
ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION REFORMS AND CHALLENGES IN KENYA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper explores education reforms in Kenya. It has presented the concern of education reforms from a historical point of view. An exploration of education reforms has been traced from the colonial period (1908-1963) up till the post-colonial era. The paper is built from both empirical and theoretical sources. The researcher also used both community and school walkabouts to get oral data. Before focusing on education reforms in Kenya and the related challenges, aspects of education reforms in Pakistan, Indonesia, Gambia, Benin, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Mali have been discussed to form the basis of literature review. Education reforms in the independent Kenya include proposals of Ominde Education Commission of 1964, the Gachathi Education Commission of 1976 that brought about 7-4-2-3 Education System, the Mackay Education Commission of 1981 that led to the implementation of 8-4-4 Education System, and the Douglas Odhiambo (Taskforce, 2012) that proposed the Competency Based Curriculum (2-6-6-3) (Amukoa,2003), an education reform whose implementation is on-going since its introduction in 2017. The paper concludes that coming up with education reform proposals in Kenya was necessary. However, there were challenges that impeded effective implementation of these reforms, especially the Competency Based Curriculum. These include in effective assessment strategy, inadequate funding, unclear understanding of CBC, antagonism on domiciling Junior Secondary School, teacher shortages, inadequate teaching and learning facilities and parents' concern.

Keywords: Education, education reforms, education system, curriculum implementation.

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1.1 Introduction

Education reform in the 1800s is most known as the common school movement. The common school movement was a movement that sought to provide a free and efficient school system for all citizens, dedicated to responsible citizenship and moral education. A common school was public; often a one-roomed school funded by local taxes, and was open to all white children. Horace Mann worked to revolutionize the common-school system of Massachusetts. He advocated a statewide curriculum and school financing through local property taxes. Schools were funded by local taxes and did not charge tuition [1].

In the Seneca Falls Convention, women fought for more educational opportunities for women and support for women's rights. The movement advocated for increased educational opportunities for women. Catherine Beecher spoke about women's right to education and shared her writing supporting equal education. Due to slavery in the South, educational reforms were severely restricted. Education reform in the North fought against the emergence of manufacturing and industrialization, which were the two fundamental factors that led to educational reform. Tomckov (2022) following the Civil War, efforts to expand academic opportunities in America continued([2]. During the Reconstruction period, more than 1000 schools for black children were opened by the US government. It is believed that rigid teachers and leaders

contributed to the population's dissatisfaction during this time. Among these leaders was John Dewey, who wanted to incorporate more activity into the classroom [2].

According to (UNESCO, 2005) Kenya inherited an education system that was characterized by racial segregation and different types of curricula for the various races at independence. The colonial schools had a different curriculum from that of the African, Asian and Arab schools. Before 1960, free and universal primary education had not been extended to African children in any of the British colonies in East Africa; racial discrimination in education was still intact. The expansion of primary education remained a crucial problem in the colonial era. The situation did not radically change with the achievement of independence in 1963 [3]. ACTION-AID Kenya, (2004) report that independence heightened pressure to increase access to universal basic education.

In January 2003, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government implemented the free primary education, providing more opportunities to the disadvantaged school-age children [4]. The policy abolished the payment of school fees and other related levies which had posed a serious hindrance to children who wanted to access education [4]. The new free primary education policy yielded admirable results as more than 1.5 million who were previously out of school once again joined primary schools [5].

The history of education in Kenya reveals rots and decay at various levels over the years [6]. The practice of focusing on examination results became rampant to the extent that schools would know how many grade A's they were going to receive. Media houses became complicit in the schemes and camped at schools under the invitation and care by schools which gave them allowances for covering them during examination results. The government of Kenya has been struggling with a new education system since 2017, which has since been rolled out and implemented. The education system is famously known as the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) and the 2022 Grade Six, the pioneering cohort, is joining the Junior Secondary in 2023 in Grade Seven.

