# Challenges related to the Zambian history curriculum and how the history school curriculum can be decolonised

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In Zambia, the attainment of independence and democracy in 1964 and 1991, respectively, necessitated innovations in the education system. After independence, different educational reforms were formulated, such as the 1977 educational reforms aimed at improving the quality of education by redesigning the Zambian education system and integrating work and study into the curriculum. The focus was to transform the school curriculum to help learners acquire different educational skills. The effort to improve the education system and change the curriculum continued, and the Ministry of Education in 1996 presented the aim of education as being the development of a complete and well-rounded individual for personal fulfilment and the good of society. Since 1964, the history school curriculum has been revamped to align with the rapidly changing world. Primary and secondary syllabi reflect Zambian history, but this has not been done to the merit. As of the 2013 revised curriculum, the Outcomes-based Education curriculum (OBE) was adopted. The introduction of the competency-based curriculum in 2013 was to help learners acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are likely to equip them with competencies that they can effectively use to serve society and the nation at large. Even though such was the case, such gains are bound to contribute little, if anything, to the curriculum process as history teaching has not been conceptualised within the context of the other human and social sciences. This article aims to explain the challenges relating to the Zambian history curriculum and further explain how the curriculum can be decolonised to suit the Zambian people.

After independence, most African countries (Zambia inclusive) revised their curricula to Africanise and decolonise the former curricula to meet their societies' growing demands and promote their local cultures. In Zambia, the effort to revise the history curriculum has been made under difficult conditions. This is because the country inherited a curriculum formulated by the colonial government. The colonial history curriculum failed to appreciate the local history to greater inclusiveness. For example, colonial masters taught much of European history by praising a European man, including the history of David Livingstone

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till his death and the history of some ethnic groups that were neglected. This has continued until the 21st century, and local history is no longer relevant. It has failed to satisfy the needs and aspirations of contemporary society. For this reason, there is a need to focus on aspects of the country's cultural heritage to enable an understanding of the origin, shortcomings, failures, and successes to have an intelligent reconstruction of the curriculum (Ng'andu, 2020).

In Zambia, teaching and learning history, as a curriculum discipline, has been characterised by political, economic, cultural, and ideological imperatives, whose teleological goal is one of the nation-building process and one of cultivating a modern dimension of national identity in the global culture. However, teachers face many challenges when teaching history because the subject's content is restricted to the curriculum. The Zambian history curriculum has not been decolonised as it contains few topics relating to the country's history (Mulenga and Mwanza, 2019). For example, the grade 11 history focuses on Europe's social, political and economic history. This history addresses issues of the world from a European perspective. When teaching World War One, pupils are only taught about Europe, not Zambia. Mbala or Abercorn is not recognised as the most important site during the war and is not included in the secondary school history curriculum. Such issues make decolonising history curricula hard (Ministry of General Education, 2013). The removal of history as an independent subject at the junior level has been received with mixed feelings. History has been incorporated into social studies, which include civics and geography. This has removed many topics, especially those related to Zambian kingdoms, of which few are taught (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011).

Further, during the curriculum implementation, history teachers are left out because they are very critical about reform; their absence in the curriculum reform process means that history is placed at a disadvantage. Mzumala (2021) revealed that teaching history at all levels must admit the inevitability of development and change. Teaching history and related disciplines should raise awareness of prejudice, discrimination, inequality, injustice, and assumptions that would otherwise go unchallenged. Without that essential way of thinking critical historical analysis, learners cannot fully enjoy learning history (Mwanza and Changwe, 2020). Some teachers I have interacted with, especially in rural areas of the Lundazi district, mentioned that they are not in contact with curriculum specialists. Some of them said that their absence had delayed them in airing out the challenges they face in teaching history, especially topics on European history (Banda, 2021).

At the primary level, history is taught in social studies, which does not advocate for better access to what teachers need to deliver sound historical ontent to the learners. The

fact is that teachers are not consulted or involved in the process of curriculum formulation or development. They have no access to participate in local or national discussions on the future of social studies, compromising the quality of the aims, goals, and purpose of what social studies should be or yield (Curriculum Development Centre, 2011). For example, Matilda Banda, one of the history teachers I contacted, mentioned that for the past ten years she had taught history, she has never been consulted by anyone from higher authority. This makes it hard for her to explain the challenges she has been facing in preparing the current history curriculum. Banda further mentioned that it is challenging to teach Zambian history to merit, and some learners describe the subject as boring (Banda, 2021).

Many teachers I have engaged with complained that the secondary history syllabus includes much European history. For example, it explains many works of Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Otto Von Bismarck and others and African leaders like Shaka are viewed as cruel leaders and never praised. Great men in Zambia who fought in world wars are never mentioned. Most of Zambian history is the history of pre-colonial times, and this focus is on labour migration and how Zambians became labourers in Copperbelt and other mines. This history is Eurocentric in nature, and it depended on gossip and rumours. It is a history of propaganda. This history is heroic in nature and judgmental. The Europeans mostly wrote what they saw, most of which was concerned with a trade that existed in the pre-colonial era (Curriculum Development Centre, 2013).

It is a pity that the country has been independent for 57 years, but its history has been neglected. Few studies have been done, and this is due lack of financial support to sponsor students to do their masters and PhDs. The country has few history professors who are old and cannot be relied on. Some of these professors are not updated with the current history. Contemporary issues in history are not well addressed because most professors depend on only the information they obtain at school (Mulenga and Mwanza, 2019). Because the examination is set in line with the syllabus, teachers do not teach what they know but what is in the syllabus. They teach what is in the book to make learners pass exams and not acquire practical skills. Most of the information in the syllabus is bookish and does not address 21st-century challenges. Most pedagogical models used in teaching history in school are teacher-centred (Curriculum Development Centre, 2013).

Despite many challenges our Zambian teachers face, I believe it is possible to decolonise the history curriculum. The following is how this can be done. Firstly, learners must gain a conceptual understanding of historical events and geographical places to understand the past. This can be more effective through the educational trip. Historical sites like the Ing'ombe Illede must be visited by the pupils at least once a term. Pupils across the country

must well utilise the Lusaka national museum. This is because the national museum is rich in the country's history. Moreover, discovery, dialogue and life experiences are essential to give learners ample chance to have first-hand information by discovering things for themselves through experiences (Mwanza and Changwe, 2020).

It can be suggested that research history courses be compulsory in all colleges and universities to allow students to participate in the writing of different local histories. This can be effective if all students research local history. For example, the University of Zambia should provide a research course to students having history as a subject. The curriculum specialists should also include history teachers before reforming the curriculum. The University of Zambia has made progress by offering Zambian history as a compulsory course. History teachers need to be consulted and their thoughts. Sponsoring the best history students is the most important thing to do as a country. Lectures and other great historians need to be involved in the history curriculum.

In conclusion, teachers face many challenges because they are not involved in curriculum reform. This challenge can end if many teachers are consulted. Also, history can be an enjoyable and worthy subject when teachers prepare effectively to foster a deep knowledge of their discipline and understand how to teach historical thinking. History teachers need to emphasise the blending of content and pedagogy. I further suggest that history teachers must be aware of contemporary issues, especially those near our region or within the country..

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