

Merits and Demerits of the Competency Based Curriculum(CBC) in Relation to Learner Friendliness in Kenya

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ABSTARCT

This paper has aimed at analyzing the merits and demerits of the competency-based curriculum in relation to learner friendliness in Kenya. The accounts presented were based on the experiences of educators, learners and parents who provided accurate and reliable information on the impact of CBC to the learners. The merits include development of technical skills, improved assessment, digital literacy and collaboration skills among others whereas the demerits include numerous academic expenses, exploitation of parents and learners, inadequate learning facilities among others. Matters arising in the contemporary society have also been discussed in detail.

INTRODUCTION

Challenges encountered by the modern society are dynamic thus a multifaceted approach is needed so as to solve them. Consequently, the education system of Kenya has shifted from the old curriculum (8-4-4) to the Competency Based Curriculum. The former was not only teacher-centered but also exam oriented therefore, it promoted corruption and cheating (Amutabi, 2003a). In addition, it only favored the academically gifted learners. However, Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) was introduced to shift the focus to the learners and how they can learn and develop skills on their own. (Norich, M. M. & Maureen, A. O. 2020) the only way a country can achieve its sustainable development goals is by ensuring that it provides an inclusive and equitable quality education to all the learners.

Since the introduction of formal western education in Kenya, there have been attempts to review the different systems of education and make amendments where necessary (Amutabi, 2019, KICD, 2018). The first system to be introduced in Kenya was the 7-4-2-3 in the year 1967. This was then reviewed to the 8-4-4 system by the late President Daniel Arap Moi in 1985 through the MacKay report of 1981. However, there have been many recommendations made to review the system. According to Strathmore University, (2020) Vincent, the Vice-Chancellor Designate, was quoted saying that we are better off with the challenges of the new system of education (CBC), rather than sticking to the old curriculum which produced half-baked graduates.

A lot of debates and concerns have been raised in reference to the implementation of the new curriculum in Kenya. Although it is good, most teachers suggest that the government should have taken more time to plan for it (Amutabi, 2019). According to Wilson Sossion, in a debate “2022: Politics of CBC”, by Citizen TV, the government rushed the new curriculum without adequate preparation. This has caused a lot of havoc in the country as schools are trying to adjust and fit in with the new curriculum. Majority of people have either proposed or opposed the new curriculum based on their personal perspectives. These views might be objective or subjective in a way. Sossion (2022) firmly contended that teachers are not ready to implement CBC due to the inadequate funds and resources which ought to be provided by the government. However, learners should be brought on board so as to find out whether CBC is friendly and beneficial to them or not. If not, then necessary measures should be taken to ensure the goals of CBC are achieved. This paper will therefore explicate the merits and demerits of the Competency based Curriculum in reference to learner friendliness.

Merits of the Competency Based Curriculum

According to most stakeholders of education, such as the late Cabinet Secretary of education Prof. Magoha (2019-2022), some teachers and parents’ representatives, CBC is the way to go because it ensures inclusivity

of learners' diversified abilities as well as creating a platform to enhance their skills and potentialities. This is achieved through the following:

Development of technical skills

The world is shifting from theory to more practical and technical skills. The new curriculum has incorporated technical subjects such as Home Science, Agriculture, Computer Studies, Physical education, Art Craft and Music. Each of the listed subjects ensures the learner is equipped with technical skills through the projects and practical works given in school. (Mohamed & Karuku 2017). For instance, in Art and Craft, a learner may be required to design a traditional music instrument that was used during the performance of folk songs. This requires him to find out how the instrument is made with the aid of either parents, siblings, or the community, design a musical instrument, and since CBC encourages creativity, he can use locally available resources to make the instrument. By the time the project is done, the learner will have acquired new skills to perhaps design more things on his own.

