Chronological Versus Thematic History Teaching Debate: Analysis of the Ghanaian Primary School History Curriculum

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How to cite
Oppong, C. A., Gyimah, G., & Afari, I. Y. (2024). Chronological Versus Thematic History Teaching Debate: Analysis of the Ghanaian Primary School History Curriculum. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 7(4), 1-20.
https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2024.37

ABSTRACT

Whether history educators should teach history chronologically or thematically is one of the long-lasting debates in history education. We depended on the content of the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum to conduct a qualitative content analysis to assess the organization of contents in the curriculum in alignment with the chronological and thematic approaches to history teaching. Our analysis revealed that the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum designers adopted a mixed-method approach (chronological and thematic) of history teaching. Thus, they arranged the major themes and topics thematically but largely organized the sub-topics and themes chronologically. In implementing the curriculum, teachers should adopt pedagogical practices that support a mixed approach (thematic and chronological) to history teaching. We recommend that textbook authors design their materials in alignment with the principles of the two approaches of history teaching to promote historical understanding, critical thinking, and understanding of historical events in order of cause and effect. Combining the two approaches helps balance the shortfalls and the strengths of the two approaches to history teaching.

KEYWORDS

Chronological approach; content; curriculum; history; thematic approach; Ghana; history teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the continuous growth of history education, the discipline is entangled with some arguments that lack a universal conclusion. One of the most heated debates among history educators and researchers has been whether history teaching should be done thematically or chronologically. Some scholars and educators believe history teaching must be approached chronologically to help students build a mental picture of the past (Collins, 1995). However, other researchers and educators support the thematic approach and opine that it helps students understand connections among historical narratives and develops students' questioning skills (Chimbunde et al., 2023; Kaya, 2022; Turan, 2020). Shane (2016) asserted that other educators and researchers have proposed a mixed approach, thus combining chronological and thematic approaches, as the best way to settle the debate. Irrespective of how long the debate might continue, the two approaches should not be seen as opposing or alternating. According to Turan (2020), the thematic approach emerged to solve the problems embedded in the chronological approach, and the existence of the chronological approach also solves the problems related to the thematic approach. Thus, combining the two approaches seems to make history teaching more meaningful and purposeful. Therefore, we assessed the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum to ascertain the history teaching approach the designers adopted, whether thematic or chronological. The study findings may provide an understanding for history teachers on how best they can present the history content to their learners to enhance the teaching and learning of history content and transfer.

Chronological Approach

Collins (1995) defined chronology as arranging events or dates in the sequence of their occurrence, thus deciding on the appropriate sequence of historical accounts that reflect the sequential events that unfolded in the past. Thus, the chronological arrangement, commonly found in history curricula and textbooks, depicts the time sequence and interrelated topics while emphasizing clear contextual justification (Wood, 1995). Advocates of the chronological approach to history teaching believe that the chronological method is an effective approach to history teaching. It allows learners to make sense of the information and makes the content appropriate for learners of diverse ages. Intuitively, one must understand past experiences and their causes and effects before comprehending more proximal issues (Turan, 2020). Hence, the emphasis on historical contexts or chronological approach offers conceptual knowledge to evaluate the organization of the curriculum's contents. An emphasis on chronology is a prerequisite for enacting any history curriculum. Barton and Levstik (2004) noted that chronology is indispensable to history education.

In the history curriculum, a connection ought to be established across contents to reflect the nature of history (Alberta Education, 2007). Using the chronological approach as a guide for curriculum content organization has enormous benefits in history education. The chronological arrangement of the contents leads to the acquisition of procedural knowledge such as cause and effect, progress and decline, continuity and change. When history educators or curriculum

designers depict historical events chronologically, the chronological arrangement provides learners with a "mental framework to make sense of the past" (Stow & Haydn, 2000, p. 87). In this way, students engage in higher-order thinking, enhancing their understanding of change, development, continuity, progression, and regression (Lomas et al., 1993). This fundamental knowledge of history enables students to develop an understanding of historical times. Therefore, from a chronological pedagogical approach, the organization of contents in any history curriculum should reflect how historical events unfolded.

Thematic Approach

In contrast to the chronological approach, the thematic approach represents an instructional or design approach where several parts of the curriculum are linked together and integrated to form a theme. Turan (2020) argued that the thematic approach is an essential tool for integrating the curriculum's subject matter and removing isolated and reductionist modes of teaching. Adherents of the thematic approach argue that the chronological approach does not provide a solution to the needs of the contemporary world. Moreover, the advocates of the thematic approach blame the chronological approach for the current declining state of history education.

