Insights into the Concepts

of the Curriculum

*Abebe Bekele**

In the process of the curriculum development two important factors are given considerable attention; the definition of the term curriculum and the ways by which educational objectives are determined. The paper examines these two issues briefly.

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of schooling is the central problem for a society that attempts to develop and expand its educational programme. Education refers to "the aggregate of all the processes by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviour of positive value of the society in which he lives" (Good, 1945, p. 145). Education, in the light of this view, is an essential social activity by which societies continue to exist. In changing societies, such as our own, this function is delegated to a specialized institution called school. Educational objectives then have as their source the values, ideals, and aspirations that a society accepts as desirable. This means the kind of knowledge, attitudes and values a society wishes its youth to acquire through schooling, must be identified, if learners are to become effective members of their society. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to discuss the ways by which curriculum objectives are determined. But first a brief look at the definition of the term curriculum is in order.

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Definition of Curriculum

Curriculum may be viewed from many different vantage points. This is so because people have, to a large extent, different views concerning the functions of the school. To illustrate, Arthur Bestor (1959), a champion of the subject-centered curriculum, argues strongly that the distinctive function of the school is the promotion of intellectual training (pp. 25-34). On the other hand, George Counts (1963), an advocate of the experience-centered curriculum, argues forcefully that the task of the school is the preparation of children for the purpose of building a new social order; accordingly, schools have the responsibility of meeting the urgent needs of the pupils for discipline, vocational training and guidance in solving problems associated with social phenomena as well as acting as an agent for social change (pp. 178-195).

It seems obvious that the meaning one attaches to the function of the school influences one's view of the curriculum. As a result there are different definitions of the term curriculum as the following three examples may indicate.

First, there are those who define the curriculum in terms of the subject matter to be studied. They understand it as "a group of subject or a field of study arranged in order of some particular sequence" (Stretch, 1939, p.18; Kraevsky and Learner, 1984; Dressel and Marcus, 1984; Bestor, 1963 pp. 194-211). According to this definition, the curriculum is the sum-total of all courses of study for the various subjects in the school.

Second, there are others who define the curriculum as all the experiences that contribute to the growth and development of the pupils (Hopkins, 1941, pp. 12-19; Counts, 1963, pp. 178-195). Accordingly, the essential elements of the curriculum are not necessarily found in books alone but also in every walk of life such as in the school, community, clubs and associations as stated by Thomas Hopkins (1941);

> The curriculum represents all of the activities engaged in by pupils, teachers, supervisors, principals, parents, and others that are in anyway affected by study in and through the school. This means that the curriculum goes on, both in and outside the school (p. 33).

One can easily see, from Hopkin's description that the curriculum consists of the plethora of experiences connected with the formal program of studies as well as those connected with the incidental, daily experiences outside the school.

Third, there are educators who understand the curriculum as a set of experiences designed to train children into the culture of their society (Smith, 1957, pp. 5-8; Lawton, 1976, p.6). According to this view, the curriculum is the means by which society educates its young and, as such, it reflects its ideals, knowledge, and skills that are considered to be significant. In other words, the curriculum is essentially a selection from the culture of a society for the purpose of transmitting its important cultural traits and ethical systems (Soltis, 1968, pp. 3-4; Apple, 1979, p. 63).

As has been pointed out above, there exists in the literature a good deal of variation in the definitions of curriculum. As a result, it is difficult to define it in a way that it means the same thing to everybody. This is so because the concept of curriculum, in part, depends on the philosophy of edu-education that one subscribes to; consequently, each curriculum expert brings his own biases to his endevours to define the term; hence the many definitions of the curriculum. It follows from the above that one has to realize the fact that definitional disparities surrounding the term curriculum are real, and that each definition has its own merits.

