

# Mapping the Conceptual Field: Notions of the History Syllabus and Textbook from the Teachers' Perspectives

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## Abstract

The Ghanaian High School history syllabus particularly is less explored by teacher practitioner in the field of history. The few researches carved on the teaching of history in the country have focus extensively on methods of teaching, students and teachers viewpoint of the subject at the neglect of what teachers themselves tell of the subject and the syllabus designed by Curriculum Research and Development Division. This research is novel in the context of the country. Using the interpretive phenomenological case study approach, the study interviewed eight history teachers who participated in the study on their volition. Results from the analysed transcript revealed that History teachers have negative perception about the SHS history syllabus. The study also established that the SHS government history textbook is not adequate to be used in teaching History. Finally, the study established that the history syllabus is in tandem with the history textbook utilised by teachers. Based on the finding, it is recommended that school authorities provide continuous training to history teachers on the proper use of the syllabus in order to change their erroneous perception about the syllabus. The ministry of education should revise and update the government history textbook with more information. Besides, the ministry of education should try and recommend other relevant history textbooks for the history teachers. Again, the ministry of education should ensure that revisions made in the history syllabus should be reflected in the government history textbook.

**Keywords:** History, Syllabus, Textbook

## 1.0 Introduction

The importance of history can never be underestimated in the development of any country. In Ghana, history as a subject have survived and enjoyed a considerable position in the nation's curriculum since the introduction of the 1987 educational reform. Experiencing changes in its contents, the history syllabus is designed to focus on the interpretation of the history of Ghana and other African countries from African perspective (Ministry of Education, 2010), which in other words implies that the prior history syllabus as opined by Buah (cited in Saphir, 2001), "... had too much emphasis on the greatness of Europe and too little emphasis on the greatness of other peoples" (p. 11). Today, the story has changed and according to Oppong and Quan-Baffour (2014) the scope of the Ghanaian history syllabus comprises the landmarks of Africa History up to 1800, cultures and civilizations of Ghana from earliest times to AD 1700 and the History of Ghana and her relations with the wider world from AD 1500 to the present. With such innovation in the content issues, the history teacher is expected to deliver the content of the history syllabus to reflect an African interpretation of history. However, as intimated by Frenette (as cited in Harris-Hart, 2002), often policy makers are not aware that teachers do not implement the official curriculum as intended. This presupposes that history teachers may or may not interpret and implement the history syllabus as delivered to them. The inclination spells out that history teacher may have their own perception about the history syllabus. Hence, as suggested by Fullan (1999) that what teachers themselves tell us about their understandings of syllabus change, reveal the ways they construct their own meaning of the curriculum is very pertinent in this study as the researchers seeks to investigate the perception of history teachers on the history syllabus and the available textbooks recommended by the Curriculum Research and Development Division.

## 1.1 Addressing the Problem

There is a seeming impression that History textbooks provide simple narratives that do not acknowledge the controversies surrounding historical topics. Saphir (2001) indicates that, in Ghana, the information in the government history textbook is not detailed enough in covering most topics. There is a seeming pressure on the

part of teachers to resort to supplementary history textbooks. Saphir (2001) in further posits that the history syllabus skims over some areas and does not give an in-depth insight into certain topics. In view of this, Saphir (2001) believes that teachers must look critically at the syllabus and add what they think the students may need to know. This corrects the syllabus by teaching what they think is necessary to give their students a well-balanced view of African history. The history syllabus was designed in line with the on – going reforms in Ghana’s Education System which seeks to make education relevant to the needs of the Ghanaian society. In developing the syllabus, care was taken to avoid a situation of over – loading the teacher and the student in order to minimize the incidence of a selective treatment of the topics for examination purposes (Saphir, 2001). However, it seems very few studies have been undertaken concerning this aspect of history education in Ghana. This awareness prompted the researchers to conduct a study to explore the concept of the history syllabus and textbook from the history teachers’ perspective. Specifically, the following objectives guided the study:

1. Perceptions of Senior High School history teachers in the Cape Coast metropolis on the history syllabus.
2. Perceptions of Senior High School history teachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis on the history textbooks.
3. How the history syllabus maps with the history textbook.

