Faith Integration in Curriculum Development: A Need for an Integrated Curriculum in Post-Civil War Liberia

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Abstract: *Integration of faith and learning practitioners must be able to develop an integrated curriculum which includes the focused, intentional and targeted integration approach as recommended in this paper. The integration should include various aspects like the programs of studies, the lesson plans and the evaluation of learning activities. Furthermore, the integrated curriculum should be designed to include faith aspects in learning through intra-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches. The paper further expounds on the meaning and significance of an integrated curriculum for Christian educators. The case is post-civil war Liberia and the major question of the paper is, how can an integrated curriculum bridge the gap of the missing link of faith integration in curriculum development in Liberia? Consequently, a proposed model is provided for Christian education stakeholders in Liberia. The model can be applicable across Christian educators worldwide.*

Key words: Curriculum, curriculum development, faith, integration, integrated curriculum, Liberia

Introduction

Imagine, what would happen if the best carpenters were taken to a hospital to perform neurosurgical and dental services on patients? Either those carpenters would choose to use their tools to work on the patients' brains and teeth or refuse to do anything with their tools. Consequently, those patients' brains and teeth problems would remain unresolved because what carpenters can do with their tools are far different from what neurosurgeons and dentists can do with theirs. Likewise, faith integration in curriculum development is about integration of Faith and Learning (IFL) practitioners to make use of the right tools to improve the curriculum in question.

This study emanated from previous studies conducted by the author where it was discovered that faith integration was indispensable for Christian educators because IFL was what they pursued (Trye, 2017, Trye, Henriquez-Green, and Green, 2019). The studies underpin the consciousness of faith integration where educational stakeholders at selected Christian institutions in Asia were conversant with IFL practices. The IFL practices were seen in the curricular materials, heard in the languages used on campus and felt by students and even strangers who visited those institutions. It was seen in the institutions' policies, mission statements, visions, core values, bulletin, course outlines and teachers' lesson plans. The practices were also heard in the speeches of the teachers, the songs, and music played on those campuses. Besides, prayers, counseling and hospitality were shown by the administrators, faculty, and students in those institutions (Trye, 2017, Henriquez-Green, and Green, 2019). The product of that research was an innovation configuration map for the integration of faith and learning practices which included ten components. The ten components are biblical foundation, shared commitment, integrated lifestyle, integrated curriculum, pedagogical practices, healthy productive learning environment, critical thinking, IFL professional development plan,

IFL modeling and Integrated Strategies. Specifically, the fifth component, integrated curriculum is being disseminated in this medium to fulfill the recommendations of Trye (2017).

When it comes to the case of Liberia, faith integration in curriculum can be briefly summarized into three historical periods. The pre-independence years of Liberia goes far back to 1461 AD when the Portuguese explorers travelled to West Africa (Guannu, 2010; Nelson, 1985). They named the place the Malagueta Coast after the pepper found there (Fyfe, 1995). Also, as mentioned by Johnson (2001), before the inception of western education in Liberia, there was already a traditional system of indigenous education in the pre-independence Liberia. The people made use of an informal curriculum to transmit their cultural practices from generation to generation (Fyfe, 1995; Guannu, 2010; Johnson, 2001). For instance, Fyfe (1995) explained that as early as 1000 CE, there existed secret societies like the Poro society and the Sande society among the Mende tribal people of West Africa. The Poro society was a bush school meant for training young boys to become responsible men in the society while the Sande society was a traditional school meant for training young girls the rudiments of womanhood (Fyfe, 1995). Faith integration in Liberia during this era was predominantly about the inculcation of the African indigenous values which is now referred to as African traditional religion.

The second phase of faith integration in curriculum development in Liberia transpired between the Americo-Liberians and the native-Liberians in the 1800s (Guannu, 2010; Nelson, 1985). During this time, faith integration continued with the foremost purpose of civilizing and Christianizing the native Liberians (Akpan, 1973; Sherman, 2010). Thus, the Americo-Liberians built churches and schools to transmit a formal educational system which was predominantly Western in nature. Due to the influence of the Western education, many educated native Liberians continue to speak English instead of their native languages (Akpan, 1973; Sherman, 2010). Both the Americo-Liberians and the natives Liberians witnessed the independence of Liberia on July 26, 1847 (Guannu, 2010; Nelson, 1985; Sherman, 2010). Unfortunately, between 1979 and 2003, Liberia witnessed a series of civil unrests which led to death, destruction of properties and displacement of people (Sherman, 2010). Every sector of the country, including education was marred by the negative impact of the civil war.