Improved way of assessment

In the old curriculum that is 8-4-4, learner's performance and evaluation was done through examination. The exam would determine transition of the learner from one class to another and from one level to the other. Since the system itself was exam oriented, every learner was determined to perform well no matter the cost. It was unfair that learners would wait for eight years for them to do the KCPE which would determine their academic abilities. It is not considerate to determine what a learner can do based on an exam given after many years of waiting. (Amutabi, 2019). However, this is contrary to the new system since learner assessment is done continuously. They do not have to wait for a long time for their assessment to be done since each activity done in and out of class is recorded continuously. This progressive assessment has given learners a chance to prove that they are gradually improving. It has also made the evaluation process easier and more authentic. For instance, if a learner is required to perform a traditional song, they may be unable at first but with practice, they will be able after some days or weeks. This shows that there is change and learning has taken place (Utomo, 2019). Therefore, CBC gives room for gradual improvement which was not there in the 8-4-4 system.

Learning communication and collaboration skills

CBC creates a personalized experience for each learner hence those who can learn through class work or practical and research are each catered for. (Grube, 2018). In every learning area are activities listed which learners should carry out. Those activities normally require the learners to either work as individuals or in groups. For instance, in Grade six English under the strand on Child Labor, learners are expected to work in groups and design posters or compose a song about child labor. Afterwards they should present it to the whole class. On the other hand, the teacher is supposed to assess the learner's ability to communicate well with the others and how he works together with others. Any student who does not show these abilities is guided on how they should interact and work together with the others. With this, we see that CBC is not only interested with the general performance of learners but also how well they can collaborate with others in and out of class (KICD, 2017).

Digital literacy

CBC is aimed at improving learner's digital skills (Njeru & Itegi, 2018). For instance, most assignments after every strand taught in class, are normally found online. In some subjects especially Science and Technology, links have been provided which learners are supposed to use to access more information on what they are learning. All this is aimed at ensuring the learner can operate a digital machine and source out information online. For instance, in the 2022 Home Science project, learners were supposed to make an embroidered handkerchief. In the instructions given, they were supposed to get the steps and design of an embroidered handkerchief from the internet (KNEC, 2022). Although the teacher was allowed to guide or assist them most of the work including researching online was done by the learners. This has created a room for them to improve their digital skills.

Moreover, after doing an assignment sometimes, the learners are required to share it among themselves using digital devices. This means they have to look for ways of sharing such as through emails, messages or Whatsapp. This is also preparing them to fit in the outside world where communication is done digitally and access to information is done on the internet.

Social cohesion

CBC has tried to create cohesion among all the stakeholders of education (Akala 2021). Initially, learning was known to only involve learners and the teacher. Most parents have even been heard saying that their duty is to only pay school fees the rest, is for the teacher and the learner. However, CBC has enlightened the society and improved its reasoning by reminding everybody that everybody that they have a role to play in education. Most of the activities in the text books involve both the parents working together with the pupils, teachers and the society as a whole. For instance, in 2022, the Grade six learners were required to organize a fund drive in collaboration with the community (KNEC, 2022). The money collected would then be used to help the needy in the community. In addition, sometimes parents have been required to record their children as they perform tasks at home then send it to the teacher. This creates good collaboration between the teachers, parents and learners hence a good relationship amongst them.

Encourages creativity among learners

In the 8-4-4 system, the main focus was on abstract thinking (Amutabi 2019). However, CBC shifted to practicality. Introduction of learning areas such as Art Craft and music have created room for a lot of creativity and invention of new things. For instance, in Craft, learners were required to use locally available resources to make ornaments that can be worn during music performances. Some learners went ahead and used raw beans and maize to design necklaces, others used sisal to make skirts. Some used beads to make ear rings and they even sold them to the teachers and other pupils. Such demonstrations validate how CBC as a whole is promoting creativity among the learners.

