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The quest for quality education: the case of curriculum innovations in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper sets out to analyse the quality education curriculum innovations that have been implemented in Kenya since independence in 1963. The purpose of the analysis is to assess the success and or failure of the innovations and determine the lessons learned that can inform future design and implementation of curriculum innovations designed to improve the quality of education.

Design/methodology/approach – This was a desk review of curriculum policy documents and related research literature. The documents analysed included various education commission reports produced by education commissions, committees and task forces appointed to inquire into education and make recommendations to government; primary school syllabuses and related research literature.

Findings – The review has revealed that the curriculum innovations recommended and implemented in Kenya have targeted the attainment of the goals of individual and national economic development; national identity and unity; socio-cultural, moral and ethical development; cognitive development and globalization; and psycho-social skills development. Many of the innovations have not been implemented effectively. Impediments to effective implementation have included hasty implementation, limited in-service training for teachers, inadequate ongoing professional support for teachers, and inadequate resources.

Research limitations/implications – Achieving effective curriculum innovation is not easy. It requires greater participation in curriculum decision making, patience in training those in various levels of the curriculum implementation process and enormous resources.

Originality/value – In adopting content analysis as a methodology, the paper constitutes a unique contribution to the study of curriculum innovation in Kenya.

Keywords Quality education, Curriculum innovation, Curriculum reform, Curriculum development, Vocationalization, Kenya

Paper type General review

Introduction

The declaration of education as a basic human right in 1948 was a clear indication that education is critically important in the lives of individuals all over the world. It is also generally recognised that education is a key ingredient in the socio-economic development of nations. However, it has become increasingly clear that it is not just education that is important but quality education and the case for improving the quality of education is made on various grounds. Firstly, good quality education has positive impacts on education itself in that where education is of good quality; students tend not to drop out of the education system. Secondly, good quality education has positive impacts on the lives of individuals. Individuals who have stayed in school longer have higher working life earnings than those who drop out early. Further, studies in both the developed world and in developing countries including Ghana and



Kenya show that higher test scores translate into higher annual earnings (UNESCO, 2004). Thirdly, quality education is beneficial to communities and nations. According to UNESCO (2004, p. 40), there is evidence that, “the quality of human resources, even if only measured by test scores, is directly related to individual earnings, productivity, and economic growth”.

In addition, quality education is associated with non-cognitive gains and positive behaviour change. Individuals who stay in school longer develop character traits such as perseverance, honesty, determination and reliability that are encouraged in school and that are required and rewarded in the job market. Further, individuals with more education seem to have the cognitive skills required to make informed choices in matters related to HIV and AIDS risk and for behavioural change (UNESCO, 2004).

Given the importance of quality education, scholars and policy makers have turned their attention to articulating what quality education is and seeking policies and programs aimed at improving the quality of education. The resultant literature on education quality underscores the complexity of the concept, and the challenge of ensuring quality education, among other things.

Conceptualising quality education and curriculum innovation

Defining quality education

While there is consensus on the fact that quality education is critical to the attainment of individual and national goals, there is no agreement on what exactly education quality means. Rather, what we have are different approaches to understanding what quality education is. A commonly held view associates education quality with students’ performance in national examinations and other learning assessment tests. Within this view, a school or education system in which students’ scores in such assessments is high is viewed as providing quality education. Indeed, for many parents this is the key in choosing schools to which to take their children.

Other conceptions of quality education adopt an input-process-output approach. Such approaches pay attention to inputs such as numbers of teachers, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks; processes such as amount of direct instructional time, extent of active learning and; outputs in the form of test scores and graduation rates (Sifuna, 2009).

Yet other approaches to understanding the meaning of quality education focus on the dimensions of quality education. UNICEF (2000) has identified five dimensions of quality in education as quality learners, learning environments, content, processes and outcomes.