Nevertheless, the tendency of most educators, is to view the curriculum as a set of intended learnings, which is planned and directed by the school to attain the desired objectives (Bernstein, p. 80; Young, pp. 345-347 1973; Hirst and Peters, p. 177, 1974; Goodlad, p. 12, 1966). What must be realized here is that the intended learnings are not necessarily limited only to the arrary of courses offered by schools. They also include those learnings which are mainly the side-effects of the operations of schooling. These learnings, which belong to the realm of the hidden curriculum, can exert a considerable influence on pupils' learnings including the formation of dispositions and attitudes. Significant learnings attributed to the influence of the hidden curriculum are "learning to live with others; learning to be patient; learning to withstand evaluation and assessment by others; learning to get to know the...power structure and how to please those in authority" (Mulcahy, 1981, p.143). The curriculum, as here defined, denotes the

results of the efforts of the adult society to impart to its youth the most significant experiences that exist in the culture. The curriculum in this sense, enables us to recognize the following points. First, in curricular decisions we are interested in a programe which contains deliberately and consciously planned learnings. Second, built into the definition is the fact that learnings are selected and planned so that certain goals will be attained, i.e. the students will acquire certain skills and habits and be able to appreciate certain things rather than others. John Dewey is correct when he says that "acting with an aim is one with acting intelligently." Third, curriculum planning involves determination of the means (Hirst, 1980, pp. 9-18). The means, in general terms, include teaching materials, facilities, and instructional procedures which are useful for reaching the ends. The curriculum, as defined here, focuses on what is involved in selecting, justifying, and arranging the intentionally undertaken learnings.

What is probably reasonable and, in fact, appropriate to consider next is the purpose of the curriculum, to provide better experience for those who go to school. The remaining part of this paper deals with this key issue of curriculum, that is, the determination and specification of educational ends.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Determination of objectives of the curriculum is an essential first task for a curriculum developer. One cannot proceed to other aspects of the curriculum development process until the task of identifying the objectives is complete. All other aspects of the educational enterprises are "really means to accomplish basic educational purposes" (R. Tyler, 1970, p. 3).

The objectives of the curriculum should be specified prior to instruction and stated in behavioural terms-behaviour meaning thought, feeling, and action (R. Tyler, p. 5). Stating objectives in this manner is important because it provides guidance for determining both content and teaching strategies, thus forming the basis for guiding, selecting, and structuring activities in which teachers engage in the classroom (Whitefield, 1980, p.23). If what is to be accomplished is clearly visualized, it is easier for one to identify the kind of things needed and the circumstances under which the tasks must be carried out.

Forms of Stating Objectives

For educational objectives to be useful in selecting learning experiences and in guiding instruction, there must be a rational basis for their formulation and statement. The following are considered as the major forms of stating educational objectives.

First, education is class-bound and the knowledge that schools provide, at any given period of time, revolve around sets of principles and values of the politically and economically powerful social group (Apple, 1979, pp. 64-65; Sharp, 1978, p. 136). The ideological interests of that particular group often influence curriculum selection and organization (Young, 1980, pp. 28-29). This means that curriculum objectives for their formulation, depend in part, upon the particular ideology of a nation whose citizens are obligated to develop and advance at a particular time in history.

The significance of these statements to the present Ethiopian education is quite clear: Marxism-Leninism is the guiding philosophy for the social and economic life of this nation. Seen from this perspective, it becomes apparent that the curriculum objectives must be stated in a manner that correspond with the Marxist-Leninist tenets of education.

Close examination of Socialist Ethiopian school curriculum reveals this fact as shown on Tables I and II.