Culture preservation

Okeyo (2021) focused his study on the integration of indigenous knowledge into education through CBC. With the new technology and the evolving world, people seem to have either forgotten their history or lost their culture. CBC is trying to preserve our culture, history and heritage in books so that they can be passed from one generation to the other. In March 2022, Grade Three learners were given a project in which they were required to study traditional foods cooked long time ago. These foods were also supposed to be prepared and presented to the whole school during the ‘Cultural Day’. Some learners were shocked to learn that long time ago, people made oil from milk and used it to cook especially vegetables. Others were mesmerized by the different types of food preservation that were practiced in the past such as drying meat in the sun.

Most of the songs written in the text books are traditional songs which might be unfamiliar to the current generation. It was also discovered that the songs children sing are mostly Western songs. However, CBC has tried to incorporate many children’s songs from our local community just to remind learners about our heritage. In 2021/2022, in the projects given by the Ministry of Education, Grade Five and Grade Three learners were supposed to organize an event for celebrating our Kenyan Heroes. In this event, they were expected to present traditional patriotic songs. Songs such as “*Wimbo wa Historia*” reminded many about our heroes such as Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. If you now ask a Grade Three learner about who fought for our independence, at least they may be able to respond.

This section has clearly illuminated some of the merits of the Competency Based Curriculum in with reference to occurrences experienced by learners and teachers in the contemporary society.

Demerits of Competency Based Curriculum

The Competency Based curriculum was introduced to solve the challenges that the previous curriculum was facing. With the new curriculum came a lot of benefits that are worth embracing. However, there are some shortcomings which cannot be overlooked and need immediate response. Below are a number of them:

Ignorance

Lack of information may be the key factor influencing many people to reject the new curriculum. Even those who are formally educated may lack adequate information about the new curriculum. Sifuna & Obonyo (2019) clearly point out the need to create awareness to all educational stakeholders in regard to the implementation of CBC. Most parents have been heard all over social media complaining that CBC has a lot of disadvantages. For instance, in 2022, before the government gave the way forward about Junior Secondary, it was said that Grade six learners would join high school. Some parents wondered how to go about cultural practices such as circumcision which was mostly done once a boy completed class eight before transiting to Form one.

In the television, most parents have been heard complaining that the new curriculum is too demanding in terms of time and money. Parents are complaining that they should not be involved in their children's education as long as they have paid the school fees and bought all the required materials. However, the statement since education should bring everybody together if we want to give the best education to learners.

Apart from parents, some teachers have also been on the frontline protesting against the new Curriculum. Some say that it is too complicated for them to teach. Others say that the practical and activities are so many that they cannot handle.

A lot of academic expenses

Most of the parents in Kenya have raised concerns over the demands that have come along with the new curriculum. Apart from just buying text books, there are many things that parents have to cater for. In the old curriculum, there were only six subjects, therefore the text books needed were basically six. However, CBC has introduced more subjects which means that the parents have to buy more text books and exercise books. For instance, in English, we still have sub branches such as literacy, listening and speaking, grammar, reading and writing. Some teachers require the learners to have at least three English books.

In addition, the new curriculum has a lot of activities and projects to be done. This is because it is shifting from theoretical work which was in the old curriculum to more practical work. For instance, a technical subject like Home Science needs a lot of practical. In 2022, the Home Science project, required learners to prepare foods that can be deep fried such as potatoes, chicken, mandazi. All the ingredients were to be provided by the learners. Some parents were lamenting that they cannot afford to provide all the required materials. On social media, some jokes went viral over the issue of teachers feeding on children's meals such as chicken and fish in the name of conducting CBC practical. Others even went ahead to say that since the introduction of CBC in Kenya, teachers have never gone on strike because they are feeding very well. However, some teachers have also taken advantage of the situation to exploit learners. They keep on demanding for either money or materials to do practical with the learners.

Moreover, in the early years of education, children are required to do a lot of art work and painting. All the materials required such as crayons, paints, books, manilas among others are very expensive.

