

Education in the New Era: Challenges and Opportunities from Content-Based Curriculum to Competence-Based Curriculum In Kenya.

Dr. Napwora Wekesa Jesse¹, Ochieng Joshua Olela²

^{1,2}Tom Mboya University, P.O Box 199-40300, Homabay-Kenya.

Introduction

The fast and complex changing world coupled with dynamic technical advancements and great need for skilled manpower in the labour market within an ever-growing world economy has brought new challenges and requirements in the education sector (Owala, 2021 in Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2019).

The role of education in many African countries after independence was to impart knowledge to their citizens to help them take up leadership roles and positions in various sectors in order to help in the running of their countries. For example, in Kenya, there have been major reforms in the education sector since independence. The education system was changed in 1964 to 7-4-2-3 to de-colonise education. In 1985, the 7-4-2-3 system was changed to 8-4-4 following the recommendations of the Mackay Commission in order to prepare its graduands for self-reliance, but seemingly, it never accomplished its mandate (Cheptoo and Ramdas, 2020) and in 2017, the education system changed from 8-4-4 to 2-6-3-3-3, which is a Competence Based Curriculum (CBC). Owala (2021) states that Kenya implemented the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 to help her citizens obtain appropriate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes through education with a focus on providing learners with the ability to obtain, improve and use knowledge, values and attitudes which would then lead to the use of skills acquired (Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2019). Momanyi and Rop (2019) argue that change of the education system to CBC was after prospective employer questioned the skills and capacity of university graduates' competency. They state that competency means the graduates have sufficient knowledge and skills to perform an activity or service to a degree of quality that is acceptable to the industry and the customer in a time within which a competent person at the level could be reasonably be expected to perform the task.

Throughout its evolution, CBC has been known by a variety of names including performance-based learning, criterion-referenced learning and capabilities-driven instruction (Griffin and Lim (2014). In CBC, the role of the teacher changes from that of an information giver to that of a facilitator whose focus should be on observable and objective outcomes which can be easily measured. Content-based curriculum means that the curriculum is based on a certain subject matter and communicative competence is acquired in the context of learning about certain topics in the subject area.

Competency-based curriculum lays more emphasis on what learners are expected to do rather than mainly focusing on what they are expected to know. Jallow (2011) posits that a competency-based curriculum is one that aims at developing in learners the ability to do things, to learn and learn how to know. Most developed countries have embraced the CBC for a long time in order for their graduates to fit in the job market. According to Mauranaza, Mtshali and Mukamanza (2017), the CBC that is being implemented in the developing countries is borrowed from developed countries and therefore developing countries are facing challenges in trying to adapt it. Frenk, Chen, Bhutta, Cohen, Crisp & Evans (2010) further argue that in this situation a reform in curriculum is hard to plan and slows the process of implementation.

Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, competencies and skills are most important in the implementation of any curriculum since they are the last group of professionals that work on the final bit of it before it reaches the consumers who are the learners. Therefore, their input cannot be taken for granted. The CBC discourages the mere acquisition of knowledge and lays emphasis on skill development. There is a change from content-based to competency based curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2005). Therefore, there is need to change the teaching learning approaches from rote-memorisation to approaches that support development of competencies and skills that can be applied in solving life problems (Woods, 2008; World Bank, 2011).

According to Republic of Kenya (2017), teachers and educators are called upon to recognize the *seven key competences* learners are supposed to be grounded in at both primary and secondary level of education. These are: 1. Communication and Collaboration, 2. Critical thinking and Problem solving, 3. Imagination and Creativity, 4. Citizenship, 5. Digital Literacy, 6. Learning to learn, and 7. Self -Efficacy

