Kenya's 2017 basic education curriculum framework: A comprehensive review

Prince Paa-Kwesi Heto
INDIE Education Initiative, USA
Masumi H. Odari
University of Nairobi, Kenya
Wyse Koku Sunu
INDIE Education Initiative, USA

ABSTRACT

Kenya's 2017 competency-based curriculum, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF), seeks to address the skills gap in the education system and make the curriculum relevant to learners. Using Soka education as the philosophical framework, we provide a comprehensive review of BECF. The analysis in this essay covers the noteworthy provisions, double-edge policies, inconsistencies, issues of concern, and potential hurdles to implementation. It argues that the curriculum is not likely to produce the intended outcome due to inherent contradictions in the framework and the lack of an effective implementation plan. While BECF provides a broad and ambitious roadmap for the transformation of the Kenyan education system, actualizing the bold vision of BECF will require an extensive overhaul of the education system, a herculean task.

Keywords: Basic Education**,** Curriculum Review, Quality Learning, Soka education, School Reform

INTRODUCTION

Kenya has gone through many changes over the last decade, starting with the adoption of a new constitution in 2010. These changes cut across different sectors, including education. Kenya's new competency-based curriculum, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF), adopted by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) in 2017, is another example. BECF seeks to cultivate every learner's potential for them to become engaged, empowered, and ethical citizens (KICD, 2017). It has been nearly three years since KICD launched BECF, but it has not lived up to the hype thus far. The implementation is mired in many controversies, which threatens to doom it. There are many debates over what the curriculum entails, its feasibility, lack of pedagogical prescription, unsuitability for Kenya, potential negative impact on teachers, and commitment to implementation (Kajilwa & Chepkwony, 2018). The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) had planned on commencing implementation in January 2019, but the Minister of Education announced on 10 December 2018 that she was suspending the implementation to allow for further consultations; in a dramatic twist, she reversed her earlier decision eleven days later, which paved the way for her staff to start implementing the new curriculum as initially scheduled (Kajilwa & Chepkwony, 2018). The action of the minister reflects the level of uncertainty and bewilderment among the population.

This article contributes to the ongoing discussion about the competency-based curriculum by comprehensively assessing the curriculum and evaluating its feasibility against the backdrop of prevailing conditions in the Kenyan education system. It argues that the curriculum is not likely to produce the intended outcome due to inherent contradictions in the framework and the lack of an effective implementation plan. The curriculum provides clear, farsighted vision for Kenya that is vastly different from the status quo, but framers offer little guidance on how other stakeholders can contribute to its successful implementation. This essay offers some ideas to help improve the implementation of the curriculum while advocating for substantive changes to the curriculum's content.

We divide the paper into five parts. Part I narrates the history of curriculum reform in Kenya, starting from post-independence reforms to the present. Part II introduces the philosophical framework that informs the analysis in this paper. The essay uses Soka education philosophical lens. Part III delves into the curriculum, highlighting its noteworthy provisions, double-edge policies, issues of concern, and internal inconsistencies. Part IV focuses on potential hurdles to implementation. Part V summarizes the discussion and offers suggestions for solving some of the problems highlighted in the paper.

HISTORY OF CURRICULUM REFORM IN KENYA

A curriculum is more than a collection of ideas about how to structure an education system and the sequencing of subjects. It is a document that reflects the current situation of a nation-state and embodies the collective aspirations of the people of that nation-state. It offers a clue into their hopes and vision for the future. A curriculum is a blueprint of how the architects understand the needs of their society and what they deem as sustainable, long-term solutions to fulfilling those needs. The history of curriculum development in Kenya in the post-colonial era tells a story of a nation that wants to become an industrialized nation, whose highly trained ethical or morally virtuous workforce would make it competitive internationally.

