Curriculum Reform and Innovation: Experiences from Kenya's Competence-Based-Curriculum.

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Introduction

In 2015, Kenya began the process of transiting from the content oriented curriculum, which had been in place for 32 years and laden with claims of content overload, to the competency-based curriculum (CBC). The move was a major shift since it completely dropped to old curriculum of 8-4-4 system and ushered in a new one of 2-6-6-3, complete with a new curriculum framework, learning areas/subjects, teaching and learning materials and pedagogy. And in 2019, CBC was rolled out in the early learning education category from play group to grade 3. This cohort is the pioneer of the CBC in the country and is now at grade 6. I consider this shift a major curriculum reform initiative in the country that is worth writing home about.

The concept of curriculum innovation is premised on the theory of learner experiences as opposed to learning objectives, laying emphasis on learning experiences rather than behavior (McKennan, 2008). It involves the process-inquiry model which negates the idea of pursuing predetermined objectives and the ends-means production baggage in favor of the process of education and learning. The assertion is that a curriculum is about paying attention to certain principles of procedure in an educational process. This perspective of curriculum reform and innovation is in conflict with Tyler's thoughts as presented in his classic, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* where the objectives model and the use of instructional objectives in both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced testing is advanced. Based on this understanding, and holding the tenet that curriculum reform focus should be on process and not outcome, the theory of learner experiences finds Tyler's thinking problematic and in need of critical examination (James, 1992).

Kliebard (1975) wonders whether the long standing insistence by some curriculum theorists that the first step in making a curriculum is specifying objectives has any merit. He further questions whether stating objectives is of any good in conceiving a process of curriculum reform. According to Dewey's curriculum theory, curriculum should not be presented as finished abstractions, but should include the child's preconceptions and should incorporate how the child views his or her own world. This can be realized by focusing on experiences of the child rather than the objectives they are supposed to achieve in the learning process. He argued that to bring such experiences to the child, the curriculum should build an orderly sense of the world where the child lives and connect fundamental activities of life with classroom activities.

Neagley and Evans (1967) defines the curriculum as all of the planned experiences provided by school to the pupils so that pupils can attain all designated learning outcomes with the use of their best abilities. This perspective is supported by Inlow (1966) who terms the curriculum as planned composite effort of learning institutions towards the learners so that they can achieve predetermined learning outcomes. But Johnson (1967), critiques these definition and argues that curriculum is a structured series of learning outcomes from which results of instructions can be anticipated. Basic principles of curriculum and instructions have been outlined by Tyler (1949) as determining the purpose of the school, identifying educational experiences related to the purpose, organizing learning experiences and evaluating the purposes. It can therefore be concluded that a curriculum is the totality of student experiences that occur in an educational process.

From basic comprehension of English language, reform or innovation means alteration of the already existing situation. According to Das and Mondal (2021) curriculum reform means altering the existing curriculum and making it different in some way to give it a new position or direction. This means there is an alteration of its philosophy, aims and objectives, methods and evaluation. Curriculum reform can also be defined as the transformation of the curriculum schemes, its design, goals and content (Hancock, Dyk & Jones, 2012), a generic term embracing innovation, development and renewal used in relation to continual

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change of the curriculum to suit the needs of changing society and changing knowledge needs by learners (Hoyle, 1972).

Reform roadmap

Over the years, Kenya's education and training sector has been guided by the prevailing national education and training goals identified through the establishment of various Education Commissions and situational analyses of the educational needs of the country (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2016). Currently, efforts in the sector seek to align education with the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and the Kenya Vision 2030. The efforts are also guided by national education policies and international agreements that mainly include periodical Sessional papers, National Education Sector Plans (NESP) that are developed every five years and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The old 8-4-4 system of education introduced in 1985 following the recommendations of the 1981 Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of the Second University in Kenya was guided by the philosophy of "education for self-reliance" (Republic of Kenya, 1981). Since then, several task force as well as summative and formative evaluation reports have led to curriculum reviews in 1992, 1995 and 2002. It is however important to note that these reviews were interested in issues of curriculum content, overloads within and across subjects as well as unnecessary overlaps. The reviews did not address fundamental issues that would transform society by enhancing the productivity of every Kenyan citizen and accelerate economic growth (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2016).