TABLE I

CORRESPONDANCE OF THE NATIONAL AIMS OF EDUCATION
WITH OBJECTIVES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUBJECTS

SUBJECTS	National Aims of Education				
	1	2	3	4	5
Amharic	1	0	1	1	0
English	0	1	1	1	0
Music	0	1	1	1	1
Drawing	0	1	1	1	0
Physical Education	1	1	1	1	1
Mathematics	0	0	0	0	0
Elementary Science	1	1	1	1	1
Social Studies	0	1	1	1	1
Home Economics	1	1	1	1	1
Agriculture	0	1	0	1	1
Handicraft	1	1	1	1	1
	5(45%)	9(82%)	9(82%)	10(91%)	7(64%)

Source: Ministry of Education. "Final Report of the Curriculum Development and Learning-Teaching Process Task Force." Addis Ababa, Vol. 1, Megabit 1977 (E.C.), p. 54; unpublished (by permission of the Ministry of Education).

The tables demonstrate the degree of correspondence of the various elementary and secondary school subjects with the following statements of the National Aims of Education.

1. To eradicate illiteracy in the shortest possible time; provide general education, step by step, so as to improve the living conditions of the broad masses.

2. To provide education based on the Marxist-Leninist conception which will raise the level of consciousness of the broad masses so as to intensify the class struggle.

3. To instil in students progressive cultural values by developing Marxist-Leninist aesthetics so that they may be guided by socialist morality and discipline.

4. To provide education, at different levels, that will promote scientific research so that students will acquire ability that will enable them to understand their surroundings, the community, and nature as a whole; to inquire, experiment, create, and integrate theory with practice in order to solve problems.

5. To provide education, at different levels, that will enhance the dignity of labour and the desire to work; help produce trained personnel in different areas so as to meet the required well trained manpower needs of the nation. ("Final Report... *Op, cit. p.* 42). *My translation.*

From Table I we observe that our elementary education consists of eleven different subjects. Of these eleven subjects, only the objectives of five subjects (45%) reflect Aim 1; nine subjects (82%) reflect Aims 2 and 3 respectively; ten subjects (91%) reflect Aim 4; and seven subjects (64%) reflect Aim 5. The conditions regarding Elementary Mathematics is rather surprising in the sense that none of the National Aims of Education is reflected in any of its objectives.

When we turn our attention to Table II, we recognize that of the twelve different subjects currently offered at the Ethiopian Secondary Schools, only the objectives of six subjects (50%) reflect Aim 1; eleven subjects (92%) reflect Aims 2 and 3 respectively; twelve subjects (100%) re-

TABLE II

CORRESPONDENCE OF THE NATIONAL AIMS OF EDUCATION WITH OBJECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL SUBJECTS

SUBJECTS	National Aims of Education				
	1	2	3	4	5
Amharic	1	0	1	1	0
English	0	1	1	1	0
Mathematics	0	1	1	1	0
Physics	0	1	1	1	1
Chemistry	1	1	1	1	1
Biology	1	1	1	1	1
History	1	1	1	1	1
Geography	0	1	1	1	1
Agriculture	0	1	1	1	1
Home Economics	0	1	1	1	1
Commerce	1	1	1	1	1
Productive Tech.	1	1	0	1	1
	6 (50%)	11 (92%)	11 (92%)	12 (100%)	9 (75%)

Source: Ibid., p. 55

flect Aim 4; and nine subjects (75%) reflect Aim 5.

From Tables I and II, it can be observed that National Aims 2, 3, and 4 are well reflected in most of the objectives of the different subjects both at the primary and secondary school levels. Similarly, one can see that the educational objectives of the pre 1975 era reflected the political-philosophy of those in positions of power (Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, 1954 E.C.; 1963 E.C.; 1965 E.C.).

Second, it is important to note that educational objectives have two parts; content and behaviour. Objectives are considered to be complete and meaningful when they have both. This point has two implications for planning and developing a curriculum.

The first implication is that curriculum objectives should not be stated in the form of contents only (R. Tyler, 1970, pp. 44 - 46; Gronlund, 1970, p.8). For example, one objective of the elementary school Amharic states "The students will join sentences to build a paragraph" (Ministry of Education, 1984, p. 125). This objective suggests the area or content to be treated i.e. "joining sentences to build a paragraph." But what the students do with the above topic or what they are expected to understand or identify is not clear.