In other approaches to understanding, the meaning of quality education focus is on the effects that education is expected to have on the individual learners and in the society. Within these approaches, quality in education is taken to be synonymous with relevance in education which refers to education that, as far as possible, responds to the needs of the learners, their families, and communities.

Clearly, there are many approaches to understanding the concept of quality education. However, as Sifuna (2009) has observed, quality education is associated with improvements in the cognitive achievement of pupils; and improvements in the social and economic lives of their societies.

Linking education quality and curriculum innovation

As with the meaning of quality education, there is no agreement on the definition of the term “curriculum”. The oldest meaning of the term “curriculum” is a course or programme of study in an educational institution. Other definitions of the term are more inclusive and refer to the formal and informal content and processes through which learners gain knowledge, develop skills as well as appropriate attitudes and values all of which are directed towards the achievement of the objectives and goals of an education program.

Given this meaning of it is not difficult to recognise that curriculum is at the core of education – it is through the content of the curriculum and the processes that go on in schools that intended individual and national goals from education can be realised. Indeed, discussions on enhancing quality in education must pay heed to the curriculum as the vehicle through which these individual and national goals can be attained. In this regard, Obanya (1999) has observed, that the desirable change envisaged by an educational policy are given concrete manifestations only through the curriculum process.

Clearly, by implication efforts to improve the quality of education of necessity requires changing the curriculum. On the other hand, curriculum scholars such as (Fullan, 1982) point out that curriculum change can be unplanned but that planned curriculum change or reform is what is referred to as curriculum innovation. Going by Doll’s definition of curriculum, curriculum innovation therefore refers to intentional changes in the content of education and or in the processes that go on in school or other educational environments.

Curriculum innovations in Kenya

Following the declaration of the Education for All goal in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and the reaffirmation of the same in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, many countries the world over have worked hard to address low enrolment rates with impressive results. In Kenya, the introduction of free primary education programme in January 2003 saw an exponential rise in enrolment in primary schools. Enrolment in public primary schools increased by over 1 million pupils or by 17.6 per cent. The GER rose from 88.2 per cent (87.3 per cent for girls and 88.9 per cent for boys) in 2002 to 102.8 per cent (87.5 per cent for girls and 105.0 per cent for boys) in 2003 (Ministry of Education, 2005). By 2007, the GER stood at 107 per cent (girls 104.4 per cent and boys 110.7 per cent) (Ministry of Education, 2008). The secondary level statistics also improved significantly following the introduction of the free day secondary education programme in 2008. The GER for secondary increased from 36.8 per cent in 2007 to 47.8 per cent (50.9 per cent for boys and 46.3 per cent for girls) in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2008; Republic of Kenya, 2012).

These education expansion successes have re-oriented countries to the issues of the quality of education provided and therefore to the curriculum which has been criticised for being irrelevant or being of poor quality. While the current call for quality education is loud, the search for better curricula in Kenya and in even sub-Saharan Africa generally is not entirely a new concern. It goes back to colonial education within which a racially discriminative vocational education for Africans was emphasised in the guise of making education relevant to the needs of the African learners and their communities. In Kenya, according to Indire (1982), vocational education for the

Africans became government policy and remained so up to independence despite African resistance.

Curriculum innovations in independent Kenya can be perceived as targeting meeting various individual and national goals as follows:

- Individual and national economic goals.
- National identity and unity.
- Socio-cultural, moral and ethical development.
- Cognitive and globalization goals.
- Psycho-social goals.

In Kenya, bodies appointed to inquire into education and make recommendations for improvement have been instrumental in initiating curriculum reforms. Whereas not all recommendations made by such bodies are implemented in full, the recommendations provide a fairly accurate picture of the curriculum reforms at different times. The following discussion of curriculum innovations in Kenya focuses on recommendations of different commissions with regard to the five goals listed above.

