

## **A critical view of the historical development and concerns of curriculum in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Education is regarded and priced as the most important good to a human being. It is seen as the major channel for the advancement of the individual. It is generally believed that if many well-educated individuals make up society, they will exercise a positive influence on that society.

This study attempted to look at the history and development of education in Kenya. The study further attempted to examine the reasons which dictated changes in due course.

The study found that change of education systems and curriculum were mainly dictated by political influences resulting from administrative changes. Economic factors also played a role in the changes.

It was evident from the study that the challenges arising from the change of the system may not have been exhaustively addressed and resulted into short-term changes in the curriculum.

The study recommends for adequate research and piloting of education systems before full implementation is adopted.

### **Introduction**

MPET (1998, pg 29) as cited in Kivuva (nd) says that the role of Education can be summarized as assisting in the establishment of the human resource base for the generations of wealth and more importantly, its application for the creative of a higher standard of living and improved quality of life. Therefore, education was viewed as a productive investment both to the individual and the society. Sadly, during the colonial regime, Kenyans, as other Africans, experienced great discrimination economically, academically, socially and politically (Bogonko 1992; Otiende et al 1992; Kivuva nd)

**Keywords:** curriculum development, education system, education commissions, sessional paper

## Literature Review

### Education was offered on racial lines.

During this time, there was nothing as a nation, only several nations living side by side in the same territory. Education like society was stratified along racial lines. There was African education, European education and Asian education. This interpreted as three separate systems separated by rigid boundaries, (Ominde 1964). This stratification was based on the colonialist's assertion that the mental development of the African adult was equivalent to that of an average 7 – 8 years old European boy.

African education, therefore tended to be hybrid, particularly hovering between a European Model with a European subject matter and an education deemed suitable to the place in colonial life considered 'appropriate' to the African population. During the exploration of Africa, around 1878, the concept of education was based on what man and woman could do – i.e. the Victorian concept. The men were supposed to learn academic subjects i.e. the three 'Rs' of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic while the women were meant to do womanly things associated with 'Bs' i.e. Bathing, Brooms, Babies and bedroom.

This clearly shows how education was abused. The exploration brought the whiteman, to exploit Africa economically in her resources. The Africans were seen as strong people who would provide cheap labor to the Europeans. Therefore, the curriculum was meant to prepare Africans for manual work, though, the Africans themselves did not have an academic curriculum, they learnt through apprenticeship, which was appropriate for that time.

Socially, the curriculum was geared towards mixing with the colonials, a main purpose of the curriculum. Religiously, African was meant to be obedient through the introduction of the Bible. The white prepared the Africans for certain services for hard work- which they taught were virtues of the Bible. This religious aspect was also meant to hold Africans captive to avoid rebellion due to virtues taught such as fear of God. Politically, the curriculum was meant to idolize particular people such that those who have power, exploit the powerless, since curriculum is two way – either to socialize or to exploit- survival or socialization.

Culturally, -Initially, the missionaries were only interested in making converts and regarded African Culture as an obstacle to Christianity. Certain cultural practices like Female Genital Mutilation (F.G.M) were opposed by missionaries as they felt that it undermined women. However, this was rebelled greatly by the Africans since they saw the missionaries as wanting to get them out of their life.

The Government's policy of 'trusteeship' and 'indirect rule' agreed with the settlers attitude towards the Africans, and all felt that the policies would bring rapid advance for the European and gradual advance for African in Education. This met harsh rebellion from Kenyans.

African Schools Movement began in Kenya as early as 1910 in Nyanza, spreading to Central province by the 1920's in 1939. Githunguri Teachers college was founded to train Kenyan(Kikuyu and other ethnicities) teacher to teach African schools. Pre-independence commissions were formed to help in curriculum or education in pre- independence Kenya.

**In 1924, the Phelps – stokes commission** was formed. It recommended the education of the girl child. It also recommended practical education for African communities. In 1925 – Advisory committee for education in tropical Africa – recommended a necessary skills training.

**In 1949 – the Beecher commission**

Sought to maintain Christian principle and overt European moral aspect to formal education, this owed to declining African moral standards.

**In 1952 – Binns commission** ignored African cultural goals completely, sought to further invest schooling efforts in moral education and practical(agricultural) education, sought to keep Africans poor and rural. The eve of independence brought with it sweeping reforms in the education system. With creation of single nation, came the emergence of a single educational system, no longer stratified along racial lines. The replacement of colonial education and government was done through political alliances, each of which had implications on education. Kenya was struggling to socialize, after being pulled apart by the colonial era through the Harambee spirit of pulling together resources which included education.

Political – alignments were built for self governance. For the country to integrate there was need for common religion due to different ethnic background. This affected education practices and education was seen as medium to this healing process. At independence, there was need for education for manpower and development. To facilitate in national healing and cohesions, commissions focused on identity and unity, which were critical issues at the time.

However, since independence, the Kenyan educational system has experienced several fundamental er changes (reforms) in structure and curricula content (Bedi et al. 2000). Such changes were influenced by a number of commissions formed by the government to look into entire education system.