1.2 Education Reforms and Challenges

Kenya's on-going reform agenda started in 1963. It was assumed that quality education is a vanguard to social, economic, and political development [7]. Education reform's definition has shifted as the needs of students have changed. However, at the core of education reform are the planned changes in how public schools operate, from how teachers teach to how schools are governed. Education reform's primary concerns include socio-economic status, equality, and equity. The general purpose of education reform is to create more equitable learning environments so that all students can learn [8]. Additionally, public education movements focus on creating an accessible environment for students to learn how to contribute to the country as citizens. Finally, the third purpose of education reform is to prepare students to compete in a global marketplace as independent consumers and producers [9].

Education reforms are launched in order to address existing problems in an economy and finance plays an outstanding role in ensuring that the reform process is a success. Several education reforms have been implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa in a bid to improve the underdeveloped education systems [10]. During the colonial period in Kenya (1895-1963), racial segregation was entrenched in the country with severe discrimination from colonial rulers [11]. The Frazer report of 1909, a British government-sponsored study of education in East African Protectorate, recommended the establishment of separate educational systems for Europeans, Asians and Africans [12]. As a result, colonial education system was stratified and segregated along racial lines in Kenya. This system of education was maintained until independence in 1963. The problems of curriculum design, development and implementation in Africa and Kenya in particular, received greater attention with the publication of the Phelps Stokes report of 1924-25. However, the Phelps-Stokes commission recommended the use of indigenous language, as the languages of instructions for African schools.

The Beecher Commission on education was established in 1948 to make recommendations for the implementation of a 10-year plan to revamp the educational system in colonial Kenya. The Beecher Commission report released in 1949 concluded that education lacked significant financing, inadequate control and facilities were of low quality and inadequate. The commission recommended stricter control over schools through greater centralization. A position Africans interpreted to mean the colonial government wanted to control African schools which led to the birth of Independent schools. Africans had established independent schools by 1910 led by John Owallo for their education because mission and government schools were inadequate. In 1952, the government closed independent schools as they were seen as a major threat to colonial sovereignty in the country [13].

Education reforms in Kenya started immediately after the country's attainment of independence in 1963. The government needed education reform to respond to the needs of the new independent state in the nation-building process [14]. This

was also in line with the recommendations of the Addis Ababa conference which proposed that a suitable curriculum be implemented in both primary and secondary schools in all African countries [15]. There was also need to recheck whether the colonial curriculum was still relevant to suit the needs of the Kenyans. Following concerns addressed in the preceding paragraph, the Ominde Commission was constituted and its key term of reference was to make changes in the formal educational system in Kenya [16]. In regard to its mandate, the Ominde Commission recommended that the colonial curriculum was to be revised to make it more relevant to the needs of the Kenyan learner [17]. The commission also recommended the introduction of the 7-4-2-3 system based on the British model [18]. The Ominde report called for education to serve Kenya's national development and abolished racial segregation that had been championed by the colonial government [19].

The establishment of Gachathi Education Commission was informed by the findings of Bessey Commission. In 1972, the government of Kenya appointed the Bessey Commission to look into the curriculum policy. Bessey Report found out that, the independence curriculum policy failed to achieve national goals of education because it was found to be narrow in scope since it laid emphasis on rote learning while neglecting vocational and technical skills in secondary schools [20]. This led to recommendations for structural changes and addition of some subjects in the curriculum of the country's educational system which was the building block of the Gachathi Education Commission of 1976. The Gathachi report noted the rising rate of unemployment among school leavers and recommended the restructuring of the education system curriculum to have more streams of Science, Mathematics and technical and vocational subjects [21].