Meeting individual and national economic goals

In most people’s view, a good quality education is associated with improvements in the livelihoods of individuals and higher productivity and thus economic growth of nations. In Kenya, curriculum innovations targeting meeting individual and national economic goals have focused on human resource development also often referred to as skills development and have been rationalised on a host of concepts and or aspirations including economic development, modernisation, self-reliance, sustainable development, poverty eradication, globalisation, technological advancement, industrialisation, and global competitiveness. Curriculum innovations targeting human resource development have focused on introduction or in most cases strengthening the teaching of science and vocationalising and technicalising the curriculum.

The first post-independence education commission popularly known as the Ominde Commission of 1963/1964 (Republic of Kenya, 1964) was mandated with taking account of “the need for trained manpower for economic development and for other activities in the life of the nation” (p. 2) observed that primary education was the only form of formal education available to 85 per cent of the children. The commission recommended the strengthening of science in both the primary and secondary school curricula. The commission recommended what it called the absorption of agriculture in the science syllabus arguing that agriculture as a subject engendered negative attitudes and feelings because of its association with punishments and tedious chores.

At the primary school level, the commission recommended greater emphasis on the teaching of the sciences both for teaching the sciences and as a basis for modern agriculture; and training in manipulative skills through subjects such as art and craft. With regard to the secondary school curriculum, on extolling the virtues of manual skills, the commission recommended technicalisation of the curriculum through the introduction of woodwork and metalwork as well as art and craft as pre-vocational subjects.

Charged with the responsibility of addressing the issue of unemployment of school leavers, among others, the second education commission popularly referred to as the Gachathi commission recommended the return of agriculture to the primary school curriculum as agricultural science as well as the introduction of pre-vocational subjects – wood work, masonry and bricklaying and business education (typing, book-keeping and commerce). For secondary education, the Commission urged for more emphasis on practical skills orientation in the curriculum. In particular, the commission recommended teaching of practical and pre-vocational skills and business oriented subjects such as book-keeping. The commission also recommended that the secondary school curriculum should give more prominence to agriculture through teaching of agricultural science specifically and through integrating agriculture in the teaching of other subjects (RoK, 1976).

Although the recommendations of the Gachathi report were not implemented in full the vocationalisation and technicalisation recommendations were taken up by the Presidential Working Party on the Second University of 1981 on whose recommendations the 8:4:4 education system was introduced in 1985. The 8:4:4 system targeted equipping learners with work-related skills for employment and self-employment with a strong vocational and technical orientation in the curriculum of both primary and secondary education. Vocational subjects in the primary school included agriculture, art and craft, home science and business education. At the secondary school level, agriculture, industrial education subjects (woodwork, metalwork, power mechanics and electricity) business education subjects (accounts, commerce and typing and office practice) and home science subjects (clothing and textile and food and nutrition) were introduced.

The 1988 Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and popularly referred to as the Kamunge commission noted the vocational and technical orientation of the curriculum and recommended strengthening of the practical and vocational approach to education. The commission recommended the strengthening of the teaching of science through provision of facilities, equipment, and materials. It also recommended that agriculture and business education be made compulsory (RoK, 1988).

The strong support for vocationalisation and technicalisation of the curriculum weakened somewhat following the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya of 199 also known as the Koech Commission. The commission noted that practical subjects had faced problems related to physical facilities, resources, and assessment causing people to develop negative attitudes towards them. The commission recommended that practical subjects (music, art and craft and home science) in the primary curriculum cease to be examinable at the end of primary examination – the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). At the secondary level, the commission identified eight applied practical skills, and technical and vocational subjects as a group of electives from which students were required to take only one.