In 2003, the civil war in Liberia came to an end. Since then, post-civil war Liberia is gradually recovering from its ugly past. Generally, the educational system runs from primary to university education (Sherman, 2010). Currently, there are more than 30 institutions of higher learning of which, 18 are faith-based. The number of faith-based educational institutions in Liberia is higher than that of the government institutions (NCHE, 2020). However, when it comes to faith integration in curriculum, during this third phase of Liberia, it has been observed that Christian educators in Liberia are lacking IFL resources (Trye, 2018). Therefore, it can be deduced from the foregoing trend that over the years, attempts had been made to integrate faith in Liberia through various means. Despite the consciousness of Christian education in Liberia, there still exists a missing link of faith integration in the curricula (Trye, 2018).

Justification of the Methodological Approach
Since the primary focus of this study was to further expound on an integrated curriculum from IFL perspective, the researcher made use of a theoretical analysis. A theoretical analysis was suitable for this paper because it provides clearer explanations to complex phenomena principles (Ellis, 2014; Trye, Jr., Henriquez-Green & Green, 2019). Added to that, a theoretical analysis has to do with a systematic investigation that critically reexamine well-known thoughts and practices held by practitioners of a given of field of study (Beauchamp,1982).The two major phenomena of this paper are faith integration and curriculum development. There are varieties of theories and practices surrounding each of them. The literature on faith integration, curriculum development and integrated curriculum were critically reviewed and synthesized to come up with suggestions that could be useful to Christian educators. In a nutshell, the methodology of this article is a juxtaposition of a literature review and the researcher's personal thoughts and experience pertaining to the best practices of faith integration in curriculum development.

Operational Definition of Key Concepts
One word can mean many things to people of different professions. For example, the word *apple*

is a name of a fruit while at the same time apple is a brand name for electronic gadgets such as computers and phones. Similarly, the fruit *orange*, is fruit but also it is a brand name of a multinational telecommunication company. Thus, in this section of the discourse, the author deems it expedient to clarify the operational meaning of faith integration, curriculum development and integrated curriculum.

Faith Integration

Biblically, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'' (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV). Faith integration in learning was fundamental to the entire education system of the Israelites (Badley, 2009). During the exodus, Moses instructed the Israelite: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, The LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on your door post of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, New King James Version Bible). Although Jesus did not attend the school of the rabbis, faith integration also played a major role in His early life. As the Bible makes it clear, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). Each of the two passages covered all five aspects of wholesome which are education—intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional and social (Badley 1994, Knight, 1989; Rasi 1991-2000; Taylor, 2012; White, 1923).

After the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, faith integration as a concept continued to be practiced by the apostles and subsequent Christian educators (Badley, 1994). However, it was after the Second World War years, when some traditional Christian educators intentionally advocated for the practice of IFL in the United States of America (Badley, 1994; 2009). By then, some Christian schools in the United States of America were influenced by secularism and there was need for Christian educators to bring back Jesus Christ into the classroom (Badley, 1994; 2009; Clark, Johnson, & Sloat, 1991; Jacobsen et al., 2004; Marsden, 1994; Ponyatovska, 2015; Ribera, 2012; Thomas, 2011; 2012). Thus, it was during the times of prevailing lapses found in Christian

education when the term, *integration of faith and learning* came about. It first appeared in the speech of Gaebelein (1968) in an attempt to describe what an ideal Christian education is. His speech was transformed to a published book known as, *The Pattern of God's Truth,* Gaebelein (1968). In Gaebelein (1968), faith integration was about the unification of all truths to God's truth (Beck, 2008).

The IFL term has been embraced by both protestant and catholic educators. However, faith integration continues to be used among Christian educators with different synonyms like the integration of faith and learning, integration of faith in learning and integration of faith, values, and life (Glanzer, 2008; Thomas, 2011;2012). For instance Glanzer (2008), advocated for the change of the IFL nomenclature. Instead of focusing on the change of the IFL nomenclature, Seventh-day Adventist educators are primarily concerned with the promotion of faith in wholesome learning (White, 1923; Knight, 1989). Added to that, faith integration from a Seventh - day Adventist epistemological perspectives considers the Bible and the Writing of Ellen White as the foremost foundation of which knowledge and truth can be tested (White, 1923; Knight, 1989). Hence, the Adventist education is balanced in a sense that it embraces any theory that supports the wholesome development of the student spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially. To a large extend, what makes any educational entity to behave the way they do is their curriculum.