## **2.0 Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Teachers’ Perception about the History Syllabus**

Dance (1970) indicates that the history syllabus make too much demands on the teachers. The teachers’ are to meet external examination demands, therefore, the teachers’ are compelled to rush students through the syllabus without considering students’ ability. This leads to memorization of disjointed facts, dates and names by students. This results in killing students’ interest in the history subject. As indicated by Crookall (1972) if the content of the history syllabus is so vast, then more time is needed for the study of History. Unfortunately, much time is not provided on the timetables for the study of History. Adejunmobi (1992) postulates that Ghanaian history syllabus is not adaptable to different learning environments. Its content is fixed; there is no room for additions until a new syllabus comes in force or the old is revised. To buttress this, Steeves (1998) states that history syllabus should be subject to revision and reasonable change in the light of the results of historical research and changing emphasis on time.

A study conducted by Mazibuko (2008) in Swaziland revealed that the teachers view the syllabus as inquiry driven. This is reflected in the structuring of the mandatory and optional content around key focus questions or areas to which student learning should be directed. However, the syllabus prescribes neither specific content sequence nor approaches, although strong emphasis is placed on student-centred modes of teaching and learning, the utilization of a wide variety of source materials, the connecting of past and present circumstance and on the investigation of contemporary issues.

Ruto and Ndaloh (2013) found that the history and government syllabi were often overloaded with more topics that could not be covered within stipulated time period. The overloaded syllabus makes the study of history difficult to study. Similarly, Boadu (2016) observed that history teachers view the syllabus to be broad and overloaded. The SHS history syllabus prescribes contents and activities that require more time for their completion. The results indicate that teachers perceived the SHS history syllabus as containing more materials some of which are irrelevant. The consequence presented by this problem could be two-fold: teachers may be compelled to rush through the topics in order to achieve a superficial coverage of the syllabus, or they may resort to selective teaching where a few topics, especially, examinable ones, would be taught in depth at the expense of full syllabus coverage.

### **2.2 Teachers’ Perception about the History Textbook**

Yildirim (2006) intimates that teachers do not find the illustrations in the textbook appropriate for student interest and grade level. Some teachers complain that the pictures and maps used in the books are not up to date and they are separated from the related content. The topics are treated in an encyclopaedic fashion and as a result, the reading becomes difficult and boring. Again, Yildirim posits that teachers find the textbooks difficult for students to read. That seems to be one of the reasons for decreased level of student interest in reading the textbook. Saphir (2001) also found that history teachers in Ghana are of the view that the SHS history textbook skims over some areas and does not give an in-depth insight into certain topics. To these Ghanaian teachers, as indicated by Saphir, the textbook skims over the atrocities that the slave trade caused to the people of Ghana and those transported to the “New World”. It says, “The Trans-Atlantic slave trade made a great contribution to the development of the New World” (SSS text 211) yet it does not mention the arrested development of Ghana and Africa. It simply states that the slave trade “brutalized Ghanaians and changed the character of slavery in their society,” “suppressing the growth of Ghanaian handicraft industries” (SSS text 213-4). It does not mention the brutality of slavery caused to those Africans transported to the “New World.” It states that without the labour of the African slaves the “great achievements of the New World” would not have been constructed. It does not

mention the agony and brutality that the African slaves in America went through to create a country in which they could not even reap the benefits.

However, this (government approved textbook) does not seem sufficient in really teaching Ghanaians about their black brethren in other parts of the world. Thus, it is impossible for these textbooks to be thorough enough when it is only about a hundred pages a year. The government issued textbook is only about three hundred (300) pages long and is used from Form 1-3 (Saphir, 2001). The implication of this is that the study of history becomes too abstract to students as there are gaps in their knowledge.

Yildirim (2006) also stipulates that teachers are of the view that sentences in the textbook are too “long” and “complex”, the flow of ideas is not suitable to critical reading, the terms used are not very clear, and the way sentences are constructed is confusing for students. Probably the reading level of a textbook is one of the most important criteria in judging the value of it for students' learning. Again, teachers' view the textbook as inadequate in leading students to research in learning the content area. It does not help the students to think critically, apply the content and search for new knowledge (Yildirim, 2006). The implication of this is that the study of history becomes too abstract to students as there are gaps in their knowledge. Teacher's work will be made easier and effective if he does well to make a good textbook available to students. Good textbook enforces learning and leads to students' better performance.

