

COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

There is a growing trend towards competency-based education (CBE) in Kenya. This paper reflects on the attributes of the competency-based education programme and the way forward especially at the higher levels of education. CBE is a new way of thinking in the Kenyan system of education designed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and launched by the Ministry of Education in 2017. It is the product of the Task Force on re-alignment of the Education Sector (2012) which was mandated to review and align the education, training and research sector in accordance with the Constitution of Kenya 2010. Competency-based education focuses on the acquisition of competencies which enable the learners to cope with life challenges. CBE focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes in terms of the desired behavioral change for the effective performance of a real-world task or activity. The attributes of the CBE programme are drawn from different reports and policy documents. The reports and policy documents are based on societal needs that have motivated the need to align the curriculum at all levels. Over the years, education has been guided by prevailing national goals which are identified through situational analysis. The reports and special documents have been used to articulate the direction the country needs to take in order to propel its development agenda. This has been emphasised by the implementation of the competency-based curriculum in all levels of education. Discussions on CBE provide important information that would guide Kenyan universities on the curriculum review. The paper concludes by giving several recommendations that universities should undertake to align themselves with the curriculum review. It is imperative that each level fits in as required for successful implementation.

Key Words: Competencies, Competency-based Education, Reports, Special Documents

INTRODUCTION

The search for a relevant and holistic curriculum of study that nurtures learners' potentials and integrates both schooling and co-curricular activities has led to the evolution of the Competency-based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya. The overarching aim of the new curriculum is to equip citizens with skills for the 21st century. CBC captures the aspirations of the country which places emphasis on the learner's competence, character, patriotism, citizenship, and ability to coexist as a responsible citizen. The designing, development and launching of the new curriculum was spearheaded by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and is the product of the Task Force on re-alignment of the Education Sector (Republic of Kenya, 2012; KICD, 2016) which was mandated to review and align the education, training and research sector in accordance with the Constitution of Kenya. It focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes in terms of the desired behavioral change for the effective performance of a real-world task or activity (Weddel, 2009).

Over the years, education has been guided by prevailing national goals which are identified through situational analysis. According to reports, a curriculum should be reviewed every five years to incorporate any upcoming trends and issues that require attention (KIE, 2002). Different reports have motivated the need to align the curriculum at all levels to international best practices in educational systems, in order to make learning more meaningful.

The Rationale of a Competency-Based Curriculum

The hallmark of the relevance of any curriculum to the society is the promptness with which the curriculum adapts to changing societal needs as well as adapting to the current needs and aspirations of the nation as articulated in various policy documents. The launch of CBC at the basic level of education by the Ministry of Education furthers the need to have the universities be in tandem with the report of the special documents.

Ford (2014) opines that Competency-based Education (CBE) and training is not a new concept. He traces the development of CBE to the theory of behaviourism whose proponent is the psychologist B.F. Skinner, as it reflects instructional designs informed by the field of psychology, and measuring what learners are able to 'do' and at what level. The emphasis is on outcomes versus process.

Reports and policy documents have been used over time to articulate the direction the country needs to take in order to propel its development agenda. Such documents are based on societal needs. Every society has certain needs that must be fulfilled in order to succeed in all facets. Different documents were used to address different things: competencies, values and attitudes, document on learning areas and documents on assessments. Apart from them are policy documents, aspirations of 21st-century skills and sustainable development goals.

Kenya Vision 2030 advocates for a link between education and labour markets; it aims at making Kenya a newly industrialised, middle-income country providing a high quality of life for all its citizens by the year 2030. It also places great emphasis on the link between education and the labor market, the need to create entrepreneurial skills and competencies, and strong public and private sector partnerships. It articulates the development of a middle-income country in which all citizens will have embraced entrepreneurship, be able to engage in lifelong learning, perform more non-routine tasks, be capable of more complex problem-solving, be able to make more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, and as vital tools towards these ends, have better reading, quantitative reasoning and expository skills. This has considerable importance for the kind of education and training system required to deliver the requisite skills, competencies and attitudes. As such, there is a need to address issues related to quality, service delivery, curriculum, relevance, teacher development and management at all levels as well as trainers in the areas of technology and entrepreneurial skill development.

