

The Curriculum for Human Development

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Abstract

Each year, there are steadily increasing rates of jobless youth, cases of mental illnesses and suicide among other issues that negatively impact the society. It is no surprise that even as countries become more economically developed, there seems to be a regression when it comes to the social and mental aspects of the human being. The curriculum, world over, has focused on educating students on how they can pass exams, acquire jobs and fend for themselves while it has practically ignored the most essential human needs, which are character, wellness and contentment. Hygge is a Danish art that emphasizes on wellbeing and this explains why the Danes are some of the happiest people in the world. If education was fashioned to cater for the most intrinsic human needs such as wellbeing, then some of the

physical needs would be tackled simply by contentment and that would curb many social evils such as theft, corruption and fraud. This underscores that there are certain issues in curriculum review and development that have barely been addressed and even where they have been addressed, students do not understand the importance of certain arts of life due to the bureaucratic culture that they have been brought up in. This suggests that there needs to be radical changes in the curriculum in order to have a well- functioning society where peoples' well-being is at the forefront of every subject.

The Curriculum for Human Development

'Education is the key to success' is a common saying that bares truth as evidenced by the success of educated people all over the world such as Malala Yousafzai, Theresa May and need I mention Barrack Obama? The success is luring and is seen as a means to a goal but has had negative effects on the society that need to be addressed. Education has reinforced the bureaucratic system. Everyone is in a rat race to acquire information, get a job and get to higher ranks. This fosters competition and selfishness. People trying to acquire more and more wealth but still there is a fundamental issue even among those who achieve success in this way. People are more depressed, the rich and poor alike and there are high levels of discontentment and entitlement, but this is the system that they have been brought up in. Curricula have made their contribution towards this society. Is there something that should change in curricula in the world for better societies?

We go through vast measures to eliminate poverty and inequality, protect the environment, encourage cooperation and the maintenance of peace and generally to have a better world. There are many international organizations with a mandate to bring about development. Funds have been used to sponsor thousands of projects and even though some have brought development, some have failed and have not proven efficient. Despite all these measures, people are still languishing in extreme poverty. Food security is still an issue and poor

standards of life encompass most societies if not all. People have been affected by depression and divorce rates are ever increasing. Even in a family where people should find happiness, there are certain flaws that if carefully examined, arise from the lack of certain concepts that could be learnt in a good curriculum. Curricula are therefore more focused on economic growth rather than human development and this has detrimental effects to society.

According to the World Health Organization, one person dies from suicide every forty seconds, many of them being young people within ages 15-29. More than 300 million people suffer from depression and this is one of the leading causes of suicide. Among these people are those who have undergone different education systems that have ignored intrinsic human needs such as mental wellness. Suicide rates in Kenya have risen by 58% from 2008- 2017. In most curricula world over, there are no specific classes to teach virtues, social skills, wellness and taking care of physical and mental health. In observing the working class, those who thrive are those who are able to balance their work well, are able to manage stress levels, are emotionally intelligent and take time to care for themselves both physically and mentally but unfortunately, not many of them are able to do this. (WHO)

In Western countries, rich people and celebrities have been caught up in drug abuse, crime and suicide despite the levels of education and wealth. It is however true that most suicide rates occur in low- and middle-income countries (WHO). In Western Europe, Belgium is one of the states with the highest suicide rates. Belgium has doctor- assisted suicides (World Population Report). Belgium has the most liberal laws on doctor- assisted suicide. With a well- developed curriculum, preservation of life should be at the forefront, taking a stance towards laws that allow for the preservation of life.

