

The Teachers Voice and Ownership in Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya: Application of Bernstein's Theory

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is a planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process necessary to improve an education system. Changing a curriculum to address societal needs cannot be overemphasized. Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula is affected. However, teachers are mostly left out during this important exercise. They are in most instances incorporated during the implementation stage of curriculum development. Teachers have a key role in all the processes of curriculum change and development and most importantly during curriculum implementation. Bernstein Theory of Pedagogic Discourse encapsulates the teacher's role in the curriculum development process. The Theory postulates that constructing a pedagogic discourse requires three inter-related rules of distributive, recontextualizing and evaluative activities. These rules are hierarchically related such that one cannot exist without the other. The teacher is able to collate various information from various groups which leads to orienting the curriculum with meaning. The teacher is also able to recontextualize expert information by simplifying and refocusing given content. Finally, the teacher evaluates the activities and gives feedback for improvement and sustainability of the curriculum. The knowledge generated by experts from different fields is encoded in highly complex symbolic forms that must be decoded and translated into pedagogies that are accessible by the learners and non-specialists: this can only be done by a teacher. The new curriculum in Kenya ought to have embraced Bernstein's theory during its development. The teacher's role was not clearly defined in the development of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya. This has resulted in various challenges in its implementation right from the onset. This is because the teachers were only involved during the implementation stage, which is the last step of the curriculum development process. This raises the question why were they not included in all the curriculum development stages? Teachers have complained of lack of involvement, poorly rolled out training, inadequate resources, and lack of understanding of the curriculum. This is a challenge in the implementation and sustainability of CBC. This article therefore is a meta-analysis that focuses on the application of Bernstein's theory during the changeover of the current Competency Based Curriculum from the 8-4-4 curriculum in Kenya.

Key Words: Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), Bernstein's Theory

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is an important vehicle in the implementation of educational changes in any country. It is an open, dynamic innovation which requires constant monitoring, evaluation, and possible change over time to meet its intended objectives and to adapt to changes in technology and times. It is recognized as the pivotal point between local and national agendas and students whom educational policies are designed to serve. This change must be undertaken by stakeholders who are mandated to study current educational trends and perform appropriate modifications to it. Curriculum development refers to a defined, planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process to create positive improvements in an educational system. Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected. However, teachers are mostly left out during the important initial stages of curriculum change. Changing curriculum to

address societal needs cannot be underscored (Alvior, 2014). Consequently, teachers, who are primary stakeholders, have a key role in all the processes of curriculum change and most importantly for effective curriculum implementation.

During the change process teachers need to be involved as implementers of the curriculum, but are they? This paper seeks to look at the nature of teacher involvement in curriculum development in light of curriculum change currently happening in Kenya using Bernstein’s Theory of Pedagogic Discourse in locating the voice of the teachers. Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) with educational structure of 6-2-3-3, has stimulated different views by the stakeholders since its inception in 2017 to replace the 8-4-4 educational system which has lasted for 32 years in Kenya.

The vehicle, ‘curriculum’, carries a load that has to be inspected overtime by experts to ensure the vehicle is not overloaded or underloaded (Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012).

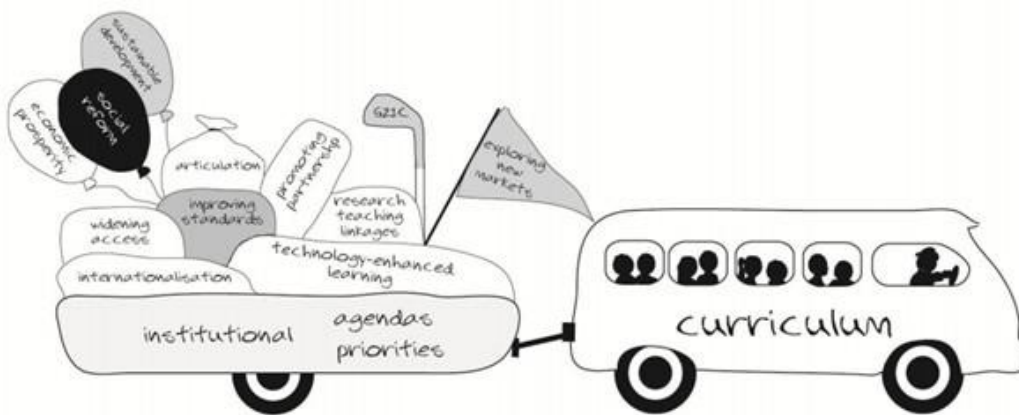


Figure 1: Curriculum as vehicle (From Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012)