According to Education for All (EFA), many students exiting from the current education join the world of work unprepared, thus posing serious challenges and dilemmas in the preparation of current and future citizens in a rapidly changing world (EFA, 2010).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The current education system is facing numerous challenges some of which have to do with the quality of the graduates and others which are influenced by the changing trends in the society. The quality of the prospective graduate employees, is wanting, as they are unemployable and they:

- a) lack technical expertise
- b) lack the knowledge of the relevant industry
- c) the quality of learning is low, and
- d) lack market exposure (Muiruri, Awori, & Ngasike, 2015; British Council report, 2015).

This has posed challenges in the society such as

- a) unemployment among the graduates
- b) not producing individuals who are intellectually, emotionally and physically balanced, and
- c) inequality (OECD, 2012).

Besides, the curriculum review is critical as there is a need to embrace a curriculum that is changing. This has also been informed by the need to embed a national values system as well as to enhance acquisition of 21st century skills.

Attributes of Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education focuses on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students, which allow for self-paced progress and provides students with the support they need to succeed. It provides more specialised learning that allows one to progress as the students demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. It relies on faculty for the development, articulation and assessment of specific knowledge, skills and abilities of which students must demonstrate mastery. Competency-based education gives the business community greater assurance that universities are equipping their graduates and future employees with the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for a productive workforce. The approach also allows for greater alignment to local workforce needs.

In CBE, students are assisted and not taught. It draws on what the competencies are, how they will be achieved, the activities and content, and how they will be assessed. Ewell (2013), as quoted in Ford (2014) refers to it as curriculum mapping. It clearly establishes and communicates the linkages between learning, assessments and specific competences.

Kenya has been operating on an 8-4-4 education system which was introduced in 1985. Under this system, pupils completed eight years of primary schooling and four at the secondary level. University degrees took a minimum of four years to complete. The whole system's guiding philosophy was an education for self-reliance. There have been some reviews and evaluations since then which have mostly addressed curriculum content issues and tidied up areas where there was unnecessary overlap. These reviews have not adequately addressed fundamental issues since the system was found to be very academic and exam oriented. If these issues are tackled, the education system could transform Kenyan society by enhancing all citizens' productivity and accelerating economic development. This is the case with the new system of education (2-6-6-3).

The existing system was not providing flexible education pathways. These are important for identifying and nurturing learners' aptitudes, talents and interests early enough to prepare them for the world of work and career progression. This lack of flexibility was found to be pushing up drop-out rates, even among academically talented pupils.

METHODOLOGY

The method used is circumstantial; it has no sampling or controls but is derived from the results of the needs'assessment reports that were given by education stakeholders in a deans' conference held at Embu University in August 2019. The reports are supported by the relevant literature reviewed in other contexts, documents, summaries obtained from the researchers' papers done in the area of curriculum. The need to undertake curriculum reforms is clear and justifiable especially because of the need to align it with the current trends in the education sector, the 2010 constitution, Vision 2030, sessional papers, and the National Education Sector Plan (KICD, 2016).

DISCUSSIONS

Competency-based education is a current issue that calls for the involvement of all the stakeholders. It is a type of learning that calls for societal support. This has been informed by the fact that we are living in a fast-changing world. With the emergence of the 4.0 internet, genetic engineering, energy storage, artificial intelligence, and virtual classrooms with no physical schools, the need for a relevant student-centric skills-based academic curriculum has become more urgent. Thus, the debate on the competency-based curriculum (CBC) is within context.

Table 1: Differences between 8-4-4 and 2-6-6-3 school systems

8-4-4 System of Education	CBC System of Education
Emphasizes competition for grades	Emphasizes excellence & competitiveness
More content memorization & repetition during exams.	More knowledge& skills applied through creativity, innovation&problem-solving
The teacher as the main source of knowledge with passive learners	The teacher as facilitator with learners who can construct their own knowledge
Rigidity in content, learning time and strategies	Flexible, responsive and supportive in embracing diverse learning needs and abilities
Little parental engagement	Involvement of parents, stakeholders, and agencies
Focus on cognitive development	Integrates pertinent and contemporary issues &service-learning, connecting the classroom to reallife and self-reliance
Emphasizes schooling& focuses on summative assessment	Emphasizes learning &strikes a balance between formative and summative assessment

Table 2: 21st Century Skills

Learning & Innovation Skills	Information, Media & Technology Skills	Life & Career Skills (Values & EQ)
Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Information literacy	Flexibility & adaptability
Creativity & Innovation	Media Literacy	Initiative & self-direction
Communication	ICT (Information, Communications & Technology)	Social & cross-cultural skills
Collaboration		Productivity & accountability

The 21st-century skills are abilities that today's students need to succeed in their careers during the information age. These skills are intended to help students keep up with the lightningpace of today's modern markets. Each skill is unique in how it helps students, but they all have one quality in common.

