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Education Curriculum Reforms In Kenya: From Theory to Competency Based Curriculum

Abstract

Studies conducted in the country have shown that there is a missing link between the graduates coming out of the education system in Kenya in relation to the industry demands. This has been attributed to the system of education that the country has in place which emphasises more on passage of examinations rather than acquisition of necessary competencies and skills which was the form of education system that existed in Africa before colonial period (apprenticeship model). In the last decade several countries across Africa have made reforms in their education sector to ensure production of graduates who posses required employability skills. Countries like Tanzania and Rwanda are far much ahead of Kenya in terms of implementing competency based curriculum in their education system. The new competency based curriculum (2-6-3-3-3) replaces the unpopular the 8-4-4 (introduced in 1985) system that has largely been blamed for decline in education standards around the country. In history, the country inherited colonial system of education that failed to meet the desires and needs of the country social economic development and has partly been blamed for pitfalls associated with it. This paper therefore discusses the education curriculum reforms in Kenya which has largely been theory based for many years into competency based curriculum which is aligned to the Kenya developmental Vision 2030 that aims to put this nation as a middle income country. Lessons learnt over the various curriculum reforms initiatives are presented in this paper as part of ensuring that other African countries journeying towards competency based learning can learn from the strides made by Kenya.

Key Words: Competency, Theory, Reforms, Curriculum and Evaluation

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1. Introduction

Education in Kenya has not been new and that African education system played an important role in society development before colonialism period. Education provides knowledge and skills to the population, as well as shaping the personality citizens in a country (Njegere, 2014). Education is mainly seen as the foundation of a country which brings economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. Education helps an individual to address poverty, build up harmony and democracy society (Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, & Awal, 2012). Education also is capable to give power for citizens to voice out their views, expose to them their real potential, lead them to become better individuals and widen their views in certain areas of life.

1.1 African Systems of Education before Colonial Period

The African tradition education was a form of learning whereby knowledge, skills and practices were passed from generation to generation (via elders to children) through practical activities, talks and also mentorship (Omolewa, 2007). This has ensured that African cultural heritage has been preserved from generation to generation through traditional education system. As other scholars have termed African traditional education as 'indigenous', 'informal', 'community' or 'pre-colonial' based education, in this paper, the colonial and African education systems are similar only that the colonial education system classrooms and qualified teachers are involved. Similar to African education system, there were places through which children or young members of the community were taken for initiation purposes and the training were conducted by respected and approved community elders. Okoro (2010) indicated that this happened through apprenticeship model of education where children and young adults (male and female) learnt under a respected elderly person. The purpose of apprenticeship was to preserve and accumulate knowledge and skills so as to foster community continuity and development in various spheres. Further, the traditional African apprenticeship training was centred on the fact that every person (mostly children and young people of both genders) were specifically trained on specific role they were to perform (at that particular age) and later in the society. For instance, the first lesson that children were taught in the apprenticeship model was to understand and know their environment and what constituted them (nature, vegetation, topography) in addition to be trained on various games, music, proverbs that reflected life experiences later in life. Later in the years, the children were introduced to graze young calves, goats and sheep (livestock) as soon they were aged six years and above in the community that I come from (Pokot in

Kenya). For girls, they were mentored by their elder grandmothers and mothers on household chores including cooking, taking care of young children, pottery (including mining clay), hide and skins making among others. Later during teenage years, the children were segregated in groups and introduced to artisans skills such as blacksmithing (developing, utensils, water troughs, spears, knives, axes, hoes among others), house making, agricultural activities, woodwork, herbal and medicine among others (Okello, 2015). The vocational training was mainly passed from parents to their children (both mothers and their fathers) and was recorded through songs and proverbs. The apprenticeship form of learning was practical one as theories were not taught (a concept associated with modern form of education). This is the education system that the colonialist found in the Africa including Kenya during the time of scramble for Africa. They therefore introduced modern education based on western models (British system in Kenya) in the African colonies. Hence, modern educations system in Kenya started before independence and has changed over the course of more than 100 years to where it is now as described in the sub-sections following.

