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## Implementation of Kenya's Basic Education Curriculum Framework: A Pursuit of Quality Education for Social Economic and Political Growth

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### **Abstract:**

*Rote learning is the main 8-4-4 system's criticism. Graduates of 8-4-4 system have not shown evidence of Education for Self-Reliance Philosophy. The Government of Kenya released the Kenya Basic Education Curriculum Framework commonly as a remedy. Its Vision is grounded in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and the Country's Vision 2030 Goals. This paper through desk top research compares the new education framework with the 8-4-4 system in promoting the quality of education in Kenya. It utilizes Fagerlind and Saha's (1989) Human Capital Theory to assert that educating a county's populace yields higher productivity of labour and provides the much needed skills essential for industrial development for socioeconomic and political growth. The organization of the new framework has focused on broad-based curriculum, exploration and selection of pathways that will avail the skills for Kenya's industrial revolution. In respect of its nobility, the hiccups that characterized implementation and execution of 8-4-4 curriculum should not be repeated. Rushing implementation processes may lead to haemorrhaged executions.*

**Keywords:** Basic education, curriculum framework, quality education

### **1. Introduction**

A reform in Kenya's education system requires wading into complex issues. Such issues include Policy and legislative, curriculum, education innovations, skill-based approaches, industry and classroom linkages, acquisition of employable skills, lifelong learning and above all the provision of education for the fast technologically evolving 21st century learner (Bunyi, 2013). The demand for educational change has recently pivoted on the provision of quality education. The philosophy behind this quality change in education has been skewed towards producing the nation's innovators, inventors, creators, problem solvers, entrepreneurs, global citizens, change makers and critical thinkers. Quality education is about learning, what is being learned and the uniqueness in learning to every individual learner (Farrell 2011).

Milligan (2017) in *Education Quality and the Kenya's 8-4-4 Curriculum: Secondary School Learners' Experiences* report that student learning and engagement as well as stakeholder, especially parents, participation is at the centre of quality education. Achieving this level of quality requires the content to be context appropriate, accessible and relevant to the lived experiences of the student and their community (Harber 2014). These characteristics are most valued in quality education. Through such meaningful learning, students usually develop a sense of autonomy and ability to make their own choices in life (Hurn, 1994). Hurn concludes that teaching and learning environment should be comprehensive, inclusive and should offer differentiated instructions that provide safe space for students to make contributions themselves. Matingi (2017) in his report on The State of University Education in Kenya emphasises that educational institutions should create an atmosphere geared towards open-ended exploration, rather than narrow, right or wrong expectations.

Quality education can be recognized in the excitement of students when they are challenging themselves, connecting at a deeper level, realizing the applicability of their learning, strengthening their knowledge and craving for more (Kendall 2007). A crucial component of education is the promotion of inquiry and critical thinking. Critical thinking not only prepares students to understand and address classroom problems, but also to greater social issues as well (Tikly and Barrett 2011). This approach of fostering democratic citizenship, can lead to economic and social change. The perspective of quality education is informed by learners' personal experiences (Peters and Oliver 2009). Quality education is an essential means of enhancing the skills necessary to contribute to the country's socioeconomic development and growth (Care, Kim and Anderson 2017). Nyerere (1967) in *Education for Self-Reliance* observe that the quality of learning and its impact on students' achievement, the eventual social and economic consequences have always been in contention. Indeed, the philosophical foundation of any curriculum framework world over is the Nyerere's ideology of *Education for Self-Reliance*.

Although the development of the 8-4-4 was meant to promote Quality Education in the lives of young Kenyans, the decoupling of the education policy and what was being implemented on the ground demonstrated how 8-4-4 framework constrained the quality of education in Kenya. The initial composition of the 8-4-4 system went through alterations in 2011. These reorganizations in the system saw removal of many of the practical subject engagements from the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. Subjects removed included Home Science, Woodwork, Building Construction, Power Mechanics, Electricity, Drawing and Design, Art and Design, Music, Accounting, Commerce, Economics, Typewriting, French and German.

