

Reforming Education in Kenya for Global Competitiveness: A Case of Competency Based Curriculum

Francis Katumo Nzoka, PhD  
Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract

Education reform demands increased as Kenya entered the twenty-first century. Developing critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills is the main goal of the government's learner-centred Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), which was unveiled in 2017. The goal of the CBC is to develop well-rounded people who can thrive in a world that is changing quickly by placing an emphasis on competency above content. In Kenya, the 8-4-4 system of education has been replaced with the Competency Based Curriculum under the 2-6-3-3 system of education. This signifies the end of a period in which the sector has been dominated by competitiveness and ranking. The primary distinction is that CBC concentrates on the observable abilities and competences that learners demonstrate, whereas 8-4-4 emphasizes content more heavily, which promotes memorization. A requirements evaluation of the curriculum measured against the aspirations of the country, according to the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, made a curriculum modification necessary. Furthermore, there have been gaps in the educational offerings since 1964 due to the partial implementation of the suggestions made by earlier commissions on education. Curriculum Based Assessment (CBA), the assessment tool provided by the CBC, evaluates students' competency in relation to predetermined performance requirements. A series of systematic procedures that gather data to support the analysis of learners' progress and accomplishments are used in CBA, in contrast to formal assessments. As a result, assessment entails the learners doing specific tasks to evaluate their level of proficiency in completing them in an actual setting.

Keywords: *Competencies, competency based assessment, competency based curriculum, educational reform, needs assessment.*

Suggested citation: Nzoka, F.K. (2024). Reforming Education in Kenya for Global Competitiveness: A Case of Competency Based Curriculum. *European Journal of Contemporary Education and E-Learning*, 2(3), 141-150. DOI: 10.59324/ejceel.2024.2(3).12

Introduction

Curriculum is the means by which a nation equips its people with the knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and values needed to participate in society and the economy and to

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. The license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, on the condition that users give exact credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if they made any changes.



advance both individually and as a nation. Thus, curricula should be tailored to the demands of both the country and each individual citizen. Since gaining independence, Kenya has only undergone one significant curriculum reform, in 1963. A shift in the Kenyan educational system's organizational framework in 1985 served as the impetus for the reform. The Presidential Working Party on the Second University in Kenya, an Education Commission established by the government in 1981, was given the exclusive responsibility of providing guidance on the creation of Kenya's second university.

During its discussions, the Commission did urge the government that the curriculum and educational system in the nation should be changed. The end effect of this was the alteration of the educational framework, which led to the 8-4-4 system of instruction. Primary education was changed from 7 to 8 years, secondary school from 6 to 4 years, and university education from a minimum of 3 to 4 years. Though there have been multiple curriculum revisions in 1990, 1992, 1995, and 2003, the educational framework has not changed since its introduction in 1985. Still, the vast majority of people firmly believe that the curriculum and organizational framework of the current educational system are inadequate for the job market. Findings from a study supported this (John, 2021).

The results of two studies by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)-a nationwide needs assessment study in 2016 and a summative evaluation of elementary and secondary education curriculum done in 2009-confirmed this. In order to provide its citizens with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to fulfil the country's social, economic, and political ambitions, Kenya Vision 2030, the blueprint for the nation's development, also emphasizes the need for educational reform (Akala, 2021).

The existing curriculum's extreme rigidity and lack of opportunity to match children's basic education to their career interests, aptitudes, and abilities present a significant obstacle. Those who graduate from secondary school with excellent marks in the standard subjects-English, Mathematics, Science, and Humanities-and go on to pursue post-secondary education and white-collar careers appear to benefit the most from the system. It appears that Kenyan education is mostly focused on this. Although the nation undoubtedly needs students who excel in the core subjects and go on to pursue careers in law, medicine, engineering, and other traditional fields, the truth is that no nation in the world creates its educational system with the intention of having all children join universities for the few traditional careers.

Many learners have a knack for the arts, sports, and vocational schooling. These are their interests and abilities. It is noteworthy that there are numerous chances for self-employment in various domains inside the Kenyan economy. In addition, the 21st century labour market is changing in a way that offers more chances in micro and small businesses as opposed to the conventional employment models in fields like engineering, medical, education, and so on. In conclusion, the conventional curriculum that emphasizes memorization stifles students' curiosity and hinders their ability to grow and pursue advanced studies.