The Current State of Learners

The learners found in society have undergone a metamorphosis. These learners consist of a) generation Z and b) generation Alpha who are digital natives and are comfortable using apps and codes while their parents use paper. They are curious and full of imagination, agile, critical thinkers and problem solvers and will join the job market in the next decade.

Roles of the Lecturers/Teachers

Considering the convergence of the need to nurture creativity among students in the CBE, literature encountered, and in order to be in tandem with the current changes in the society and accommodation of the changing learners, the lecturer's role needs to change and have the necessary abilities. The changes need continuous education on the lecturer's part and self-improvement is an imperative. "We can't build the future for the youth but we can build the youth for the future" declared the 32nd president of the United States of America, Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s. Thus, there is a need to:

- Have a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm
- Adapt to the environment
- Teach and reach all the learners
- Embrace and implement technology
- Be forward-thinking, curious and flexible
- Research and knowledge generation
- Be Lifelong learners
- Have high emotional intelligence
- Have high self-esteem
- Have social skills
- Professional learning
- Collaborate with others

In addition, teachers/lecturers then must:

- Engage in continuous professional development
- Become community facilitators and join the research team
- Create and embrace opportunities which concern CBE

CONCLUSION

According to Kipsang (2019), it is therefore crucial that Kenyan universities engage in curriculum reform as well as understand the current changes in the education system by:

1. Re-designing the learning context to suit the new curriculum

- Offering short courses to refresh teachers'/lecturer's skills
- Have pre-service teacher preparation
- Identify schools/placement sites where the learners would be placed for teaching practice and job placement
- Participate in collaborative teacher preparation
- Getting involved in integrating technology, teaching, and learning.
- Have some courses made compulsory; for instance, dealing with topics such as Information Communication Technology (ICT), ethics and integrity, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and mentorship as well as introducing other new courses

2. Acquiring the 21st-Century Skills

These comprise skills, abilities, and dispositions that have been identified as being required for the success in the 21st-century society and workplaces by business leaders, educators, government agencies and academics. They entail creativity, critical thinking, communication, information literacy, collaboration, technology literacy, media literacy and flexibility.

3. Understanding the Pillars which Guide Competency-Based Education

Several pillars guide CBE and should be put into consideration in the curriculum review. The pillars include a) national goals of education b) values c) guiding principles d) theoretical approaches

4. Embedding the pertinent and contemporary issues content in the curriculum: drugs and substance abuse, use and misuse of ICT, environmental conservation, HIV and AIDS, religion, gender issues, violence and family, health and education, sexuality and insecurity, citizenship, health education, life skills, education for sustainable development, non-formal programmes, service learning and parental engagement should all be catered for.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the report findings and discussions of the special documents, the following are recommended for Kenyan universities:

1. They should plug in CBC implementation since it is the responsibility of all stakeholders and may not be left for KICD and TSC. They should play their role in implementation as well.

2. Arising from the deans of education meeting, there is need for education departments and schools to work in harmony in order for the objectives of the CBC curriculum to be realized successfully and efficiently.
3. There needs to be a CBC implementation committee in each university and the schools of education must take the lead. University graduates ought to have the basic capacity to implement CBC. This must be integrated into the curriculum.
4. CBC principles which are learner-centered must be entrenched in the curriculum and this calls for curriculum review to incorporate different forms of assessment, content, and modes of delivery.
5. Pedagogical approaches that are CBC compliant ought to be incorporated in the teaching by faculty members. This calls for a review of course syllabi.
6. Lecturers and teachers need retraining and universities should create short courses for teacher professional development.
7. Encouragement of research on CBC principles among university students and faculty. Universities ought to participate in the development of training modules for CBC content.
8. It was observed that currently, the large class sizes in some of the universities may not provide the interactive learning environments required by CBC. This calls for creativity on the side of the teacher, introduction of tutorials and reduction of class sizes.
9. Improvement of the infrastructure in Kenyan universities is not an option. CBC encourages technology and E-learning in the universities ought to be promoted. This will call for preparedness for the lecturer and for the students and especially in terms of tools and resources.
10. The curriculum should introduce additional core subjects of CBC such as world languages, emotional intelligence, ethics and digital literacy to already existing subjects.

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