The aim of teacher education is to produce quality teachers who can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the learners. The teacher is an essential facilitator in the implementation process of the curriculum. In education, therefore; the importance of the teacher takes second place only after that of the learners so that the quality of the teacher is of great concern to the education system. Quality in education is considered as the most important element. Improving quality according to UNESCO (2000) is as equally important as ensuring the education for all (EFA) goals are attained. The overall education policy of most governments is to achieve education for all. The priority is to ensure equitable access and improvement in quality and efficiency at all levels of education with the ultimate goal of being to develop an all quality education that is accessible and relevant to all its citizens. This is guided by the understanding that good education can significantly lead to economic growth, improved employment prospects and income generating opportunities for sustainable development (Republic of Kenya, 2005a). Teachers Service Commission (2013) argues that in order to achieve the above objectives of teacher quality, professional development and effectiveness, it would ensure that quality staff are recruited and effectively utilized to safeguard and maintain the highest possible standards of the teaching and learning process. It is no wonder, that the teacher is usually blamed for low pupil achievement. Proponents of teacher education distinguish it from teacher training. They argue that teacher education embraces a wider perspective of continued learning within the teaching process. They also perceive teaching as a profession where there is initial and in-service training (Borg, 2006).

The Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) in Kenya contend that learners should be provided with free education from pre-primary to secondary level. Consequently, this has posed a serious challenge to teachers in Kenya. A *challenge* is an instigation or antagonisation intended to convince a person to perform an action they would otherwise not. Teachers and principals must therefore continue teaching and properly managing schools despite the challenges posed by the 100% transition. The reality that was witnessed by primary school teachers over ten years ago is now with the secondary school teachers!

Despite the 100% learner-transition challenge in Kenya, the teachers are required by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the Ministry of Education and the government in general to be pedagogically effective.

I acknowledge that CBC is good for the current and future generations but faces challenges to its smooth realization.

The next sub-section looks at the structure of the new education curriculum.

The Structure of The New Education System/Curriculum (Cbc): 2-6-3-3-3 In Kenya.

1. Pre-primary Years of Education- 2 years (Children aged between 4 and 5 years)- PP1 and PP2.

Subjects: 1. Language Activities 2. Mathematical Activities 3. Environmental Activities 4. Psychomotor and Creativity Activities 5. Religious Education Activities

Note: Digital literacy and pertinent and contemporary issues will be integrated across all subjects.

2. Lower Primary Education – 3 years (Children aged between 6 and 8 years)- Grade 1, 2 &3.

Subjects: 1. Literacy 2. Kiswahili Language Activities / Kenyan Sign for learners who are deaf 3. English Language Activities 4. Indigenous Language Activities 5. Mathematical Activities 6. Environmental Activities 7. Hygiene and Nutrition Activities 8. Religious Education Activities 9. Movement and Creative Activities

Note: ICT will be a learning tool in all subjects

Pertinent and contemporary issues will be mainstreamed in all subjects.

3. Upper Primary Education – 3 years (Children aged between 9 and 11 years)- Grade 4, 5 & 6.

Subjects: 1. English 2. Kiswahili or Kenyan Sign Language (for learners who are deaf) 3. Home Science 4. Agriculture 5. Science and Technology 6. Mathematics 7. Religious Education (CRE/IRE/HRE) 8. Creative Arts 9. Physical and Health Education 10. Social Studies. 11. Optional subjects: Foreign Languages (Arabic, French, German, Mandarin)

Note:

- ICT will be cross cutting in all subjects
- Pertinent and contemporary issues will be mainstreamed in all subjects.
- A pastoral programme of instruction will be conducted once a week
- There shall be formative and national assessment to assess learning outcome.

4. Lower Secondary Education – 3 years (Children aged between 12 and 14 years)- Grade 7, 8 & 9.

Core Subjects: 1. English 2. Kiswahili or Kenya Sign Language for learners who are deaf. 3. Mathematics 4. Integrated Science 5. Health Education 6. Pre-Technical and Pre- Career Education 7. Social Studies 8. Religious Education(Learners choose one- Christian/Islamic/Hindu Religious Education) 9. Business Studies 10. Agriculture 11. Life skills Education 12. Sports and Physical Education.

Optional Subjects: Learners choose a minimum of one and a maximum of two from the following: 1. Visual Arts 2. Performing Arts 3. Home Science 4. Computer Science 5. Foreign Languages (German, French, Mandarin, Arabic) 6. Kenyan Sign Language 7. Indigenous Languages.