1.2 Education System in Kenya from Early 1900s to 1963

The modern education provision initially by the colonialist did not target African children but the European settlers and Indian children. Over time, as part of promoting Christianity through sharing of the Gospel, the European missionary churches started mission schools for Africans not only in Kenya but other countries in Africa (Lelei & Weidman, 2012). The main players of modern education system in Kenya before and after independence were; British colonial government, Christian missionaries, Asian groups (Aga Khan) and independent African churches and associations that did not subscribe to missionary stance with regard to certain African traditions (Otiende, Wamahiu & Karugu, 1992). By the year 1909, a department of education had been set up by British East African protectorate to guide on education provision for the country (Mackatiani, Imbovah, Imbova & Gakuha, 2016). The enactment of education department by British government on their colonies promoted racial segregation whereby African children did not attend similar schools with colonial children and Asians (Lelei & Weidman, 2012). This form of segregation was commonly in British protectorate government schools that favoured white and Asian children as opposed Missionary schools that catered for African children but not to higher levels (up to class 4). To Asian schools, they admitted children from wealthy Africans and their own denying other African children from accessing their schools and this was due to the controls they received from colonial administration. As a result of this colonial education policy, tensions and

conflicts arose because of Kenyans determination to preserve their customs, traditions and cultures which the education policy was against (Acedo, Adams & Popa, 2012). The Africans were also against the 'modern' form of education because the agenda was to make them labourers for European colonisers and not to develop intelligent mindset who might question the behaviours by the colonial administration (Sheffield, 1973). The education commissions were all aligned towards attaining various curriculum goals for the governments of the day (colonial) and not adequately address the pressing educational needs for African children.

The goal of the education offered by colonial government to African children was to colonise their minds (Malisa & Missedja, 2019). This would ensure that once the children of African finish their school, they would take subordinate roles (those who had inferiority complex when interacting with settlers) while the settlers' children took higher roles in the social, economical and political landscape. Because of this discrimination, African independent schools began in Kenya during the colonial period starting in central region of Kenya dominated by Agikuyu community (Natsoulas, 1998). The aim of formation of these African run schools was to provide more educational opportunities for African children who were denied education by European settles, to keep away missionary influence on their schools, to maintain their cultural heritage and values, to inform Africans on the evils of colonialism and create opportunities for educated Africans who could not gain employment in colonial administered schools.

1.3 Education System in Kenya from Independence (1963) to Date (2020)

After Kenya attained independence in 1963, a new system of 7-4-2-3 of education was adopted. This means that learners spent seven years in primary, four years in junior secondary education (Ordinary Level), 2 years in high school (Advanced level) and three years in colleges or universities. This system of education was inherited from colonial administration but policy changes happened through various education commissions to ensure that the system education offered was demand driven. The country reformed its education in three pillars over the years; manpower requirements, social demand and cost benefit analysis strategies (Namaswa, 1989). The social demand pillar came as a result of the societal pressure to ensure that majority of African children got access to education after independence. The notion was that access to education was a prerequisite of better living standards for majority of Africans who had been denied education by the colonialists. Wanyama and Changach (2013) alluded that the model adopted at independence period was focused on consumption

role of education rather than investment aspect. One of the effects of this model was production of many school leavers who were not adequately prepared to meet the demands of the job market. According to MacLeod and Urquiola (2018), majority of parents in developed countries preferred taking their children schools that had higher absolute achievement (the investment aspect) compared to those in sub Saharan African countries that after independence the concern was just to ensure every child accessed schooling irrespective of whether the child gained skills at the end or not. The consumption model appeared to be popular in many African countries because majority of households could not be able to meet the cost of education if the education system was investment driven as seen by the case in developed countries. Many developed countries in the early 60s and 70s (USA Britain, Australia) adopted investment education aspect which gave valuable education system of training and teaching children who come out of college and get employed instantly thus contribute to the GDP of the country.