A more adaptable and thorough framework for Kenya's educational system as well as the necessity of curriculum reform to define the expected competencies at each learning level were suggested in 2012 by the Odhiambo Task Force on the Re-alignment of the Education and Training Sector to the Kenyan Constitution of 2010. The Task Force also demanded that the educational system be restructured to include



two years of pre-primary education, six years of primary school (three years of lower and three years of upper), six years of secondary education (three years of junior and three years of senior), a minimum of two years of middle level college education, and a minimum of three years of university education.

Kenya joined the bandwagon in 2017 and introduced the Competency-Based curriculum to replace the 8-4-4 curriculum, which was content-based and had been in use since 1985. The government also started the process of gradually discontinuing the 8-4-4 curriculum, with the last class covered by this curriculum scheduled to take the KCSE national exam in 2027.

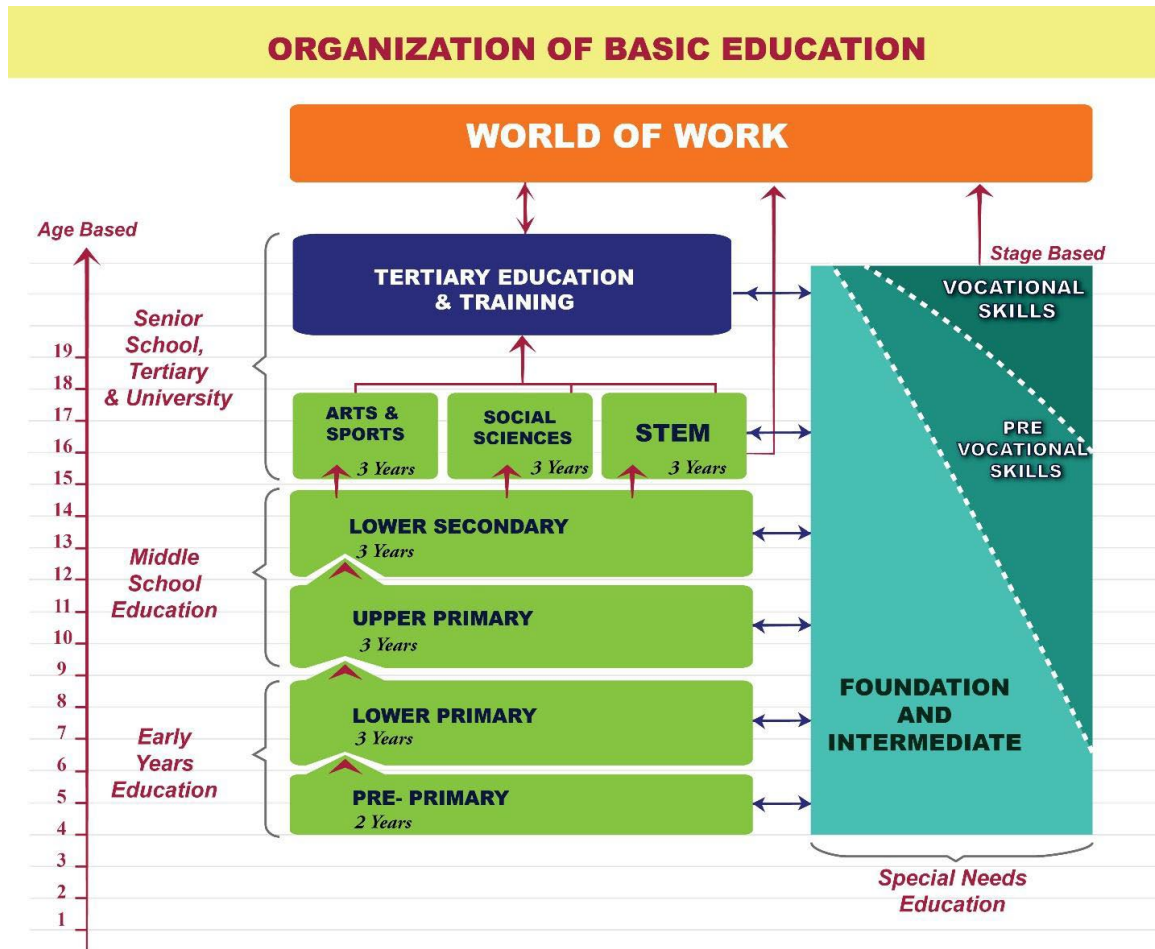


Figure 1. Basic Education Model of 2-6-3-3 Structure

Source: KICD, 2019

- o Early years Education; -This will comprise of two years of pre-primary education (PP1 & PP2) and three years of lower primary school education (Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3)
- o Middle School Education; -This shall comprise of 3 years of upper primary education (Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6) and three years of lower secondary education (Grade 7, Grade 8, Grade 9)



- Senior Secondary; - This shall comprise of three years of education targeted at learners in the age bracket of 15 years to 17 years and lays the foundation for further education and training at the tertiary level and the world of work.

In addition, it suggested creating the National Qualification Framework to determine and evaluate the level of achievement and competencies of students who had attended various learning environments or educational structures, as well as broadening access to education at all levels and reforming accreditation and assessment processes. At the tertiary level, the Task Force suggested that the Commission for University Education (CUE) should certify the quality of the programs offered at all universities in the nation, that national skills and competencies training programs at TVET be expedited, and that university curricula and programs be developed based on the curricula offered at the Basic Education cycle.

In addition to supporting the development of values and the acquisition of necessary skills and lifetime learning, CBC also strengthens the role that communities and parents play in the delivery of education.

Key Tenets of the Competency Based Curriculum

The framework is guided by the following principles:

Parental Empowerment and Engagement

The success of a child's education is greatly influenced by their parents. In order to provide an environment that is supportive of learning and inspires children to reach their best potential, they share accountability with schools (Amunga, et al., 2020). The framework will give schools the chance to give parents the tools they need to be involved at all stages and levels of basic education and to contribute to their children's learning results.