The Mackay Report influenced the extension of primary education from seven to eight years, thus influencing the restructuring of the education system from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4 and introduction of technical and vocational practical subjects in primary schools [22]. Mackay Education Commission of 1981 or popularly known as Mackay report of the presidential party on the second university in Kenya, addressed the issue of second university in Kenya and loopholes identified in the former education system in Kenya. That is, secondary education curriculum was viewed as being too academic, narrow and examination oriented. The situation led to the rise of unemployment of school leavers between 1970 and 1985. In 1981, the Government reformed curriculum policy chaired by Professor Mackay [23]. The 7-4-2-3 curriculum failed to achieve its goals and failed to aid learners to be placed on the job market after secondary school education between 1964 and 1985. Mackay report of the presidential party on the second university in Kenya led to the removal of the advanced 'A' level of secondary education and the expansion of other post-secondary training institutions. It led to the establishment of Moi University, the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 and to the establishment of commission of higher education [24].

Amutabi (2019) contend that the previous education models of 7-4-2-3 and 8-4-4 produced social and economic hierarchies, where the rich were systematically eliminating children from poor backgrounds in prestigious secondary schools. There was increasing gap between performance of private schools and public schools to the extent that private schools at primary school level were taking almost all the slots available in good performing public and private schools. Children who attended academies were having more success in secondary schools and were taking places in better courses at public and private universities. Since 1985, public education in Kenya has been based on an 8-4-4 system with eight years of primary education followed by four years of secondary school and four years in the university [25]. Although 8-4-4 policy has been described a major educational reform in the history of Kenya's education system since independence in 1963, it is viewed as a great devastation to the nation. The system of education still remains the most radical and perhaps mindless change in the education in Kenya [26]. Even if the system was changed today, it has already caused great menace to the country; the toll on the nation will be felt for many years to come. Its devastation is similar to that of the failed Ujamaa in Tanzania many years after it was officially scrapped [27]. Again, 8-4-4 system has been the subject of national debate since its inception. It has been criticized for being broad, expensive and burdensome to pupils and parents". The 8-4-4 education system has also been implicated in the worst strikes that engulfed a number of schools in Kenya during the year 2001 and the general poor quality of education [28].

There has been an issue with the 8-4-4 system of education that has periodically called for certain recommendations for adjustment. For instance, since its inception, several commissions have been formed with the view of improving it: These include, the Wanjigi Report (GoK, 1983), The Kamunge Report (GoK, 1985), The Mungai Report (GoK, 1995), The Ndegwa Report (GoK, 1991) and The Koech Report (GoK, 1999). Majority of these reports were either rejected or partially implemented. For instance, the Kamunge Report recommended the reduction of examination subjects under the system was only implemented in secondary schools but not at the primary level; sadly, the Koech Report was rejected by

president Moi [29]. These changes (implemented, rejected and unimplemented proposals) are clear indications that there were problems in the system of education. Hence, the system of education did not benefit majority of Kenyans.

Education systems in Kenya since independence, has achieved egalitarian access to education for both boys and girls. This is far much contrary to what happens in Pakistan. According to Shakeel and Shah (2019), girls attend separate schools with boys at both primary and secondary levels. Fewer girls attend school than boys. Many children of both sexes do not attend classes and ghost schools are a problem. For many families, children are necessary to work in the fields and help with chores and duties hence schooling is not really an option.

Since its introduction, CBC has delivered incredible development results in countries where it has been implemented. This is because it avoids focus on exams and creates many possibilities for advancement in the careers of learners. This mode of education is in consonance with national qualification framework (NQF) which supports lifelong learning. In lifelong learning, there is recognition of learning which takes place in formal, non-formal and informal sectors and prior learning [29]. The vision of the basic education curriculum reform is to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered and ethical citizen. This will be achieved by providing every Kenyan learner with world class standards in the skills and knowledge that they deserve, and which they need in order to thrive in the 21st century. This will be achieved through the new education system; the 2-6-6-3 system otherwise referred to as the Competency Based Curriculum [30].