Note: ICT will be a delivery mode for all subjects.

5. Senior Secondary Education – 3 years (Children aged between 15 and 17 years)- Grade 10, 11 & 12.

In this level, there are three (3) Learning Pathways

Core Subjects for all the pathways: 1. Community Service Learning 2. Physical Education

1. Arts and Sports Science Pathway

In both Arts and Sports tracks, the learner will be expected to learn core subjects as well as choose options. Life skills in this learning pathway will be adapted to suit the specific issues in each learning area.

a) Arts

Core subjects: 1. Legal and Ethical Issues in Arts 2. Communication Skills

Optional subjects: the learner will be required to take *one* of the following subjects: 1. Performing Arts (Music/Dance/Theatre and elocution) 2. Visual and Applied Arts (Fine Art/Applied Art/Time-Based Media/Crafts)

b) Sports Science

Core subjects: 1. Human Physiology, Anatomy and Nutrition 2. Sports Ethics

Optional Subjects: the learner will choose a minimum of *one* and a maximum of *two* of the following subjects according to the learner's personality, interest, ability and career choices: 1. Ball Games 2. Athletics 3. Indoor Games 4. Gymnastics 5. Water Sports 6. Boxing 7. Martial Arts 8. Outdoor Pursuits 9. Advanced Physical Education

2. Social Sciences Pathway

- a) **Humanities:** 1. History and Citizenship 2. Geography 3. Christian Religious Education 4. Islamic Religious Education 5. Hindu Religious Education 6. Business Studies 7. Mathematics
- b) **Languages:** 1. English Language 2. Literature in English 3. Lugha ya Kiswahili 4. Fasihi ya Kiswahili 5. Kenyan Sign Language 6. Indigenous Languages 7. Arabic 8. French 9. German 10. Madarin
- c) **Business Studies**

3. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

a) Pure Sciences

Core subjects: 1. Community Service Learning 2. Physical Education 3. ICT

Optional subjects: the learner will select a minimum of three of the following: 1. Mathematics 2. Physics 3. Chemistry 4. Biology

b) Applied Sciences

Core subjects: 1. Community Service Learning 2. Physical Education 3. ICT

Optional: the learner shall in addition select one of the following subjects: 1. Agriculture 2. Computer Science 3. Foods and Nutrition 4. Home Management.

c) Technical and Engineering

Core subjects: 1. Community Service Learning 2. Physical Education 3. ICT 4. Mathematics 5. Physics/Physical Science 6. Chemistry/Biology/ Biological Sciences.

Optional: the learner will in addition select one of the following subjects: 1. Agriculture Technology 2. Geosciences Technology 3. Marine and Fisheries Technology 4. Aviation Technology 5. Wood Technology 6. Electrical Technology 7. Metal Technology 8. Power Technology 9. Clothing Technology 10. Construction Technology 11. Media Technology 12. Electronics Technology 13. Manufacturing Technology 14. Mechatronics.

d) Career and Technology Studies (CTS)

Core subjects: 1. Community Service Learning 2. Physical Education 3. ICT

Optional: the learner shall in addition select one of the following subjects: 1. Garment Making and Interior Design 2. Leather Work 3. Culinary Arts 4. Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy 5. Plumbing and Ceramics 6. Welding and Fabrication 7. Travel and Tourism 8. Air Conditioning and Refrigeration 9. Animal Keeping 10. Exterior Design and Landscaping 11. Building Construction 12. Photography 13. Graphic Designing and Animation 14. Food and Beverage 15. Motor Vehicle Mechanics 16. Carpentry and Joinery 17. Fire Fighting 18. Metalwork 19. Electricity 20. Land Surveying 21. Science Laboratory Technology 22. Electronics 23. Printing Technology 24. Crop Production.

(**Source:** Republic of Kenya (2017). *Basic Education Curriculum Framework*. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.)

How Can Secondary School Principals Facilitate Their Schools In Transiting Smoothly From 8-4-4 To 2-6-3-3-3?

