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## Rethinking the Curriculum; Core for the Reform

James Gitonga<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chuka University, P. O. Box 109 – 60400 Chuka, Kenya.

\* Author for Correspondence Email: [gatojimtosh@gmail.com](mailto:gatojimtosh@gmail.com)

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The skill-focused curriculum (CBC) currently being implemented nationwide in Kenya is akin a springboard loosely fixed. Like every other country, the syllabus was revamped to equip learners with the necessary skills to deal with emerging challenges in a fast-changing world. However, a keen scholar is apt to note that the CBC implementation in Kenya is riddled with several bottlenecks. Scholars have contended that impacting knowledge and evaluation approaches in CBC must emphasize further assisting students in creating a relationship between proof, hence the ability to produce novel information. This paper analyses how teachers are a veritable tool in implementing the CBC curriculum in Kenya. It also delves into the essence of education reform. Lastly, the paper is intended to address and call out on various players to adopt a genuine approach, eschew negative bureaucratic ideals, and implement a curriculum that resonates with its objectives.

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## INTRODUCTION

The change of a curriculum should be veritable, not spurious. Indeed, it is easier to move a cemetery than to change a Curriculum. However, what is needed is an individual curriculum for

every child and also an individual curriculum for every teacher to implement. Kenya is at the rudiments, hence taking baby steps in implementing a fresh syllabus dubbed skill-focused curriculum (CBC). Hinged on a tenet of breaking away from a theoretically buoyed

curriculum, the CBC aims to produce a holistic individual with competencies, values, knowledge, and skills necessary to succeed in a highly competitive world.

At this juncture, it would be imperative to pause the question: what entails competency? What is the highway to the "how" to implement and consequently realize the competency? What is the cornerstone that the competency is 'based' on? This paper pursues to underscore the core of the competency-centred curriculum reform. It further delves into what should be and is supposed to be a genuine national dialogue not informed by bureaucratic rigidity, political, whimsical aspects, or vested interests. In good faith, the study attempts to unmask the fundamental recipe for entrenching a curriculum based on personal Ethos, Collective societal ideals, and a futuristic universal well-being of the Kenyan Child.

Ruth and Ramadas (2019) explored *the competency-based curriculum, customized to suit the needs of Africa: 21<sup>st</sup>-era advancement* that the core of CBC resides in nurturing skills instead of concentrating exclusively on graduates' credentialing (pg. 47). Woods (2008) and the World Bank (2011) additionally observe that CBC gives priority to proficiency development in lieu of only attainment of subject expertise, signifying a transition from knowledge centred to students centred methods. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD] (2017) underscores applying a student-centric approach, including role enactment, discourse, issue resolution, projects, case analyses and educational excursion. Within this framework, the teacher evolves into a specialist, guide, or mentor directing the educational journey.

As per Waweru (2017), legislation in the Spanish Curriculum highlights that CBC incorporates fundamental skills as distinct elements, enabling students to advance at their own speed and transition to higher-level content after acquiring proficiency in sought-after skills. Redding (2016 and Redding, 2017) outline competency as an amalgamation of abilities, mindsets, and knowledge that a student needs to excel in.

The Kenyan government's assessment of national education prerequisites in 2009 put into effect the CBC educational program in 2017. This educational program includes teaching methodologies, evaluations, ratings, and educational reporting, relying on learners showcasing competence attainment. The focus is on particular competencies (understanding, abilities, principles, outlooks) connected to effectively executing academic performance, demanding proficient teachers (KICD, 2017). Thus, this paper, submitted to the committee appointed by the president on CBC execution, aims to scrutinize the condition of CBC execution in Kenya and the crucial elements required for effective execution.

### **Teachers as Bonafide Implementers of CBC**

Kabombwe (2019) realizes the nuances engaged in grasping the fundamental concepts of CBC and reiterates that efficient execution demands participants in school administration, guardians, and the government to have a comprehensive comprehension of CBC's meaning. In South Africa, for example, teachers discovered it difficult to relate to CBC jargon. In many nations, CBC competencies are frequently misinterpreted as checklists, learning goals, or proficiency results.

Prez and Clem (2017) argue that CBC changes the emphasis from knowledge and content to the accomplishment of competencies. This triggers a vast definition of learning and illustrating competencies, departing from the customary teacher-centred approach to more cooperative teaching methods and adopting more synergetic pedagogies. CBC modifies the traditional responsibilities of teachers and learners, with teachers evolving into guides and students actively engaging in constructing knowledge. This study gives the need for the teacher to adopt the role of a coach, though it was clear that Teachers were not able to perform this role.