### **2.3 Mapping between the syllabus and the textbook**

According to the study conducted by Saphir (2001), the textbook correlates with the syllabus yet teachers find it a necessity to give reading beyond the government textbook since it is not detailed enough on most topics. In France, because teachers want to adhere to the curricula and want teaching tools that will help them do that, textbook publishers tend to follow the syllabus guidelines very closely. Even so, they have editorial freedom in their approach to most topics, as the syllabus does not provide extensive explanations of the material to be covered (Hutchins, 2016). Again, Hutchins (2016) posits that for textbook to be approved in Texas, technically, a textbook only needs to include half of the material in the State's curriculum guidelines and is free to include material that is not required (which makes it easier for textbooks to meet the guidelines for multiple States).

Studies in Africa, especially in Zambia have also established the linkage between textbooks and syllabi. Nakawa (2012) for instance, examined the relationship between mathematics textbooks and its syllabus in Zambia and concludes that the ideal objectives in mathematics textbooks were not reflected in the syllabus. The study further found that the textbooks highlighted mathematical knowledge and skills but this was not reflected in the syllabus designed by the Zambian education ministry. Nakawa (2012) further found that within the textbooks, problem-solving skills were less observed and limited to simple calculations and sentence problems, a situation which further reveals the gap between the syllabus and the textbook. Thirdly, the study further found that skills that were not directly relevant for the students were included in the textbook while this was not found in the syllabus. Nakawa (2012) therefore concludes that while the objectives of mathematics education syllabus advocated for the ability for communication, pupil's activities desired in the textbooks were mostly restricted to the writing process. It is, therefore, clear in most African settings, textbook writers do not adhere to the guidelines given in the syllabus as Nakawa (2012) found was the case in Zambia.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study was hooked on the interpretive phenomenological case study aspect of qualitative research. The choice of such design was in tandem with Merriam (1998) position that in interpretive phenomenological research the researcher intention is to see how participants 'make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world' (p.6). In keeping this epoch, the study sought to examine how history teachers make sense of the history syllabus and textbook recommended by CRDD. The purposive sampling was utilised for the study. This according to Welman and Kruger (1999) is the most important kind of non-probability sampling that helps the researcher to identify the main participants and also for the purpose of the study to look for people who have experienced the phenomenon to be researched. To Oliver (2006), the choice of the techniques is also based on the premise that participants have special knowledge of the research issues and are willing to participate in the research. In all, a sample size of eight (8) history teachers were selected from the eleven (11) Senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis that offer history. The choice of the eight (8) history teachers were in line with Boyd's (2001) assertion that in phenomenological research two (2) to ten (10) respondents are sufficient to reach saturation. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to interview the history teachers. The responses solicited were sorted into categories and were analyzed thematically so as to put respondents' views into perspectives (Marais & Meier, 2004).

### **4.0 Results and Discussions**

The results and discussion were presented sequentially in accordance with the order in which the objectives of the study were formulated.

#### 4.1 Perceptions of History Teachers about the History Syllabus

This research objective was to find out the perceptions of history teachers on the history syllabus. The responses of teachers have been presented below; the teachers were asked is the history syllabus overloaded with more topics. The teachers indicated that the syllabus is overloaded with more topics and it contains some irrelevant facts and information. One of the teachers was of the view that *“the syllabus is already overcrowded and yet additional ten (10) topics have been added and the duration or time to study all these topics is still limited.”*

He cited Colonial Rule in West Africa, European contact with West Africa, Problems of Independent West African states as some of the topics that have been added”. Another teacher expressed the view that “the topics relating to East and Southern Africa such as Bantu, Axum, Swahili civilizations among others does not hold much relevance for the Ghanaian student, although they all formed part of Africa so such topics should be modified”. This is in line with what Ruto and Ndaloh (2013) and Boadu (2016) stated as the history syllabus is overloaded with more topics than the teachers could cover. This means that some teachers will not be able to complete the syllabus since the time allotted for the teaching of history is insufficient. This will affect the approaches (methods) such as role play, discussion, field trip, question answer method among others teachers use in the teaching of history. It leads to memorization of disjointed facts dates and names by the student.