For the smooth transition from 8-4-4 system of education to 2-6-3-3-3, the school principal(s) should possess the following qualities:

S/he should be a *visionary* leader. This is the quality of thinking about or planning the future with imagination or wisdom. It is having original ideas about what the future will or could be like. It is today's picture for tomorrow's reality. Think about what you should do now and in the near future as you wait for the double intake of Form One and Grade Seven CBC learners in 2023. What is your plan?

A leader and his/her vision are married together and cannot be divorced. The two are inseparable. No other person will fulfil the vision of the school but you. The credibility of the vision is determined by the principal. It should be the frame of reference that propels you and it is the driving force for you to move the school forward. Vision is the energy of progress. Every great invention in our history was a result of visionary people. E.g., it was the vision of giving every person access to people-friendly software that inspired Bill Gates to develop and invent the Microsoft Global Empire. Vision inspires you when you are discouraged and motivates you to be persistent in the midst of despair.

S/he is *swift*. S/he seizes a given opportunity and puts it in proper use. Opportunity is provided by your parents, the national government, the County government, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), the Wards, community-based organisations, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations and scholarships, e.g. Wings to Fly by the Equity Bank in Kenya. As a principal, what are you doing with the opportunity given? Not everybody has the opportunity. Therefore, use this opportunity of being a principal to bring about positive change in your institution.

S/he is *hardworking*. This is a personal decision. Go to your office and open your mind or block it. If you work hard, most students and teachers and the Board of Management will want to emulate you and the school will progress. If you are lazy, the standards of the school will fall. As a leader, you will at times stumble on the way and fall but rise up and continue. Your school will not succeed if you as the driver doesn't work hard.

S/he is *determined* and *courageous*. Don't ever be discouraged. Be determined and consistent regardless of the obstacles placed on your path as you transit to the new system of education. Believe in God and He will be with you. **Joshua 1:9** “*This is my commandment-be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*” Manage your schools without fear and help convince others to do the same. It does not matter in which type of school you are. Always be on the move. Don't complain that some are in good schools. Don't remain static.

S/he must be *proactive* not reactive. There are two types of people in society based on the actions they take to do something or solve problems based on the two circles in life: circle of concern and circle of influence. *Proactive* people live in the circle of influence. They know that their decisions and not their conditions will bring about change. They know they may not control the circle of concern but they can control the way they react to this circle. As a principal of a school, you may not control the behavior of politicians, government policies, economic problems, the weather, etc., but you may react to them wisely and appropriately to the benefit of your school. *Reactive* people live in the circle of concern. They keep complaining about things they do not have control over. They do not take ownership of things they can control. The same case applies to school performance or educational standards. The reactive one will blame the government, parents, teachers and the students. The proactive one will begin blaming himself/herself before laying blame to other stakeholders.

Another characteristic is that s/he adopts *reflective* and *collaborative* approaches in teaching and management, and solving school problems and challenges. S/he is eclectic in use of problem-solving strategies and possesses *good verbal skills*.

S/he should be *sacrificial*. Every person who has achieved success in life has made sacrifices to do so. Effective leaders sacrifice much that is good in order to dedicate themselves to what is best. As a leader, the principal, should give up more than others in order to go up.

Also, s/he should be a *role model* in the school in terms of language, conduct, professionalism, among others. S/he is able to inspire his/her teachers to teach effectively and students to learn and perform better respectively.

S/he should *create a positive school culture*. This includes the values, beliefs and behavior or habits that characterize the school life. This implies that school culture can either promote or impede teacher effectiveness (TE). If the school culture promotes TE, then it will have a positive effect on the school leadership and pedagogical effectiveness of teachers in terms of their cognitions. That is the way they feel, think, see and believe about their role as managers and teachers. On the other hand, if it does not support TE then it will impact negatively on their TE in terms of their cognitions. That is, school culture can affect teachers' self-reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students, content and awareness of problem-solving strategies common to classroom teaching and school management. If it promotes collegiality, then teachers will work together and solve problems, if it does not then teachers will work individually and this will affect their effectiveness (Mosha, 2006; Napwora, 2018).