To this end, Tanaka (2019), an advocate of the thematic approach, asserted:

"This centrality of historical thinking contrasts the current worries in the discipline of history about a decline in interest and attention (and significance?) as well as a rise of a presentist mindset. Historians have generally blamed external factors, especially the denigration of humanistic understanding, in favor of science and technology. While there is good reason for such a view, historians have ignored internal issues; we have so naturalized our processes that we have overlooked how history is a part of the problem" (p.52).

Tanaka (2019) agreed with Ermarth's (1992, 2011) perspective that the history that emerged in the twentieth century no longer aligns with the scientific, practical, or conceptual transformation in our contemporary societies. Tanaka and Ermarth's assertion raises the question of whether history also suffers from the damaging confusion Bastian (2012) pinpointed in human comprehension of nature and time.

The thematic approach thus rejects a linear progression through history. Instead, advocates of the thematic approach support the holistic learning of the events, figures, and concepts that have accounted for the changes in human history (Cannadine et al., 2011). Despite the advantages of the thematic approach, critics have criticized the thematic approach for undervaluing the relationship between cause and consequence and chronology. Advocates of the chronological approach have criticized the thematic approach for its less emphasis on cause-and-effect relationships amongst historical events by selecting events or topics from grand historical knowledge instead of chronologically (Turan, 2020). However, proponents of the thematic approach, such as Tanaka, reject these criticisms, arguing for selecting events and topics for teaching since it is impossible to teach everything that has occurred from the

beginning of the world to the present (Tanaka, 2019). Thus, according to the thematic advocates, the thematic approach does not focus on less content by neglecting certain topics as claimed; it instead selects fewer topics and imparts detailed knowledge to students. This ensures that students acquire in-depth knowledge and understanding of history (White, 1994). Turan (2020) outlines some benefits of the thematic approach as follows: appropriate for exposing students to the multiplicity of historical perspectives, enables students to be more creative, assists students in acquiring a deeper understanding of events, enables easy recollection of information, creates room to incorporate current issues, and allows historical learning beyond the textbook.

Purpose of the Study

With the continuous debate, each country or department of education has the autonomy to decide how they intend to structure their history curriculum to blend the two approaches or adopt a single approach to ensure effective history teaching and learning. Most existing literature has focused on the debate between the thematic and chronological approaches of history teaching without necessarily focusing on how designers have utilized the two approaches in curriculum design (Turan, 2020; Williams, 2016). We must thoroughly investigate all aspects of the discipline to achieve a better history education (Byrom, 2014). Therefore, it is not only the teaching methods, instructional materials, and assessments done in schools that are critical issues in history education, but the content of the history curriculum presents an equally pressing area for research (Alexander & Debbie, 2017). While the selection of contents in any history curriculum largely determines what learners study about the past, the arrangement of these contents can enable learners to appreciate an accurate picture of the past. This calls for certain key procedural principles to be followed when selecting and arranging the curriculum. Some studies have suggested that the level of students' comprehension of procedural concepts has the potential to thwart their understanding of more substantive concepts (Lee, 2005). Stearns et al. (2000) argued that emphasizing procedural concepts in the classroom is critical for introducing students to different historical perspectives.

This paper does not intend to be entangled in the debate but seeks to contribute to understanding. We explore how curriculum designers organized the contents in the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum. The investigation arose because recent studies increasingly advocate chronological and thematic approaches to history teaching. Some studies have even recommended planning and implementing appropriate teaching according to both approaches. Consequently, thematic curricula are being designed chronologically, especially in some European countries (Koren & Najbar-Agicic, 2007). The curriculum represents the maiden history curriculum for primary schools in Ghana following the 2017 curriculum reforms. Ehsan (1997) and Fullan (2007) suggested that when a new curriculum is enacted and implemented, a comprehensive review of the curriculum needs to be conducted to provide insights into the curriculum document. We conceived this paper as part of our goal to determine the

incorporation of chronological and thematic approaches in designing the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum.

Therefore, the study aims to analyze how curriculum designers structured the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum contents within the chronological and thematic framework. We explored whether the arrangements of the contents of the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum reflect the tenets of the chronological or thematic approach and provided suggestions that the curriculum designers, history teachers, researchers, and policymakers could use for future modifications.

Context of the Study

In September 2017, Ghana launched a new national curriculum for primary schools. The new curriculum provides the overall direction for primary school education in Ghana. The curriculum laid out the framework for introducing history as a compulsory subject at the primary school level, thereby leading to the emergence of the "History of Ghana Curriculum for Primary Schools." In Ghana, through an appointed curriculum design committee, the Ministry of Education designed the curriculum expected to be implemented by teachers at various school levels. Thus, since Ghana operates with a fidelity approach to curriculum implementation, the nation designed the specific curriculum for each subject and allows teachers to implement the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2019). As such, teachers, who are the final implementers of the curriculum, are given the requirements to operate in alignment with the national curriculum.

