



Application of Pragmatism to Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya: An Analysis of Basic Education Curriculum Framework

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ABSTRACT: Globally the world is experiencing rapid changes economically, socially, with new demands setting in. It is therefore necessary for every country to reform education system to remain relevant and functional. Educational philosophies provide ideas that can be applied to make education instrumental. Pragmatism is one of such philosophy which has been used to advance reforms in education. This paper examines the concept of pragmatism in terms of aims, principles and theoretical bases in guiding curriculum reforms. The need for reforms has also been highlighted. The new education system in Kenya (CBC) has been presented in terms of mission and vision and how it relates to the Kenya blue print for economic development- vision 2030. Theoretical underpinnings for CBC have also been presented. Further the paper has related the principles of pragmatism to the CBC through a critical analysis of the Basic Education Curriculum Framework in Kenya to conceptualize how ideas of the philosophy have been reflected in the new curriculum. The paper concludes that, to make education meaning, prior experiences of learners must be exploited and learner engagement must take precedence in the teaching- learning process to develop them as empowered citizens. The philosophy has been applied to a great extent in the new curriculum. To fully actualized the new curriculum, the paper recommends that more funding be provided initiated from the budget making desk to cater for additional facilities, resources and teacher development.

KEY TERMS: Basic Education Curriculum Framework, Competency Based Curriculum, Community Service Learning, Experiential learning, Pragmatism.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the world is experiencing many dynamics which include; tremendous increase in the amount of knowledge, rapid changes in the labour markets demands, changes in work environment, changes in the structures and types of jobs among others. The twenty-first century education and training institutions are required to continuously upgrade their knowledge and develop a variety of competencies and skills among learners. For learners to function in the contemporary society, education should equip learners with necessary skills and also help them to develop the ability to apply those skills. With too much information available, there is need for learners to understand it and apply it in profitable ways. Skills deemed critical for today's world include Critical thinking, Creativity thinking, Communication and Collaboration commonly known as the 4Cs (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009). The four should be overlaid across all curriculum designs, schemes of work and lesson plans. In addition to the four, programmes should also focus on other skills such as Emotional intelligence (EQ) (McDonald, 2021), Entrepreneurship, Inquiry and Problem Solving (Dewey, 1997) which are key to relationships, successful work and social life. In this respect education and training should aim to empower students with practical skills that will be instrumental in a changing world. Curriculum content should be dynamic and not a replica of what was relevant in the past. Students should be prepared for lifelong- learning strategy as one of the most powerful responses to the changes that life will continue to bring.

CONCEPT OF PRAGMATISM

Pragmatism originates from a Greek word 'Pragma' meaning 'Activity' 'Action' or 'Practice'. The focus of the pragmatist school of thought is 'practicability' or 'utility'. In any encounter, experience is at the center of the inverse with action taking precedence over thought. Accordingly, the yardstick for learning output is experience. True ideas and beliefs are only those that are workable and profitable. As a philosophy, pragmatism is practical and flexible with no absolute standards. According to Durant (1961) pragmatism is the belief that truth is the practicability of ideas. According to the pragmatist, emphasis of education should be on life matters and growth of learners. In this regard, teachers should engage learners in experiences that are applicable in life and encourage them to develop into productive individuals. Knowledge that is emphasized is based on experience and the use of



scientific methods to generate knowledge. To the pragmatist, there is no permanent knowledge or subject. Subjects matter should keep on changing so that we get appropriate subject matter for a given purpose. Taking into account the aspect of change, pragmatist wants to relate what they teach to the surroundings and experiences of individual children. They wish to teach children how to think rather than what to think. Education is considered as life and not a preparation for it therefore, subjects/ learning areas should relate to contemporary problems that learners face in society/schools, that is, education should not be separated from life itself and community above all, education must encourage creativity.

In the 21st Century Kenya has adopted a problem-driven, pragmatic approach to redesigning education and training programmes. Due to its practical and utilitarian nature, pragmatism has significantly impacted on education. According to pragmatism, education should aim to:

- i. Create new values: To the Pragmatists aims of education should not be fixed. Education is regarded a process of remaking, re-organizing ideas, and blending experiences.
- ii. Enable learners to gain experience by engaging them in activities: For learners to generate/create new values, both activity and experience are necessary. To foster creation of new values, education should provide diverse learning activities: physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic.
- iii. Help the learner to develop mechanisms of coping with the self and the society.
- iv. Enable the learner to form a world view that can help him/her deal successfully with different problems in life.
- v. Promote holistic development of learners (physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and aesthetically).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO EDUCATION REFORM

- i. Learning experiences that are relevant and practical.
- ii. Education theory and practice for social function
- iii. The duty of the teacher/ trainer in creating a learning environment where learners will deal with different problems which relate to real life and will be keen to come up with solutions.
- iv. A learning process that provides real life experiences to the learner.
- v. Education practices that embrace constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experiences
- vi. The need to embrace lifelong learning to enhance creation and maintenance of positive attitude to learning to attain personal and professional development.
- vii. Practical education as a means to help individuals develop and enhance problem solving skills which help learners to solve real problems in their own lives and society at large.
- viii. Pedagogical approaches which focus on learning by doing, for example, the project oriented learning, experimentation, experiential learning, and problem solving activities among others. Emphasis should be on individual learners, rather than on not the text book of the teacher/ trainer or the discipline/ learning area. Approaches to the teaching learning process should be flexible and dynamic to suit the interest of the learner: 'to do' and 'to make'.
- ix. Democracy into learning through collaborative projects and activities.
- x. Developing problem solving skills among learners
- xi. Education should have a social function.