**The Ominde Commission- 1964**

This was the immediate post- independence established with the focus to expand manpower capacities and fight poverty. It dealt with cultural, social, religious and other needs and came up with nine objectives which are:

- Education as a function of Kenya must foster a sense of nationhood and promote national unity.
- Education must serve the people of Kenya and the needs of Kenya without discrimination.

- The public schools are an instrument of the secular state in which no religion is privileged but they must respect the religious conviction of all people.
- The Kenyan schools must respect the cultural traditions of the peoples of Kenya, both as expressed in social institutions and relationships.
- An excessively competitive spirit in our schools is incompatible with our traditional beliefs and must be restrained. Every young person coming from school must be made to realize that he has a valuable part to play in the nation life.
- Education must be regarded and used as an instrument for the conscious change of attitudes and relationships, preparing children for those changes of outlook required to modern methods of productive organization and foster respect for human personality.
- Education should sub serve the needs of national development.
- Education must promote social equality and remove divisions of race, tribe and religion.
- An outcome of our educational provision to all levels must be adaptability to

### **The Gachathi commission – 1976**

Looked at restructuring the education system in light of the Ominde Commission report Objectives

- To foster national unity, remove social and relational inequalities, create a national consciousness, be adaptable, and be relevant to the real life situations of the Kenyan environment.
- Foster cooperative effort and responsibility through self-help projects make each member to contribute according to ability.
- Foster social values by fostering traditional practices that are conducive to national unity.
- Promote cultural values by fostering that are conducive to national unity.
- Inculcate economic values among the youths; eradicate negative attitudes towards work, especially manual work.

In 1976, **International labor Organization** called for a change of education system in order to help reduce unemployment. The change consisted of increasing the technical and vocational aspects of the curriculum. The move by (LU) towards vocationalising the education system won support from the World Bank (Kivuva, nd)

### **The Mackay Report– 1981.**

Report of the presidential working party on the second National University in Kenya was the point of genesis of the 8-4-4 system, a move away from the Old British model of Primary, lower secondary (o'level) upper secondary (A level) and higher education the policy was designed to encourage students to become more self reliant and better oriented towards self employment. It contained a broad curriculum at both primary and secondary levels, with a strong emphasis on practical subjects silting alongside rather traditional approach to academic subjects. Business education was introduced into upper primary as an evident of encouraging self-employment and providing basic knowledge and skills on issues

such as record keeping, there was a cross- circular emphasis on attitudinal orientation towards self- employment. The Mackay report had the following objectives.

- Re introduction of the 8-4-4 system- eight years in primary school, four in secondary and four University.
- Numeracy and literacy skills would be offered in the first six years.
- Basic education with practical orientation would be offered in the last two years of primary education.
- Whereas before 1981, those in primary school studied up to class seven, the report recommended that it should be increased to eight years.
- The A- levels pass followed the 7-6-3 educational system.
- The demand was also from school leavers who left to study overseas because local universities were expensive.

This led to starting of a second university – Moi University. The report also recommended the setting up of a commission of Higher Education (CHE) the 8-4-4 system which was pre-vocational in nature was introduced in 1985, following the Mackay report. It was hoped that it would orient youths towards self employment.

#### **Rationale of the 8-4-4 system.**

- 1) Challenges for National development concept are aimed at responding to the challenges of National development and the participation of the youth in development
- 2) Need for a more relevant curriculum;-need for practical oriented curriculum that will offer a wide range of employment opportunities.
- 3) Equitable distribution of education resources;-ensure there are equal opportunities for all students regardless of their place origin, creed or race by providing equitable distribution of educational resources
- 4) Technical and vocational training;-emphasis on technical and vocational education to ensure students graduating at every level have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be used for self employment, salaried or further training.
- 5) Appreciate and respect dignity of labor.

Curriculum involved established of vocational subjects e.g.

- i) Arts and crafts
- ii) Agriculture
- iii) Home science

Pupils in these courses are supposed to produce functional and appealing articles. Learners to create self employment and income. Learners to share knowledge and skills (setting up and maintaining simple workshops for leatherwork, woodwork, metalwork and weaving)Agriculture enable students acquire agricultural knowledge and skills which are relevant and useful to their lives.

Ability to grow crops such as vegetables of secondary education;-to prepare the learners to make positive attitude contribution to development. Create positive attitude towards vocational training after school. Acquisition of attitudes of national patriotism, self respect, self reliance

E.g. Wood technology

Metal technology

Power technology

Electrical technology

**Others were;** Accounts, Commerce, Typing and office practice and Home science

The technical schools which were offering the above courses were relabeled technical institutes to concentrate in artisan craft courses.

### **University Education**

The presidential working party was to make general recommendations on establishment of a second University.

### **Rationale**

.Due to population growth rate of 4% annually and STD 1 entry of 1.2children there was need for rapid development of education in all levels. Provision of higher educational opportunities would bridge. Rapid economic growth must be counted with supply of manpower

### **PROSPECTS \$ PROBLEMS**

- a) Primary school leavers were too young at the time of exiting schools to the productive.