Since CBC requires constant record keeping of learner's performance, schools and parents have had it the rough way. Every activity done by the learners in and out of class requires to be captured on video, or as a photo, printed and filed by the teachers. The results are also supposed to be uploaded online. In most schools especially private ones, public schools and those in remote areas where there may be no electricity, parents have been forced to cater for all the expenses. Schools that lack computers and other electronic devices have been forced to seek cyber services which are also very expensive.

Exploitation of parents and learners

Education in Kenya is assumed to be free, however, there are some head teachers who have seized the opportunity to exploit parents. This is through demands such as buying uniforms especially in Junior Secondary, providing resources and materials for practical and paying school fees and creating portfolios for learners. There are some teachers who take advantage of learners by demanding cooking products and food

from them. A case was reported of a teacher who asked her eighty learners to buy 100g of meat each. Unfortunately, after preparation, the meat was eaten by the other teachers instead of the learners who bought it. The government and school administrations should take charge of this issue and ensure learners' wellbeing is observed in school.

Inadequate learning facilities

Inadequate learning resources and facilities hinders the effectiveness of the Competency Based Curriculum (Mutisya 2019). There have been many debates and disagreements over the issue of Junior Secondaries and the fate of the Grade Six learners. Initially, the government had proposed to take them to high schools. It even went ahead to construct one class in the high schools that would admit junior secondary learners. This would have been considered better since most high schools are already established with learning facilities such as laboratories, libraries, workshops and computer laboratories that are vital for technical subjects. However, others opposed the idea by arguing that the learners were too young to join high school hence, the proposal of retaining them in primary. The truth is that only a handful of primary schools have all the facilities required by CBC. How many primaries are there that have laboratories? (Saram & Susan, 2014) a successful education system requires adequate funding.

On the first week of 2023, Sub-County directors and other officials from the Ministry of Education went to primary schools to assess the readiness of having Junior Secondaries. Most turned out not ready or equipped with the necessary facilities. With this it seems like there will be a shortage of learning institutions offering Junior Secondary education or the few schools available will be overcrowded. For instance, in Kikuyu Sub-County, most private schools were declared unqualified to have Junior Secondary section. All the Grade Six learners from these schools will have to transfer to government primary schools. This will cause a lot of challenges. One, the public schools they are joining will be overcrowded and struggle for the limited resources which are already scarce. On the other hand, directors of private schools will have lost many students hence reduced income for the private schools. A school within kikuyu was compelled by the sub-county to construct laboratories and meet other requirements or foregoes the thirty Grade Six learners. This has brought financial instability to that school.

Shortage of trained teachers

When the Competency Based Curriculum was introduced in Kenya, the Ministry of Education made plans on how teachers would be trained to teach the new curriculum. This has been achieved through in-service of teachers whereby, they get trained with additional skills about the CBC despite having qualified in the teaching profession. However, the government has not met the threshold of training enough teachers to meet the high number of learners in Kenya. According to a report done by the Presidential Working Party of Education Reforms, 34.64% Kenyans think that few teachers have been trained on CBC implementation. Apart from just training, it cannot manage to employ enough teachers. In December 2022, the Teacher's Service Commission advertised 30,000 vacancies for teachers. On application, some subject combinations were allocated very few slots per county. For instance, Geography/Mathematics had as few as 6 slots in most counties like Narok. Are seven slots enough for all the Junior secondary schools in Narok? This means another problem is arising. The issue of inadequate trained teachers means the rest of the schools with few or no trained teachers on CBC will end up taking the burden. What if they do not meet the expectations required by the new curriculum? Who is to blame if CBC is not taught the way it should? According to Wilson Sossion, on an interview "2022: *Politics of CBC*", by Citizen TV, teachers are not yet prepared to teach CBC because the government has not provided adequate training.