There are areas that have been considered as among key tenets of the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). CBC will provide equitable and egalitarian opportunities to all learners and is likely to create a level playing field since it will not be examination oriented. This means that there will be no ranking after assessment of the system. As much as this is the true presentation of CBC concluded mode of assessment, the approach may discourage bright learners from working hard and those who are average fail to be aggressive in their academic endeavours [31].

Muchunguh (2021) asserts that some of the key obstacles facing CBC include assessment of learners, inadequate funding and lack of adequate information, teacher shortages, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, inadequate funds and lack of stakeholders' involvement and unclear understanding of CBC. There has been unclear understanding of CBC. This has made the public, the stakeholders, particularly parents to face certain degree of uncertainties. Even most head teachers and teachers, who are key implementers of the new education system, do not understand it. A higher percentage of teachers have gone through seminars meant to help them conceptualize the new education reform. Unfortunately, most, if not all of them, have reportedly argued that they understood nothing from the seminars. Even the facilitators they have admittedly told teachers to take it the way they understood it. This came out clearly when teachers had been taken through the session and then there was time to ask questions [32].

Further, There have been heated discourses on where to domicile the Junior Secondary students after completion of Grade Six. The debate was a concern between the Ministry of education, the Teachers' Service Commission and the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT). The Ministry on one hand had gone ahead to finance infrastructure in some secondary schools with prime aim of hosting Grade Seven in secondary schools [33]. It emerged that in some schools the teacher: learner ratio was 1:70 which was far beyond the recommended maximum rate of 1:40. Such a high ratio has got its own challenges [34]. Teachers find it impossible to pay attention to all learners, especially the slow ones. Also, teachers were not able to give adequate assignments to the pupils, as they could not cope with the marking and teaching workload (UNESCO, 2005). The findings of Muricho, *et al* (2021) also revealed an aspect of teacher shortage in Kenya. Teacher to pupil ratio in Kenya is far much below the bar compared to Indonesia where, as of 2017, Teacher-to-pupil ratio dropped from 1:20 to 1:16 in elementary schools [34]. In Kenya, only two teachers have been sent by the Teachers Service Commission to handle all the 17 subjects in Grade Seven Junior Secondary. Sadly, each teacher has only specialized in two teaching subjects.

1.3 Methodology

This paper has embraced historical approach, and produced from already established empirical and theoretical study findings. The approach has been found useful in establishing historical trends of educational reforms in different parts of the globe, selected African countries that have embraced education reforms. The paper relied on both secondary and primary data to identify aspects of education reforms in Kenya and the related challenges from a historical perspective. In addition, the research used both community and school walkabouts to determine the challenges and conclusion drawn by the researcher. Literature sources on education reforms in Kenya encompass findings of empirical studies as well as information from other secondary sources.

1.4 Conclusion

The Kenya government policy to achieve meaningful reform in the education sector has been a good concern for the country. Nonetheless, coming up with effective strategies to conduct adequate piloting, effective development of learning materials, inadequate stakeholders' involvement and shortage of teachers against high teacher-pupil ratio has been a concern. In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, everyone has a right to education.

The Kenya Vision 2030 has refashioned its bid to enhance a 100% transition. As much as there has been education reforms in Kenya, more so after independence, economic constraints has caused heavy burden on the parents, especially in the struggle for implementation of the very latest education reform in Kenya, CBC. The unstable status of the government of Kenya has also been seen as a challenge for education reforms.

Still, on the CBC, which has currently reached Grade Seven, it is assumed that these learners have been exposed to computer gadgets since the time they were in Grade 1 in 2017. Sadly, this had never been, and still, not the case either. There is dire need that adequate preparation be put in place if at all effective development and implementation has to be realized. Such approach will enhance workable education reform for the benefit of learners as well as the society at large. In a nutshell, not much competency has been achieved by the individual learner since its inception in 2017.

Conflict of Interest

Author are declared No Conflict of Interest

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Not Applicable

Author Contribution

All Work done by the Pius Wanyama Muricho.

Ethical Considerations

Not Applicable

Inform Consent

Not Applicable

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