A body of knowledge known as school effectiveness studies lists the curriculum as one of the core factors of determining quality of education inputs, processes and outcomes (Oduol, 2006). Informed by this understanding, the Ministry of Education has over the years given attention to the curriculum frameworks used at different levels of education in the country. A series of studies, analyses and conferences led education planners to re-examine the curriculum from postmodernism perspectives, which involves a radical reappraisal of modern assumptions about culture, identity, history and language. It should be noted that as observed by Doll (1989), postmodernism has radical

implications on contemporary education and curriculum development. It implores that the curriculum should be student-centered, planned around inter and trans-disciplinary learning and multiculturalism, collaborative discourses among the learners as a community and have a vision transcending the past towards the future. This philosophy is what is seen to have informed conceptualization and structuring the CBC design and implementation in Kenya.

A summative evaluation of the education system in Kenya in 2009 by the Kenya Institute of Education revealed that the curriculum was too academic, overloaded and examination oriented. It also revealed that learning happened within an environment of ill equipped workshops with teachers not well trained in technical skills and therefore, learners graduated without having acquired entrepreneurial skills, which were the core focus of the then 8-4-4 content oriented curriculum. This situation was correlated with rising unemployment cases among young people which posed a serious danger of upsurge of social vices (Kenya Institute of Education, 2009). In 2012, the Basic Education Sector Analysis revealed that although access to education had greatly improved since introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008, there were concerns of quality of learning outcomes which were largely traced to the curriculum framework used, especially in the basic education sub-sector. The evaluation is aligned to Daniel Stufflebeam's Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model of curriculum evaluation whose main focus is informing decision makers on what changes should be made to an existing curriculum.

Studies also noted that the existing curriculum did not provide flexible education pathways for identifying and nurturing the talents and interests of learners early enough to prepare them for the world of work and career progression. Learning assessment had been limited to summative approaches only whose purpose was mainly assessment of learning instead of formative assessment, which is largely premised on assessment for learning. It was further observed that the potential gifts and talents were ignored due to an unnecessary focus on examination. Thus, based on the situational analyses and evaluations, and after promulgation of the new

Kenya Constitution in 2010, a new policy and legislative framework on education and training became necessary. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 introduced a Bill of Rights which conferred a range of Rights to the Child that the Education Act, Cap 211 had not taken care of. The Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on Policy Framework on Education, Training and Research did not also effectively provide the foundation necessary to develop the skills and competencies required for realization of Kenya Vision 2030 (MoE, 2012).

But perhaps it is the Sessional paper number 14 of 2012 that set the stage for design and implementation of the CBC. It underscores the need to construct a balanced education curriculum aligned to delivering the aspirations of Vision 2030 and the development of teachers with a different mind-set by focusing on core educational outcomes, based on content of the subject being taught, and on developing a repertoire of skills and competences required by all learners and teachers. These include literacy, numeracy and enquiry skills, thinking skills, communication skills, observation and investigative skills, application and transferable skills, social and ethical skills, entrepreneurial skills and talent development at all levels (MoE, 2012). These assessments and attendant discussions led to production of the report on "Re-alignment of the Education Sector to the Kenya Vision 2030 and Constitution of Kenya 2010 in 2012 and the subsequent Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015 on "Reforming Education and Training in Kenya" that formed the framework for curriculum reform process which culminated to CBC.

Curriculum reform in Kenya that led to design and adoption of the CBC can be said to have been influenced to a large extent by postmodernism philosophy. The factors of globalization, advancement in information technology, the knowledge explosion, the conversion of world ecology into a knowledge society, a change in the concept of knowledge acquisition and the redefinition of learning and multiculturalism, which are very present in the CBC are central to postmodernism philosophy. Looking deeper into the principles, objectives, content and pedagogical processes of Kenya's CBC, it reveals a student-centered approach that focus on active acquisition of knowledge through experience, inquiry-based learning and problem-solving activities by learners. The pedagogy seeks to foster higher-order

thinking skills and other capacities among learners as well as lifelong process of learning. Instead of laying all the emphasis on the objective approach, the CBC was developed through a process approach, which considers interests of students as the guiding notes for content selection and designing of learning activities. The need to cultivate global consciousness, multiculturalism, environmental studies, ethics and talents among learners have also been infused in the curriculum and pedagogy through an inter-disciplinary approach. All these are hallmarks of a postmodernism curriculum which also focuses on values, civic and moral issues and conscientiously considers them as part of the curriculum. Appreciation of diversity such as multicultural realities, differences in gender, marginalized and vulnerable people, disabilities and other kinds of diversity in the classroom are also evident in the CBC as well as de-personalizing learning and promoting collaborative learning to encourage learners to work together in groups with their peers should also be given priority.