A history curriculum, like the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum, should have five essential components: rationale, aims and objectives, topic/content, methods of teaching, and assessment instruments (Oppong, 2009). These components present specific areas for research in history education. As noted by Lee (2005) and Oppong (2009), studies on the aims and objectives, teaching methods, assessment within the history curriculum, and pupils' understanding of history have dominated research in history education. Therefore, the need for our current research to expand the literature on history education emerged.

METHODS

Research Approach

We adopted qualitative content analysis for this study. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), "qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). Qualitative content analysis is a common strategy for data analysis in qualitative descriptive studies (Sandelowski, 2000). The qualitative content analysis is more structured and allows researchers to identify key concepts and variables in a study (Hickey & Kipping, 1996).

Data Collection

We collected samples of the curriculum as the data for this study. As noted in the previous sections, this curriculum represents "the maiden history curriculum for primary schools in Ghana following the 2017 curriculum reforms" (Ministry of Education, 2019). Evaluating newly implemented curricula is crucial for understanding their structure and effectiveness. The significant change in the educational landscape warrants careful examination to understand how the subject is structured and presented to young learners.

We focused on the primary education syllabus because it forms the foundation for students' historical understanding. Hence, the study analyzes the curriculum at this level to reveal how basic historical concepts and approaches are introduced to students early- whether chronological or thematic. This research analysis goes a long way in impacting the patriotic and nationalistic discourses in Ghana through the learning of history. We did not focus on the junior high and senior high schools (JHS/SHS) because the curriculum at these levels has received considerable attention in the literature compared to the primary level (Boadu, 2021; Dwomoh, 2018; Oppong & Adjepong, 2022). Also, given the depth of analysis required for a thorough curriculum review, focusing on a single curriculum level allows for a more comprehensive examination within the constraints of the study. We affirm that the study of the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum contributes to the broader debate on chronological versus thematic approaches in history teaching. As Shane (2016) asserted, some educators and researchers have proposed a mixed approach, combining chronological and thematic approaches, as the best way to settle the debate. Therefore, our study examined how these approaches are balanced or if a single approach was adopted in a newly implemented curriculum. In the following subsection, we describe how the data was analyzed.

Data Analysis

As highlighted in the research approach section above, we adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to systematically interpret the content of the text data (curriculum). Through this approach, the data was analyzed through several stages. First, we familiarized ourselves with the curriculum data through a comprehensive reading of the curriculum's rationale, aims, content, and outline, followed by a page-by-page reading. This stage helped us understand the curriculum's content before proceeding to the main analysis. Secondly, following the initial review, we conducted a detailed search to find out how the curriculum content aligns with the principles of the chronological approach, arranging events by their order of occurrence or dates, as defined by Collins (1995). Thirdly, we shifted our focus to the thematic approach, conducting a thorough search within the curriculum to verify if the content arrangements aligned with the thematic approach, which involves organizing content based on themes or main ideas (Turan, 2020).

Throughout the three stages, we took detailed notes based on observations connected with our research objective. Writing analytic memos during the analysis also facilitated our understanding of the issues. We used the NVivo 14 qualitative research analysis software to

assist the analysis process and enhance data management. Qualitative researchers have recognized this software as beneficial for managing a large amount of data in qualitative studies, thereby enhancing the study's rigor (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Credibility and Trustworthiness

For our study, we followed several techniques to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. In ensuring the study's credibility, we engaged in prolonged engagement with the data, thoroughly familiarizing ourselves with the curriculum through multiple readings before beginning the analysis. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended this deep immersion in the data. We also engaged in member validation by sharing our preliminary findings with two curriculum experts and two history educators in Ghana to ensure that our interpretations accurately reflected the local educational context.

Additionally, to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings, three qualitative researchers independently coded a sample of the curriculum content. We resolved and discussed any discrepancies to ensure consistency in the coding process. This step aligns with recommendations for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Finally, we synthesized our findings to determine whether the curriculum predominantly followed a chronological approach, a thematic approach, or a combination of both. We remained mindful of potential biases throughout the analysis and strived to maintain objectivity. Our approach was guided by the principle of reflexivity, thus acknowledging our positions and perspectives as researchers (Finlay, 2002).

RESULTS

Content of the Ghanaian Primary School History Curriculum, Relative to the Chronological Approach

The analysis is conducted in two parts: first, it discusses the main strands in the curriculum, and second, it discusses the specific arrangement of topics from Basic 1 to Basic 6.

Six (6) major strands, each divided into sub-strands, make up the history of the Ghanaian curriculum for primary schools. The strands are (1) History as a subject; (2) My country Ghana; (3) Europeans in Ghana; (4) Colonization and developments under colonial rule in Ghana; (5) Journey to Independence; and (6) Independent Ghana. The curriculum generally follows the principle of chronology, especially from the third to the last strand, which covers Europeans in Ghana, colonization and developments under colonial rule in Ghana, the journey to Independence, and the establishment of independent Ghana. Thus, all the other strands fall within the chronological paradigm except for the second and third strands.