The reports from all the successive commissions, committees, working groups, and taskforces, since independence, bare testimony to this aspiration (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012). The Ominde committee, for example, came up with eight national goals on which independent Kenya should build its education system in 1964 (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012). The goals include fostering national unity, promoting socio-economic, and expanding technological and industrial innovations for the country's development (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012). The Mackay report of 1984 adopted all the eight goals (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012). Similarly, the Koech Report published in the year 2000, Sessional Paper number one written by the National Education Conference in 2005, Kenya Vision 2030 launched in 2007, the Kamunge Report published in 2008, and the new Kenyan constitution adopted in 2010 embraced most, if not all, of the eight original goals adopted by the Ominde Committee. Like any other curriculum before it, BECF embraces these goals; it seeks to educate students to compete in an industrialized nation and attain a high quality of life (KICD, 2017).

The question is: why has the Kenyan education system failed to achieve these goals despite the overwhelming support since 1964? What would be different this time? While there are many explanations for the failure, the two dominant positions either blame colonialism or post-colonial elites. According to Court and Ghai (1974), a possible reason for the failure is that the Kenyan authorities have not structurally reformed the colonial education system they inherited. Put differently, since independence, Kenyan educational authorities find it challenging to accomplish goals they set for themselves because colonial structures and practices continue to forestall ongoing efforts aimed at making the education system serve the needs of Kenyans.

Eshiwani (1990), however, disagrees. According to Eshiwani (1990), the Government of Kenya succeeded in expanding education dramatically between the 1970s and 1990s because the government extensively restructured the education system, and significantly revised the curriculum to place more emphasis on the technical and vocational skills that were in high demand. Kenyans have made significant changes to the education system; therefore, the education policymakers need to accept the blame for inadequacies of the system, he argues. The reason for the apparent failure of the system to achieve the eight goals outlined in the Ominde committee is due to several factors including the role examinations play within the system, poor internal efficiency, insufficient resources due to poor economic conditions, and continued problems with curriculum relevance (Eshiwani, 1990).

It appears the two dominant arguments are looking at the same issue from different dimensions. While an in-depth analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, we think the two sides make sense. One need not be wrong for the other to be right. Eshiwani is correct for stating that the government restructured the overall education system and needs to accept responsibility for its failings. But it is also possible that the reforms did not change educational outcomes because what replaced the colonial system was not radical enough to change the deeply embedded aspects of the colonial system, people's attitudes and mindsets. That is, it did not lead to a socio-cultural change in the education system (Court and Ghai, 1974). In effect, there are problems within the current education systems that are hold-over from the colonial era, and there are problems that the post-colonial elites have created.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's approach to education, Soka education, as its philosophical framework. This philosophy inspires the three questions that guided the analysis in this essay. The three questions are: How will an idea, concept, or activity contribute to the lifelong happiness of a learner? How does it connect with other ideas, concepts, or activities in the curriculum, and how far does it alter the existing educational practices or status quo? What kind of education system would emerge should all these ideas work as intended and unintended?

Like John Dewey and other progressive educators of his days, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a 20th-century Japanese educator, emphasized the importance of growth in his educational approach. He embodied the spirit of caring for each student's wellbeing (Makiguchi, 2002). Makiguchi developed his philosophy of value-creating (Soka) education by adopting a reflexive

approach to his work, a method of inquiry which is now known as action-based research. He advocated for a complete overhaul of the Japanese education system of his days because he wanted education systems to focus on learners' lifelong happiness, instead of national goals (Bethel, 1994; Heffron 2018). From Makiguchi's perspective, education needs to help learners develop and polish their lives for the sake of living happy and fulfilling lives, regardless of their material and physical circumstances. Based on his broad conceptualization of education, Makiguchi encouraged educators to awaken in learners the desire to become better human beings since it is only through cultivating their character that they will be able to attain inner fulfillment or absolute happiness (See Bethel, 1994). The role of education is to help learners cultivate their humanity and willingness to create value out of every circumstance.