Curriculum Development

Describing the concept of curriculum is not quite simple. It is like the famous Indian parable of the six blind men who had an encounter with an elephant. Each of the blind men touched different parts of the elephant. The blind man who held the elephant by the tail told the five other blind men that, the elephant looked like a rope. The other blind man who held the elephant by the trunk linked the elephant to a tree. The one who held the elephant by its leg was convinced that the elephant looked like a mountain, while the blind man who touched the elephant by its side argued that the elephant looked like a big wall (Saxe, 2016). This parable has to do with the different ways of describing the phenomenon of curriculum.

Etymologically, curriculum scholars do trace the meaning of curriculum to a Latin word called *currere*

which means to run on a race or a course of study (Beauchamp, 1982; Ellis, 2014; Hunkins and Ornstein, 2016; Wiles, 1999; 2008). Generally, the definitions from the literature on curriculum can be grouped into four major themes (Hunkins and Ornstein; 2016; Wiles, 2008). Firstly, curriculum is considered as a subject matter or a written document (Beauchamp, 1982; Ellis, 2014; Wiles, 2008). As a subject matter it has to do with the general notion of curriculum materials such as books and syllabi (Wiles, 1999; 2008). For instance, one of the famous contributors of curriculum as a subject matter believed that the curriculum should concentrate on five subject areas (a) The command of the mother tongue and the systematic study of grammar, literature and writing, (b) mathematics, (c) sciences, (d) history and (e) foreign language (Ellis, 2014).

Apart from the general understanding of curriculum as a subject matter, the second group of curricular scholars defined curriculum as a set of all the experiences that usually occur in an educational environment (Ellis, 2014; Wiles, 2008).This definition of curriculum is linked to the humanistic philosophical school of thought which was supported by educators like Bobbitt (1918) and Dewey (1966). For instance, Bobbitt (1918) wrote that curriculum must contain all the things that children and youth must do and experience at a school. Similarly, Dewey (1966) advocated for the practice of democracy in education. He believed that play should be an essential component of the curriculum. Some of these learning experiences include lunch, play, sports and all the extracurricular and nonacademic activities that happen within and outside of the school (Wiles, 2008).

Thirdly, curriculum is envisioned as a plan (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2016; Wiles, 1999; Wiles & Bondi, 2007). For example, both Tyler (2013) and Taba (1962) considered curriculum as a plan for learning that occur in school. Also, Alexander (1971) believed that a curriculum is planned program of learning opportunities that is meant to achieve broad educational goals and related objectives. Likewise, Tanner (1980) considered the curriculum as a set of planned and guided learning experiences for the learners' continuous and willful growth. And, for Eisner (2005), the curriculum is imagined as a series of planned actions for instruction in a school.

The fourth group of scholars defined curriculum as an outcome (Wiles and Bondi, 2007; Wiles, 1999; 2008). Curriculum as an outcome primarily has to do with goals and producing results. According to Wiles (2008), it "targets specific knowledge, behavior, and attitudes for students and engineering a school program to achieve those ends" (p.2). In other words, every curriculum has purpose of accomplishing something specific.

Besides the four definitions, the author of this paper has provided a fifth definition which comprises of all four aspects: curriculum as subject matter, curriculum as experiences, curriculum as series of plans and curriculum as outcomes. Thus, the author defines curriculum as a legal document that is systematically developed by an institution with the sole purpose of intentionally infusing the philosophy of the institution into the psyche of the absorbers. Whereas the institution could refer to a school, church or any entity that is responsible for developing a particular curriculum, the absorbers are the consumers or simply the students for whom the curriculum was designed.

Even though curriculum definitions are different, curriculum developers generally follow three major stages which are incorporated in the process of curriculum development (Hunkins & Ornstein; 2016; Wiles, 1999, Wiles and Bondi, 2007). The process of curriculum development often begins with the stage of curriculum design which primarily has to do with curriculum decisions (Wiles, 1999). Curriculum decisions in the curriculum design stage are usually developed by curriculum stakeholders—government representatives, school administrators, teachers, parents, students and curricular specialists (Wiles, 1999). Curriculum stakeholders are often constrained to respond to Tyler (1949; 2013) four fundamental questions in the design stage. These questions are:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether and to what extent theses purposes are being attained?