Digital challenges

Sifuna and Obonyo (2019) in their study highlighted the inadequate digital skills which hinders effective implementation of CBC. Some teachers do not know how to go about digital matters and finding information online. Some schools have had to spend extra money on accessing internet services. For instance, teachers are required to upload the results of the learners on the portal. A teacher who does not have the skills needed, will opt to go to the cyber to get the results uploaded hence spending a lot of money. Nevertheless, not everybody

in Kenya has the privilege of accessing reliable internet and electricity. Learners and teachers in the remote and inaccessible places face the challenge of uploading results online and accessing learning materials online. For instance, a teacher in Maralal, Samburu County may delay to upload his learners' results because of unstable internet. As much as the government wants people to shift from analogue to digital, they should ensure there is reliable supply of electricity throughout the whole country.

Matters arising in our contemporary society

The future of first cohort CBC learners since the rolling out of CBC might seem deem. This is due to the fact that by the time CBC was being introduced, a lot of issues were still unresolved such as the deployment of trained, qualified teachers for CBC. According to The Star 8th Sep 2021, Nelson Havi (A Kenyan) was planning to file a petition challenging CBC. He added that the education system in Kenya should not be an expensive, inefficient and ineffective experiment with our children and their future as is our leadership. Parents still feel like their children are victims of trial and error. Some in Garissa Township even went to the extent of registering their children as candidates even before they could complete grade 7 because they felt it was better for them to do the KCPE and transit to high school rather than joining grade 7 in junior secondary which has not well planned for by the government.

Unmotivated teachers

A lot of teachers have raised concerns over not being trained to teach CBC. The government should have trained them first before rolling out the new curriculum. In the case of Junior Secondary Schools, teachers with degrees were deployed to teach there even though they have different areas of specialization. This has contributed to many teachers feeling unmotivated. For instance, a teacher who has specialized in humanities or languages is still expected to teach sciences regardless of their subject combinations. Maithya & Akala (2014) indicate in their research a relationship between teacher's subject specialization and subject mean score. To address this, the government should therefore ensure it deploys enough teachers who will be allocated subjects based on their specializations. Momanyi & Rop(2019) indicated in their study in Bomet East Sub-County that effectiveness of CBC depends on teacher's preparedness.

Conflicts over authority

The government deployed degree teachers to teach in primary schools. However, the issue of administration and who would be in charge was not clearly stated by the Ministry of Education. In some instances, head teachers have reported that teachers are rebellious because they have degrees, therefore a primary teacher or head teacher cannot give them any responsibility. In other cases, primary teachers have felt inferior thus not interacting with the Junior Secondary teachers. According to Alabu, Kembo Otara (2020) the Ministry of Education should come up with training materials for school managers to empower them on effective management of conflicts.

Recruitment and payment of teachers

In a report shared by Maithya & Akala (2014), most schools in Kenya are understaffed. Since the introduction of the CBC, the government of Kenya has been striving to constantly employ teachers. However, this effort is still being inhibited by inadequate funds. Therefore, the teachers that have been deployed are not enough to match the large number of learners. Some teachers have also turned down the internship opportunities offered by the government because the money they are being paid is very little and cannot match the economic hard times that we are facing as a country. For instance, if teachers are paid ksh 20,000, this makes them feel unmotivated to perform their assigned duties. The government needs to urgently work on employing enough teachers as well as paying them fairly.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we must all be ready to embrace change if we want a better future. The best way of securing a better future for a country is investing in its education system (AU 2021). It is clear that there are many factors which determine the system of education in a country. This is also applicable in Kenya, whose education has

been affected by many factors such as politics and Kenya's leadership. However, it should be noted that it is all for the better. When the education system of Kenya was reviewed, it did not mean that the old curriculum was bad, but rather that it needed a few amendments. That is how the new curriculum was introduced. In the above discussion, this paper has attempted to discuss a general overview of the Competency Based Curriculum, its merits and demerits in relation to learner's friendliness. A lot of illustrations have been driven from the real experiences with parents, students and teachers. More research should be done by other academic scholars so that any shortcomings of the new curriculum are immediately dealt with.

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