Chronologically, the curriculum should have placed the third strand, the Europeans' presence in Ghana, before the second strand, my country Ghana, as the name Ghana only came into existence after the arrival of the Europeans. Thus, the curriculum designers missed the principle of chronology in this instance. Probably, the designers thought teachers should provide learners with an introduction to their country, Ghana, before revisiting the presence of the Europeans. However, this was not the case for the remaining strands. The curriculum designers

chronologically arranged the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth strands. The arrival of Europeans preceded Ghana's colonization. Indeed, the formal colonization of the country occurred four (4) centuries after the first European nation, Portugal, arrived in the country. Again, the colonization of the country precipitated the agitation for independence, which was characterized by various nationalist activities that have been described in the curriculum as a "journey to independence." The attainment of independence also ushered in various republics and military takeovers. This arrangement of the strands provides an appropriate mental framework for classroom teachers to organize their history lessons. This is more important for primary school teachers who may not have studied history in their teacher preparatory institutions (Oppong, 2009). In the next paragraphs, we present an analysis of the curriculum based on the various school levels, Basics 1-6.

We present a specific content arrangement from Basics 1 to 6.

For Basic 1, four (4) out of the six (6) main strands have been outlined for study: "history as a subject, my country Ghana, Europeans in Ghana, and independent Ghana." "History as a subject" has the meaning and importance of history and the learners' community history as its subtopics. The first strand, history as a subject, exposes learners to what history is about. This gives learners a mental picture of history to further explore other substantive matters or topics. The strand, "History as a subject," is followed by "My country Ghana," which deals with Ghana's naming trajectory, why she was named Gold Coast, and how and why she ended up being named Ghana. Then there is "Europeans presence in Ghana," which comprises the European nations that came to Ghana and where they settled. The last topic, "Independent Ghana," touches on the presidents Ghana has had over the past few years. As indicated, the arrival of Europeans should be taught first before learners are exposed to the name Gold Coast and how the name changed to Ghana. Though it may not make pedagogical sense to teach the name Gold Coast as a topic without referring to the Europeans, with the current primary school history curriculum structure, the principle of cause and effect is jumbled. At Basic 1, the mental capacity of the learners may not be developed to the level that allows them to make deductions or inferences. Therefore, establishing an appropriate logical connection between issues might be difficult for learners. The influx of Europeans gave birth to the name Gold Coast. Hence, it is appropriate to teach the coming of Europeans first so that the learner will appreciate that a principal outcome of the Europeans' presence was the name Gold Coast, which Europeans gave to the land. Thereafter, an attempt could be made to teach how the name changed to Ghana at independence and the presidents who have ruled the country since Ghana's independence. In this way, the learner will develop a mental framework for understanding the events unfolding over time.

In Basic 2, two (2) strands are earmarked for teaching and learning. These are "my country Ghana" and "Europeans in Ghana." While "my country Ghana" comprises the people of Ghana (major ethnic groups), major historical locations, and selected individuals (women), "Europeans in Ghana" deals with early trading activities between the local people and the

Europeans. Here, the curriculum designers adopted the topical approach of organizing a history curriculum. This approach categorizes historical content under various topics. For instance, the topic of ethnic groups in Ghana is captured under the strand "My country Ghana." An emphasis is placed on the location and characteristics of these groups without specifically referencing their roles within Ghana's history. This is followed by major historical sites in the country like Kumasi Military Museum, Okomfo Anokye Sword, and Gbewa's Palace. The designers devoted a section to the contribution of outstanding women to Ghana's development. It concludes with the trade between the Europeans and Ghanaians during the initial stages of the Europeans' presence in the country. In all these arrangements, no specific historical events present the opportunity to ascertain the chronological dimension of the topic's organization.

For Basic 3, "My country Ghana" and "Europeans in Ghana" are assigned for study. "My country Ghana" consists of the origin of ethnic groups, the connections that transpired among the various ethnic groups, major historical locations (forts and castles), and the contributions of Ghanaian entrepreneurs. "Europeans in Ghana" encompasses the coming of the Europeans. Under "My country Ghana," the first two (2) subtopics: 'origin of ethnic groups'; and 'intergroup exchanges' followed the chronological order. The various ethnic groups, such as the Akans, Ewes, Ga, Mole-Dagbanis, and Gonjas, arrived in the country before trading among themselves began. Again, it was after the ethnic groups had arrived in the country and in their quest to amass more territories and power that they came into conflict. For example, the Akwamu-Denkyira War of 1688 and the Denkyira-Asante Wars between 1699 and 1701, among others, were largely aimed at territorial expansionism. This means that the arrival of various ethnic groups in the country resulted in trade and conflict. The arrangement of the topics in the manner explained in the curriculum allows teachers and learners to appreciate the concept of cause and effect in history.