Hence need to lengthen the primary stage so that pupils can complete school when they are mature enough to work as productive members of the society.

- b) Children should be prepared for life agricultural activities and simple requirements of industry through subjects such as metal work, leather work and home science

## **Problems**

- .Negatives attitudes towards vocational training which was seen as designed to provide a special kind of inferior education for African to hamper their political advancement
- Elites argued that vocational education was appropriate for rural peasant farmers' children. Further more, resources for vocational courses were rare and thus no practical skills were taught
- Vocational training is geared towards non-salaried occupations. on-elite felt that education is an investment which was geared towards economic returns in form of salaries
- General attitude of education is provision of white –collar jobs. This influences those attitudes of school children as to form why they are in school. They form opinions of their careers while in school.
- The cost involved in implementation of the system was too high. There was need for additional class, construction of workshops and purchasing of tools.
- Past experience of technical schools did not produce employable manpower. The technical schools did not serve the purpose which they were created. Four years of technical training at secondary schools does not improve one's' employability.
- Amount of time dedicated on vocational training deprived students adequate time for basic cognitive skills which resulted into serious deficiencies in functional literacy and numeracy.

## **Performance gap in curriculum developments**

Discrepancy between theory and practical implementation reasons:

- 1) Kenya is in hurry. Due to rapid social and economic changes, it is hard to wait for accurate research. Some decisions may be ministerial orders and snap political decisions.
- 2) Limited resources; required for designing, implementing and evaluating projects. Most curriculum projects are imported and modified.
- 3) Global explosion of knowledge has had an unplanned impact on local curriculum. The tide sweeps through the subjects due to technological changes

## **Criticism of 8-4-4 curriculum**

1. It is burdensome to pupils and teachers-requires many books and physical facilities according to King and McGrath (2002) not
2. Teacher adequately prepared for the new system. According to Amutabi (2003)
3. A lot of time was required to implement the curriculum resulting to reduced performance according to 1997
4. Vocational subjects were optional and in some cases impractical e.g. Agricultural in arid areas

5. Lack of essential resources and facilities which were not available in the locality and locals would not provide them (Kerrey 1997, Simiyu 2001)

6. Lumping up of graduates/ lack of differentiation

However, although the 8-4-4 policy has been described a major educational reform in the history of Kenya's education system since independence in 1963. It has been said to be broad, expensive and burdensome to pupils and parents. According to (Amutabi 2003) it has also been implicated in the worst strikes that hit a number of schools in Kenya in 2001 and the general poor quality of education.

Other commissions were formed subsequently like the Kamunge Report of 1988, which raised the issue of curriculum overload of the 8-4-4 and recommended review to allow option in vocational subjects and more time to cover the curriculum more efficiently. Also by the time technical and vocational education was introduced within the 8-4-4 policy, there was a serious shortage of qualified teachers for these subject, most of them were untrained. It also gave financial burdens to parents for building workshops and home science rooms.

The Koech report – 1999 – identified other weaknesses of the policy. They included loss of two years of 'A' level which robbed the students the opportunity to mature before entering university. It claimed that a number of students could not cope with the transition to university life and unsupervised learning life styles. Teachers should have been educated on the dynamics and demands of the new system through workshops and short courses, especially during holiday before implementations.

During the 2002 campaign, for presidential general elections, the platform for National Rainbow Coalition was on introduction of Free Primary Education, a slogan that saw the party to state house. The free primary education was implemented immediately the following year, 2003, and since then, it has met its challenges that include overcrowding in classrooms and overstretched facilities for learning. There is also the Free Secondary Education Tuition fees.

However, the government does not always release the FSE and FPE funds in time and this leaves education managers at tight corners when it comes to school planning. The current government ((the Jubilee) Coalition) found its way to state house again on a platform of many promises some of them educational. The issue of digitalization in the education systems is a welcome one due to the fact that the world has gone digital in all aspects.

The jubilee government is yet to provide the free laptops it promised all the standard one going children as soon as it form the government.

## Conclusion

The coming of western Education system not only led to the abolition of the African indigenous education system but also affected the perception of African towards technical and vocational education as a whole (Bogonko 1992, Otiende et al 1992). The curriculum was set such that it provided skills that them as labourers on the European firms, that kind of treatment negatively affected the Africans attitude towards technical and vocational education (Bogonko 1992). Also during the colonial period, technical and vocational was offered in Kenya Primary schools the jeans schools (Simiyu 2001).

Therefore MacKay's report 1981 did not raise something new because vocational educational subjects were compulsory in Kenya African education until 1966 when they were officially abolished following the Ominde Report 1964, according to Simiyu therefore Mackay Report was a mere revitalization of the past colonial educational practices.

The irony is shown in how Kenyans in the early colonial period fought against a system of education that was vocational and technical in focus because they saw it as shepherding them to second-class lives in a colonial environment while in the post-colonial world, Kenyan educational planners see a need to train students vocationally and technically to better serve the needs of the country— Eshiwani George S. (1993)

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