However, lately, the case for skills oriented education has received impetus owing to the current development blue print – Kenya Vision 2030 (RoK, 2007) – whose aim is to transform Kenya into a newly industrialized, middle-income country by 2030. Charged with the responsibility of realigning education to the new constitution promulgated in 2010 and the industrialisation goal elaborated in Vision 2030, the Task Force on The

Re-Alignment of the Education Sector to the Constitution of Kenya 2010 (Republic of Kenya, 2012) expressed displeasure with the primary education curriculum for relegating practical skills to non-examinable subjects. In its recommendations, the task force laid emphasis on the teaching of ICT, entrepreneurship and agriculture at the primary and junior secondary levels and ICT and entrepreneurship at the Senior Secondary level. Indeed, the task force recommended that ICT and entrepreneurship become compulsory subjects at all levels. Further, the task force recommended the establishment of senior secondary technical and vocational streams whose students will major in technical subjects and trade courses respectively.

From the foregoing, it is clear that with regard to the goal of individual and national economic goals, the theme in curriculum reforms has been and continues to be on the teaching of science and skills oriented subjects. What has changed has been how much emphasis should be put on these subjects, whether or not some of them (e.g. agriculture) should be taught as separate subjects and entry of computer and ICT studies owing to an explosion in the use of computer based technologies worldwide.

All the same, the decades old vocational and technical orientation of the curriculum has not produced the desired results. With 46 per cent poverty incidence level in 2007 (RoK, 2007) a substantial number of Kenyans continue to live in poverty and the country has not ceded its space in the list of developing nations.

Meeting the goal of national identity and unity curriculum reforms

The populations of most African countries are made up of peoples with diverse cultures, languages and histories since their boundaries were determined at conference tables in Berlin in 1885. Consequently, at independence, the need to develop social cohesion through engendering national identity and national unity were identified as important national development goals and nations looked to education and to the curriculum to make significant contribution.

The government in Kenya took the first opportunity to come up with education that would, among other things, engender national unity by charging the Ominde commission with that responsibility. The Ominde Commission identified fostering a sense of nationhood and promotion of national unity as an objective of education in Kenya. The commission raised for itself the question, "What is the contribution that might be made by the curriculum towards the goal of national unity" (RoK, 1964, p. 39). In answering the question, the commission looked to changes in the history and geography curricula, greater emphasis on the teaching of Kiswahili, a focus on the arts and crafts and introduction of targeted co-curricula activities. The commission recommended revision of the primary history and geography syllabus so as to localise content and teach history "as seen from the African eyes" (RoK, 1964, p. 58) and to focus more on the geography of Kenya and of Africa respectively. With regard to Kiswahili, the commission observed that Kiswahili was a unifying language in Kenya and a means of Pan-African communication and recommended that Kiswahili becomes a compulsory subject at the primary school level. With regard to artistic content in the curriculum, the commission expressed the recommend the inclusion of African music and dance. As part of the co-curriculum, in pursuant of the goal of national unity, the Ominde commission recommended the introduction of what it called "ceremonies" such as singing of the national anthem and the raising of the flag, and dramatisation of the diversity of Kenyan population.

The next commission to pay significant attention to national identity and unity was the KOECH commission of 1999. The commission devoted a whole chapter to national unity and recommended greater focus on patriotism through coverage of topics such as national heroes, historical sites, events, and symbols of national unity in history. The commission singled out subjects like Kiswahili, history, geography, literature, music and drama as requiring reorientation so as to give due emphasis to Kenyan culture, patriotism and national heritage in their curriculum.

The curriculum reforms targeting the goal of national identity and unity have largely been implemented. Soon after independence, African history and geography were introduced in the curriculum and continue to be taught. Kiswahili is now a compulsory subject in both the primary and secondary school curriculum. However, as the ethnic clashes of the post 2007 elections clearly demonstrated, the Kenyan identity has not been achieved as Kenya continues to be ethnically divided.

Recommendations made by the latest team to inquire into education in Kenya – the 2012 Task Force which identified quality of education as a major issue do not seem radical at all. The Task Force recommended the teaching of citizenship education to encompass History of Kenya and the Constitution as core subjects from primary to senior secondary levels and the teaching of Kiswahili as a compulsory subject at all levels of primary and secondary education. One cannot be too hopeful that, if implemented in the same way as earlier recommendations, these recommendations will yield national unity and identity.