The challenge with the implementation of such a practical and job-oriented curriculum was that it was not taught effectively due to a lack of adequate preparations. The problem was compounded with the government's inability to provide the necessary material resources, training and support to equip educators (Milligan, 2017). In addition, the curriculum was being criticized for the overwhelming size of the syllabus, rigidity and limitations for students to explore their interests, aptitudes and abilities. The curriculum was thought to be incompatible with higher education and job opportunities available in Kenya and on global market. Education in Kenya baked lame duck graduates within their own traditional communities. Curriculum reform targeting national development through building vocational and technical skills remained a mirage. The structure and curriculum of the 8-4-4 system simply was not fit and had outlived its purposes.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

From the background information reviewed, some scholars have alleged that students graduating from Kenya's 8-4-4 system have not displayed evidence of attaining adequate skills and knowledge for self-reliance. The 8-4-4 system is deemed to be a *Failed Philosophy*. It is argued to have been the best system of education that never was (Ngome 2004; Kabitaandji, 2017; Kendall 2007; MOEST 2015; KICD 2017; Makau 1985; Milligan 2017; Ogutu 2017 and Wanzala, 2017). The researchers in this paper argue that despite Kenya's Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KBECF) being aligned with Kenya's development needs and Africa's Agenda 2063 that aims to address continental's youth employment through skills revolution, lessons learned from implementation intricacies of 8-4-4 system ought to be the guiding principles in actualizing the next agenda in Kenya's education. The country should not allow the hiccups that were witnessed in the implementation and execution processes that characterised 8-4-4 curriculum. The researchers propose that since the Kenya Basic Education Curriculum Framework is a paradigm shift, it requires trade-ins from all stakeholders, beneficiaries and adequate time for training personnel, preparation of necessary materials and adequate piloting. Any oversights in these processes may lead to implementation haemorrhages that can rock the very education legacy Kenya is yearning to secure for her future citizens' lives.

## 3. Objective

This paper through desk top research analysis compares and contrasts the new KBECF as Competency Based Curriculum with the already implemented 8-4-4 system in promoting the Quality of Education in Kenya. The researchers ventilate this pursuit using Fagerlind and Saha's (1989) Human Capital Theory to assert that educating a county's populace yields higher productivity of labour and provides the much needed skills essential for industrial development, higher wages and national socioeconomic and political growth. KBECF endeavours to equip the youths with the much needed 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to increase social and private returns for prosperity of Kenya and her people.

## 4. Methodology

The study used descriptive desktop survey to conduct an audit of the extent to which 8-4-4 system of education has contributed to socioeconomic development of Kenya and equipped the country's youths with skills required in the job markets. This approach allowed the researchers to also examine the similarities and differences between the new and the old systems of education and their implementation procedures. It was predominantly qualitative in nature and relied on both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources included materials from the archives such as monthly and annual reports from NGOs, parliamentary commissions and the ministry of education. Other documentary sources included books, journals, magazines and newspapers. To ensure that only knowledgeable informants participated, the study employed purposive sampling technique. This design helped the study to draw key inferences and recommendation in the implementation procedures followed in both 8-4-4 system and KBECF as Competency Based Curriculum.

## 5. Literature Review

Recently at the Africa Union level, member countries resolved to support Africa's Agenda 2063 which gives emphasis on education that catalyzes skills revolution and active promotion of science, technology, research, and innovation. The ultimate goal of the Agenda 2063 is to build knowledge and capabilities for exploitation of Africa's resources and future generations. This ideology has been given impetus by the African Union's vision - *An Integrated, Peaceful, And Prosperous Africa, Driven by Its Own Citizens to Take up Its Rightful Place on the Global Arena*. To realize this vision, Africa's nations' systems of education need to pursue changes that are guided by evidence-based decision-making processes, supportive legislative frameworks and improved resource allocation to the actual teaching and learning process in classrooms. Education being a vehicle through which change can be initiated, ought to wing the economy of middle income states in sub Saharan states (Care and Kim; Anderson and Gustafsson and Wright, 2017). It has therefore been the

desire of successive governments in Kenya to bring about Quality education in its systems reforms in line with national and continental aspirations.

### 5.1. Kenya's 2015 National Curriculum Policy Document

Way back in 2015 the government of Kenya introduced the National Curriculum Policy Document. The purpose of this Policy document was to provide quality and relevant education to Kenyan youth that could hone the necessary skills to mitigate unemployment and participate in knowledge intensive economies (MOE, 2015). As such, the structure of the 1985 8-4-4 and the 2017 2-6-6-3 curriculum frameworks, at inception, were both geared towards promoting quality education through developing the skills necessary for Kenyans to be contributing members of their society. The 8-4-4 curriculum therefore was not only intended to establish theoretical and academic foundations and cultural development, but also to prepare learners for self-employment through exposure to all aspects of education, especially practical activities (Makau1985). The 8-4-4 curriculum was to provide for college preparation, vocational competence and employment opportunities in Kenya (Kuhlman, 1992).