Differentiated Curriculum and Learning

The concept of diversity and inclusion is strengthened via differentiated curricula and instruction. It guarantees that each student will receive curricular content and instructional strategies that are suited for them. It gives educators the freedom to modify the curriculum to fit the needs of each student. It does not need that each student study the same material in the same manner for the same amount of hours at the same time.

Opportunity

The curriculum gives students a range of chances to help them recognize their needs, talents, and potential in order to fulfil the vision and goal of the reform. They will be able to contribute to both the advancement of the country and the workforce as a result. Equal access to education for all is the main focus. This will make learning enjoyable for students and cut down on the number of students who drop out of school due to a curriculum that does not suit their needs.

Community Service Learning

One type of experiential learning that gives students the chance to use their knowledge and abilities in a new environment is community service. Following this, teachers assist students in analysing the lessons they have gained from this activity and considering how they may be used to further their academic and personal goals. In order to effectively implement community service learning, students must place equal attention



on their education and meeting actual community needs. Learning objectives are connected to significant human, safety, educational, and environmental requirements that are jointly decided upon by service recipients and community partners. To improve learning, the service experience is incorporated back into the classroom. Students engage on real-world issues that connect academic knowledge to real-world situations while also improving their analytical and social abilities as well as their civic and ethical duty.

Diversity and Inclusion

To this end, the framework will help students recognize and value the diversity found in Kenya with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, language, culture, and religion. It's also important to remember that every student is unique in terms of their learning requirements and skills, and that every learner deserves respect and worth in an inclusive learning environment. Ensuring that educational institutions accommodate all students, regardless of their needs-be they physical, emotional, intellectual, or otherwise-is the essence of inclusion. The paradigm acknowledges that not every student is academically brilliant and takes into account each student's needs, preferences, and social and cognitive talents in addition to respecting the variations in how children learn. Ensuring every learner receives a basic education based on their needs and skills is the fundamental end aim.

Excellence

Each student will receive the support they need to succeed in the subjects that most interest and suit them. Rather than just emphasizing sheer rivalry for exam scores, the Framework encourages quality and competitiveness. Because each student will be guided to flourish in their areas of interest and aptitude, this will help to lessen the challenge of examination malpractices.