In Basic 4, five (5) out of the six (6) strands have been outlined for study. These include: "history as a subject; my country Ghana; Europeans presence in Ghana; colonization and developments under colonial rule in Ghana; and independent Ghana." In this grade, the topic organization mostly meets the chronological requirements. It begins with the importance and origins of history, followed by the rise and fall of some major ethnic groups in Ghana. European missionary activities in the country and the gradual establishment of colonial rule in Ghana, initiated by the Bond Act of 1844, also followed. The rise and fall of states and kingdoms predated the arrival of the Europeans. Other events also occurred concomitantly with the Europeans' activities in the country. Akwamu, for example, rose to power primarily due to the presence of Europeans. The Asante Kingdom finally fell due to the British invasion of Kumasi in 1874, ultimately resulting in colonial rule. In sequence, one event led to another, and this is how, in an actual sense, the historical events unfolded. If events are structured chronologically, learners will understand the causes or motives that prompted the events.

However, the next topic after the "Establishment of colonial rule" is "The Republics." This arrangement means there exists a jump over the "journey to independence." This order is akin

to placing the cart before the horse, and this has the propensity to confuse fledgling learners. This should not have been the case since one event leads to another, as known in history. The various republics were born after the attainment of Independence.

Topics for Basic 5 have been arranged in chronological order. Four (4) strands are captured here: "My country Ghana; Europeans' presence in Ghana; colonization and developments under colonial rule in Ghana; and journey to independence." Apart from the subtopics under "My country Ghana," which appears delineated chronologically from the other topics, the principle seems to have been followed. Thus, "developments under colonial rule" precede "the Trans-Atlantic slave trade." Indeed, the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the early 19th century saw the gradual process of establishing colonial rule with all the associated economic, social, and political developments. The activities of the colonial government heralded the formation of the proto-nationalist movements, which was the genesis of the long journey towards Independence.

Basic six (6) has four (4) strands: "Europeans presence in Ghana; Colonization and developments under colonial rule; Journey to independence; and Independent Ghana." Generally, there is a chronological arrangement of the topics. For instance, the coming of the Europeans resulted in colonization, which prompted the struggle for independence, and independence ushered in the Republics and military interventions. Consequently, one activity sequentially led to another. However, another arrangement at this same grade level defies the chronological principle. In the curriculum, the "4th Republic" is placed before "the military takeovers." Except for the 1st Republic, each Republic's antecedent was a coup. This may restrict the learners' ability to mentally place the events sequentially to see possible relationships between the coups and the republics.

Content of the Ghanaian Primary School History Curriculum in Relation to the Thematic Approach

Generally, the designers arranged the content of the Ghanaian primary school history curriculum thematically. Each of the six (6) strands, history as a subject; my country Ghana; Europeans in Ghana; colonization and developments under colonial rule in Ghana; a journey to independence; and independent Ghana, constitute a major theme (a big idea). The thematic approach requires that many elements of the content of the curriculum are integrated into a broader theme (Phillips, 1999; Waldman, 2009). As such, each theme encompasses several events, activities, or experiences that logically connect to form a larger idea (Tanaka, 2019). Thus, designers divide the thematic curriculum into themes or units, and the content of a unit can be taken from any historical period intended to be taught.

In accordance with the thematic approach's principles, each theme has been further divided into sub-themes or sub-strands. While the themes focus on the main ideas, the sub-themes comprise a series of logically arranged events under a particular context or concept aimed at helping students develop a better appreciation of cause-and-effect relationships. Together, the six (6) themes have been divided into twenty-three (23) sub-themes, and these

are as follows: 'History as a subject' contains why and how we study history; learner's own history; family history; and community history. 'My country Ghana' encompasses the people of Ghana, inter-group relations, the origins of Ghana's name, significant historical sites, and a few selected individuals.

The strand, 'Europeans in Ghana, ' consists of the arrival of Europeans, international trade, including the slave trade, missionary activities, and the impact of European presence. The strand, 'Colonization and developments under colonial rule,' deals with establishing colonial rule in Ghana and social, economic, and political development. 'Journey to Independence' covers early protest movements, the formation of political parties, the 1948 riots, and Ghana's gaining of independence. Finally, the strand, 'independent Ghana,' consists of republics and military rule (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The themes and their corresponding sub-themes have the propensity to provide students with a clue to examine, appraise, and reorganize significant historical events to generate ideas, making it easier for them to understand new events (Zevin, 2000). Hopkins et al. (1995) asserted that the thematic approach is founded on the idea that knowledge is acquired most sufficiently and effectively when presented as part of a coherent whole, which thus enables students to relate what they are learning to real-life situations. This implies that we must interconnect the activities, events, experiences, and concepts that form sub-themes of a major theme to enhance students' comprehension.