The concept of value creation is different from the idea of extracting value or simply having values. Makiguchi is not advocating for students to develop particular values, like honesty, respect, and hard work.[1] By value-creation, he means making a conscious decision to find meaning and purpose in every situation and using the meaning to improve the living condition of oneself and others. Makiguchi wants everyone to develop the ability to transform whatever is going on in their life into hope-filled situations from which the elements of beauty, gain, and good will manifest. Beauty means turning the situation into an aesthetically pleasing sight; good means ensuring that one's action benefits all members of society and not just oneself. Gain refers to the benefit that the action taker derives from that action. The concept of value-creation depends on the effort that a decision-maker invests in making themselves and others happy. Put simply, a large part of the value-creating process hinges on understanding how the victory of others serves the ultimate interest of the decision-maker. However, it is not a naïve quest to ignore or subjugate the personal benefit of the decision-makers but rather an attempt to help learners transform themselves from the state of unconscious living, characterized by an egoistic pursuit of self-actualization, into people who are conscious of how others support and contribute to their existence and happiness.

ASSESSING BECF

BECF provides a unique and expansive interpretation of Kenya's Vision 2030 strategic plan and the 2010 constitution. In the BECF, stakeholders will find a document that tries to stay faithful to the guidelines

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[1] We relied heavily on the work of Bethel (1994) in writing this paragraph.

in Kenya's 2015 Seasonal Papers and all other recommendations, like those in the Odhiambo Committee Report. By remaining loyal to the initial reports and other documents, like the 2010 Constitution and the EAC Harmonized Curriculum, the writers of BECF allow for some continuity within the education system, instead of completely overhauling it. Yet, BECF is groundbreaking in several ways. Despite its many transformative provisions, the curriculum has problems that are both endogenous and exogenous. This section provides examples of some of the noteworthy initiatives, double-edged policies, issues of concern, and contradictions in the curriculum.

Noteworthy Provisions in the BECF

The policies on special education make BECF unique. The new curriculum takes a comprehensive approach to issues of inclusion. It allows teachers to adapt the curriculum to make it easily accessible to learners with special needs. BECF calls for the integration of special needs students into the general school population. It expects teachers to create Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for every student with a disability. Tailoring the curriculum and lesson plan to individual learners' needs has proven to be one of the most effective means of educating people with disabilities (See Graham, Harris, and Larsen, 2001; Subban, 2006). BECF's special education requirements go beyond the classroom to specify that the national examination authorities must accommodate the needs of examinees with disabilities. Another vital provision that can quickly be forgotten or glossed over is the guideline that encourages schools and school districts to provide services that would lead to early identification and prompt intervention for students with special educational needs.

While these policies are not particularly groundbreaking since Kenya from 1984 has been implementing policies aimed at educating students with special needs at the primary level (Muli, 2015), they are noteworthy because they now extend to secondary schools. Special needs students, according to Muli (2015), face significant hurdles in either accessing secondary schools or completing the curriculum if they succeed in enrolling in one. BECF also stands out because it extends useful special needs educational practices, like differentiated learning to the general population. Differentiated learning is an approach to teaching where teachers develop an in-depth knowledge of each student's learning needs and plan their lessons accordingly. Although many educators understand the need for differentiated learning, it is not widely used in classrooms worldwide (Subban, 2006). By highlighting and encouraging teachers and administrators to adopt differentiated learning principles in their classes and schools, KICD has shown leadership by embracing the idea that

presenting information to students in multiple sensory modes support learning (Howard-Jones, 2014). With this simple yet courageous act, KICD has ushered in a new age of education on the African continent. Additionally, integrating the needs of students with special needs into the main structure of primary education instead of treating it as an afterthought, positions Kenya as the leader on issues related to equity and social justice for children with special needs on the African continent.

Another strength of the curriculum is that it intends to educate students on a broad range of topics that teachers would not assess directly. The curriculum commits to educating students on what it called "Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCI) facing societies" (KICD, 2017, p. 110). The issues are on a broad range of topics, including global citizenship, peace, human rights, environmental problems, sustainable development, community-service learning, morals, and security. Although KICD is yet to develop the matrices for teaching the PCI, BECF encourages teachers to mainstream the PCI into the various subjects. Furthermore, BECF asks educators to use the 'hidden curriculum' (lessons which students learn from schools but not taught directly) and unstructured activities to facilitate the acquisition of the core competencies and values.