Drug abuse and cancer are on the rise yet things such as good diet for healthy living that lead to longer lives are not inculcated in the curriculum. Primary and high school students find themselves well into drugs before they learn of cancer, liver cirrhosis or the neurological impacts of drug abuse. Drug abuse causes changes in brain development that can lead to underperformance. Many states have legalised or are in the process of legalising the use of marijuana. Marijuana is common among the youth in Kenya and many do not know the side effects of this drug. Dependence on this drug is more evident in people who took the drug from their teen and pre-teen years. They learn of the detrimental effects of drugs when they are well into taking them. Withdrawal becomes hard and lives are filled with regret and trying to take back lost years. Death suddenly seems more lucrative than life. We have broken societies despite having gone through the curriculum and learning what is essential for life. Do curricula really teach what is essential for life?

Struggle Education

Governments are adapting new curricula inclined towards human development. However, the fundamental values of life are not being adopted into these curricula. Even in the most developed curricula, students from a young age are confused about things such as their gender and personalities. We still have prejudice and even in the most developed societies there is racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance and sexism. Kenya's education curriculum is highly theoretical. There have been changes developed in Kenya's curriculum which are more inclined towards human development, but the adjustment mechanism raises questions.

The new curriculum seems promising and it is more like the Western world's curriculum, but can we really adopt this model that has managed to produce a society with 50% of divorce rates considering the effects divorce has on children including affecting school performance?

Students have had to deal with the loss of parents and a low sense of self-worth due to their family backgrounds and experiences but there are no systems to ensure the wellbeing of such students. They become resentful and this is how their characters develop. They grow up with a negative attitude towards life and keep failing in school because that is how they have grown up. Experiences shape character.

Developing character is the most important aspect of education. With tenacity and perseverance, even the less intelligent students are able to work hard and succeed. Measures should be put in place to help develop students' character and virtues such as patience and hard work. Children are more intelligent than we perceive them to be. They learn faster and it is important to let them learn what they can while they are still young. This does not mean to impose information and learning on them but to develop their interests. Children should be exposed to arts, languages, music, dancing, sports, poetry and whatever valuable skills necessary while they are still young. These arts, such as languages and music can be evaluated, and a degree awarded even before they go to college. This gives them a chance for job opportunities while still young.

Arts are not only an investment but because of neuroplasticity, they help the brain grow and become more intelligent. Such neurological facts should also be taught in schools because students can learn that they can become intelligent and their grades can change. Attitudes towards education, personal expectation and self-drive are important tools for education success. Many students who fail in school are highly intelligent but despair because they believe that just because their grades have been dropping, that means that they are failures. They simply do not understand how the brain works and that the brain can be rewired for positive thinking.

Rosenthal's Rat Experiment

Robert Tyron did an experiment to show that genetic differences just like experiences and environment produced individual behavioural variations. He exposed genetically diverse groups of rats to a maze and termed the ones who made the fewest errors as 'maze bright' and the ones that made more errors as 'maze dull'. He then mated the 'bright males' with 'bright females' and 'dull males' with 'dull females'. Tyron repeated the same test with the children of the rats, mating the 'maze bright' males with 'maze bright' females and 'maze dull' males with 'maze dull' females. Tyron repeated his experiment for seven generations. The 'maze bright' rats made fewer mistakes than the 'maze dull' rats even those that had been cross-fostered to be raised by the maze dull mothers. In this experiment, Robert Tyron showed that genetics and nature make a difference in intellectual abilities.

Some people are born intelligent by virtue of their genetics while others, by virtue of their genetics, may not be as intelligent as illustrated by Robert Tyron's experiment. But can intelligent people really achieve success in education if they have a negative attitude towards learning? Everyone fails at some point and if intelligent students fail, do they understand how

the brain works and that they are not becoming unintelligent, rather, they need to put more effort? In the Kenyan system, many people who succeed in primary school do not necessarily succeed in secondary school and one of the reasons is the failure to understand how the brain works. Another question raised is can the less intelligent people by virtue of their genetics become intelligent?