S/he should be *collaborative (a team player)*. One who harmoniously works with other stakeholders for the successful and smooth running of the school. Effective collaboration involves effective communication, mutual support, balanced contributions, proper co-ordination, effort and cohesion. One needs to collaborate with God, Ministry of Education, Board of Management, teachers, students, subordinate staff, the religious leaders (sponsors), community, politicians among others. Team work is believing in each other for one is too small a number to achieve greatness. If everyone is moving forward together, then success will take care of itself.

Moreover, s/he must possess *technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK)*. This is a framework to understand and describe the kinds of knowledge needed by a teacher for effective integration of technology for teaching specific content of subject matter and requires understanding and negotiating the relationships between these three components: technology, pedagogy and content (AACTE, 2010). Technology learning should be closely connected to teacher's professional knowledge, that which directs their professional activities. The new curriculum requires teachers and managers to integrate digital literacy, pertinent and contemporary issues across all subject areas from Pre-Primary to Senior Secondary. It states that ICT will be a learning tool in all areas.

The next sub-section briefly highlights some of the challenges faced by developing countries in general and Kenya in particular in the implementation of CBC.

The Challenges of Implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (Cbc) In Kenya.

To begin with, inadequate learning and teaching materials is a major challenge. Momanyi & Rop (2019) and Ondimu (2018) as quoted by Akaka (2021) contend that there have been gaps during the preparation of books and also delays in publication of books and sometimes it is not easy to get particular books. This frustrates teachers and parents who need these books for the learners.

This worrying trend in primary schools if not checked immediately, will be transferred to Grade 7 in Junior secondary schools in the year 2023.

Second, serious understaffing is a chronic problem in public schools in Kenya. There is a shortage of over 100, 000 teachers in both primary and secondary schools (Onyango, 2020). This makes it difficult for each learner to get individualized attention.

Third, lack of ICT skills among a majority of the teachers yet ICT literacy is one of the core competencies in CBC. When technology is used as a partner then it assists learners and teachers to develop access to new ideas. If teachers are not ICT competent, they will not be able to implement the curriculum easily during this technologically advanced era.

Fourth, the 100% learner-transition from primary to secondary schools has caused overcrowding in classrooms and overwhelmed the teachers. The teacher- learner ratio of 1:40 is no longer tenable. Teachers can no longer claim to be effective. in CBC, there is focus on each individual learner and if the learners are many, it will be

difficult to have individualized attention to the learners (Amunga, et.al. 2020). Also, students have different learning styles and the teacher's teaching pace may favour some students while others may be disadvantaged.

Fifth, lack of enough parental support. Most parents whose children are undergoing CBC are products of 8:4:4 curriculum, therefore they have very little knowledge of the new curriculum and not able to assist their children with homework.

Sixth, the curriculum structure has been designed in such a way that most of the activities happen almost at the same time and therefore if a student was to be absent from school for any reason it would be very difficult for the student to catch up with the others who were in school during his/her absence (Amunga, et al. 2020)

Seventh, minimal public participation in curriculum design and implementation of the CBC. Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) has been in the forefront basting the government on the hurried implementation of the CBC without exhaustively involving parents, teachers, parliament and other stakeholders in public participation on curriculum design and implementation.

Also, Altinyelken (2010) argues that CBC favours students from educated families where parents are steering learning with adequate materials to support their exposure. The parents are supposed to facilitate their children's learning in CBC through provision of resource materials and this may only favour children from well-to-do families.

The Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) (2017) postulates that teachers will be supported to have knowledge and confidence in modern pedagogical tools to enable them to adapt to the curriculum to meet the needs, interests and talents of the learners. On the contrary, KNUT (2019) findings indicate a lack of adequate and proper teacher preparation. Also, the BECF clearly stipulates learners' competencies but teachers' competencies are overshadowed (Cheptoo and Ramdas, 2020). Most teachers are ill-equipped to implement the CBC because they are not its product. Almost all of them are products of 8-4-4. The big question is how will CBC achieve excellence and break from the path of mediocrity witnessed in other education systems such as the Content-based curriculum?