Likewise, the major themes or strands of the history curriculum must relate to each other to ensure coherence and help students fully appreciate the subject (Smart & Harnett, 2009). Examining the six (6) major strands of the primary school history curriculum indicates some interconnections among the themes. Thus, the first strand, 'History as a subject,' is intended to, among other things, introduce students to the history of their families and communities. This directly links to the second strand, 'My Country, Ghana,' the country's evolution ultimately resulted from the convergence of families and communities to form states and kingdoms, primarily along ethnic lines.

Further, the third strand, 'European presence in Ghana,' has some connection with the forgoing strands, as learners are made to appreciate that foreigners, and for that matter Europeans in particular, played a crucial role in the country's history. Again, the third strand directly affects the fourth strand, 'Colonization and development under colonial rule.' Thus, the arrival of the Europeans eventually led to colonization. The fifth strand, titled 'Journey to independence,' stems from the fourth strand, as colonization instigated the fight for Independence.

Finally, as independence ushered in various civilian and military regimes, the fifth strand connects with the final, 'Independent Ghana.' Using the thematic approach to arrange the curriculum's content can allow students to appreciate the interconnections between events and concepts, which can assist them in appreciating holistic historical knowledge.

Analysis of the first strand, 'History as a subject,' indicates that its sub-strands are largely interconnected. Why and How We Study History, the first sub-strand under this thematic strand, deals with the importance and sources of history. We expect this to be the basis for evaluating learners' historical thinking abilities. After gaining this understanding, the teachers introduce the learner to their personal, family, and community history, emphasizing that individuals make up a family and that the convergence of various families creates a community. This can give the learner an understanding of the relationship between individuals, families, and the community.

The fourth and fifth sub-strands (major historical sites and some chosen individuals) are separated. The other three sub-strands (the people of Ghana, inter-group relations, and how Ghana got its name) of the "My country Ghana" strands are somewhat connected. Thus, while 'The people of Ghana' deal with the various ethnic groups in the country, 'Inter-group relations' highlight the contacts between these groups, especially during their formative years, which mainly were trade and war. These two sub-strands shed light on the origin of Ghana's name, explaining its emergence following the establishment of hegemony over all ethnic groups.

Although the sub-strands (major historical sites and some selected individuals) are not directly linked to the forgoing three sub-strands, since these are nationally recognized and designated assets, they are inherently connected to the main strand, 'My country Ghana.'

Examining the third strand, 'Europeans in Ghana,' reveals that all the sub-strands are related sequentially. Thus, upon Europeans' arrival on the Gold Coast, they began their commercial engagements with the local population, which included the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This happened concomitantly with missionary activities, which resulted in significant changes in the socio-economic lives of pre-colonial Ghanaians. Similarly, the fourth strand, 'Colonization and Developments under Colonial Rule,' along with its sub-strands, aligns thematically. Substantial developments followed the establishment of colonial rule in the political, social, and economic sectors of the country undertaken by the colonial administration. Thus, three sub-strands (social development, economic development, and political development) directly emanate from the first sub-strand (establishing colonial rule in Ghana). The fifth strand, 'Journey to Independence,' and its accompanying sub-strands are closely interconnected.

The roadmap to Ghana's independence essentially commenced with the founding of movement groups such as the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society, the National Congress of British West Africa, and the West African Youth League, among others. The formation of these movement groups catalyzed the formation of political parties after World War II. When these movements emerged, they developed people's self-awareness and granted them a strong sense of nationalism. They also caused random protests and fights with the colonial government, which led to the 1948 riots. The outcome of all these was the attainment of independence in 1957. The last strand, 'Independent Ghana,' as noted, has two sub-strands linked with each other. Following Ghana's Independence, a succession of civilian and military regimes emerged since similar factors contributed to the removal of various civilian governments.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis suggests that the curriculum's framers adopted chronological and thematic approaches in their design. As noted, the curriculum contents were presented chronologically in many cases. In some cases, however, the designers somewhat complied with or did not adhere to the chronology principle. The curriculum analysis revealed that the sequence of contents across the various grades (basic one to six) was maximal because many topics appeared not to be unconnected. Thus, the curriculum designers largely followed the principle of the chronological arrangement of topics that characterizes most conventional history curricula. Despite the lack of absolute adherence to the chronological principle, the curriculum's attention to chronology is adequate to yield the needed pedagogical outcomes. Studies have acknowledged the importance of well-sequenced content (Hodkinson & Smith, 2018). For instance, logically sequencing topics in a curriculum is essential to promoting efficient teaching and learning of history (Education Bureau of Hong Kong, 2016). Moreover, students can better appreciate history if the content is well-sequenced (Friedlander, 2014; Malamed, 2016).