Through the consumption education model, the government introduced free education to primary and secondary schools and this resulted to enrolment increase in schools was recorded across the country but the quality and effectiveness of education was significantly affected since the available facilities in schools could not sufficiently address the educational need of learners enrolled. With this in mind, the government was faced with a dilemma of having too many graduates who would not fit into the employment sector. This lead to rethinking of education system by formation of various education commissions. Through the Gachathi Report of the year 1976, Mackay Report of the year 1981 reformed Kenya's education system of 7-4-2-3 (7 years in primary, 4 in junior secondary O-level, 2 in advanced secondary A-level and 3 in colleges or universities) to 8 – 4 – 4 (8 years of primary, 4 of secondary and 4 of tertiary level) education in the year 1985 with the need to address the problem of educated unemployment by the introduction of vocational and technical subjects in primary education and also to improve the quality of education at all levels (Wanyama & Changach, 2013). From the time it was enacted in the year 1985 to 2009, the 8-4-4 system (eight years in primary, four years in secondary and four years in university), the system had been blamed for focusing much more on children passing in examinations rather than acquiring competent knowledge and skills to enable social and economic development of the country.

1.4. Vision 2030 and Education System in Kenya

The Kenya government adopted Vision 2030 in the year 2007 to act as a blue print towards country's attaining an industrialized middle income economy by 2030. During the development of the vision, it was discovered that production of quality human resources to attain the whole vision was pegged on the education sector that prides itself in innovation and discoveries. In the last 20-30 years, the country has relied much on expatriate input to push various developmental agenda. The Chinese have been present in the country constructing railways, roads, dams and also houses, the work which could have been carried out by competent Kenyans. This dependence on developed economies for human resource support has been blamed for stagnation of majority of countries across sub Saharan Africa. Further, the country also aimed to export its human resource to other nations of Africa and the world and this can only be attained whereby the curriculum system produces graduates who are competent in their professions (Terwes & Muthima, 2020). This situation created the debate for the need to reform the education system to ensure the goals and objectives of the Vision 2030.

1.5. The Reforms of Education System from 8 – 4 – 4 to 2-6-3-3-3

With calls for reforms in the education sector, the government of Kenya created a commission of inquiry led by Davy Koech in the year 1999/2000 with recommendations made including the replacement of 8-4-4 system of education with Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training (TIQET), removal of examination between primary and secondary schools and reduction of subjects at secondary schools to ease curriculum (Republic of Kenya, 2000). One of the recommendations led to removal of technical subjects (Arts, Craft, Music, Agriculture, Home Science and Business) has been hailed to contribute to the current human resource gaps in the country leading to production of low quality graduates in tertiary education who lack requisite skills to drive the country forward (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This state of affairs have continued overtime until the year 2009 when the government conducted a summative evaluation of the 8-4-4 and it was found out that it would be impractical to implement the 8-4-4 system as it did not align with the country's development vision. The promulgation of new constitution in the year 2010, called for the need of review of education system and this led to formation of Douglas Odhiambo education commission in the year 2011. In the year 2012, the commission came out with the report that proposed a replacement of 8-4-4 system of education with 2-6-3-3-3 one. This report heralded the introduction of competency based curriculum in the Kenyan system of education that was set

to be implemented gradually from pre-primary school up to primary level until the year 2028 when it will be fully functional at all levels of education.