Key Competencies of the Competency Based Curriculum

The Kenyan Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) is built upon seven primary core competencies that, when completed, should guarantee the student as a whole human being. From the most fundamental learning levels up, these abilities serve as the cornerstones or basis for what all students should know.

Communication and Collaboration

Transmitting intended information from one person to another through a language that both parties can understand is called communication. It is the communication of ideas, signals, opinions, and information through writing, behaviour, speech, or signals. A partnership that is intentional and in which all sides choose to work together to accomplish a shared goal is called collaboration. The competency-based curriculum places a strong emphasis on the involvement of learners in a variety of learning activities. The majority of these tasks will need to be completed in small groups, in pairs, or by the entire class. In order for the students to meet the desired learning objectives, they must communicate with one another in a clear, courteous manner. In order to accomplish the learning objectives, the students must cooperate and work together in addition to using appropriate and effective language. The skills that learners will gain in communication and collaboration will benefit them in the classroom, at home, and in their daily life.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving



Critical thinking and problem-solving helps create an open mind and readiness to learn. In the context of providing high-quality education, critical thinking is one of the primary learning outcomes that are expected. Thinking critically comes in three flavours. Problem-solving, judgment, and reasoning are these. The ability to think critically allows students to reach conclusions that are supported by facts and reasoning rather than just their own opinions. Also, the ability to investigate novel approaches is provided to the learners via this competency. The idea that there are different ways to approach an issue will be appreciated by the learners. Every aspect of our life requires the use of critical thinking, which is highly significant.

The knowledge and viewpoints that occasionally contradict the learners' previously held views and opinions will also be valued. In every subject and discipline covered in the basic education curriculum, learners of all ages can benefit from this competency.

Creativity and Imagination

The capacity to conjure up fresh mental ideas and sensations and bring them to life is known as creativity and imagination. In the course of creativity and imagination, students create mental images of imaginary objects. Though the items in the learners' imagination are things they have neither seen nor experienced, they will transform those images into actual objects. The ability to conjure up mental images of things partially experienced in reality and to translate those ideas into tangible forms is another definition of creativity and imagination. It occurs and persists in the mind as imagination. Creativity is the ability to take imagination to a new level and create something worthwhile.

Teachers and students are expected to use their imaginations to conjure up thoughts and pictures in their brains as part of the Competency Based Curriculum. These concepts and visions will thereafter be transformed into tangible, observable works of art. Learners who possess imagination and creativity will always bring interest to their own lives and the lives of people around them, since they are capable of coming up with fresh ideas that improve both. In most learners, this skill exists, although it is typically concealed. Teachers that support students in thinking independently help them develop this skill. By putting the students in difficult situations that encourage them to think creatively and critically, the teacher will be able to accomplish this goal.

Providing students with a favourable environment in which they can develop their full potential in imagination and creativity and apply it in school, at home, and in their daily life is the main goal of the curriculum, which is quite flexible and leaves room for creative ways of teaching the students.

Citizenship

Communities founded on shared identities will always be formed by human nature. A specific human desire naturally gives rise to the shared identity. Economic, social, political, or religious needs could be present. It is natural for a group of individuals who share similar needs and a common identity to expand and get stronger, eventually forming a community. In order to uphold its ideals, such a community will create a structure for governance and a set of agreed values. Citizens, are therefore regarded as the people living in various communities. On the other hand, the status of having the rights, obligations, and advantages of a member of a certain community is known as citizenship.

A feeling of national identity is shared among citizens. The curriculum helps develop a feeling of citizenship in students so they may respond intelligently and impartially to



contentious and conflicting situations. The ramifications of their decisions and deeds will be clear to them. Respect for oneself and other people is ingrained in citizenship culture. Moreover, it cultivates a distinct perspective towards community members that is grounded in fairness and justice.

Digital Literacy

The capacity to use digital devices to study information and content stored on them is referred to as digital literacy in the Competency Based Curriculum. Among other digital gadgets, these include phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop PCs. As a result, the primary focus of digital literacy is on the aptitude for finding, assessing, and applying knowledge via digital media. If students can access and explore information using technology in a safe and secure manner and evaluate the quality of the material to improve their learning, then they are considered digitally literate in the context of education. Thus, the knowledge, abilities, and proper use of a range of hardware platforms, including computers, smartphones, tablets, and their software, are included in the competency of digital literacy.