This is a major problem which appears in the objectives of the various subjects, both at the primary and secondary school levels in this country. Tables III and IV show the conditions in detail.

TABLE III
PATTERNS OF STATING OBJECTIVES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF ETHIOPIA

| SUBJECTS | No. of Objectives | Behaviour - Content Components | | | Level of Statements | | |
		Behaviour only %	Content only %	Content and Behaviour %	Clear but not Measurable %	Too Broad %	Too Specific and Measurable %
Amharic	5	–	100	–	20	80	–
English	7	85.7	14	–	14.3	71.4	4.3
History	5	60	–	40	20	80	–
Geography	31	–	–	100	87.1	9.8	3.1
Mathematics	20	25	30	45	–	100	–
Physics	16	81.3	12.5	6.2	12.5	87.5	–
Chemistry	22	4.6	36.4	59	68.2	31.8	–
Biology	21	19.2	19.1	61.7	52.4	42.9	4.7

ource:- Ministry of Education. "Final Report of the Curriculum Development and Learning-Teaching Process Task Force." Addis Ababa, Vol. 1, No. 1, Megabit 1977 E.C. unpublished, (by permission of the Ministry of Education.) P. 301.

TABLE IV
PATTERNS OF FORMULATING OBJECTIVES IN THE ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS OF ETHIOPIA

SUBJECTS	No. of Objectives	Behaviour - Content Components			Level of Statements		
		Behaviour only %	Content only %	Content and Behaviour %	Clear but not Measurable %	Too Broad %	Too Specific and Measurable %
Amharic	8	-	100	-	62.5	37.5	-
English	5	60	-	40	-	60	40
Mathematics	3	-	66.7	33.3	-	100	-
Elementary science	16	66.6	-	33.3	16.7	83.3	-
Social Studies	14	-	-	100	85.7	14.3	-

Source:- Ibid. p. 300.

Accordingly, all the objectives in Amharic (100%), at both levels of schooling, and (66.7% of the mathematics objectives at the primary school level are expressed in terms of contents only without suggesting what kinds of behaviour must be cultivated as a result of learning the contents of Amharic and Mathematics. Therefore there is a need for clearly determining why students are learning the contents. In the case of the Amharic objective at the primary school level, the statement clarifies what the students learn, but not what they are going to do with what they learn. Terms that give clues to some kind of behaviour must be included to develop good curriculum objectives. Thus "To acquire skills of joining sentences to build a paragraph" is a better statement of the Amharic objective.

The second implication is that objectives should not be stated in terms of behaviour only (Goodlad, 1966, pp. 46-49), such as "To interpret accurately and skilfully" or "To acquire attitudes and values". Objectives of this type, indicate that education is expected to bring about certain behaviour changes in the students, but they fail to specify the content to which the generalized patterns of behaviour are to be used. In other words, it is not enough to talk simply about interpreting accurately and skillfully without reference to the content in which the interpretation is to be made. If we look, once more, at Tables III and IV we see at once, that most of the objectives in three secondary school subjects: English (85.7%) History (60%) and Physics (81.3%), and in two Elementary school subjects: English (60%) and Elementary Science (66.6%) are formulated in terms of behaviour only, thereby making them inadequate because they have not suggested the kind of contents in which the sets of behaviour are to operate.

Concerning the behavioural and substantive elements, the "Final Report" of the Ministry of Education concludes:

> All the objectives of Amharic and English subjects and most of the objectives of Mathematics, Physics, Elementary Science...are stated either in terms of behaviour or content only rather than being expressed in terms of both behaviour and content; as a result the objectives of these subjects are considered less effective than the objectives of the other subjects (p. 218). (By permission of the Ministry of Education) *My translation.*

The objective, "To interpret data accurately on taxation" includes both the behavioural element, namely, "To interpret data accurately" and also content, namely, "taxation", on which the interpretation is to be made. Another objective, "To acquire positive attitudes toward social and technological implications of science" is a complete objective since it contains the behavioral element which is to be acquired by the students, namely, "acquiring positive attitudes" and the substantive element, the content in which this behaviour is to operate, namely, "social and technological implication of science." Coming back to Tables III and IV, we observe that the objectives in three secondary school subjects: Geography (100%), Biology (61.7%), and Chemistry (59%), and only in one elementary school subject: Social Studies (100%) are stated in the correct form.