Properly organizing the content chronologically allows learners to appreciate and assimilate procedural concepts such as historical time, cause and effect, progress, and decline. Ofsted (2007) noted that the effective application of chronology in the history curriculum reduces learners' difficulties in understanding history. A well-chronologically arranged topic helps the learners develop potential in constructing their historical accounts. Thus, they learn from the early stages of their development. This prevents learners from acquiring a confused, superficial comprehension of the past (Hoodless, 2002).

On the other hand, as demonstrated in the analysis, the curriculum designers also employed the thematic approach in arranging the curriculum's content. As demonstrated, all six major strands of the curriculum are connected in terms of coherence and the knowledge and skills they contain. Besides, the sub-strands of the major strands have been arranged to conform to the tenets of the thematic approach, as there are explicitly identified connections among the sub-strands. In contrast to the chronological method, which emphasizes events and their order of occurrence, the thematic method highlights the main ideas of historical events. It brings together several interrelated historical occurrences or facts within a single theme, presented sequentially (Turan, 2020), as the curriculum has demonstrated.

Studies on learning and memory reemphasized the suitability of applying the thematic approach to teaching abstract constructs (Tanaka, 2019). According to Turan (2020), an important means through which the human brain can recall new information is meaning-making (connecting with other information). The brain forms a multifaceted system of links between freshly acquired ideas and associated knowledge. Thus, information is linked with previous and relevant ideas and increases exponentially. The thematic method, as has been adopted in arranging the content of the curriculum, can foster students' appreciation of these connections since it treats many similar events and facts around a central theme (Hopkins, 1995). For

instance, when discussing the major strand 'Europeans in Ghana,' the interconnectedness of all the sub-strands helps students recall that the arrival of Europeans in Ghana led directly to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Christian missionary activities, and the introduction of Western education and medicine. Therefore, teaching topics selected from familiar themes can increase the possibility of students recollecting newly acquired knowledge, subsequently providing learning that focuses on the broad picture (Tanaka, 2019). The analysis also revealed that the curriculum designers adhere to two major pedagogical principles—continuity and sequence—when organizing the contents.

First, there was the principle of continuity, which requires that thematic strands in any curriculum are arranged to make continuity and recurring opportunities for their practice possible. For vertical repetition of that activity, a chosen theme should be planned for all the grades in the school system. Such an organization makes continuous learning of a particular theme possible for the learners at each level. For instance, strands such as "My country Ghana," "Europeans in Ghana," and "Independent Ghana" have been repeated across the grade levels. The curriculum's content is structured so that most major strands are revisited at different grade levels. This may enhance learners' understanding by allowing them to practice previously acquired skills and reflect on old materials in a new form. The outcome of such an organization is a mastery of the subject matter rather than being exposed to different themes at all levels. In other words, continuity denotes the repetition of strands across various grades to foster students' appreciation. Indeed, research has shown that learning history, if it will lead to deeper understanding, involves the repeated study of events or facts (VanSledright, 2002). Johnston (2012) argued that students' comprehension is concretized anytime they revisit the content.

Second, the principle of sequence, like the principle of continuity, was noticed in the organization of the contents. The sequence refers to the developmental continuity of a chosen thematic strand. With "continuity," even though the learning experience is repeated, it is done by increasing the difficulty level compared to earlier experiences. This fosters students' ability to understand better and practice the act of doing history. As a concept, sequence promotes continuity of learning and ensures progressiveness, thereby augmenting students' competence. In this curriculum, the repeated strand builds on the previous one in detail. This allows logical progression from simplistic ideas to complex ideas that involve activating prior knowledge or building new learning on prior learning.

As already noted, the framers of the primary school history curriculum adopted a mixed-methods approach (chronological and thematic) in designing the curriculum. Thus, as shown in the analysis, the events (sub-topics/themes) have been organized chronologically even though the contents have been arranged thematically. Again, the analysis shows that the arrangement of the six main strands moves chronologically, especially from the third to the sixth strand. Adopting this mixed-methods approach in the history curriculum and implementing it in the classroom can benefit teachers and students, as it can foster a better understanding of history. This is because each approach has its advantages. Therefore, teachers and students can have

the opportunity to exploit the respective advantages of the two approaches to history teaching. Furthermore, the weaknesses of one approach may be mitigated by the strengths of another. Turan (2020) supported this, suggesting that combining the two approaches can overcome the deficiencies of both methods. However, the debate over the efficacy of both approaches appears to hinder a universal and successful application and appreciation of the mixed method approach to history teaching. According to Stradling (1997), the debate has also focused on whether the two approaches are compatible. We agree with Şimşek (2017) that these two approaches should not be considered an alternative. Thus, neither of these two methods should be regarded as better. Instead, both approaches must be considered as helping to make history teaching more relevant and understandable to students.