2.0. The New Competency Based Curriculum

As the theme of this Africa Knows! Conference 2020 is 'Decolonising Minds' the government of Kenya with the aim of making the country compete in the global stage in all aspects of social, political, scientific, education and economic arenas. The education system currently in majority of African countries have contributed to one way on dependence on outside help in terms of development. The United Nations (2015) sustainable development goals cannot be fully realised by Sub Saharan African countries when there is heavy dependence on external support. Areba (2019) argued that the country in the face of globalisation had to reform the education sector to achieve sustainable development agenda and Vision 2030. The competency based curriculum is aimed at cultivating students' capacities to learn and perform activities to expected standards. In the previous system of education that was largely theoretical, the expectations by the instructors in classroom were for the learners to learn and pass examinations. With the introduction of competency based curriculum in Kenya, the shift is to learn and apply the knowledge through activities required by the curriculum. With the previous 8- 4-4 system of education that focused more on the summative evaluation, the new 2-6-3-3 curriculum mainly relies on formative evaluation strategies.

According to Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), CBC introduction into the Kenya system had informed various policy documents such as Kenya Vision 2030, Constitution of Kenya 2010, the Task Force report on the Re-alignment of the Education Sector to the chaired by Professor Odhiambo, the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015 on 'Reforming Education and Training. Other documents that informed the curriculum reforms include the 21st Century skills, the harmonized curriculum for the East African Community States, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and KICD needs assessment report 2016 among other documents formed the basis of the curriculum reforms (KICD, 2017). This means that the new CBC curriculum has been widely consulted to ensure that its objective match the current and future needs of learning in Kenya and Africa as a whole.

Momanyi and Rop (2019) on discussing the benefits of new curriculum argued that emphasis on attainment of relevant skills as opposed to academic certificates is one of the significant

achievements of CBC. Unlike the current system (8-4-4 which is being gradually phased out from the year 2017 to date) where learners' transit to the next class based on examination performance, CBC allows learners to progress through classes upon demonstrating mastery of prescribed competencies. These competencies are: digital literacy; self efficacy; learning to learn, citizenship, imagination and creativity; critical thinking and problem solving; and communication and collaboration (KICD, 2017). The mastery of these competencies is what will drive the nation forward other than the certificates that are issued after completion of a certain level of education. Further, the use of summative evaluation has denied many students opportunities to acquire higher education skills as it is the determinant on which courses they are likely to pursue in the future. With this in mind, the government rolled out the programme in the year 2019 after conducting the pilot for two years. This is presented in Figure 1 showing the journey it has taken to where we are as a country.
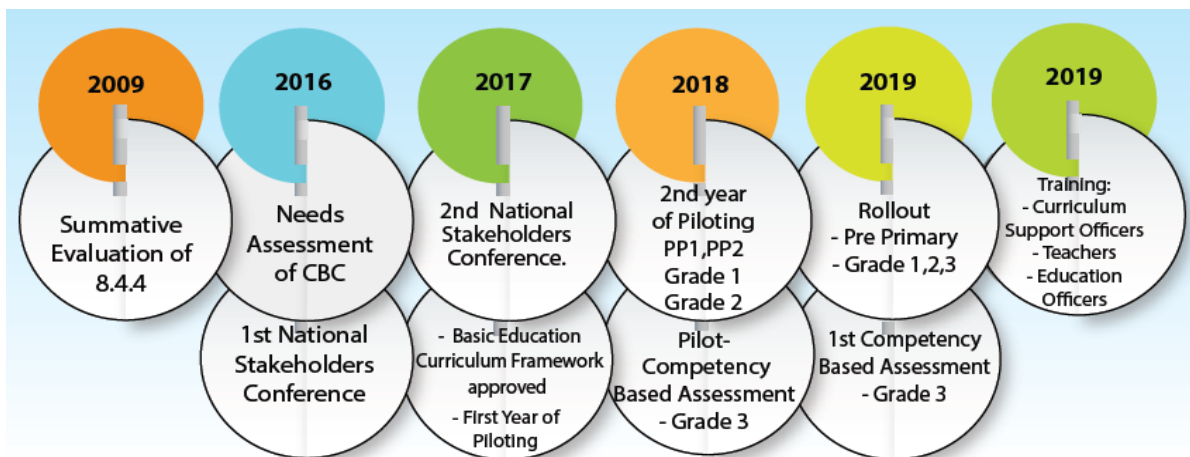