Furthermore, lack of enough infrastructure in schools is another challenge. The government abolished many of the school levies like PTA fund that helped in constructing classrooms, dormitories, laboratories, libraries, etc. Since CBC involves a paradigm shift from passive to active learners, it will require modern classrooms, laboratories, multimedia centres, latest technologies among others so that these resources help learners to active. Without them, it would be difficult for the successful implementation of CBC.

Likewise, there is a quagmire on where to host the Junior secondary school learners. Some suggest that they should be admitted to secondary schools while others argue that they should be retained in primary schools but taught by secondary school teachers and have different school managers.

Finally, work burn out. There is a lot of pressure in work and home environments due to the challenges mentioned earlier. Teachers find it difficult to balance between their roles as managers, teachers, parents working away from their homes due to the delocalization policy. This causes stress among teachers and consequently makes them ineffective

The next sub-sections briefly makes some suggestions to address the above challenges.

Some Suggestions on Addressing the Challenging Facing Implementation of CBC.

In the light of the above discussion, I suggest the following:

One, teachers should fully embrace the Teacher professional development tool so as to enhance their job effectiveness. However, the government should reduce the number of documents to be filled to the bare minimum to help the teachers and principals concentrate on the teaching and learning process.

Two, the government should address the serious shortage of teachers in public schools in Kenya. More teachers should be employed on permanent, and internship terms to help reduce the shortage.

Three, the teachers and school principals should be creative and innovative enough to improvise the teaching and resources using locally available materials to solve the problem of lack of enough teaching and learning materials in their institutions.

Four, the government should increase its funding to learning institutions in order for schools to build enough classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, get enough teaching and learning resources, among others.

Five, the government should train and educate in-service teachers and school principals in secondary schools in readiness for the implementation of the CBC in the year 2023. They should acquire the necessary content and disciplinary knowledge, skills (including ICT among others) and competencies in order to implement the curriculum when the students finally arrive in their classes. Carla and Vander (2018) contend that for CBC to be effectively implemented, the teachers need professional development and capacity building.

Furthermore, the government should immediately infuse CBC training in teacher education colleges so that by the time these teachers graduate, they shall have gained enough competencies to teach learners within the CBC. This will end up helping the government to save the funds that it is using during the holidays on CBC and redirect the funds in procuring teaching and learning resources (Akala, 2021; Owala, 2021).

Moreover, School principals and Boards of Management (BoM) should fully support teacher professional development programmes in their institutions in terms of finances and leadership and should attend refresher courses on institutional leadership and collaborative supervision in readiness for the CBC.

Also, schools should maintain the required optimum class sizes to ensure quality learning since large classes are an impediment to quality learning. As much as there should be universal access to education by every Kenyan child, classroom size should be considered in order to offer quality education.

In addition, parents should be sensitized through Parents' Associations (PA) meetings, the media and community awareness programmes to be aware of their roles in the implementation of CBC as this will help them to be collaborators and co-educators with the teachers in the quest to offer their children the best education under CBC.

Lastly, teachers and principals in secondary schools should accept the reality of receiving students with low entry grades and overcrowding in classrooms and find innovative ways of overcoming the challenges.

Finally, many stakeholders have contended that it is better for Junior secondary learners to be hosted in primary schools which are majorly day schools. This is because most of the Grade 7 learners would still be young and would not take care of themselves while away from their parents or guardians if they were to join boarding schools. Also, there is lack of enough facilities in most secondary schools to accommodate all of them.

Conclusion

Many countries are implementing the CBC because of its strengths. It helps learners to acquire competencies needed to perform specific tasks and to easily fit in the job market. However, the implementation of CBC in developing countries such as Kenya has been made with many challenges and it calls for the concerted efforts of all education stakeholders in order to overcome these challenges. The government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should train, educate and orientate secondary school teachers and fully fund the educational institutions in readiness for the successful implementation of the new curriculum from 2023.

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