Meeting the goals of cultural, moral and ethical development curriculum reforms

Curriculum innovations targeting meeting of cultural, moral and ethical development have been rationalised on the need to reclaim the place of African culture in education in order to make education culturally relevant to the learners. Also, attention has been drawn to increased social problems such as idleness, alcoholism, immorality and various forms of corruption and the need for education to nurture positive values and attitudes so as to prepare learners deal with these problems. The role of the school curriculum in developing learners' morally and spiritually is also seen to be critical.

In this regard, various education commissions have made recommendations on the introduction and or strengthening of the teaching of cultural studies subjects. The Ominde commission, for example, underscored the importance of African music in primary schools in enhancing a sense of shared cultural heritage. The Gachathi commission recommended teaching of cultural subjects identified as history, civics, music, arts and crafts, physical education and dancing, religious education and social ethics in the primary school curriculum and local culture and history in the secondary school curriculum.

Within the 8:4:4 curriculum, beginning in 1985, the cultural subjects social studies, art, craft, music, and religious education were subjects of the primary school curriculum while history and government, religious education, social education and ethics, art and design; and music in the secondary school curriculum. On the other hand, the Kamunge commission recommended that social education and ethics as well as the values of cooperative effort and mutual social responsibility become part of both primary and secondary curricula. In its turn, the Koech Commission of 1999 was specifically asked to make recommendations on ways and means of enabling education to facilitate mutual social responsibility. In its report, the commission devoted a whole

chapter to the matter and among other things recommended integration of cultural studies and skills in relevant subjects of the curriculum for all levels of education. The commission observed with concern that social education and ethics was taught only in secondary schools where it was optional in forms 3 and 4 and recommended that social education and ethics, and Religion be taught at all levels of education.

Despite the presence of the social cultural subjects on the school curriculum, the effectiveness of the curriculum in the cultural, moral and ethical development of learners continues to be a concern. Rampant corruption in the general society, rising levels of alcoholism especially amongst the youth and incidences of school unrests and violence manifest lack of success in this area.

Meeting the cognitive and globalization needs of learners curriculum reforms

As already indicated, the most commonly used indicator of the quality of education is educational outcomes as measured by learning achievement scores. Concern about the quality of education with regard to cognitive gains of learners is couched in the language of “falling standards” of education and the need to develop skills such as critical thinking, creativity, logical judgement, problem solving, as well as globally competitive skills. The Ominde commission of 1964, for example, expressed concern about the standards of education in primary schools and underscored the urgent need to raise standards in the schools. The Koech Commission of 1999 also expressed concern about the “falling standards” of education and the Task Force on the Realignment of the Education Sector to the Constitution of Kenya 2010 noted a drop in the quality of education and identified the expansion in enrolment following the introduction of FPE as the cause.

Innovations in this area have focused on pedagogy, medium of instruction, teaching of foreign languages, ICT education, and curriculum design and assessment.

Recommendations and reforms with regard to pedagogy have emphasised on a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred pedagogy. In 1963, the Ominde Commission, for example, drew attention to the overly teacher-centred methods of teaching in primary schools and recommended use of the activity method. The Gachathi commission recommended the use of problem solving methods. Innovations that have focused on changing the pedagogy have focused on in-service training and education for teachers (INSET). The earliest innovation was the English medium of the early 1960s later renamed the New Primary Approach (NPA) in which lower primary teachers were trained in the activity method to facilitate the use of English as the medium of instruction from standard 1. Current national INSET programmes with a strong learner-centred component include Strengthening of Teaching of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE) for primary and secondary school science and mathematics teachers and the School-based Teacher Development (SbTD) that has to date trained primary school teachers in English, Kiswahili, science, and social studies.