COMPETENCY BASED CURRICULUM (CBC)

Globally countries have developed national curriculum frameworks geared towards competency based education to meet local needs of their citizens. Some of the lead countries are Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Norway, and South Africa. Likewise, Kenya has also reformed education to adopt the alternative model of CBC under the 2-6-3-3 system of education to meet changing societal needs as recommended by Rodney in 1994. To replace the old system of education (8-4-4), which was operational for thirty two years, the government of Kenya unveiled the new system of education in 2017. CBC is different from 8-4-4 in that it focuses on performances and competencies which can be observed as opposed to mastery of content and rote learning. Many Kenyans expressed the need to adopt a competency-based approach (CBA) that would advance application of skills as opposed to mere acquisition of knowledge. The need for a curriculum that would empower learners with 21st century skills to help them succeed rather than survive in this era was also expressed. Competency based curriculum (CBC) focuses on unique talents and abilities of



learners as individuals as opposed to entirely focusing on academic work and performance in examinations. The new competency-based curriculum aims to educate, engage, empower, and produce ethical citizens who can contribute to the creation of a socially, economically, and politically stable society.

The mission of the curriculum is 'nurturing every learner's potential' through a strong foundation of knowledge and seven core competencies. CBC aims to help identify special talents and capabilities of learners' so as to nurture them through appropriate teachings and learning activities. The curriculum changes call for a paradigm shift in pedagogy, from conventional teaching methods to learner-centered instruction where teachers guide and facilitate the teaching- learning process. This makes the curriculum extremely learner-centered in tandem with the specific needs of learners depending on their innate abilities and talents (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Learners progress at their own pace regardless of the learning environment. The approach is thus adapted to meet diverse learning abilities and learners' demands thus promoting more efficient student outcomes.

The Competency Based Curriculum report in Kenya presented to the national curriculum steering committee in 2018 notes that the main aim of CBC approach is to develop in learners' skills that will enable them to face challenges of the future and also empower every learner with knowledge and skills in different areas of learning customized to each learner. This approach entail collaborative learning process between the learner and teacher/ trainer where the two jointly pursue answers and solutions to all learning expectations deemed beneficial to humanity (KICD, 2018). To promote learning at each stage, CBC places emphasis on hands-on learning/ learning by doing, practical experimentation, experiential learning and learning through observation. The mission of the curriculum is 'nurturing every learner's potential' through a strong foundation of knowledge and seven core competencies: communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, imagination and creativity, citizenship, learning to learn, self-efficacy and digital literacy. ICT serves as a learning tool in the teaching and learning process and pertinent and contemporary issues (life skills and human sexuality, health promotion issues, learner support programmes, parental empowerment and engagement, socio-economic and environmental issues and, citizenship education) are mainstreamed in all learning areas. The curriculum is expected to equip every learner with knowledge and competencies deemed necessary to attain sustainable development. As part of the new CBC curriculum, learners will participate in a new learning area called Community Service Learning (CSL) where learners will engage in working on real problems to link academic learning with practice. In addition CSL will enhance learners' analytical ability, social skills, ethical responsibility, self-efficacy civic and career development. At the national level, CSL will contribute to Kenya's Vision 2030 which is the blue print for development by linking education with the labour market through partnerships with industry. Moreover, it will develop in learners necessary entrepreneurial skills to help them gain confidence as they pursue their future growth through education and career pathways thus promote economic growth of the country through generation of wealth (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

To provide immediate feedback which is then used to improve learner performance, assessment for learning (AFL) will be executed using various tools such as checklists, rubrics, observation schedule, projects, questionnaires, portfolio, rating scales, and diaries. The main purpose of assessment is confirmation of the ability of learners to demonstrate development of specified competencies in the various sub strands as specified in the learning outcomes. To build a shared cultural mindset of ongoing learning process in CBC, parental involvement is incorporated into learning activities (Republic of Kenya, 2017).