Biemans et al. (2009) highlight the significance of appropriately putting into operation the educator's function in putting into action CBC in Western

countries. Carla and Vander (2018) notice that successful implementation necessitates teachers to develop professionally to enhance their abilities. CBC approaches change the definition of teachers' role as leads, changing guidance towards providing students with sufficient exercises to attain competence. Teachers' actualities and encounters must match up with the CBC instructional approach for effective execution.

### **A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE CORE OF THE REFORM.**

The connection between the national education framework and its economic growth is intrinsic. Acknowledging this essential connection, Kenya has aligned its countrywide and growth-oriented goals with education. Diverse academics have thoroughly expressed the stimulating functions that education performs in growing human competencies, nurturing operations, and advocating welfare. (Ojiambo, 2009; Nussbaum, 1998; Send, 1982; Government of Kenya, 1964).

Opposing this perspective, Allais (2014) challenges the existing setup of the connection between education and the economy. He asserts that competency/ outcome-oriented certification structures are unexplainable and comprise a squander of assets and time. Allais contends that such harmful, especially in countries with inadequate education structures, highlights the need to restructure the education system to focus on strong knowledge domains instead of the fundamental truths of students (Young, 2010; Bernsten, 2000; Hoadley, 2011). The execution of the skilled-focused curriculum in Kenya has been continuing for six years, igniting discussions on execution methods, timeliness suitability, stakeholders' readiness, and existing resources.

In the midst of this continuing discussion, there is an appeal for Kenya's CBC execution to gain inspiration from the educational system in Finland. In Finland, the National Education Authority manages the educational framework, concentrating on the growth of education and executors' training within the Ministry of Education. The values of the Finnish education

system, which highlights a culture of learning and a trustworthy culture, should be replicated. This system also highlights work ethic among teachers while ensuring a mean income of 3,570 Euros (Ksh 428,400) and high—quality educator training (Marko, 2014). The supportive surroundings in Finland encompass timely intervention, a personalized method, active involvement of learners, a constructive learner-teacher bond, and supportive response. This ethos should be ingrained in the continuing implementation of the skill-focused curriculum in Kenya, with a comprehensive concentration on facilitating education of countrywide standards.

The lack of normative formation has been the root cause of a shaky and unproductive education system. It suffices to argue that the bureaucratic idiosyncrasies of the government have been informed by hypocritical tenets and legal reforms that, in most cases, instead of empowering the curriculum implementers (Teachers), the laws have been perpetually detrimental (Owuor & Odera 2017). There has been a debate by the recently inaugurated Kenya Kwanza government that there is a need to employ 58000 teachers in the first year of the said administration (The Standard Newspaper, September 2002). I surmise that the shortage of teachers in public schools is not the root cause of a poorly implemented education system. The cornerstone for the empowerment of a curriculum implementer is good remuneration, an undisturbed mind, a non-toxic working environment, and independent-mindedness.

From the times of Odongo to Sossion's leadership in the Teachers' National Union of Kenya (KNUT), Teachers have been agitating for better pay, but the government has all along been short-changing them through legal battles, intimidation, and draconian rules. Good remuneration touches the conscience of a curriculum implementer and stirs a need to connect with the child. How would a coerced curriculum implementer deliver? How possible is it for a teacher without a clear focus of mind to deliver? There is a need for this task force to advise His Excellency the President that

implementation of the curriculum starts with the teacher and ends with the teacher. A curriculum cannot be implemented in the KICD boardrooms. The Kenyan curriculum implementers have vehemently operated in a very toxic environment, hence curtailing their intrinsic motivation. What with the heads of institutions acting as demigods to intimidate, humiliate, underestimate, and coerce the implementers?

It would be imperative for this task force to advise His Excellency the President to see to it that the remuneration of the curriculum implementers is factored in the reforms if a truly skill-centred curriculum is to be realized. The focus mainly lies on the procedure rather than the product in curriculum development. A critical approach to the process and in good faith will yield formidable end products of well-skilled and normatively formed students. A curriculum should be created and implemented openly, comprehensively, and engagingly. It is disastrous to implement a curriculum in haste since haste is the wind that blows down the scaffolding. How can the implementation be genuine if, at the grade 6 level of implementation, there are hardly any resources such as sports academies? How can we claim to implement the CBC when children practising a swimming class are seen 'swimming' in the sand? How can the 'How' be realized when the 'What to' use is not available?