Successes and Failures

The Constitution of Kenya of 2010, The Basic Education Act of 2013, The Basic Education Curriculum Framework of 2016, The 2018 National Curriculum Policy and the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 on Reforming Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya are the key documents guiding the roll-out of the CBC (MoE, 2019). It is constructed on six key principles namely opportunity; excellence; diversity and inclusion; differentiated curriculum and learning; parental empowerment and engagement and community service learning (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2016; PAL Network, 2020). To achieve these principles, a number of policy provisions needed to be put in place and their implementation fast tracked to provide learners with experiences envisaged in the new curriculum. However, although the government rolled out CBC in 2019, it did so when most of these policy frameworks were not in place. Where they are in place, they haven't been fully implemented due to lack of political will, poor planning or inadequate resources.

Although the curriculum reform process in Kenya that led to CBC can be lauded as having gone through

evaluation approaches that foster innovative and contemporary curriculum reform processes such as those advanced by postmodernism, there have been several challenges that have emerged already. First and foremost, there needs to be a legal and policy framework that is aligned to the philosophy of the new curriculum in place. However, as early studies have revealed, there are several legal and policy gaps that may derail the efforts of the new curriculum to realize its full potential.

There are pertinent policy related challenges and failures in implementation of CBC in Kenya. For instance, the commitment by government to provide free and compulsory Pre-Primary Education for all 4-to-5-year olds is provided for in the CBC. Further, the government developed the National Plan of Action for Children 2015-2022 that provides for the children's right to survival, protection, health and education. However, the policy on the provision of free and compulsory Pre-Primary Education has not yet been enforced. Pre-primary education in Kenya remains fee-paying even as these policy provisions exist on paper. Further, under the CBC government aimed at providing health and nutritional support for 0-5- year olds attending day-care centres and schools within the framework of the 2009 National School Health policy. However, three years after rolling out CBC, the guidelines on health and nutritional support in schools have not been fully implemented. This denies learners the kind of school experience envisaged in the CBC and thereby negating the basic philosophy of focusing on leaner experiences as opposed to learning objectives.

As provided for in the Kenya Constitution 2010, the Basic Education Act No. 14 of 2013 and the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 on Reforming Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya, primary education should be free and compulsory (MoE, 2019). However, the CBC has been unable to actualize this provision since there is no legal framework for implementation of this policy and at the same time, the government has allowed school board and parents teachers associations to agree on levies to be paid from time to time. This has seen introduction of levies in primary schools which negates the whole idea of free and compulsory schools resulting to unpleasant interruptions of learning experiences that has led to school dropout in some cases.

The government of Kenya was able to run the in-service training program for teachers on continuous basis to orient teachers with the content and pedagogical processes of the CBC. Before rolling out, between 2017-18 the government trained181 Master trainers. These were sourced from the Ministry of Education, Kenya institute of Special Education (KISE), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEA) and the Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) have been trained. Ministry of education reports also show that 1165 curriculum support officers and CBC champions were trained as Trainers of Trainers, who were deployed to various County training centers to train larger groups of teachers. Additionally, 1468 education field officers from Ministry of Education (MOE) and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) were trained to give supervisory roles during the implementation of the CBC (Amunga et al., 2020).These capacity building efforts reveal the desire to have teachers and education officers who understand the CBC and thus being able to create a learning environment that will give learners the desired learning experiences.

Another notable success is development and production of teaching and learning materials needed for the CBC. Through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum development, the government was able to develop appropriate content for pre-primary 1 and 2 as well as grades 1, 2 and 3. Working with private publishers, it was possible to mass produce the materials which was deemed sufficient for all learners in the early years education category that pioneered the new curriculum. Teaching and leaning materials can significantly improve the quality of learning experiences and improve learners' achievement. For example, an educational video may provide a learner with new insights and an appealing worksheet may provide the learner with new opportunities to practice a new skill gained in class. This process gives the leaner exciting learning experiences and evokes their imaginative thinking thereby enabling them to create their own knowledge and understanding. Such new knowledge is the focus of the philosophy of learner experiences as opposed to focusing on objectives which would "box"

the learner into a certain predefined path to learning (Ondimu, 2018).