This confirms the earlier study by Dance (1970) which stated that teachers rush students through topics which lead to memorization of disjointed facts, dates and names. This makes the subject difficult to study, since the students now have more topics to learn. Because teachers want to prepare their student well enough to enable them passed their examination; they are compelled to do selective teaching especially the examinable once at the expense full syllabus coverage.

Also, the teachers expressed the opinion that the content of the history syllabus is fixed but it makes rooms for addition by the teacher. One of the teachers indicated that topics like *“the civilizations such as Egypt, Bantu among others have content which not change it has remains the same year in and year out”*. This confirms by Adejunmobi’s (1992) assertion that the content of the history syllabus is fixed. Again, they expressed that the syllabus made some room for addition. Again another teacher expressed that *“I only add to the content of the syllabus when teaching, that is where I give additional information to the students”*. It can be observed that using the syllabus alone is not sufficient for teaching history. The teacher should have knowledge about current world affairs in order to fuse that into his or her teaching if he wants diversity and dynamism in his teaching. This encourages effective teaching and learning.

Lastly, the respondents were of the view that, the history syllabus suggests the use of teaching and learning resource. Teachers perceived the teaching and learning resources stated in the syllabus to be appropriate for the teaching of History. The respondents cited the use of resource person, reference books, maps among others as some of the teaching and learning resources. The use of textbooks, maps and historical atlases are in tandem with what Crookall (1975) stated as appropriate teaching learning resources for the teaching of history. However, the teachers realized that the teaching and learning resources for teaching was not available in most schools even though the syllabus suggests the teaching and learning resources.

One of the respondents stated that *“there is no map for teaching this makes teaching topics like slave trade difficult. The students do not know where the various places been discussed are located”*. This means that the teachers are further burdened with the responsibility of providing these resources for teaching. The findings confirm several studies (Harris, 2002; Oakes & Saunders, 2002) on the availability and adequacy of instructional materials for teaching history. All these studies show that many history teachers do not have access to the number and quality of instructional materials needed to provide students with the educational opportunities required to meet academic standards.

The analysis of the syllabus shows that the syllabus is overloaded with more topics. From the syllabus there are twenty two topics and each topic has its own sub- topics which have to be completed within a period of three years. The syllabus recommends that approaches (methods) such as question and answer, discussion, lecture, project method, brainstorming, field trips and debate are to be used in the teaching of history. It also recommends instructional resources for effective teaching of history. Examples of resources in the syllabus for the teaching of each topic include textbooks, visual aids such as maps, charts and pictures, historical diary, newspapers audio visual aids such as film and use of museums as well as resource persons.

In conclusion, it can be said here that Ghanaian history syllabus is overcrowded with more topics and its content is fixed. The adverse effect of this is that, experienced history teachers are likely to teach the subject based on topics they assume are likely to appear in their final exams. The actions of these teachers have the tendency to reveal on a one sided aspect of the syllabus to students, hence, making it impossible for students to enjoy the full utility of the history syllabus.

#### 4.2 Perceptions of History Teachers about the History Textbook

This research objective was to find out the perception of History teachers on the history textbook. The responses of teachers are analysed and presented below;

On the issue of the history teachers' perceptions on the government history textbook, most of the teachers' interview reveals that the history textbook contained illustrations but the few illustrations and are questionable. One of the respondents stated that *"the pictures and maps are not clear and not up to date as the history textbook had been subjected to reprinting and photocopy over the years which reduce it quality"*. This confirms what Essuman and Osei- Poku (2015) described as, illustrations in textbook are black and white and look blur it does carry the message to the students in it realistic state. The teachers also should concern that, the maps and pictures are not separated from the content of the topic but rather add to the content. One of the teachers stated that *"I am compelled to find better pictures and maps to enable effective teaching and learning"*. This is in agreement with Bovee and Arens (cited in Johnson, 1994) believe that an illustration must bring out the right kind of perception for learning to take place. A good illustration must be simple, accurate, and appropriate (Loomis, 1986).

In addition, the teachers perceived the government history textbook to be boring and difficult since information found in the history textbook is scanty. For instance, one of the teachers stated that, *"the textbook is difficult and boring for teachers and students to read since the point are not separated but fuse and written in easy form"*. Thus teachers and students are burdened to fish out information for themselves which makes the textbook difficult and boring to read. This affirms Yildirim's (2006) assertion that the textbooks are difficult and boring for teachers and students to read. Another respondent stated that, *"... Complex language structure was used to write the history textbook which is above the knowledge level of the students"*. This compels students to search for more information to enable them better understand what is written in the textbook. Yildirim (2006) stated as the sentences in the textbook are too long and complex and the sentences are constructed is confusing for students.