Alusbei (2016) explains that the role played by the teachers in the curriculum development and implementation cannot be ignored. Their understanding and perception of the curriculum is what they pass directly to the learners. If they are left out in the process of curriculum development, then they are most likely to implement the curriculum wrongly and this can result into a failed curriculum which does not meet its intended objectives. Wedell & Grassick (2017) reported that curriculum development is a complex process, which requires a lot of resources and is time-consuming. He further stated that if the teacher is not involved entirely in the process of development, then curriculum might not be implemented effectively. Oduor (2019) also adds that there is need for an improved relationship between the teachers and the curriculum governing bodies to ensure that the strategies put in place by these bodies allows for the teacher’s voice to be fully integrated in the developed curriculum.

Bernstein (1999) and Shaver (2017) suggested two models of teacher involvement in curriculum development. Bernstein (1999) suggested that teachers should be involved in the recontextualizing field and the secondary field of curriculum implementation. Shaver (2017) outlines that the teacher should be involved at the central level and at the local level of curriculum development. The local level gives the teachers an opportunity to develop the curriculum at the school level and the central level allows them to be part of the decision-making process and to contribute as experts. The Taba Model of Curriculum Development proposed that one of the ways of evaluating the impact of curriculum to its intended audience is to ensure the involvement of teachers from the beginning to the top of the whole process of curriculum development (Lunenburg, 2011).

With the foregoing information, it can be observed that teachers are an integral part of the curriculum development process and not just at the implementation stage of the whole process. Their voice needs to be

heard, effected, and incorporated in a curriculum.

Bernstein's Theory of Pedagogic discourse

Curriculum in Kenya has undergone several changes since independence. In 1963, the East African Community which include Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania adopted the 7-4-2-3 system of education. This lasted for 18 years until 1985 when the system was rendered obsolete, and a new system of education dubbed 8-4-4 was formulated. This system lasted for 32 years until 2017 when a recommendation by the Koech commission report of 1999 was made for a new system of education. Kenya introduced the Competency Based Curriculum which focused on 2-6-6-3 system of education. These changes were necessitated by the ever-changing societal needs. Scholars have considered this process important to making education meaningful (Wanjohi, 2011)

Basil Bernstein is one of the most influential and widely discussed theorists in the sociology of knowledge (Parlo Singh, 2002). In his research, Bernstein had his focus on the importance of making explicit models and theories used to define research problem in curriculum development (Halliday, 1995). Bernstein (1990) modelled how change could be instigated in the national education systems to ensure stability or uniformity across all involved parties and stakeholders of educational reforms. This model was termed a pedagogic device (Parlo Singh, 2012). According to Bernstein (1990, 1996, 2000), constructing a pedagogic discourse requires three inter-related rules of distributive, recontextualizing and evaluative. These rules are hierarchically related such that one cannot exist without the other. First, distributive rules regulate the power of relationships between social groups by distributing different forms of knowledge and thus leading to different orientations to meaning. Secondly, recontextualizing rules regulates the formation of specific discourse, which are the rules for 'delocating a discourse, for relocating it and for refocusing it.' Finally, the third rule which is evaluative rules are concerned with recognizing what counts as valid acquisition of instructional and regulative texts.

These rules were all associated with the main fields of the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 1990, 2001) which includes fields of production, recontextualizing and reproduction. Similar to the rules, recontextualizing of knowledge cannot exist without its production taking places and reproduction cannot also take place without recontextualization. These three fields are key components in developing any curriculum today and Bernstein's ideas of using this model in reconstructing instructional discourse is important.

The field of **production of knowledge** discusses the knowledge intensive areas that can be studied by the learners and have not yet been exploited or needs to be reconstructed to enhance the knowledge level. This is the primary field which is considered the intellectual field. The knowledge generated by experts from different fields is encoded in highly complex symbolic forms and must be decoded and translated into pedagogies that are accessible by the learners and non-specialists (Singh, 2002). Singh further explains three other levels that can lead to production of new fields of study such as increase in the volume of knowledge in various fields, loss of trust by the public in learning institutions and growth in specialized knowledge and technologies. (Ungar, 2000).

