provides a holistic picture and a lens or model to help frame the entire curriculum in alignment with sustainable development (assessing countries' strengths and weaknesses as well as current and future challenges). It will provide a tool to ensure that the SDGs achieve transformative outcomes through education by developing a multisectoral mechanism to catalyse work across sectors. The framework is a tool for orienting towards sustainability through education. It supports a holistic life course approach involving:

- i. new paradigm thinking (systems thinking, integrative thinking, critical and creative thinking);
- ii. new learning and delivery approaches;
- iii. integration of different types and forms of knowledge including indigenous and traditional knowledge systems;
- iv. core competencies;
- v. the interconnectedness of the challenges and linkages between the SDGs;
- vi. the integrated continuum of the complex interplay of social and environmental factors mixed with biological, behavioural and psychological issues that help to define learning outcomes and skills development across the course of a person's life
- vii. values, attitudes and ethics, including inclusion and democracy, respect for people and all life forms, equity and social justice, quality of life, care and duty, and sustainability;
- viii. strengthened equity, tolerance and respect for others;
- ix. enhanced individual and collective responsibility; and
- x. new learning delivery and approaches.

Sustainable development goals; the intersection of politics and curriculum/instruction

The importance of effective teaching and learning throughout all learning phases, both in motivating learners to continue learning throughout their lives and in equipping them with the knowledge and skills to do so cannot be over emphasized. This according to Amartya (2013) is that the 'nature of the curriculum, is of course relevant to the development of technical skills (such as computing) that facilitate participation in the contemporary world. However,

there are other issues involved which could hinder the acquisition of the skill values and attitudes as stated in the sustainable development goals. This is also shown in the inter relatedness of the sustainable development goals, failure to achieve goal number one for example; 'End poverty in all its form everywhere' could lead to failure to achieve several other goals. Education and poverty are inversely related. Populations with high education levels have a lower number of people in poverty, as education imparts knowledge and skills that garner higher wages. The direct effect of education on poverty reduction is through increased earnings or income. The indirect effect of education on poverty is that education improves income, and thus makes the fulfillment of basic necessities easier and raises living standards, reducing human poverty. Education indirectly helps in the fulfillment of basic needs such as water and sanitation, utilization of health facilities and shelter, and also affects women's behaviour towards reproductive health and family planning (Jeffery & Basu, 1996). Conversely, poverty is a barrier to education. This shows that when political leaders eliminate poverty in the society through provision of food, good housing, clean water, affordable and free healthcare, schools, free education, and employment opportunities the people will feel powerful enough to affect their lives and the powers that govern them. It means that the people will feel secured enough to come to school and learn the knowledge, skills and values that are essential for sustainable development as designed in the curriculum. Government need human capital in order to utilize its physical and natural capital, technological and skills, and these human capital can only be made possible through education and the development of rich curriculum content and instructional strategies.

The education sector contributes to food security through several components, including 1) food availability (e.g. through growing produce in school gardens); 2) proper use of food (e.g. sanitation, hygiene, and nutrition education); and 3) as a safety net, the provision of school meals helps to keep children in school and thus helps families to educate their children and protect their food security in times of crisis (World Food Programme, 2016). Education and food security interact in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways. People who are well nourished live, learn and work longer, and contribute to achieving their societies' aspirations for inclusive economic growth, human development, environmental health and innovation. Education plays a key role in helping people move towards more sustainable farming methods, promoting sustainable small scale agriculture and understanding of nutrition. Investing in agricultural education and training is essential. This includes rural agricultural development through agricultural colleges and universities (teaching, research and outreach) at all levels, for farmers, extension service providers, researchers, etc. to develop a knowledge system and support network, and upgrading the skills and capacities of individuals involved in all aspects of agricultural innovation.

Instructional practices are also shaped by political ideology, with some approaches emphasizing critical thinking and student-centered pedagogies, while others focus on rote memorization and standardized testing (Giroux, 2011). These differences in approach can impact students' ability to engage with complex issues, think critically, and develop informed opinions (Westheimer, 2015).