Also, other responses indicated that the textbook is not thorough enough and adequate to be used for the teaching of history. Some of the respondents indicated that *"the textbook skims over the atrocities that the slave trade caused to the people of Ghana and those transported to the New world"*. They were of the view that the textbook does not give vivid picture of the conditions of the slaves. It was not really detailed about the long and weary march of the slaves from the interior to the coast. This confirms Saphir's, (2001) assertions that the history textbook does not mention the agony that the African slaves in America went through to create a country in which they could not even reap its benefits. They also stated that the history textbook was not thorough enough for the teaching of the history subject since the information in the textbook is scanty. Teachers are compelled to read different books to supplement the information provided in the government history textbook.

Varied views were expressed by respondents concerning the interpretations of the government history textbook. The respondents indicated that the history textbook does not provide different interpretations. However, there are some interpretations that are ambiguous and do not portray the true picture of events that occurred in the past. Another claimed that *"the history textbook provided a one-way interpretation and that only the teacher helps the student to understand the information explained in the history textbook"*.

Analysis of the government history textbook shows that, history textbook is not thorough enough and adequate to be used for the teaching of history. This is due to the fact that the information in the textbook is scanty and the illustrations are few.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that the history textbook contains scanty information and not thorough enough to be used for teaching history. Also, the illustrations are not clear to give further information to student.

#### **4.3 Mapping between the History syllabus and the History textbook**

This research objective was to find out how the history teachers' perceptions on the syllabus maps with their perceptions on the history textbook. The responses gathered from the teachers' interviews are presented below;

The respondents were of the view that the textbook correlate with the syllabus especially when the topics in the textbooks are compared with those in the syllabus. They agreed that it was necessary to give reading beyond the government textbook this is because the information in the government history textbook is not enough. One of the respondents asserted that *"... I do give reading beyond the government history textbook in order to help my students learn more and not to limit themselves to the government textbook"*. Supplementary textbooks and pamphlets are used by teachers to provide extra information on topics. This confirms by Saphir (2001), that the textbook correlate with the syllabus yet teachers find it necessity to give reading beyond the textbook since it is not detailed enough about most topics.

Also, the teachers expressed that the content of the textbook reflect the guidelines in the syllabus. Again, they were of the view that the syllabus does not provide extensive explanations of the materials to be covered in the textbook. The syllabus gives the topics, sub-topics and the teaching and learning resources among others. This affirms Hutchins' (2016) claim that the syllabus does not provide extensive explanation of the material to be covered. Due to this, history teachers need to seek for additional information in order to make their classes interesting and stimulating for their students. Also, they suggested that both the syllabus and the government history textbooks should be revised and updated with more information.

The analysis of the history syllabus and the government history textbook revealed that to some extent there is mapping between the topics in textbook and the syllabus. However, when the syllabus was revised in 2010 two topics such as ‘Civilization of Nilotic Sudan from 3000 BC and The world Situation by AD 1500 was removed from the syllabus but these topics have not been reflected in the government history textbook. This is because the textbook has not been revised since it was published since 1993. Although the syllabus does not provide extensive explanations of the materials to be covered in the textbook the syllabus provides an overview of the content that has been explained in the textbook.

### 5.0 Implications for Policy and Practice

It has been observed that to some extent the history syllabus maps with the textbook and the content guidelines of the textbook reflect those of the syllabus. This means that the syllabus should provide an overview of the content to be explained in the textbook. Teachers should be given training on the proper use of the syllabus in order to change their perception about the history syllabus. The ministry of education should ensure colloquiums are organised for teachers consistently. The assistant headmaster of academics should try and give history the maximum time, just like the other subjects. With regards to the teachers’ perception on the textbook, the ministry of education should revise and update the government history textbook with more information. Besides, the ministry of education should try and recommend other relevant history textbooks for the history teachers. Regarding mapping between the syllabus and textbook, the ministry of education should ensure that revisions made in the history syllabus should be reflected in the government history textbook.

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