The second field that Bernstein identified was the field of **Recontextualization** which falls between the primary and the secondary field of knowledge production. It comprised two main sub-fields; Official Recontextualizing Field (ORF) – involving (specialized departments and state agencies) and the Pedagogic Recontextualizing Field (PRF) – involving: university departments of education, specialized media of education, newspapers, weeklies, journals together with readers and advisor (Bernstein 1990). This field may also comprise those not specialized in educational discourse but have a stake on matters education. This field also identifies the learners with different needs and classifies them to aid the reproduction of instructional materials that benefit the entire community of learners. Educational authorities and syllabus writers have membership composition that comprises teams that involve the teachers and other institutional

administration.

Finally, the last field that Bernstein talked about is the field of **reproduction** which involves schooling institutions. In this field, which is also called the secondary field, involves the use of pedagogic texts, such as the curricular schemes and textbooks created in the recontextualizing field by the teachers, curriculum advisors and the trial schools. These converted into forms that can be shared in classrooms with the learners and those this information is intended for (Delamont, 1998 & Bernstein 1996).

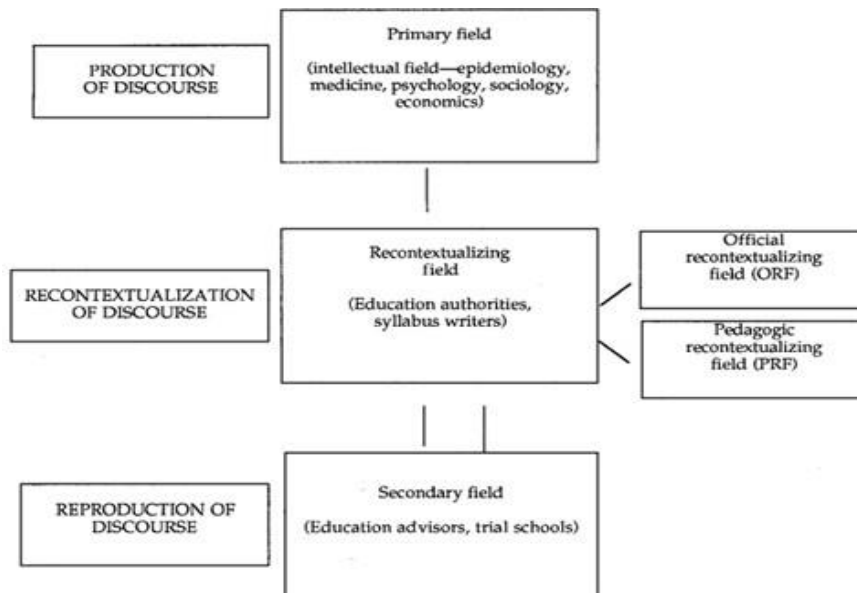


Figure1. Bernstein's construction of discourses across fields (after Glaby 2000).

The location of the teacher's voice in Curriculum Development according Bernstein's Theory

The teacher's voice in curriculum implementation can be classified in three areas to form part of curriculum reforms as curriculum writers, members of advisory committees, and classroom implementers of the curriculum (Bernstein, 1999). In the Kenyan context, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) is mandated with the task of curriculum development and implementation. One of their key roles is to ensure that the stakeholders participate in the process of pedagogic discourse development and implementation (Nyamai, 2020). The teachers, being key stakeholders in the entire process, should have their position clearly defined in the whole process of curriculum development.

It is therefore necessary to identify the role of teachers in the development of CBC in line with Bernstein's theory of pedagogic discourse. Bernstein indicates that teachers should not only be involved during the pilot stage of curriculum development but should also be involved in the process of **production** of new pedagogy (conceptualization of the idea), **recontextualizing** context (input of teachers on the changes to be made) and the **reproduction** of the curriculum at the secondary level (presentation of the curriculum to the learners at the school and classroom level).

Mulongo (2017), in his research on cross-national learning assessments: relationship to education policy curriculum and capacity development in Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, found out that the general lack of consultations of stakeholders in the process of curriculum development, leads to many challenges. This causes the developed curriculum to be underperceived, making its implementation very poor.