We are staring at a monstrosity of a poorly implemented CBC, especially when the secondary school teachers who are supposed to start the implementation early next year are either partially trained or a big number are not trained. In Finland, syllabus readiness entails a dual strategy to familiarize teachers with cross-cutting skills. Initially, educators are involved in the countrywide curriculum function, where they familiarize themselves with the fresh syllabus and integration of cross-cutting competencies. Afterwards, throughout the regional curriculum procedure, educators and other participants actively participate in influencing the regional syllabus. In this stage, they explain how the learning of cross-cutting competencies is

smoothly merged into diverse school subjects. Holappa (2007) highlights that this regional syllabus not only motivates and empowers educators, including principals, but also empowers them to develop the regional syllabus and improve their operational procedures, eventually improving the comprehensive excellence of education.

Lastly, the parliament should see the disbandment of the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), creating a less toxic environment in which the curriculum implementers can thrive. Perhaps the draconian ideals by the TSC that are instead supposed to protect her employees have brought the slogan among the implementers: "Teach and go home". Such an indifferent attitude would be precariously detrimental to the learner. A disgruntled teacher results in a 'disgruntled' curriculum. It is wrong for TSC to make pedagogical decisions as well as the catalogue of bureaucratic ideals that it enforces on educators. It is ridiculous for TSC to come up with some mediocre proposals. Fancy this: TSC intends to introduce the wearing of uniforms by the teachers. According to TSC Deputy CEO Ken Mulunda, TSC is going to introduce a colour that could easily match the new norm and give the teachers a new look that could help for efficient monitoring and other work execution practices amongst the TSC's staff in the future.

In the late afternoon of Friday, November 12, 2021, Martha Omollo, a teacher based in Nairobi County, obtained a notice to her school. Commission for Teachers' Services delivered a letter informing her of a relocation to a school located in Trans Nzoia County, a distance of 400 kilometres away. She was required to report and start teaching on Monday. Earlier in the week, Omollo assumed the position of representative for a teacher's advocacy group. This group had voiced apprehensions regarding the allegiance of union officials to their members and the absence of clarity in the medical cover plan financed by teachers through unintentional wage reductions. After the media briefing, Omollo received a cautionary phone call from the Teachers' Service

Commission, counselling her against openly talking about matters concerning teachers.

In April 2021, the press filed a document regarding a teacher, Magdalene Kimani, who journeyed to a school a distance of 20 km for a duration to oversee a nationwide assessment. In response to this impartially unbiased account, the regional education official sent her an explanation request, yet the report was instigated by the press and in good faith to show how hardworking the teacher was. In 2022, Ali Billow Mahat, the principal of Danaba Mixed Secondary School in Wajir County, stated that he learned he had been removed from the TSC payroll; hence, he could not get his August salary. Upon inquiry with the TSC as to why he had not gotten his income, he was advised that it had been stopped due to his "death". Ali was not the only disgruntled teacher in the North Eastern region; Isaiah Kaberia Kimathi and Etirikia Kimathi Shadrack claim they received their "Death" Certificates while actively in class, and since August 2022, they have not received their pay.

It is laughable how TSC, a body with very sophisticated Information systems (a fully-fledged ICT directorate), could commit such errors of omission. These cases are just small-scale representations of the mistreatment that Kenyan teachers bear beneath the TSC. The TSC has carried out large-scale relocations of teachers away from their home areas in a "Delocalization" procedure. It is ironic for the TSC to think that national unity comes from relocating teachers, disturbing their families, and contemptuously displaying no sympathy or empathy. This is a case of bureaucratic hubris. What disturbs teachers has a one-to-one effect on the students.

Teachers who are nervous and who feel undervalued cannot handle children with self-respect and react to the exceptional conditions of the children in their charge. From the foregoing, it suffices to say there is a need either to abolish the body called the TSC or split it, hence curtailing its condescending attitude and smothering its draconian powers. To have an honest rollout of the CBC, there is a need to be genuine in structuring

the laws so that all the parties are carried on board. Teachers are equal partners; parents are equal players, and the government, as the patron of the implementation, should endeavour to give equal chances to everyone to contribute. For CBC to effectively roll out, we do not need a cabinet secretary with too much hubris constantly ashaming education officials. Rather, we need one who embraces dialogue, decorum, and respect for all.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, skill-based curriculum implementation in Kenya, as of 2017, requires the engagement and discussion of involved participants to facilitate the educators in attaining the planned student-focused syllabus. The diverse challenges highlighted in the Kenyan Fundamental Education Framework 2017 require rectification to provide a clear understanding of the methods as per CBC. Appropriate teacher instruction, positive compensation, professional handling, and continuous career growth would enhance the execution of CBC.

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