Despite these successes, there are operational challenges that are bedeviling implementation of the CBC. Inadequate teachers in the country has bee a long standing an issue that has persisted in the education system for a very long time. While the Teachers Service Commission has acknowledged this challenge, they haven't been able to provide adequate human resources needed citing limited financial resources (Onyango, 2020). Large class sizes resulting from this situation lead to overload and stress upon available teachers thereby compromising the quality of teacher learner interaction, an important element in promoting positive learner experiences.

The CBC requires a high degree of parental involvement. However, this parental support has not been forthcoming probably due to the removed role of the parent that had been promoted by the old curriculum. Indeed, this demand for parental involvement has led to a public outcry by many parents across the country lamenting that most of their time is taken up by participating in learning activities with their children. It should be noted that the kind of learning experiences that learners engage in the company of their parents play acritical role in improving perception of school and learning among the pupils and thus gives them a totally new experience with the curriculum.

Curriculum reform and innovation best practices

Curriculum reform and innovation is all about change. Countries or institutions change their curricula because of a number of factors ranging from changing socioeconomic and political dynamics, need to cope with changing world and desire to provide an education that is relevant. Whatever the reason, every reform process faces the question of how change eventually will happen. All in all, to appreciate the role of change management in curriculum reform, it would be interesting to go back to the proponents of curriculum reform and ask whether the intended change happened as expected. Sahlberg (2006) observes that curriculum change efforts are typically labelled as implementation of intended curriculum in the classroom practice in schools. A common means of the reform process is the incorporation of information to raise the awareness of

reform to the general public, capacity building for teachers and other stakeholders involved in direct implementation of the new curriculum, determining and securing resources needed and putting in place the legal and policy frameworks upon which the new curriculum will be hinged.

Curriculum reform is a learning process for the government, teachers, learners and the entire school community. A good understanding of change and clear conception of curriculum are necessary conditions for smooth translation of a new curriculum into practice. Because curriculum reform and innovation involves change, better understanding of change management is crucial. Policy makers, educationalists, schools and teachers need to be acquainted with change dynamics even as they reform the curriculum and prepare for its implementation. Therefore, learning about change management and its key features should be an integral part of the curriculum reform process. Many curriculum reform processes have taken the traditional focus on the product and ignored the most vital element of process. As a consequence, many curricula have become overloaded, confusing and inappropriate for teachers and students (Sarason, 1996). It is therefore important to shift the thinking from a curriculum as product model to a curriculum as a process. This transforms the curriculum reform from a purely technical document to a comprehensive approach that serves as a guideline for learning and school improvement. To achieve this, there is need to reconceptualize the curriculum from the thinking of it as a technical piece to a learning guideline that seeks to improve both the process of learning and learning outcomes.

Given this understanding, it would be important to consider to what extend did the government of Kenya consider critical success factors for a successful curriculum reform and implementation process such as applying the practices of change management, preparations for financing and resourcing the new curriculum, capacity building and training of teachers and others directly involved in its implementation, sensitization and awareness among the public and key stakeholders and putting in place appropriate legislative and policy frameworks. Key principles of conceptualizing what drives successful curriculum change should guide the reform process as identified in

Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2005) and presented by Sahlberg (2006) in curriculum change and learning.

Making sense of why a new curriculum is necessary. This involves a process of thorough research and evaluation of existing curriculum in relation to obtaining socioeconomic and political situation as well as consideration of global trends, market dynamics, people's culture, tastes and preferences. For instance, it is important to demonstrate how the old 8-4-4 system was incompatible with changing national and international trends. This process allows for deeper introspection and understanding of why curriculum is necessary. In the end, it results in a clear justification of curriculum reform and helps give a clear direction of the reform process.

Understanding the change process and developing leadership. Change is not always embraced. Often, there is an element of rejection of change if its management is not well planned. Implementing a new curriculum requires changes on many fronts. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the complexity and internal dynamics of change process for one to achieve sustainable curriculum reform and implementation process. Sometimes this is difficult and frustrating to do because it requires convincing decision makers and getting them to appreciate that curriculum change and reform process is necessary. In the case of Kenya, this is an area that was not properly explored. The curriculum reform process faced challenges relating to rejection from many quarters, some of which are crucial in the curriculum reform and implementation process like the Teachers Unions. In fact, court cases were filed to stop the process and motions tabled in parliament seeking to halt the reform process. This is a clear demonstration that change management was not aptly executed.