Impact of Politics on Student Learning

The infusion of political ideology into curriculum and instruction can have significant consequences for student learning (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). On one hand, it can foster critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement by exposing students to diverse perspectives and encouraging them to question assumptions. On the other hand, it can lead to a narrow, biased education that reinforces existing power structures and limits students' understanding of complex issues. Politics in education is an indispensable area of educational administration that focuses on the best decision making process regarding how allocation and distribution of resources should be for the performance of education and sustainable development. This informs the need to take the issues of politics seriously, to ensure that it is not left in the hands of the incompetent ones so as to prevent the defilement of education. This is because politics can influence education in various ways, which can be positive or negative in nature. When the influence is positive, education will grow and develop considerably as expected for the benefit of individuals and the society at large. However, when the influence is negative, education will be adversely affected and sustainable development will be hindered. These shows that politics has an important impact on education in any society.

Effects of Politics on Education and Curriculum for Sustainable Development

1. **Curriculum Content:** Political ideology influences the selection of texts, historical narratives, and scientific theories, potentially marginalizing certain perspectives or promoting a dominant ideology (Kumashiro, 2009). For sustainable development the content of curriculum must reflect world's best practices and tools that will equip students with skills and knowledge necessary for innovation and problem solving.
2. **Teaching methods:** Political leanings shape instructional practices, with some approaches emphasizing critical thinking and student-centered pedagogies, while others focus on rote memorization and standardized testing (Cochran-Smith, 2004). To achieve sustainable development the methods of instruction to be used in teaching should be skill based and student centered this will ensure that all the needs of the student to learn, innovate and solve problems has been catered for.
3. **Resource allocation:** Political decisions impact funding, leading to disparities in resources, facilities, and opportunities for students (Oakes, 2005). Education is resource based and for sustainable development to be ensured through education and learning a huge percentage of the yearly budgetary allocations of government both at the National, State, and Local level should be pledged for the funding of education. Not only pledged but proper policies for implementation should also be put in place so as to avoid misappropriation and diversion with sanctions where necessary for defaulters. Government at all level should ensure that the funds allocated are properly used for the intended purpose.
4. **Teacher Autonomy:** Political pressures can limit teachers' ability to design curriculum, choose materials, and teach controversial topics (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The teacher is the backbone of all education system and behind every successful curriculum there is a teacher. In order to achieve sustainable development through education, Government must provide

the education sector with adequate manpower to manipulate the resources available and to teach effectively and with adequate enumeration, welfare and incentives the teacher will not only teach effectively but will also drive the nation towards economic growth and sustainable development.

5. **Student outcomes:** Political ideology can influence student assessment, graduation requirements, and post-secondary opportunities (Giroux, 2011).

Effects of Education and Curriculum on Politics for Sustainable Development

1. **Shaping civic engagement:** Education prepares students for citizenship, influencing their political participation, voting habits, and community involvement (Westheimer, 2015). This shows that when governments provide the resources for effective schools adequately, education will ensure that students are better prepared to serve the government and promote its economic growth thereby increasing output and sustainable development.
2. **Informing policy decisions:** Educational research and data inform policy decisions, shaping political agendas and resource allocation (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This shows that with the impact of research carried out through education, government officials are provided with a breath of knowledge capable of moving the nation to a higher stride enabling policy makers to make informed decision about policies that can move the nation forward towards achieving sustainable development.
3. **Reproducing or challenging social inequality:** Education can perpetuate or challenge existing power structures, influencing social mobility and political representation (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).
4. **Fostering critical thinking and media literacy:** Education can empower students to critically evaluate information, navigate political polarization, and engage in informed discourse (Giroux, 2011).
5. **Developing future leaders:** Education shapes the knowledge, skills, and values of future political leaders, influencing the trajectory of political ideologies and policies (Apple, 2004).

Conclusion

This article probed into the issues of politics of education, curriculum and instruction and its implications for sustainable development. The issues of politics, education and politics of education and curriculum were conceptualized with the insight to increase understanding of how they operate thereby easily establishing their inter-connectedness with achieving sustainable development goals. The imperativeness of politics in education as well as the relevance of education in the wider political landscape was elucidated to show their importance for the greater good of humanity. The idea of political behaviour often displayed in education was examined, emphasizing the intricacies of the different political behaviours and curriculum frameworks, Politics is inextricably linked to education just as education underpins the efficacy and efficiency of the politics in the society. The performance of political leaders hinges on their training and exposure acquired through education. The review concludes that the intersection of political ideology and education is complex and multifaceted and rather than attempting to eliminate politics from education, we should strive for transparency, inclusivity, and critical

thinking to empower students to navigate complex issues and become better informed, better engaged, and innovative critical thinking citizens so as to derive the economy forward and ensure the achievement of sustainable development goals as stipulated by the united nations.

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