Third, curriculum objectives have to be stated in terms of the students' behaviour (Gronlund, 1970, pp. 1-4). This means that the statement of objectives must refer to the action of the students as a result of being in the educational program. The following statements taken from Grades 4 - 6 Political Education Syllabus are examples of bad objectives:

> The students will be deeply convinced that revolutionary Ethiopia is proceeding to the bright future. They should also be convinced that the guidelines given by the revolutionary forces are the necessary precondition for the achievement the better living conditions of man. This will help them grasp the discipline of the working class to study hard; and participate in social activities and contribute to building the new society ("Ministry of Education" 1984, pp. 112-113).

The above statements of objectives are deficient in that they refer to an action of the teacher. All the statements imply that the teacher, not the students are involved in some kind of activities. What are the students expected to acquire, believe or do after they are through with the instructional programme of political education is not indicated.

The statement of any objective in the school has to be a statement of changes to take place in students (Gronlund, pp. 1-4). When the above objective is stated in relation to students' behaviour it would look like the following:

- To analyze how Revolutionary Ethiopia is striving to achieve better living conditions for its populace.
- To become familiar with the guideline given by revolutionary forces for the attainment of better living conditions for man.
- To acquire the discipline of the working class.

One of the major advantages of stating objectives in this manner is that it provides a basis for assessing pupils' attainments of the kind of development which is sought (Ericksen, 1984, pp. 91-93).

And finally, how generally or specifically should objectives be stated ? Two kinds of views are expressed concerning this issue. According to the first view, educational objectives should be stated in precise, directly observable and measurable terms (Mager, 1962; Popham, 1970, Esbenson, 1971). Mager believes that if one succeeds in stating objectives in a highly specified fashion (by using words that denote action), one will convey one's intent in exactly the same way one understands it (p. 10).

The advocates further argue that knowing the terminal behaviour of the students can provide opportunity for the teacher to differentiate the relevant from the irrelevant kinds of activities. Activities that do not have a direct bearing on the objective will be avoided, although they may be considered later on under different conditions and for different purposes. Mager indicates that highly explicated objectives are advantageous for evaluation purposes. This means that stating objectives sharply in measurable and observable terms helps the teacher to select text items that clearly measure the student's ability to learn to the desired degree (Mager, pp. 3-4).

According to the second view, objectives must be stated in behavioural terms but only at a level of generality (R. Tyler, 1970). Behaviourists who advance arguments against the high degree of specificity of obj... dicate that what is needed in the formulation of objectives is a cl... tion of expected behaviour. They object to too general statem... they believe that such statements cannot be translated into e... practices for the purpose of guiding the selection of learning... and the evaluation of results. For example, the objective, "To develop the ability to learn English" is too gneral.

There is no doubt that many benefits could be derived from utilizing measurable and directly observable behavioural objectives, but many educators are opposed to applying it to curriculum planning and classroom instruction for a number of reasons (Apple, p. 107; Schwab, 1970, p. 18; L. Tyler, 1969, pp. 100-119). First, if objectives are stated in highly specific manner, there is little chance for students to critically examine problems from different perspectives (Eisner, 1970, 75:253-256).

In the second place the use of precise objectives may force teachers to develop too many objectives which may not be achieved in the time available, as stated by Ebel (1967): "If one tried to state all of them explicitly in advance, he could easily spend all his time writing objectives and have none left for actually teaching" (p. 75:261). Louise Tyler (1971) called attention to the fact that the use of overt behaviour and measurability criteria proposed by Mager and Popham result in the formulation of trival objectives without any regard to the inner feelings such as character formations which are equally, if not more, important to aspects of schooling (7:53-59).