The teacher's role was not clearly defined in the development of CBC in Kenya. This has resulted in teething problems in its implementation right from the beginning. This is because the teachers were only

involved during the implementation stage of the curriculum development process. Teachers have complained of lack of involvement, poorly rolled out training, inadequate resources, and lack of understanding of the curriculum. This is a challenge in the implementation and sustainability of CBC.

The Critique of CBC Curriculum in Kenya

After a consensus on the need for changing the curriculum, KICD with the support of the government and other stakeholders agreed that there is need to change the structure of the curriculum from 8-4-4 to 6-2-3-3 system. There are series of studies that have punched holes in this curriculum as a rush-decision which never involved proper consultation of stakeholders (Sifuna and Obonyo, 2019; Amunga et. al, 2020; Akala, 2021 & Okeyo and Kanake, 2021), while others have foreseen its benefits (Amutabi, 2019; Oduor, 2019 & Nyamai, 2020;). In this section we look at the positive sides of this implementation, the negative sides, and the way forward for the CBC in connection with Bernstein's theory.

According to Sifuna and Obonyo (2019), CBC has attracted a lot of attention from various scholars and stakeholders because of how the government has handled its introduction and the pitfalls of the entire process. However, Amutabi (2019) applauds CBC since it is learner centered rather than teacher centered approach. This promotes the ideals of lifelong learning in which learning in informal, non-formal and formal contexts are promoted.

Challenges may exist at the initial stages of any curriculum implementation process given that it is complex and requires a lot of brainstorming and research. Teacher involvement in the development process has seen several countries such as Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and South Africa successfully implement CBC (Amutabi, 2019). Their key to success was grounded on the involvement of all the stakeholders especially teachers from the beginning of curriculum development process which is in-line with what Bernstein suggested.

In the 8-4-4 curriculum, teachers grappled with examinations which led to unnecessary and unhealthy competition coupled corruption in the education sector (Ambaa, 2015). The better the results produced, the more rewards one gets. This shifted the learning paradigm from learning to merely passing exams. This is supported by Momanyi (2019) who states that national examinations were causing a lot of anxiety and trauma to the teachers and learners because they determine the life chances these learners had. CBC advocates for an approach in which education is based on learner competencies and removes the pressure placed on them so that all receive placement based on their skills and talents. Teacher's focus has been shifted to modelling learners who are equipped with necessary 21st century hands-on skills (Okeyo & Kanake, 2021).

Given the challenges, CBC implementation in Kenya will eventually be affordable, flexible, skill-based, self-paced, engaging and will permanently eradicate the unnecessary competition among learners and teachers. Hoskins & Crick (2010) stated that the learning process should take place to enable the learner to apply what they have learnt but not create competition which is what CBC stands for.

According to Amutabi (2019), CBC advocates for flexibility in the pedagogy in which the learners are not placed into strict timing of period and times. The teachers are given the opportunity to have ample time with the learners as they assess their competency development over a period. CBC advocates for lifelong learning ensuring that the learning process reaches maturity where the learner has mastered imparted skills. There is no condition in which the learner as to perform just as well as the other learners or age mate, the learners can be slow or fast, they will take different times to complete the expected activities and at the end of it all, they shall have achieved the expected objectives of learning.

According to Bernstein, pedagogic discourse should allow the learners and the teachers to come to a

common understanding of the content being covered (Bernstein, 2000) which is advocated for by CBC.

The voice of the teachers through the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) from a report published in 2019 indicates that teachers were not involved in the process of the new curriculum and their participation was not considered in the entire process of the curriculum development (Oduor, 2019). In their report, the CBC is based upon the summative evaluation done in 2009 as the basis of the change in 2018. The process of evaluation was conducted by a team that mostly comprised foreign consultants with limited knowledge on the curriculum reforms on the Kenyan context (Oduor, 2019). Various other stakeholders were excluded in the process of summative evaluation in 2009. According to Bernstein, this is a production field that required the input of the teachers who are the actual implementers of the curriculum that was being developed (Bernstein, 2001).