Capacity-building. Capacity is one of the key conditions for successful implementation of curriculum reforms. This involves execution of policies, strategies and resources that are aiming at increasing the collective power of people. However, this was a missing link in the Kenya case even when there was consensus that curriculum change was necessary. Although the government put effort in enhancing the capacity of the

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, which was leading the reform process, a larger section of the core education stakeholders such as teachers, the civil society, parents associations and private education sponsors were left out of the process and only involved when the final product was completed.

Developing cultures of learning. Successful curriculum change involves learning during implementation. A powerful factor of change is learning from one's peers, especially those who are further along in implementing new curriculum. This takes an approach of forming professional learning communities at the local, school and community level, using teachers in collaborative curriculum research and reform projects and learning from countries that have implemented similar curriculum reform processes. As pointed earlier, the reform process was an exclusively government run project which did not give opportunities for learning groups as they contributed to the reform process. This would be a key factor for consideration if the reform process was to be mooted all over again.

Utilizing the ideas that already exist in schools. Schools are full of good ideas about how to improve teaching and help pupils learn. Many curriculum reforms ignore this reality. Recognition of the hidden capacities of schools and teachers, the identification of these passive potentials and then facilitating the exchange of good ideas and practices that work was a missing link in the Kenya reform process. In essence, a bottom up reform process would be embraced where participatory approaches involving learners, communities, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders would be embraced. But from the Kenya reform case, it was a clear top down approach, which could be one of the reasons why the new curriculum is still facing implementation changes until today, three years after rolling out.

Community awareness and sensitization: Embracing changes brought about by a new curriculum is not an automatic event. It requires educating and sensitizing the general public, especially parents, for them to understand the implementation process, consequences and their expected roles. I can observe that this stage was conspicuously missing in the Kenya curriculum reform process. The public only got sneak peaks of the new curriculum through the media. There were no

organized and deliberate community education, awareness and sensitization programs in place. This explains why implementation of the new curriculum is facing rejection today. In fact, the Law Society of Kenya has recently filed a case in the high court seeking to stop implementation of the new CBC curriculum. This is a good example to demonstrate how lack of proper community and stakeholder education and awareness process can impede a curriculum reform process.

Conclusion

In conclusion the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) that ushered in the CBC in Kenya was an outcome of evaluations, studies, stakeholder engagement, a national needs assessment study, deliberations from a national curriculum reform conference and several benchmarking studies. Implementation of the CBC in Kenya has had its fair share of successes and challenges, especially at this take off stage. Broadly, the main issues raised by stakeholders that have a bearing on successes and failures emanate from a slow process of mind shift, from the old content oriented curriculum whose focus was attainment of the set learning objectives to the new CBC which is constructed with emphasis on learning experiences. For the learner to get quality learning experiences, there needs be greater involvement of teachers, fellow learners and parents. In addition, learning exercise require materials that need more financial resources allocated to implement the new curriculum. It can be argued that Kenya's CBC is aligned to curriculum reform theory of greater focus on learner experiences and thus will demand mind shift by all stakeholders if it is to depart from the old content and objective oriented curriculum that is gradually being phased out.

It is important to underscore that there are some basic elements that should be considered for a successful curriculum reform process. Appreciating the concept of change and the need to effectively manage it has a bearing on the process and product of a curriculum reform process. Curriculum reform drivers should come up with a clear change management strategy at every stage of the reform and implementation process. Adopting a participatory approach is another important point for consideration in a curriculum reform process. Instead of running a government controlled top down

approach, involving key stakeholders including teachers, parents and learners in a bottom up process allows for ownership and gathering of useful insights that may not ne noticed when the reform process is designed, controlled and executed by a few select individuals at the national level. Building the capacity of key player, both in the reform and implementation process is required to ensure every stakeholder directly involved in the process has the know how of going about it. A legal and policy framework to hinge the reform process is a statutory requirement. This means before the reform process gets underway, it is important to ensure the institutions tasked with legal and policy instruments for the reform process provide such frameworks. This is also important because financing follows legal and policy frameworks. Community education, awareness and sensitization will enhance acceptability and embracing of the new curriculum within the society. Implementation of a good curriculum can fail due to rejection by parents, teachers, learners and the general public.

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