Furthermore, the curriculum is distinct for openly acknowledging the need for Kenyans to adopt new sets of values. The values people choose to live by determines their life choices and allows them to express, through those choices, what is important to them (Chippendale and Colins, 1995). BECF indicates that the vital need for education in Kenya is to teach students the national values and foster in learners the desire to live by these values (we will discuss this issue further in later parts of the paper). KICD's willingness to be upfront about their attempt to create the space for students to learn the values enshrined in Kenya's constitution, openly and honestly, sends a positive signal that they are interested in using the curriculum to transform the way people live. According to KICD (2017), the new curriculum intends to achieve its goal by not relying solely on classroom instruction but also through changing the school culture, extra-curricular activities, and club activities. We agree that using the hidden curriculum would provide students with multiple opportunities to learn about the national values experientially, which would reinforce their theoretical understanding of these values.

Another important strength of the curriculum is that it clearly defines terms and provides many examples to guide readers. Essential parts of the curriculum are clearly outlined, and the authors did well to provide operational definitions for most of the technical terms and, in some cases, the rationale for adopting them. The operational definition of the terms and goals

would make it easier to monitor, evaluate, and measure the curriculum's impact.

Additionally, the curriculum introduces new support services to aid student learning and growth. For instance, BECF requires schools to provide learner support services or programs such as career counseling, guidance and counseling services, and mentorship programs. Making these services readily available to students would improve the quality of education significantly.

In summary, BECF has some groundbreaking provisions, like mandating differentiated learning across the whole curriculum and requiring IDP for all students with disabilities from preschool to secondary school. The next section will focus on policies that are simultaneously good and bad; these policies could be helpful to some students and produce catastrophic outcomes for others. The impact of these policies is contingent on many other factors, making it challenging to prejudge their effects.

Double-edged Policies

The title of the section, double-edged policies, implies that the policies could simultaneously produce positive and negative outcomes. Like swords with double edges, the authorities need to carefully implement these policies since they could simultaneously produce both positive and negative effects. BECF has many double-edged policies, like the course offerings, assessment, and emphasis on religious education. While these policies are clearly needed, and the rationale for including them in the new BECF cannot be easily dismissed, they can wreak serious havoc in their current form. In the case of assessment, the curriculum calls for the use of assessment for learning (formative assessment) and assessment of learning (summative assessment). Although it is a good idea that the architects of the BECF explicitly encouraged teachers to stop depending solely on summative assessment, the curriculum in its current form did not put in place any mechanisms or incentives to get examiners and teachers to shift their dependence on summative assessment to formative assessment. BECF prefers competency-based formative assessment. A competency-based assessment helps educators determine whether students can apply what they learn to real-world situations based on some pre-set criteria or benchmarks rather than comparing students to how well they did in relation to their peers. When implemented correctly, educators can get a good idea of what each student knows and what they need to work on to master particular skills. The downside of this policy is that if it is co-opted into the external examination council's existing structures, teachers would be burden with too much paperwork, which will distract them

from teaching, fostering a mentoring relationship with students, and doing the real work of getting to know each student individually.

After spending so many years perfecting their summative assessment tools, the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) might find it challenging to transition to a competency-based evaluation system quickly. For KNEC to reduce or eliminate their use of summative assessment techniques, they will need to overhaul their operation completely by developing new sets of services and competencies. The examination culture in the country will also need to change. Currently, examinations serve as a tool for identifying learners who are suitable for further studies, training, and the job market (EAC, 2014) and this will not change in the grand scheme of things; therefore, changing the way teachers assess students in the classroom alone might not reduce examination malpractices significantly. The educational authorities must commission a study into the relationship between the use of examination as a sorting mechanism and social problems, such as examination malpractices and low test scores.