Web search and internet application software should not be the only aspects of digital literacy. The world of technology in which we live is incredibly dynamic. This means that this type of literacy is constantly being innovated. Both the instructor and the students need to be ready to meet and manage the demands of the dynamic field. Thus, digital literacy questions conventional wisdom and methods. Both the teacher and the students experience transformational learning as a result of it. Teachers and students must gain, develop, and maintain up-to-date digital literacy competencies in order to deal with the rapidly evolving world of technology.

Learning to Learn

Learning is a lifelong process that begins the day we are born and continues throughout our daily lives. Thus, learning facilitates the application of prior knowledge to novel circumstances. It facilitates the growth of our social networks inside the community. Learning is a multifaceted process that affects our body, mind, and soul. We must first desire to learn in order to be able to do so. Every day, we get new knowledge that allows us to make changes in our life. Education ought to benefit both the student and society at large. In education, learning to learn is a broad term. It is the will to study and the perseverance to do so, organizing our own learning through time and information management. When the student works both alone and in a group, this is accomplished. Therefore, understanding one's own learning style and requirements is essential to learning to learn. To learn effectively, a student must be able to recognize chances for learning and cultivate the resilience to overcome setbacks. The learners will be able to build on past knowledge and experiences after they have attained this competency. There are four pillars of learning i.e.

Learning to know: This is the most basic form of learning. Learners will acquire academic knowledge but with little or no application.

Learning to do: Learners will acquire knowledge and do certain activities using that knowledge e.g. in sports.

Learning to be: This combines the first two pillars and helps the learner to be what they want to be in life. The learner is able to act with growing independence, discernment and personal responsibility.

Learning to live together: This is the epitome of learning. The learner will acquire and apply the first three pillars of learning and co-exist with others in society.



Self-efficacy

The term self-efficacy describes a person's confidence in their capacity to complete particular jobs or responsibilities. It establishes an individual's perspective and way of thinking about a certain activity. One's level of self-efficacy may influence how well they complete assignments and projects. A student can complete personal tasks in a variety of methods when they have a high feeling of self-efficacy. When taking on challenging tasks, a learner who has a high sense of self-efficacy feels confident. Instead than seeing challenging activities as risks to be avoided, he or she views them as challenges to be overcome. Deep interest in novel learning activities is stimulated by self-efficacy. This type of learner will create and work toward stretch goals for themselves.

Self-efficacy in schooling cultivates life application skills such as confidence and self-worth. When faced with failure, a student with self-worth and confidence can apply and persevere with great effort in order to turn those circumstances into accomplishments. Strong self-efficacy fosters the curiosity and bravery of a student to seek goals that will benefit them personally as well as those of their families and communities.

In addition to acknowledging the resources at their disposal, the learner will assume personal accountability for their use, preservation, and safeguarding. A learner who has a high sense of their own abilities will exhibit traits such as assertiveness, empathy, effective communication, negotiation, non-violent dispute resolution, and resistance to peer pressure.

The student will need to gain this ability in competency-based education in order to be able to confidently tackle some tasks that may appear challenging. When asked to sketch and colour, a pre-primary student need to be able to take on these assignments with bravery and assurance. Teaching students that "yes we can" is something the instructor should be able to accomplish. In the classroom, at home, and in their future lives, it will assist the learner deal with even more difficult situations.

Challenges Facing Implementation of CBC in Kenya

The use of competency-based curriculum (CBC) in basic education has grown over the past several years, although CBC faces a number of difficulties as a result. This is mostly because of its creative methodology and the fact that it is a self-paced, mastery-oriented curriculum that makes extensive use of technology. A competency-based learning curriculum not only gives students an alternative to traditional courses (whether they are taken online or in person), but it also enables them to demonstrate their mastery of a variety of tasks and abilities in order to pass the courses. While the model has a lot of potential, there are some obstacles and defects that must be fixed before it can be used as a practical teaching tool (John, 2021).

Achieving excellence

Educational establishments must exhibit an unwavering dedication to quality in order to implement a competency-based curriculum. Among the main issues they are dealing with are the following: - How can the intensity and calibre of curriculum-based programs be maintained so that they are equal for all students? In what way will the curriculum accomplish this aim of excellence? In what ways will the competency-based



approach transcend past trends in general education and avoid becoming just another mediocre system?