Figure 1: CBC Implementation Process in Kenya

Source: KICD (2019)

2.1 Benefits of Educational Change from Theory to Competency Based Education

Competency based curriculum education involves many activities that helps to promote student learning in classroom. For instance, the use of formative assessment helps students to correct their mistakes hence provide more learning opportunities to students (Priest, Rudenstine & Weisstein, 2012). This motivates majority of learners who were excluded from the previous system due to their poor performance in summative examinations a chance to correct their mistakes, improves their learning towards acquisition of required knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the methods and content of assessment applied using competency based learning approach are more oriented towards application and less on theory (Scheopner, Brett, Cox & Greller, 2018). In New Hampshire Scheopner et al. (2018) noted that

competency education, a K–12 reform aimed to ensure that all students meet high expectations, requires that students demonstrate mastery of competencies to advance and earn credit, typically through assessments where students apply knowledge. The previous education system had more on theory and less on application thereby producing graduates who were not well competent.

Momanyi and Rop (2019) discovered that in Kenya, there is hope from all Kenyans that the implementation of the new curriculum would address the problem of graduate employability in the country. This is because 8-4-4 system graduates tended to lack relevant job market skills. Therefore, CBC purposes to engage learners in applying knowledge through demonstration as opposed to content overload which has been the case for many years. In a research conducted in Tanzania, Lukindo (2016) research found out that teachers had adequate knowledge of competence based education and they preferred the teaching methods associated with it; questioning, project development and problem solving as opposed to lecturing approach that was used in the previous system. According to the results, the recommended teaching approaches through CBC ensure retention of knowledge and application of it in future by the learners since it is not a benchmark for procession to the next stage of education.

In Rwanda, Muraraneza and Ntombifikile (2018) informed that CBC was introduced in the school curriculum as a guide towards transforming and improving the education and training of the health workforce for improved population and health outcomes. The study found out that as a result of using CBC in the education system, there was significant transformation in health practitioners in Rwanda as has been the case even now whereby the country is using robots to assist medical workers to manage Covid 19 patients in addition to use of drones to deliver medical products to rural areas of the country. In Kenya, Areba (2019) discovered that the CBC adoption in the country goal was to address the societal needs, technological, social and economic demands of the country towards achievement of sustainable development goals. The above cited studies have given hope that Africa will be indeed be redeemed from poverty through adoption of competency based education which is a key to success.

3.0 Conclusions

Kenya inherited a British based colonial system of education that focused on making Kenyans productive labourers and obedient subjects rather than skilled and independent

minded workers. The African traditional education system before the colonial period was skilled based (apprenticeship) unlike the 'westernised' model which is mainly theory based as has been seen in this paper. Because of the discrimination that the colonial government had towards education of Africa children, after independence in the year 1963, the Kenyan government recreated their education system to increase their competitively in the global market and reflect their own vision of development through adoption of social demand model of education that emphasised on more children accessing schools rather than competencies they were to achieve after finishing their education cycle. This paper has analysed how the Kenya modern education system evolved out of an oppressive British colonial administration, passing through a consumption-oriented theoretical system that imitated Western education models, but failed to honour Kenya's pre-colonial educational legacy of producing graduates who are skilled (apprenticeship model). After various education policy reviews (1970s- early 1980s), a new system of education 8-4-4 was introduced in the year 1985 which changed the system of education to mainly examination based. The country found itself producing many graduates who did not properly meet the job market demands leading to influx of expatriates from developed nations to work in key industries as opposed to Kenyans. This state of affairs has resulted to low employment opportunities for the graduates and stakeholders demanded for introduction of more competency based education. As of 2020, there has been good reception from stakeholders on the benefits that the new system has brought towards imparting knowledge and skills to learners. Evidence from other countries that the new CBC curriculum is a game changer towards Kenya's realisation of sustainable development goals agenda.

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