The next double-edged policy that deserves further consideration is the new structure and orientation of basic educations. Although not as radical as some might want it, BECF presents a new understanding of basic education, and if implemented faithfully, it could challenge the current understanding of what secondary schools ought to be in many ways. The structure of education under BECF, especially at the senior secondary school level, mimics that of a college rather than a traditional understanding of grade school. The curriculum has gotten rid of core subjects like English, Kiswahili, Integrated Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies at the senior secondary school level. In their place, students will now take introductory-level career-oriented subjects. The implicit assumption is that students will be well equipped with basic knowledge in these core subjects and develop sufficient self-knowledge to choose a career path by the time they turn 14 or 15 years of age. Another assumption is that students will be highly skilled in their chosen profession if they start learning a trade at a young age (the problems with this reform will be discussed in the next section). These subtle changes are reasonable first steps, but their impact would depend on how they are implemented.

Another example of a double-edged policy enshrined in BECF is the emphasis on religious education. Basing their argument on the findings of Persell (1990), the architects of the new curriculum argued that there is a critical need for Religious and Moral Education. Apart from political and economic problems, KICD deems moral and ethical problems as the most critical issue facing Kenya today. According to KICD, many Kenyan youths

do not have the "desired values, positive attitudes and psychosocial competencies needed to function as responsible citizens" (KICD, 2017, p. 14). It further argues that "there is a noticeable values [sic] and behavioral crisis among the general population" (2017, p. 14). To address the moral and ethical crisis, BECF mandates the study of Christian, Islam, and Hindu religions from pre-school to lower secondary school, Grade nine.

KICD (2017) makes a compelling case for the need for new ethics and modes of living, but it is not clear if the proposed solution, religious education, is what Kenya needs. Available data indicate that the lack of religious education may not be the reason why a moral and ethical crisis exists in Kenya. Students in Kenya perform incredibly well on national tests in Religious and Moral Education than any other subjects. Analysis of Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination reports indicates that Kenyan students perform exceptionally well in religious education, compared to other subjects (MEST, 2015a). More than sixty percent of candidates pass the KCPE religious education examination annually; in 2012, 75.75 percent of candidates passed while the percentage pass for the second-best performing subject, science, was 62.76 percent (MEST, 2015a). The test score demonstrates that most students know more about religions and morals than other subjects. Hence, continuing to teach them religions and morals alone would not be enough. From every indication, Kenya's essential need is to imbibe in citizens the desire to live virtuous and trustworthy lives. Nonetheless, theoretical knowledge might not be enough. What appears to be needed is an inner transformation of each student. Schools must create the opportunity for students to train their instincts to become virtuous; adults, on the other hand, need to be good models. Other possible solutions exist, such as creating programs for both youths and adults to learn and dialogue about life and the national values. Schools can offer classes on different philosophies of life, civic values, and principles. The authorities ought to find ways to introduce interventions to ensure that the BECF would not reproduce the same social structures that support the purported morally bankrupt and value-less behaviors prevalent among the general population. In its current form, BECF may not be able to change the status quo.

Some Issues of Concern

Although BECF has many things to celebrate, some parts could potentially cause unintended severe harm. In this regard, the primary culprit is the non-traditional aspects of the curriculum; ironically, it is its most appealing aspect. BECF is non-traditional because it saddles the traditional and progressive/constructivist understanding of education. BECF is a

beautiful collage of ideas. It brings together great concepts and theories, but therein lies the danger. Unless the implementation team does an excellent job of taking the views and develop them into a coherent system, some stakeholders may discard some of the vital aspects of the curriculum. To illustrate, the curriculum aims to mainstream pertinent and contemporary issues (PCI) into non-classroom-based school activities but fell short in articulating a vision for how vital the six PCI is to the success of the curriculum. If the learner support programs, for instance, are not well implemented, the curriculum would not bring about the desired societal changes. Specifically, it's hard to envision how students would be able to develop the skills to know the kinds of careers that would suit them by the age of 14 and 15 without the support of school resource persons. Currently, many schools in Kenya do not have well-functioning student support services. The educational authorities need to develop the infrastructure for implementing learner support programs and hire well-trained resources persons for each school. Without these resources, children from less-resourced families would find it challenging to make informed career choices at secondary school.

