Kenya’s Education System: History Of University Education

Education plays a key role in the transformation of societies including poverty reduction, human development, enhancing job prospects for individuals and the socio-economic development of nations. The education system ought to be designed in a way that it focusses on inculcating not only knowledge but also values that can help the learners to participate in building the nation and not just being exam oriented leaving the learners enslaved in theoretical work which only involves cramming the contents with sole purpose of passing examinations.

Kenya’s education system has undergone a drastic evolution from the colonial rule era right through the independence and post-independence period. The colonial era was marked by a period where the education system was very discriminatory by being classified as either European or African system of education. The colonial administration, most of whom were mostly missionaries, only wanted locals to be trained on basic simple skills like working as carpenters, farm attendants, wood carvers, messengers and house maids. The informal skills acquired were meant to enable the locals to provide cheap and readily available labor force to the colonial masters (Gachathi, 1976). Under this system of education, the main aim was basically to have a semi-skilled labor force who could serve the colonial masters by working informally as either security guards, grounds men, cooks or messengers.

Upon attainment of independence in 1963, a shift in the education system was witnessed. The 7-4-2-3 education system which comprised of seven years of primary education, four years of secondary education, two years of high school and three years of university education was introduced as the country marked the end of the colonial rule. Its main aim was to foster African Socialism and national unity (Ominde Report, 1964). It was anticipated that the learners would be equipped with skills to enable them be competitive as well as get employed into jobs that were previously preserved for the colonial masters. The President, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta issued a presidential decree to abolish primary school tuition fees particularly for the learning institutions located in the arid and semi-arid areas. This is because they were lagging behind in providing education to the locals during the colonial days. This directive sought to ensure that there were equal opportunities for all children to access education. The president’s decision was guided by the need to use education as a tool to eradicate poverty, diseases and ignorance in the country.

In 1985, the 8-4-4 system of education was introduced. This system included eight years of primary education, four years of secondary school education and four years of university education was introduced to address concerns that the basic education previously provided lacked the necessary content to promote sustainable self-employment among the graduates (King & McGrath, 2002). The system major setback was that it was mostly exam-oriented with a lot of emphasis and focus on the learners passing the examination. No interventions were put in place to tap into to enhancement or nurturing of the learners’ skills! Upon completion of the studies, most graduates were found to be unmatched to the job market. Under this system of education, numerous concerns were raised on the system producing half-baked graduates who were unproductive in the job market. The system was found to be exam oriented with a lot of energy being directed into theory work leaving the learners with little practical skills that can

make them competitive in the labor force.

Further, there was lack of emphasis on the identification of the learners' strengths and talents which ought to have been nurtured to enable them fit perfectly into the market upon completion of studies (Wanjohi, 2011). This resulted in massive unemployment rate among the youthful generation despite the mushrooming of institutions of higher learning. The 8-4-4 system was more of an academic slavery to the learners as since it focused on having the learners acquire good grades at the expense of molding an individual into an all-round citizen flexible enough to fit into the society. The worst case scenario is where some graduates despite having passed with distinction, they could not secure job either due to the irrelevance of the courses to the market or low quality of the courses undertaken. Frustrated graduates, with no job or skills to get into self-employment, ended up downing their certirtificates and settling for odd jobs that came their way. An example is an Actuarial Science graduate from Nairobi University who resorted into working as a tout in the transport industry within the city to make ends meet!

As an intervention to address the above-mentioned challenges which emerged from the 8-4-4 system, the Ministry of Education in 2018 saw the need to introduce the 2-6-3-3-3 system of education popularly known as the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). The system comprises two years of pre-primary education, six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education and three years of university. This education system emphasizes on competency development rather than acquisition of content knowledge (Sifuna, 2019). The skills acquired by the learners are geared towards enhancing their ability to solve real-life problems by being creative and critical thinkers. Identification and nurturing of talents from learners is emphasized under the competency-based curriculum so that the learners grow to be all-round individuals who can fit perfectly in the job market.

With the rolling out of the competency-based curriculum in the learning institutions, there is hope that the education system will be revolutionized by creating a paradigm shift from enslaving the learners into exam oriented curriculum to one that seeks to empower them with relevant skills that nurtures their interests and abilities as well as preparing them to be ready for employment in future. The new curriculum is also designed to meet the national goals of education among them promoting national unity, fostering learner's individual development, self-esteem and ethical values that are key in shaping the nation. The CBC is anchored on seven pillars that are key to ensuring the learners come out of the learning institution being well prepared to fit into the society and flexible enough to take part in nation-building. The pillars include: enabling the learners to be critical thinkers and have problem-solving skills, have digital literacy which will enable them to be innovative and creative, be citizens of high integrity and uphold good moral values, have confidence which is key to enable them to be effective in their work and build on their communication and collaboration to enable them interact in a respectful manner not only with their peers but also with the leaders and society members at large.

By equipping the learners with relevant skills as well as nurturing their God-given talents, the learners will have an opportunity to be competitive in the job market where they no longer have to rely on white-collar jobs but are able to get into self-employment. The current education system will be instrumental in addressing the problem of unemployment which has been rampant in the nation. With the advent of the competency-based curriculum, the learners will not be enslaved into the theory work but will be practical-based where learners have the freedom to explore and nurture their talents. This will enable the learners to be flexible enough to fit into the

labor market.

The competency-based curriculum is learner-centred and adaptive to the changing needs of society (Sifuna, 2019). By developing the learners' problem-solving skills, they will emerge to be critical thinkers in decision making not only at the individual level but also in the community they live in as well as in nation-building initiatives. This will shape their thoughts and enable them to be better leaders and citizens who can make rational decisions critical for the nation's development. As knowledgeable citizens, they will be in a position to put to task the policymakers by ensuring they are accountable to the electorates in line with their mandate and power bestowed on them. The knowledge acquired if applied appropriately, will play an immense role towards realization of the country's development agenda including the Vision 2030.

With the above merits of the competency-based curriculum that was recently rolled out in the country's education system, we are optimistic that it will help the learners to become self-independent by developing skills that can help them become better citizens and leaders. In comparison to the education system that existed during the colonial era and just after independence, it is clear that the competency-based curriculum has been designed with the aim of emphasizing on the significance of developing skills and knowledge as well as applying the competencies to real life situations as opposed to brainwashing the students! Proper implementation of the CBC with adequate monitoring and evaluation structures to assess progress among the leaners will be vital in ensuring the graduates emerging from school are fully baked individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to participate into the development of the nation. CBC is also anticipated to be a game changer in ensuring the learners are not mentally enslaved into just what they learn in the classroom but can think outside the box to analyze and come up with solutions to that can be applied in multiple developmental sectors.