Therefore, the outcomes of these four questions become what curriculum developers call curriculum designs which are chiefly content based.

Following the design stage is the implementation of the curriculum. Successful implementation of curriculum results from careful planning by all of the stakeholders (Wiles, 1999, Hunkins & Ornstein, 2016). However, the teachers are considered as the primary stakeholders of implementing curriculum in the classroom (Trye, 2017). Thus, teachers need administrative support in order to effectively implement curriculum.

Finally, curriculum development involves curriculum evaluation and supervision (Wiles, 1999, Hunkins & Ornstein, 2016). Although curriculum evaluation and supervision concern all of the curriculum stakeholders, it is the primary responsibility of educational administrators to evaluate the curriculum from time to time. This third phase of the curriculum development process is systematically done to investigate the worth and merit of programs of study. The foremost aim of curriculum evaluation and supervision is primarily for the purpose of improvement (Wiles, 1999). Curriculum evaluation is helpful for accountability and it promotes a deeper understanding of the curriculum which provides room for improvement. What is obvious in the process of curriculum development is that, it happens as result of a combined effort of all the educational stakeholders within a given institution. Hence, it is not an ideal practice for one person to develop a curriculum.

Integrated Curriculum

According to Rennie, Venville and Wallace (2013), the word "integration" comes from a Latin word, *integrare*, which means, "to make whole, or to renew" (p.1). An integrated curriculum is "a way of thinking about what schools are for, about the sources of curriculum and about the uses of knowledge" (Beane, 1995 p.1). Some supporters of an integrated curriculum advocate for the wholesome disciplines of knowledge wherein the educator is primarily seen as a generalist on integrative themes and secondarily as someone who specializes in the content area (Beane, 1995, Rennie, Venville, and Wallace, 2013). Similarly, from an IFL perspective, Trye (2017, p. 158), described an integrated curriculum at the ideal level as follows:

"There is evidence that teachers know their subject well and use an integrated curriculum plan which includes the focused, intentional and targeted integration of faith and learning practices in all subject areas. This is evident in the program of studies, in lesson plans, and in the evaluation of learning."

There are three key words in Trye's (2017) definition of an integrated curriculum that need further explication. These are (a) focused, (b) intentional and (c) targeted. An acronym, FIT has been assigned to them. The word, *focused* is the first key word in the Trye's (2017) definition. It means that the educational stakeholders of an integrated curriculum must be conversant with the vision, mission, and core values of the institution (Taylor, 2012; 2019). Besides being knowledgeable about the philosophy of the institution, being focused implies that the board of trustees, educational administrators and major curriculum stakeholders are supportive and passionate about faith integration in the curriculum (Trye, 2017; Taylor, 2012). In a nutshell, being focused is purely administrative. Once the idea of integrated curriculum is caught by administrators at the top, it can be easily bought from the bottom.

The second key word in Trye's (2017) definition of an integrated curriculum is *intentional*. Intentionality has to do with educators' in-depth knowledge of a balanced curriculum. A balanced curriculum from an IFL perspective concentrates on every aspect of the students' whole-person development. There are five dimensions of students learning—intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual. Intellectually, an integrated curriculum from an IFL perspective is designed to meet multiple intelligences of students in the classrooms (Gadener, 1992). By the way, the concept of multiple intelligence is biblical (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Lastly, the word *targeted* means that the policies, program of studies, lesson plans, evaluation of learning and disciplines are all synchronized to meet the ultimate goal of redemptive education (Taylor, 2019). The process of redemptive education reveals the knowledge pertaining to the great controversy between good and evil. The Bible teaches that God created mankind in His image but sin separated humanity from God (Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 3). Jesus came to redeem mankind from the shackle of sin that was caused by Satan. However, humanity

has a role in the process of salvation and that is to believe and accept Jesus Christ (Knight, 1989; White, 1923). Thus, the ultimate goal of an integrated curriculum is to restore humanity or to reconnect humanity to God (Knight, 1989; White, 1923). The last part of this paper concentrates mainly on the need for developing an integrated curriculum for faith integration in Liberia.