Thus, other things being equal, many educators prefer general objectives to highly specified ones. The following type of curriculum objective stated in terms of a high degree of specificity is not recommended: "Given a list of 35 chemical elements, the learner must be able to recall and write the valences of at least 30" (Mager, 1962, p. 28). On the other hand, objectives which are too broad are not recommended either because, such objectives do not facilitate the processes of selection and organization of content and the evaluation of the outcome of the school programme. The following examples of the pre 1975 Ethiopian secondary education objectives are too broad:

a) To produce people who can think objectively and dispassionately.
b) To train the emotions properly and open the heart to the interests and concerns of others and the world at large. (Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, 1965, p. 2).

From the above objectives, the phrases "think objectively and dispassionately" and "train emotions properly and open the heart" are too broad and vague. Consequently, they are not functional objectives from which contents can be selected and organized, instructional procedures can be

identified, and tests and examinations can be prepared. Objectives should be formulated in such a way that they do not mean different things to different people. This can be achieved by using action verbs such as "develop", "demonstrate", "identify", "analyze", etc. On the basis of this argument the above two broad objectives could be stated at a level of some generality but not measurability, somewhat like the following.

a) To develop intellectual skills and abilities to analyze the underlying principles or problems of a phenomenon or a material or an event.

b) To demonstrate a desire to help others in times of difficulty.

The level of generality can be determined by two factors, namely, the level required for effective use in life and the "probable effectiveness in teaching the students involved to generalize the learning to the level desired" (R. Tyler, 1969, p. 79). The first factor leads to objectives which are not too specific. For example, one can see the value of reading an Arabic Newspaper, but to be able to identify the technical aspects of the Arabic language is not an important objective. The second factor suggests that one has to emphasize the general idea to be learned by the student involved (Joyce and Well, 1983, pp. 49-50). In teaching addition to children of Grade Three, it is important to seek as objectives the understanding of the concept of addition and not have them practice each number combination again and again as separate objectives. The desired objectives in such a situation can be stated as:

a) Understanding the idea of addition, and
b) Developing ability to add whole numbers

In view of the principle presented above, how does the picture of formulating educational objectives look like in the Ethiopian schools' curriculum? The results of the study by the Ministry of Education on the general quality of Ethiopian education, at the primary and secondary school levels, reveal that the statement of most of the objectives are not in tune with the principles advanced in this paper. The traditional way of formulating objectives at a very broad level seems to be quite dominant. The objectives of five secondary school subjects, out of the eight, and of three elementary school subjects, out of the five, are formulated at a level of high generality

and broadness. These subjects include Amharic (80%), English (71.4%, History (80%), Mathematics (100%) and Physics (87.5%) at the secondary school level; and English (60%), Mathematics (100%), and Elementary Science (83.3%) at the primary school level, according to Tables III and IV, respectively. The objectives of three secondary school subjects: Geography (87.1%), Chemistry (68.2%), and Biology (52.4%), and two elementary school subjects: Amharic (62.5%) and Social Studies (85%) are expressed with clarity but not a high degree of specificity or broadness. Elementary English is the only subject whose objectives (40%) are stated at a rather high degree of precision and measurability.

Recognizing the ineffectiveness of formulating educational objectives in terms of too much generality and breadth; high specificity and measurability either in behaviour or in content only, the Final Report of the Ministry of Education states:

> All those objectives of the elementary and secondary school subjects which are stated either in too broad or too narrow terms; expressed either in behaviour or content only;... should be stated in clear terms; and expressed in terms of behaviour and content;... Appropriate training must be given to those curriculum practioners for the purpose of promoting understanding in the formulation of objectives (p.246). (by permission of the of the Ministry of Education). *My translation.*

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