Consequently, Stradling (1997) called for the teaching of history to be approached partly chronologically and partly thematically. This means creating a balance between the two approaches. Thus, according to Stradling (1997), "In practice, it seems to me that it is wholly possible to combine the two approaches quite effectively… What is important is that when looking at these themes and processes, they are still set into the context of a broadly chronological framework, not just so that they grasp the broad sequence of events but also because they can then see, for example, how apparently distinct political, social, economic, cultural and intellectual developments were actually influencing each other and may have been interdependent" (p. 17). This suggests that the current primary school history curriculum, which uses the mixed method approach, can provide students with the needed historical knowledge if implemented appropriately.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We explored how the most recent Ghanaian primary school history curriculum employed the two approaches to history teaching: chronological and thematic.

Our analysis revealed that the curriculum designers used chronological and thematic approaches, encompassing six major strands that guide history teaching. Each strand is further divided into sub-strands, enhancing a comprehensive exploration of Ghana's historical narrative. The chronological arrangement is generally adhered to, particularly in strands dealing with the presence of Europeans in Ghana, colonization, and the journey to independence. However, inconsistencies arise, such as the placement of "My country Ghana" before "Europeans in Ghana," which can obscure the logical progression of historical events. Nonetheless, adherence to the chronological principles, even though not in its strictest sense, was crucial for primary school teachers, especially those without much historical background[1], as it has the propensity to aid in constructing a coherent framework for lessons and enhance students' understanding of historical timelines. On the other hand, the thematic approach interconnects various historical elements, which can help students grasp broader concepts and

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[1]In the context of Ghana, a primary school class teacher is required to teach multiple subjects though some of the fields or subjects might not be their area of specialization. Hence, a teacher might be teaching history and yet, not have much historical knowledge.

relationships between events. Each strand forms a major theme with logically arranged sub-themes that explore significant topics, such as the impact of European presence on Ghana and the evolution of Ghana's identity. For example, the first strand, "History as a subject," lays the groundwork for historical thinking by linking personal and community histories. The syllabus also emphasizes continuity and sequence, revisiting themes across grades to deepen understanding. Adopting the two approaches in designing the syllabus can augment pedagogical effectiveness and foster students' holistic appreciation of Ghana's past, thereby promoting their recognition of the interconnectedness of historical events and their implications for contemporary society.

Arranging the contents of a history curriculum chronologically and thematically is essential for promoting historical understanding. Pedagogically, such an approach can help teachers teach history in a more organized and holistic manner. However, arranging the topics chronologically or thematically in the curriculum does not inevitably lead to the development of children's cognition (Hodkinson 2003a). Thus, properly organizing the topics in the curriculum will not automatically translate into learners' ability to fashion coherent historical explanations and begin to understand relationships between historical events (Philpott, 2010; Stow & Haydn, 2000). The classroom teacher's job is to teach learners how to acquire the expected learning outcomes. As a result, teachers are encouraged to teach carefully according to the chronological and thematic arrangement implemented in the curriculum to impart a better understanding of history to learners. As they produce textbooks to supplement the curriculum, authors should also be guided by the tenets of the two approaches espoused in the curriculum.

The study findings inform history educators and curriculum designers to embrace the mixed method approaches of combining the chronological and thematic approach of teaching history. These two approaches may support learners in developing an understanding of historical narratives from broader contexts, thereby ensuring the historical contents become more engaging and connectable. History curriculum designers and educators should strive for curriculum and lessons that showcase important historical themes while maintaining the chronological ideology to ensure learners can identify cause-effect relationships and patterns, which are vital for historical thinking and analysis. Since students can explore significant historical themes while learning about different historical periods and comparing and contrasting them, they may sharpen their critical thinking and analytical skills. Curriculum designers should understand the importance of combining the two approaches when developing a history curriculum. Thus, their curriculum design style will enhance historical literacy.

Limitations of the Study

The study could have been more extensive if we had interviewed some selected history teachers to determine their perspectives and added additional data sources. Thus, the perspectives or perceptions of history teachers who are the final implementers or curriculum instructional gatekeepers of the Ghanaian Primary school history curriculum could have added additional

perspectives. However, the packed nature of the academic calendar of the teachers we approached made them turn down the request. Notwithstanding, we conducted a robust document analysis to present an evaluation outside of the history teachers' perspectives. Moreover, we added a member validation by ensuring some selected history educators and curriculum experts cross-checked our analysis and interpretations of the Ghanaian primary school history syllabus. Future research could consider adding history teachers' perspectives as an additional source of data. In Ghana, the curriculum is usually developed at the national level since Ghana operates with the fidelity approach of curriculum implementation, so consultation with teachers might be minimal when developing the curriculum.

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