A Need for Integrated Curriculum in Post-Civil War Liberia

Sequel to the above explications from the literature consulted on faith integration, curriculum development and integrated curriculum, this paper proposes a 4S Model for IFL in Liberia. The first "S" in this model stands for the students' life and learning. The primary purpose for designing any curriculum is for it to fit the needs of the students' life. From grade school to graduate school, the IFL curriculum should be designed in a way that Liberian students learn about life. At every level of learning, in every subject and topic, there should be connections to students' life because life itself is complex and it is constantly changing. Whenever IFL curriculum decisions are being undertaken in Liberia, Christian educators should be concerned about everything surrounding the Liberian students' life. This can be done by conducting needs assessments from time to time and by studying the nature of the students for whom the IFL curricula are primary designed.

The second "S" of the proposed 4S Model for developing IFL curricular in Liberia represents the school's philosophy. Christian educational stakeholders should design their curricular to fit the school's philosophy. The philosophy comprises the school's mission statement, vision and core values (Taylor, 2019; Trye, 2017). Since philosophy plays a vital role in faith integration, every faith-based institution in the Republic of Liberia should design the curriculum in a way that the philosophy runs through every subject, topic and activities. For instance, if the core values of a school are liberty, justice, integrity, teamwork and excellence; they should be reflected in every subject, topic, and activities of the school (Taylor, 2012; Trye, 2017). Thus, from time to time, Christian educational stakeholders should see to it that the school activities are in compliance with the school's philosophy. They are expected to be written in the institutional policies and other supporting curricular

materials like the bulletin, student handbook, course outlines and lesson plans.

The third "S" is societal trends. Apart from the school's philosophy, the curricula of Christian educators in Liberia should be in alignment with the trends of society. Societal trends comprises of widespread activities, either negative or positive occurrences in the country and the world at large. For example, in a post-civil war country like Liberia where reconciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration are taking place, the IFL curriculum should highlight such aspects. Globally, the IFL curriculum should also consider the inclusion of 21st century skills in order to meet the needs of global challenges. Hence, in the development of the integrated IFL curriculum, Christian educators in Liberia must design curricular that fits the local and global educational trends.

Lastly, the fourth "S" stands for the Salvation Message. Whatever curriculum that is designed by Christian educators in Liberia, they should not neglect the salvation message. Every subject, topic and activities of curriculum should include the message of salvation. Besides the writing of supporting Bible verses and prayers, the salvation message are found in all the books of the Bible, nature, personal experiences and the Jesus story. Christian educational curricular designers should therefore be reminded from time to time that the ultimate goal of IFL is to remind students and staffs about the kingdom of God and that is, " Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's own life for His friends" (John 15:13). Hence, as displayed in figure one, an integrated IFL curriculum is all inclusive of the students' life, school's philosophy, societal trends and the salvation message.
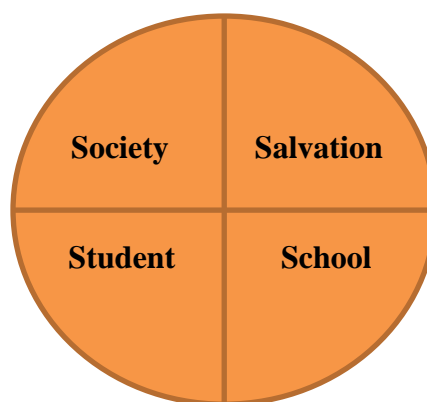

Figure1: Trye's 4-S Model for an Integrated Curriculum

Conclusions and Recommendations

So far, it has been mentioned in this paper that faith integration, curriculum development and integrated curriculum mean different things to different people. In case of Liberia, there are more faith based institutions compared to government educational institutions. The Ministry of Education and the National Commission for Higher Education monitor educational activities in Liberia. Nevertheless, the current educational system of Liberia remains challenged due to its past history. Especially, when it comes to faith integration in curriculum, it has been observed that Christian educators in the country are lacking IFL resources. In response to this gap, this paper provides clearer insights on how an integrated IFL curriculum fits the needs of Christian education in Liberia.

The author concludes that faith integration in curriculum development is the combined effort of all educational stakeholders. He defines curriculum as a legal document developed by institutions solely for the purpose of infusing philosophies into the psyches of the curriculum absorbers— who are the students. And the operational definition provided for an integrated curriculum is teachers' knowledge of their subject and application of the integrated curriculum plan which includes the focused, intentional and targeted integration of faith and learning practices in all subject areas. The paper ends with the provision of a 4S Model—Students' Life, School's Philosophy, Societal Trends, and the Salvation Message. Hence, Christian educational stakeholders in Liberia are encouraged to consider these as vital ingredients for the development of an integrated curriculum from an IFL perspective.

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