Innovations with regard to curriculum design have focused on a movement towards integration of subjects that were formerly offered as separate subjects. The first of such efforts was the primary social studies (geography, history, and civics) which was first introduced in the early 1960s. Currently in primary curriculum – creative Arts (music, art and craft and drama), social studies (geography, history, civics, environmental education, civic education and aspects of business education) have been integrated. In

secondary curriculum, language and literature in both English and Kiswahili have been integrated.

A yet to be introduced curriculum innovation targeting the cognitive attributes has to do with curriculum design approach. Current curricula has been designed based on the objectives approach. The recent task force on education has recommended a shift to competency based design within which the knowledge, skills and competences that will be expected of all learners at different levels of education are articulated and an assessment framework developed.

With regard to the language of instruction, current policy which is based on the Gachathi commission stipulates that mother tongues – the languages that the learners already know and speak – are to be used as languages of instruction in standards 1 to 3 in linguistically homogeneous areas as a strategy for enhancing students' learning of content.

The need for Kenya to become globally competitive has gained urgency especially with the articulation of Vision 2030, the development blue print with the target of Kenya becoming a newly industrialized country by the year 2030. Innovations with regard to globalisation have included the teaching of foreign languages – French and German mostly in secondary schools and the teaching of ICT which was first introduced as computer studies in secondary schools in 1996. Currently, there is a serious push for teaching of ICT with the Task Force recommending that ICT becomes a compulsory subject at all levels of education.

Despite the foregoing curriculum reforms directed towards the cognitive and globalisation needs of learners, recent learning assessment reports suggest that primary school learners are not learning very much. The Uwezo home-based assessments of 6 to 16 year old children in 2010, 2011 and 2012 have reported very poor results. The 2010 Uwezo report, for example, indicates that only half of children aged between 6 and 16 years could read a standard 2 level story in English, and that only half of the children in standard 1-8 aged 6-16 years have acquired the highest numeracy competency expected of standard 2 learners (Uwezo, 2010). The government's own assessment conducted in 2010 also reported poor results in reading and mathematics with those tested attaining mean scores of 297.58 and 295.6 (compared to standardized means of 300) in reading and mathematics respectively (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2010). The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) reported correspondingly, poor reading attainment. In keeping with the medium of instruction policy, standard 3 pupils were assessed in reading in English, Kiswahili and either Luo or Gikuyu. The study reported that 14 per cent of pupils tested in English, 18.6 per cent in Kiswahili, 14.8 per cent in Gikuyu, and 20.3 per cent in Dholuo in the last term of standard 3 could not read a single word correctly (Piper, 2010).

Meeting the psycho-social needs of the learners' goal curriculum reforms

The HIV and AIDs pandemic has played a significant role in drawing attention to the need for curriculum to respond to new social challenges. The 1999 Koech Commission, for example, noted the seriousness of the HIV and AIDs pandemic and recommended inclusion of HIV and AIDs messages in social education and ethics, home science and biology. Currently, the primary school curriculum for example, has introduced what

are referred to as “emerging issues” including new diseases such as HIV and AIDs, sexuality and gender issues, drugs and drug abuse, rights and conflict and wars.

The innovations have included infusing content on these areas in selected carrier subjects or across the curriculum. Further, life skills has been introduced as a subject in the curriculum with a focus on developing learners’ psycho-social knowledge and skills applicable in dealing with the various psycho-social challenges likely to confront learners. The intention is for learners to be helped to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, stress and anxiety management, effective communication, and assertiveness.

Curriculum innovations targeting the psycho-social needs of learners are fairly new and the impacts they will have remain to be seen.

The discussion in the foregoing sections shows that ever since the attainment of independence in 1963, the Kenya government has sought and implemented a considerable number of curriculum reforms aimed at improving the quality of education and thus enhance the attainment of various individual and societal goals. Unfortunately, also, many of these goals remain unmet. Consequently, the question why the curriculum reforms have not achieved the desired effects comes to the fore. In the next section, I discuss the impediments that have confronted the curricula reforms of the different goals.