Big Class Numbers

The size of the classes is another major obstacle to implementing a competency-based program. Having more pupils in a classroom might hinder peer exchanges during class discussions and have an adverse effect on student-teacher interactions. Given that each student learns differently, some students in a high-density class may benefit from the instructor's speed while others may not. This makes it extremely difficult to adopt competency-based curricula and limits teachers' ability to use interactive, learner-centred teaching techniques. Reducing the size of the class can benefit both the teachers and the students, as it allows the teachers to better support students who are struggling with their studies on an individual basis.

Education Facilities Required

The infrastructure required for this paradigm is substantially different, as a competency-based curriculum entails a fundamental transition from passive to active learning. Modern classrooms, creative centres, smart boards, labs, and the newest technology at all levels are necessary for educational institutions to adopt a competency-based curriculum because they enable students to actively engage in the learning process. In essence, this means that the administrators must be completely persuaded of the benefits that their institutions would experience as a result of putting the new competency-based learning model into practice.

Standardization of Assessments

Standardizing the processes used to evaluate competence or skills is one of the issues CBC faces in basic education. This is due to the fact that, as a personalized learning strategy, CBC places a strong emphasis on subject mastery regardless of the setting, duration, or mode of completion. When it comes to implementing assessments, some of the issues that institutions face are as follows: How can we test every student for every performance outcome? How can we find ways to let students show that they understand a subject on their own while yet meeting performance standards? Who sets the learning objectives for students, and should they differ amongst schools?

Widespread Acceptance and Comprehension

One relatively new learning model is competency-based learning. Employers who are unaware of the approach are inclined to be sceptical of students who graduate using this mode of instruction. Furthermore, a lot of firms in the labour market are strict about only hiring individuals who graduate from conventional educational programs and who get a particular grade.

Broadening Teacher Development Programs Based on Competency

Many basic education institutions' teachers lack the necessary training to administer competency-based curricula, unless they themselves came from it. For this reason, one of the most important conditions before implementing competency-based learning is to improve their capacity. One such issue that CBC is dealing with is the instructor's understanding of competency-based teaching. Even while some of them may comprehend competency-based learning, many of them still find it difficult to grasp and lack the skills required by the competency-based system. Identifying the competences required based on the particular job profiles, performance expectations, and measurement criteria in many key domains, such as communication and analytical



skills to build the learning experiences, are some of the things that need to be addressed in this situation.

Conclusion

Because of its novel approach, competency-based learning has attracted considerable interest from basic education institutions as well as other education stakeholders. Despite the fact that a competency-based curriculum is far more effective in assisting learners in acquiring the abilities required to complete particular activities, CBC faces a number of difficulties in putting its curriculum into practice. Institutions must primarily concentrate on teacher capacity-building to assist them in becoming familiar with the evolving learner-centred programs in order to systematically address these problems. Institutions can accomplish this by offering a variety of teacher development programs, which enable them to acquire the skills necessary for this kind of cutting-edge educational program while working in the field.

References

- Akala, B. M. (2021). Revisiting Education Reform in Kenya: A Case of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 3(1), 100107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SSAHO.2021.100107>
- Amunga, J., Were, D., & Ashioya, I. (2020). The Teacher-Parent Nexus in the Competency Based Curriculum Success Equation in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 12(1), 60-76. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEAPS2020.0646>
- IBE-UNESCO. (2017). The Why, What and How of Competency Based Curriculum Reforms: The Kenya Experience. *Journal on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment*, 11.
- John, R. O (2021). *Successes and Challenges of CBC Implementation in Kenya*, published by John Robert Owala. Institute of Educational Development-East Africa. The Agha Khan University, Dar es Salaam, 8th May, 2021.
- Republic of Kenya (2016). *Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BCEF)*. Nairobi. Government Press.
- Republic of Kenya (2012). *Reforming Education and Training in Kenya*. Session Paper No. 14. Nairobi: Government Press.
- Republic of Kenya (1981). *Presidential Commission on Establishment of the Second University in Kenya (Mackay Report)*. Nairobi, Kenya, Government Printer.