Another issue of concern is the emphasis on the connection between education and the labor market. Although the stated purpose of education is to enable "every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered, and ethical citizen" (KICD, 2017, p 10), there is a high possibility that BECF might not succeed in this regard. BECF may be unable to nurture "independent, confident, cooperative, and inspired learners who love learning and are keen, focused and able to apply their knowledge in order to make constructive contributions as productive responsible citizens" (KICD, 2017, p 10) because the framework places too much emphasis on the needs of the labor market to the detriment of other aspects of life. One clear manifestation of this thinking is the decision to have students choose career pathways at the age of 14 or 15. Without the necessary supporting systems, the education system might end up tracking students from low-income backgrounds into low earning careers and thereby continue to reproduce social inequalities. More so, at the age of 14 or 15, most students are too young to be sure of what they want to do.

Furthermore, it is doubtful that schools, in their current form, can help students acquire sufficient verbal and writing skills by the time they finish Junior Secondary. According to MEST (2015b), Kenya's performance on the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) III assessment indicates that

> Forty percent of Standard 6 students cannot interpret
> information included in various part of a given text in

association with external information, while only 6.4% are proficient in critical reading, i.e. can read from various parts of a given text and evaluate and make inference about the author's message. And 70% of those students are not numeracy competent, i.e. cannot translate verbal, graphic, or tabular information into an arithmetic form in order to solve a problem (p. 14).

The SACMEQ-III report demonstrates that more than half of students in grade 6 do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills. It shows that existing foundations are weak, meaning that there is a vast gap between students' current performance and expected performance. While it is good to have lofty expectations for students, it is vital to make sure those expectations do not impose new impediments on their growth. BECF, in its present form, will handicap students who are late bloomers academically. It would also hinder students' ability to develop an in-depth understanding of these core subjects since they would spend less time learning them.

Had the curriculum developers chosen not to 'place great emphasis' on skills and competencies related to the economy, their final product would have been more radical than the current version of the new BECF. The senior secondary school curriculum might look like the first year of college, just that it would be spread across three years instead of one year. Students would get liberal arts education that would require them to take multiple introductory-level courses, which would expose them to different fields of studies and career paths. For instance, after taking an introductory commercial farming course, a student could develop an appreciation for people in that profession even if they do not become farmers themselves. Just like college, students would have the free will to explore multiple fields that interest them. Such an alternative outcome for BCEF would help students expand their knowledge base and develop an appreciation for people from different ways of being. Through their studies, they would learn about multiple career paths without being pushed by parents, elders, teachers, and counselors into careers they might hate later. It would also break the circle of social reproduction since adults would no longer be able to unnecessarily track students from marginalized communities and low socio-economic backgrounds into low-wage industries.

Further, BECF does not adequately address issues related to school climate. Providing a vibrant, inclusive learning environment for students, in the case of Kenya, calls for educators to transform the existing education culture and climate that is rife with cheating, bullying, and other malpractices (Kirimi, 2016). It would require replacing a culture in which teachers do not

listen to students' needs (Gitome, Katola, and Nyabwari, 2013) with a culture of care where everybody, including students, would be actively involved in caring for one another. According to Gitome et al. (2013), disruptive indiscipline is one of the important causes of low performance on KCSE. The finding of Gitome et al. (2013) suggest that there is a need for a major transformation in the education culture; hence, BECF should have offered more guidance on how schools can transform their school's climate. BECF acknowledges the influence of Vygotsky's Social Cultural Development theory, which could help educators transform their school climate. But it fails to apply Vygotsky's theory rigorously. To illustrate, the curriculum does not provide a robust plan for improving the interaction between children and adults in the educational environment. Without creating the enabling school climate for the application of some of the concepts, the good ideas in the curriculum will remain just that – ideas.

Notable contradictions within BECF

BECF has some notable inconsistencies that deserve attention. One good example of this is the discourse on values and morals. The curriculum ascribes to the idea of a pluralistic and secular Kenya yet adopts a definition of religious education that legitimizes the hegemony of some religions over others. BECF mandates the study of Christian, Islam, and Hindu religions from pre-school to lower secondary school grade 9, meaning students will study, in a structured environment, three religions out of hundreds of religions for at least nine years of their life. There is no mention of African Traditional Religion nor other religions such as Sikhs, Parsees, Buddhism, Bahais, et cetera that are also practiced in Kenya. This situation raises some critical questions such as: are the students supposed to know what these religions teach, as is currently the case in most Kenyan classrooms, or are they expected to understand the national values from the perspective of different religious traditions and philosophies? What is the purpose of religious education activities in the curriculum? Is it to make students religious or help them understand and respect the wisdom in these various religions? Does a nation-state need religion to create a moral society?