While Tyron showed everyone that intelligence is also dependant on genetics, he did not show that intelligence can be learnt or bred. The 'maze bright' rats were not necessarily smart. They were bred to have the ability. Another study was done by psychology students in 1963. A Harvard psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, had twelve psychology students repeating the same experiment with rats bred as 'maze bright' and others 'maze dull'. They were told to train the rats to choose the darker arm in a T maze. They were given five days to train the rats to complete the maze. After those five days, the 'maze-bright' rats completed the maze twice as fast as the 'maze dull' rats. What the psychology students did not know was that the rats had been selected at random, which meant that the rats performed how they had been trained. The participants who were told they had 'bright' rats, helped the rats perform better because they unconsciously handled the rats differently.

In Rosenthal's experiment, attitude and expectations have an impact on people's performance. People can be 'bred' and trained to succeed. This shows the importance of developing certain traits and skills in children while they are still young. They grow up believing that they are intelligent, and their attitudes are reflected on their performance.

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change, remodel and reorganise in order to adapt to new situations. While we continually practice a certain activity, neuronal circuits are being formed and strengthened. We eventually become masters of a skill and we can learn anything through practice. If children can know this from a young age, their attitudes towards education and challenging tasks can change. Their attitudes towards life is positive. Things can be learnt, and education is enjoyable. With neuroplasticity, not only are skills learnt, but character is also developed through practice. Character refers to the aspects of our personality that we develop through the way we respond to situations. We can teach our brain to always respond positively.

The Stanford Marshmallow Experiment:

Psychologist Walter Mischel conducted a series of studies on delayed gratification in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In these series of studies, a child, ages 4-6 years old would be asked to sit in a room with a marshmallow on the table in front of them. The child was offered a deal, that if he would not eat the marshmallow while the researcher left the room, they would be awarded a second marshmallow when he came back. The choice was simple, either eating one immediately or two later.

The researchers did a follow up study. They tracked the progress of all the children that participated in the marshmallow experiment. The ones who were patient and waited to receive another marshmallow had higher performances in school, better social skills, better responses to stress and lower levels drug abuse than those who were not willing to delay

gratification. The researchers followed up on each child for more than 40 years and they kept on performing better in life. Success is therefore not only dependent on intelligence but character.

Character is developed, and the curriculum should take this into account and teach children and students the importance of certain skills and their benefits. They produce a better society with individuals who are determined to achieve success at every level as demonstrated by the Stanford marshmallow experiment.

Recommendations: Towards a Better World

It is already quite evident that curricula have not taken into account some intrinsic human needs. They have produced a society with impatient individuals who give up before they even try. Selfish individuals who opt out of marriages when they do not get what they want. Reckless individuals who believe that they have the freedom to do whatever they want but most of them end up getting hurt. Productive individuals who are corrupt, selfish and accumulate wealth for themselves. Entitled individuals who believe the world owes them success by virtue of their parents' wealth or level of education. Highly dependant individuals who cannot do anything on their own and the list goes on and on. All these are educated individuals who have gone through education systems.

In conclusion. before we talk about world hunger, job creation and better governance, we need to teach students from a young age the importance of sharing, selflessness, a positive attitude, thanksgiving, perseverance, good health and mental wellness, emotional intelligence, tenacity, courage, contentment, passion and compassion in whatever they do. This way, we are able to produce selfless leaders hence do away with corruption. We build a compassionate society hence tackle world hunger. We have people with mental wellness hence reduce depression and suicide rates. We produce people with a positive attitude towards work and a willingness to stay focused and work hard for the betterment of society. We also have a society where people are content and understand that they cannot have everything they want. This way, we reduce social evils such as theft and bribery. People are also able to care for the environment and instead of being extravagant, they put their money to productive use such as farming. This could reduce world hunger and malnutrition immensely. A society where people are motivated to study and provide solutions to world problems and not only to be wealthy and have better life. The answer lies, not in the solutions that we take when the damage has been done, but in the measures that we take to prevent these damages. All this can be done through a curriculum inclined towards developing character, wellness and contentment.

References

World Health Organization