There has been limited and erratic training conducted for teachers to implement the new curriculum. The experts who were trainers of the new curriculum were limited in number and could not tackle the training of all the teachers within the country (Amunga et. al, 2020) According to Bernstein, teachers should not only interact with the curriculum for the first time in workshops and seminars, they should have an understanding of the proceedings of the curriculum right from its inception which was not the case with CBC (Bernstein 1999). Furthermore, training and seminars were cut short by the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore few teachers were trained. This selective training of teachers was not sufficient to cater for all the people that were to interact with CBC program (Oduor, 2019). Koskei and Chepchumba (2020) stated that teacher training lasted only three days and as such, the trainers had a hard time going through all the content that ought to have been covered in more days. This affected the teachers' proper understanding of the entire concept of Competency based curriculum implementation.

Mulongo (2017) illustrates the role of the teachers in the development and implementation of CBC curriculum in Tanzania was ignored and this resulted into teachers continuing to use the traditional knowledge-based learning and assessment methods in the name of CBC. The same is repeating itself in Kenya. Due to lack of proper understanding of the implementation approaches, teachers continue to use their normal way of teaching and assessment with half-baked implementation of the competency-based curriculum (Momanyi, 2019). Paulo (2014) conducted a study on pre-service teacher preparedness in Tanzania regarding introduction of CBC in secondary schools in Tanzania in 2005 showed that there was no indication and proof that teacher education curriculum was changed to accommodate the integration of CBC. Hence, the teachers were still being trained using the knowledge-based curriculum even after introduction of CBC.

In Kenya, lack of teachers' guides, students' textbooks during the hurriedly conducted pilot study placed the teachers in an awkward position (Momanyi & Rop, 2019; Koskei & Chepchumba, 2020). Bernstein (1999) indicated that the recontextualizing field aids the preparation of all the necessary materials that are required by the teachers and the institutions that are to implement the pilot study in the secondary field of reproduction. Bernstein indicates that these processes are hierarchical in nature, and one does not proceed without the completion of its predecessor (Okeyo & Kanake, 2021). This points to the importance of having teachers involved in the whole curriculum development process. These resources would have been easily produced if teachers' input had been considered at the production stage as Bernstein puts it. Any updates, additions and/or deletions (recontextualizing) would easily have been realized since teachers were involved from the onset.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The Implementation of the CBC requires a series of remedies to bridge the gap between the teacher and their understanding of the curriculum. It is visible that the implementation of CBC requires an overall change in the instructional approach in terms of learning, teaching, and assessment. This requires that there

is a change in the teacher training program; both in-service and pre-service, to equip teachers with effective implementation strategies. New inventions, abilities and approaches of this curriculum will be sought to handle challenges associated with its implementation. If this is properly undertaken, then it will be in line with Bernstein's recommendation on the construction of pedagogic discourse in which the teachers as the core implementors of the curriculum with a clear understanding of the whole process of development, implementation, evaluation, and challenges expected of the new curriculum.

According to Majoko (2019), the key competencies for education are demonstration and possession of knowledge, skills, understanding, behavior, and attitudes required to perform a given task to a described standard. This demonstration requires the equipping of learning institutions and teachers with the required resources to assess activity-based learner centered learning. The government should therefore put in place the mechanisms to ensure that to prepare the learners for competence-based learning, the resources needed are availed to the learning institutions and teachers for effective implementation of this curriculum. This would involve availing adequate learning resources and materials required for CBC implementation.

There is a need for integration of technology to improve the teacher practices in CBC implementation. Given that this is a new dispensation, the teachers may not have all the resources necessary for the successful implementation of the curriculum (Akala, 2021). There is acute surge in the number of learners in primary schools due to the role-out of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003. Given that the competency of every learner must be monitored, teachers need a better way to attend to the needs of each learner. Integration of ICT in pedagogy is this perceived better way that will improve classroom engagement and content delivery by the teachers (Njeru & Itegi, 2018).

There exists a gap between public and private school teachers with reference to CBC implementation. The government should offer mandatory training for all the schoolteachers, both private and public schools, to prevent learners from receiving raw deals in some learning institutions. The tendency in Kenya with reference to 8-4-4 curriculum was that the private schools used rote learning learners to pass national examinations and acquire a good stature at the expense of proper teaching of the learners. There is a need for more teacher training cross-cutting all institutions so that all learners get equal treatment.

As a matter of urgency, higher learning institutions, especially those concerned with teacher training should integrate the CBC training in their teacher-education programmes to allow for proper understanding of CBC in the pre-service training. A systematic approach should be developed for the in-service training to ensure that all the teachers are trained properly for CBC to succeed. Continuous professional development would be necessary if not mandatory going forward.

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