The inconsistency between the curriculum's stated goal of building inclusive, multidisciplinary schools, and the decision to have schools offer only certain tracks or pathways is another example. For instance, only 25% of all senior schools will offer courses in the Career and Technology Studies pathway, while just 15% of secondary schools will offer the Technical and Engineering (KICD, 2017). This situation raises many concerns. How will the implementing committee decide the pathways that each school will offer? Are

there any provisions to ensure that secondary schools in rural and underserved communities can provide courses in a wide variety of career tracks? How easy will it be for children from a rural county to enroll in secondary schools that offer their desired pathway in another county if no secondary school close to that child offers that program? KICD needs to clarify some of these issues and develop a plan to ensure an equitable distribution of opportunities so that all children will have a fair chance of becoming whatever they seek to become. By aligning the curriculum's intent with the curriculum's specific provisions, the curriculum developers will increase the curriculum's odds of inspiring real change.

Potential Hurdles to Implementation

This essay started by acknowledging the challenges the Kenyan authorities are dealing with when it comes to implementing BECF. The ongoing implementation challenges bear testimony to the curriculum's ambitions, and it offers a glimpse into how difficult it is to translate sound visionary policies and curriculums into action (Ogar and Opoh, 2015). Since BECF is calling for major changes, educational leaders need to develop a multi-dimensional and multi-year implementation plan if they are going to succeed at implementing it. A study carried out by KICD in 2009 provides valuable insights into some of the reasons why previous curriculum reform efforts failed (MEST, 2015b). Some of the challenges identified include issues with the implementers' capacity, the assessment and management structures that do not support curriculum implementation, lack of resources, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, socioeconomic challenges, and the like (Ziganyu, 2010; MEST, 2015b). Most, if not all, the problems remain unresolved and would serve as a barrier to implementation.

Nonetheless, BECF will generate its own opposition and unique implementation challenges. One of the potential hurdles to implementation would be the gap between reality and the vision of BECF. The curriculum is ambitious and adopts a different understanding of education compared to the status quo. Transforming the education sector to conform to BECF's definition of education requires a complete transformation of the education system. To illustrate, BECF calls for differentiated learning. The discourse in many Kenyan classrooms leans toward teacher-centered teaching pedagogies that focus on recitation, rote memorization, and repetition instead of understanding (Pontefract and Hardman, 2005; Westbrook, 2013). Contrary to the dominant discourse in many Kenyan classrooms, which are teacher-led recitations, differentiated learning is a learner-centered approach to teaching, which requires teachers to be well versed in multiple dialogic pedagogies.

Educational authorities will need to retrain current teachers and retool all teacher training institutions in the country. Also, for teachers to differentiate their lesson plan so that all students can get something out of school, it would be ideal for them to have adequate space and resources, small class sizes, and autonomy. Unfortunately, Kenya does not currently have such ideal conditions (Nganga & Kambutu, 2017). The average national student to teacher ratio for grade 1 in 2015 was 44, which is a significant improvement from 2005 when it was 82 (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer 2015). These examples illustrate why the BECF implementation committee need to be creative, proactive, and resourceful when implementing the curriculum.

Stakeholder buy-in is going to continue to be a big stumbling block. BECF, in its current state, can improve educational outcomes to some extent if all stakeholders support its implementation. Unlike a building that can be demolished and rebuild, it requires a lot of compromise and strategic efforts to transform an education system. Restructuring the education system will affect people and power relations. The successful implementation of the curriculum would require anticipating the impacts and developing a plan to prevent or resolve the concerns of stakeholders. Creating an implementation plan with its various matrices would be helpful in this case.