Why little success with curriculum innovation

Fullan (1982) reminds us of the temporal approach to the study of curriculum innovation. The temporal approach illuminates the process nature of curriculum innovation and draws attention to the three phases in the curriculum innovation process – the intended or planned curriculum, the taught or enacted curriculum, and the received curriculum or what students actually grasp which is finally what will count with regard to attainment of goals. In what follows, I argue that for various reasons, many of the curriculum reforms implemented in Kenya have remained at the level of intentions with little implementation or enactment of the intended innovation.

Individual and national economic goals

Curriculum reforms targeting the individual and national economic goals have largely been about introducing vocational and technical subjects in the primary and secondary curriculum. The best effort being the introduction of the 8-4-4 curriculum reforms within which agriculture, art and craft, home science and business education were introduced at the primary level, and agriculture, industrial education, business education and home science subjects were introduced at the secondary school level. In my estimation, the 8-4-4 curriculum reforms, especially at the primary school level remained mere intentions since, for various reasons, the subjects were not taught effectively.

The reforms were introduced without adequate preparation. Indeed, some writers have argued that the reform was motivated by a political agenda (Ojiambo, 2009). Teachers were not trained to implement the new curriculum. Parents were expected to meet the costs of the necessary infrastructure such as workshops and home science rooms, and materials which they were unable to provide in most schools in the country while teachers were not trained (Sifuna, 1990). In the circumstances, schools were unable to teach the practical aspects of the vocational subjects. In a heavily

examination oriented system, the fact that attempts to examine the practical aspects of the subjects soon fizzled out did not help matters. Further, the negative attitudes towards vocational education developed during the colonial era had not changed and vocational education continued to be associated with poor outcomes. Consequently, while vocational subjects remained on the timetable, there was little effective teaching of the subjects going on. The fact that the subjects are no longer examinable following the recommendations of the Koech commission suggests that they are not taught at all.

Meeting the goal of national identity and unity

The curriculum reforms targeting the goal of national identity and unity have included the teaching of African history and geography and Kiswahili. As already indicated, implementation of these reforms started with the introduction of African history and geography in the curriculum followed by strengthening of the teaching of Kiswahili to the level where it is currently an examinable subject in both primary and secondary curricula. A possible explanation of the lack of success of the curriculum innovations with regard to the attainment of national identity and unity goal could come from critical scholars. Such scholars have pointed out that replacement of European history and geography with those of Africa soon after independence amounted to a superficial change in the curriculum with little change in its philosophy (Sifuna, 2001).

On the other hand, it is possible that socio-political and economic processes within the general society work in ways that militate against the attainment of national identity and unity despite what the schools might do.

Meeting the goals of cultural, moral and ethical development

Curriculum reforms targeting cultural, moral and ethical development in learners have involved inclusion of cultural studies subjects such as music, art and craft, religious education and social education and ethics. Owing to teachers' lack of knowledge and skill, and the academic requirements of the KCPE examination, teaching of subjects like music, and art and craft focused more on theory or content knowledge which did little for development of appreciation of music or art. Similarly, the teaching of religious education subjects – Christian religious education and Islamic religious education – have been taught through teacher centred methodologies which do not encourage students' engagement with moral and ethical issues. Consequently, learning these subjects and indeed passing examinations in the subjects has not led to positive moral and ethical changes in the learners.