### 5.2. 8-4-4 System of Education

According to Amutabi (2003), the 8-4-4 system of education unfortunately promoted an environment of rote learning. He describes this environment as professionally hurting, harmful and devastating to the Kenyan education system. He alleges that within the 8-4-4 education culture, rote learning is prominent. He argues that this is common especially during the preparation of national examinations where unhealthy competition and regurgitation of facts rather than digesting them takes place. He adds that such a curriculum suppresses the students' interests in learning thereby constraining opportunities to attain quality education and experience upward mobility in the education system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) indicated that learners from the current curriculum do not display the expected level of competence and that Kenya's basic education system is failing to produce graduates with skills and competencies that satisfy the needs of a participatory society and the knowledge economy (MOE, 2015).

Bunyi (2013) notes that the best practices and lessons learned from past Kenyan curriculum innovations have been applied to the incoming Kenya Basic Education Curriculum Framework. She reports that government's purpose for reviewing curricula has been to re-orient nations to the issues of quality of education. Bunyi laments that although the development of the 8-4-4 was meant to promote quality education in the lives of young Kenyans, the decoupling of the education policy and what was being implemented on the ground demonstrated how the structure of the 8-4-4 framework constrained quality of education. He however notes that although the approach to the new reform policy shows evidence of an awareness of lessons learned and efforts to promote quality education, the government's ability to successfully implement this policy into practice is yet to be demonstrated.

A shift in focus on learning achievements for students through a competency-based approach, compared to the 8-4-4 content-based approach, can ensure desired outcomes for quality education in the form of skills development and individual and national growth. In tackling the misalignment of the human and economic needs of the nation and the educational goals of the country, Odiemo, (2008) finds that a mismatch between the knowledge necessary for survival and curriculum content is likely to create individuals who are unable to respond to their survival demands dictated by their local environments. As such, the content-based approach, which emphasizes knowledge over application, perpetuates learners' inability to translate their knowledge into the real world.

A reform in the education system would shift the curriculum to be more student-centered, discussion oriented, and participatory in its learning methodologies, creating an environment which promotes quality education (Milligan, 2017). The adoption of a Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to the curriculum is based on the results of the 2016 national needs assessment, international best practice and an intention to develop quality education by making learning a more meaningful experience. This approach permeates traditional academics and delves into subject matter which is relevant for this century (Ogut, 2017).

### 5.3. Competency-Based Approach

The competency-based approach focuses on application rather than acquisition of knowledge. It emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to know (Kabita, 2017). This learner-centered approach is formulaic of quality education as it provides an aspect of real-life connection, life-long learning and contextual relevance. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework's puts into perspective Core Competencies such as: communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, self-efficacy, digital literacy and learning to learn. It fosters the skills necessary for learners to expand their pool of economic opportunities and contribute to the growth of the nation (Care, Kim, Anderson, 2017).

The KBECE vision: - *To Enable Every Kenyan to Become an Engaged, Empowered and Ethical Citizen; and mission - Nurturing Every Learner's Potential* are grounded on the ideals of the reformed Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and the ambitions of the country's Vision 2030 goals (KICD, 2017). Riddell, (1999) observes that for any country to develop there must be reforms in three lenses namely: - educational, economic, and political groundings. Kenya's National Goals of Education clearly point towards the nation's political and economic agenda in laying the foundation for this reform.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

- A careful analysis of the proposed reform goals of economic growth and social cohesion show that the reforms are imbedded in the curriculum shift from the 8-4-4 system which primarily focuses on content to the new Basic

Education Curriculum Framework model. The model's focal point is on the learners' acquisition of competencies and skills relevant for success in the 21st century economy. The researchers opine that the center of reforms is the need to impart the skills young people need to enhance their employability and economic productivity at local and global levels. This demands that significant shifts in conceptualizing education quality, relevance, and outcomes should be carefully appraised at every stage of implementation.

- Since Quality education is attained through emphasizing the role of the learner and de-emphasizing the role of the teacher as the primary source of information, The National Curriculum Policy framework on education should highlight the processes and timeframe on identification and construction of specific academies, universities that are going to be developed to spur and nurture the various talents in Kenyan youths. Kenya requires talent academies for the development of athletics and gymnastics, sports and games, performing arts, film industry among others. The dream of this nation lies in the development of these institutions.
- The 8-4-4 system of education was well intentioned. It underwent a lot of revisions as from 2011 because it was hurriedly implemented. Similarly the new Kenya's Basic Education Curriculum Framework is an idea whose time has come. It is aligned to Africa's Agenda 2063 which aims to address continent's youth employment through skills revolution. Kenya should not allow the hiccups that were witnessed in the implementation and execution processes that characterised 8-4-4 curriculum. The researchers argue that since CBC is a paradigm shift, it should rop in all stakeholders, beneficiaries and adequate time should be allocated for training personnel, enough resources provided for purchasing and preparation of necessary materials and finally adequately well piloted. Any rush in implementation processes may lead to execution haemorrhages that rocked the 8-4-4 system of education.

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