Furthermore, KICD might want to spend more time discussing with all stakeholders the vision enshrined in the new BECF for them to understand and develop a mental image of what they will be building together with KICD. Without a shared vision, some of these stakeholders may unintentionally do things to hamper the curriculum's smooth implementation. In this case, getting the most robust buy-in of all stakeholders could mean getting them to one, accept that they would need to develop a collective approach to sharing the pain that would result from BECF; two, change their way of thinking and way of doing things; and three, be willing to accept a high level of uncertainty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper provides a comprehensive review of Kenya's 2017 basic education curriculum framework. It highlights some of its notable points, inconsistencies, potentially harmful policies, and some of the challenges to implementation. It concludes that while BECF has progressive policies that are visionary, it might not yield the intended outcomes unless the authorities change some of the policies and implementation strategies.

KICD can avoid some of the implementation challenges by being creative in their approach. To demonstrate, the implementation plan of KICD can focus on operationalizing other critical aspects of the curriculum, like scaffolding elements of competency-based assessment, mainstreaming

Pertinent and Contemporary Issues and the like, before switching to the new course and organizational structure. This approach will ensure that teachers, staff, administrators, and the implementation team will have adequate time to develop the physical, environmental, cultural, and sociopsychological conditions that can sustain the new system. Also, starting from the subtlest elements in the curriculum would ease people into the process. Implementing the most visible aspects of the curriculum, on the other hand, will likely trigger people's defense mechanism and their aversion to change; and thereby, causing them to become entrenched in their position or unintentionally sabotage the implementation process.

Although the Odhiambo Taskforce proposed multiple tracks as a way of aligning students' education with the human resources aspirations of Kenya's Vision 2030 plan (MEST, 2012), their solution does not sufficiently address all the problems of the old curriculum. For instance, creating multiple tracks will not be enough to address the Economic Survey's findings that students are dropping out because the secondary education curriculum is rigid (KICD, 2017). We operationalize 'rigid' to mean it does not offer options and the ability to change course midway. By linking secondary education to a future career, BECF creates a new system that would be more rigid than the curriculum it is replacing. BECF, with its pathway component in senior secondary school, has the potential to lead to a new kind of tracking, which would make it more challenging and costlier for a student to alter their career trajectory after they get tracked into one of the careers paths available. We want to suggest that the Curriculum Review Committee take their idea a little further by making the senior secondary school curriculum a liberal studies curriculum.

Additionally, the Odhiambo committee's recommendation to create multiple tracks might only help students who have resources, financial and human, which puts them in the position to make informed career decisions in their early teens (MEST, 2012). The authorities ought to ensure that concepts such as equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency are reflected in every decision to foster the kind of students the Odhiambo committee envisions. Hence, any policy option with a higher propensity to discriminate against vulnerable population deserves to be re-assessed. In this case, the pathway curriculum, in its current state, can hurt students from indigenous, minority, and low-income communities the most.

However, providing a multidisciplinary training to all students in Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and the Arts would make students more competitive in the job market and, most importantly, expose them to multiple ways of seeing and thinking about the world. A child who

wants to be a doctor but realized after enrolling in courses related to that career path that it does not suit their way of life would not need to switch their pathway, assuming KICD decides to adopt our recommendation. Such a student would not lose their credits and can easily take more courses in other subject areas even if their new interest is in the theater arts. Developing a broad range of knowledge will also uniquely prepare students to benefit from post-secondary education, be it at trade school or university.

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PRINCE PAA-KWESI HETO is the President and CEO of INDIE Education Initiative**.** His major research area includes governance, international cooperation, trade, peacebuilding, development policy, education, poverty eradication, gender mainstreaming, youth empowerment. Email: prince@indie-edu.org.

MASUMI H. ODARI, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, Kenya. Her major research interests lie in the area of Soka education, African literature, intercultural exchange programs, and social justice. Email: modari@uonbi.ac.ke.

WYSE KOKU SUNU, MBA, is the Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of INDIE Education Initiative. His major research interests lie in the area of auditing, financial accounting, indigenous and folk education, human capital development, and rural and community development. Email: wyse@indie-edu.org.