Meeting the cognitive and globalization needs of learners

Pedagogical reforms intended to improve learning have focused on changing teaching methodology from teacher-centred to learner-centred methods. Although the learner-centred activity based New Primary Approach introduced in the early 1960s remains the official policy, teaching and learning in primary schools remains heavily teacher centred. Classroom observation researchers have reported that children spend the greater proportion of lesson time reading pieces of text after the teacher or engaged in choral responses to teachers' questions (Bunyi, 2005). Recent research of teacher education in Kenya indicates that while the primary teacher education (PTE) programme in theory trains teachers in progressive learner-centred methodologies, in practice, the training equips trainees with theoretical knowledge instead of practical

knowledge of the learner-centred methods they are expected to use once they graduate. Consequently, even when teachers engage learners in activities using a variety of teaching learning materials, for the learners, it often amounts to mere manipulation of the materials with little understanding of the concepts being taught (Bunyi *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to shortcomings in pre-service teacher training, there is little ongoing professional development of teachers. There are few in-service training opportunities and teacher advisory centres that were set up to provide professional support to teachers no longer focus on their key responsibility owing to various constraints including limited human and material resources.

Subject integration innovations have also encountered impediments. For example, integrated English which is a combination of English language and literature in English has been on the curriculum since the 1980s. However, the two subjects continue to be taught separately. A key reason for this is that teachers have not been trained to teach in an integrated way (Magoma, 2012).

Use of the mother tongues as languages of instruction in lower primary classes has also not been implemented effectively. Both teachers and parents prefer the use of English in the mistaken belief that the earlier the children start to learn in English the more English they will learn and therefore the better they will be prepared for the KCPE which is in English (Muthwii, 2002). This is a clear indication that there is no shared belief about the value of mother tongues as languages of instruction between those making curriculum decisions, and teachers and parents. Fullan (1982) reminds us that teachers cannot effectively implement what they do not believe in.

Meeting the psycho-social needs of learners' goal

Curriculum reforms targeting the psycho-social needs of learners are fairly recent in Kenya and have taken the direction of infusing messages of the so called “emerging issues” such as HIV and AIDs, drug abuse, sexuality and gender issues in carrier subjects or across all subjects, and the introduction of life skills as a subject in the curriculum.

There are indications that subject teachers are not integrating these messages in their lessons. The over loaded curriculum and the requirements of highly competitive examinations; and teachers' lack of knowledge and skills owing to lack of INSET and lack of integrated materials are some of the impediments to integration.

Further, behaviour change is the main objective of a life skills curriculum. Changing learners' behaviour requires that students engage in a discursive and reflection process in the lessons. However, as has already been pointed out, teachers do not have the knowledge and skills to organise and conduct such lessons.

Conclusion

In the quest for quality education, Kenya has implemented diverse curriculum innovations targeting individual and national economic goals, national identity and unity, socio-cultural, moral, and ethical development, cognitive development and globalisation goals as well as psychosocial goals. However, many of the innovations have translated into mere intentions, as the actual teaching of the innovations has been ineffective and in some cases, the relevant subjects are not taught at all. The result has been that the intended goals have not been achieved and quality education has continued to elude Kenya.

The Task Force on The Re-Alignment of The Education Sector to The Constitution of Kenya 2010, the latest to conduct an inquiry into education in Kenya has made several curriculum related recommendations targeting improvements in the quality of education in Kenya. Based on the discussions in this paper, my assessment is that the recommendations are not new. The focus is on putting emphasis on skills development through the teaching of subjects such as technical and vocational subjects, agriculture, ICT and entrepreneurship, and on engendering a sense of nationhood and unity through the teaching of subjects such as history and Kiswahili.

Kenya's past performance in curriculum reform suggests that unless the process is approached differently, little success in attainment of quality education goals will be achieved. Fullan (1982) has pointed out that real curriculum innovation is difficult to achieve because curriculum innovation is critically about changing people – their knowledge, skills, practices, beliefs, values and attitudes. The people involved in curriculum innovation are many and diverse. They include curriculum planners and developers, quality assurance officers, teacher trainers, teachers, parents, students, and community members. In a centralised curriculum system such as we have in Kenya, changing all these people so that they have shared beliefs and values of the curriculum innovation is extremely difficult. It requires greater participation in curriculum decision making, patience in training those in various levels of the curriculum implementation process and enormous resources.

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