Theoretical Underpinning for CBC

The Basic Education Curriculum Framework is underpinned by several theories:

Visible Learning Theory by Hattie (2012) which postulates that changes in systems of education trigger fundamental changes and reforms in curriculum worldwide. Learners must be equipped with problem solving skill through learning. It is also the duty of education to enable learners to work collaboratively in teams, bring diverse perspectives to their learning, communicate through discussions and take initiatives and build useable skills. Teaching as an activity is considered worth only when it impacts on student learning in terms of changing learners' behaviour or character in accordance with age, ability, and in the desired direction. In visible teaching, learners know what to do and how to do it and the teachers get to know whether or not learning is taking place. To make teaching and learning visible, learning goals should be clearly expressed and challenging to provide direction on the types of engagement between the teacher, the learner and the environment during the in the learning process. Goals in the long run provide the basis for developing criterion referenced assessment as a basis for competency-based curriculum.



Instructional Design Theory- The theory offers a clear guide towards a curriculum that elucidates how to help students learn and develop in the era of globalization. According to Perkins, (1992) instructional design theory offers guidance for fostering cognitive learning in terms of goals, the desired knowledge and expected performance. The theory focuses on the means for attaining specified goals for learning and offers guidelines on methods and experiences to be used in different situations in curriculum implementation in this respect, it is a design-oriented theory. In the designing, values play an important role since they underlie both the goals the curriculum pursues and the methods it offers to attain the goals. The BECF takes cognizance of the place of values as an anchor for the pillars of the curriculum.

Experiential learning theory- by Kolb (1984) - knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. In learning, immediate or concrete experiences provide the basis for observations and reflections leading to assimilation (absorption and translation) and further distillation into abstract concepts leading to production of new implications for action and creation of new experiences..

The whole process of learning combines physiological, mental, emotional stimuli. It is learning that involves making observations and doing things (Hansen, 2000). Experiential learning allows learners to set learning goals, go through the experiences, reflect and transfers newly obtained knowledge to new situations. In this regard the learner is seen as the initiator of learning. Dewey (1897) notes that the business of the teacher is simply to determine through experience how the discipline of life shall come to the child. He believes that education is responsible for providing the learners with the experiences rather than mere information.

Transformative learning theory (by Jack Mezirow) - whose focus is on creating meaning out of knowledge and experiences as they go through life. Transformational learning also emphasizes the idea that learning is not cumulative, it is interactive (Learning is a constant process of revision in the face of new knowledge and experience). Transformational learning theory goes beyond memorization to emphasize, contextual understanding, initial reflections and assessment of reason (Wallace and Clark, 2014).

Information processing theory - The theory stresses that a child's brain has internal structures that select and process in coming materials, store and retrieve it, use it to produce behaviour and process feedback on the results. The theory also states that much learning involves association established through contiguity (closeness) and repetition and also recognizes the importance of reinforcement in providing feedback.

Holistic learning theory/ global learning- This is learning style that advocates engagement of all aspects of the learner; -mind, body and spirit in learning experiences for effective learning to take place.

Change theory by Talcott Parsons (1902–1979). The Theory comprehensively describes and illustrates how and why desired changes are expected to happen in a particular context. Focus is on mapping out the gap between what a programme or change initiative achieves and how these lead to the achievement of desired goals. The long-term goals are first identified and then all necessary conditions that must be put in place for the goals to occur taken into consideration. The theory gives emphasis to five principles:

- i. **Discursive**- a change of narrative held by actors about an issue/concern, or problem.
- ii. **Procedural**- a change of the processes and strategies designed to manage the issue.
- iii. **Content-based**- a change of the content to be presented
- iv. **Attitudinal**- a change in the way actors perceive the issue.
- v. **Behavioral**- a change in the way actors react to the issue, formally, informally, in dispensing procedures and in practice.

The theory is relevant in the implementation of CBC in institutions because it requires administrator/managers, teachers/trainers and other educational stake holders to change their interpretation of education and shift from focusing on education as academic achievement to focus on development of competencies and values.

Constructivism Theories

According to this theory, the learner develops personal interpretations of the world based on experiences and interactions. In this regard, learning is viewed as a process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring or communicating it. This is to say that human beings construct knowledge through participation in different physical and mental learning experiences. The learner develops an understanding of the world by interacting with it. Among its proponents are; Piaget, Dewey, Brunner, Vygotsky, Gardner and Erik Erikson's.



- a) **Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory-** This theory deals with how human beings gradually acquire, construct, and use knowledge in a progressive manner through four stages of learning (Sensorimotor Stage, Preoperational Stage, Concrete Operational Stage, and Formal Operational Stage).
- b) **Dewey’s Social Constructivism-** Dewey felt that the curriculum should in the long run produce individuals’ who can deal effectively with the contemporary world. To this end, curricula should include learner’s preconceptions and take into account how the learner views his or her own world. Curricula should be ecologically oriented to reflect the world where the child lives. To characterize learners’ behaviour, Dewey uses four instincts, or impulses: social, constructive, expressive, and artistic and hoped to use occupations to connect fundamental activities of life with classroom experiences. The theory gives emphasis to continuous participatory and experiential learning to make learning practical. The same practical approach is emphasized in the curriculum reforms in Kenya.
- c) **Bruner’s Cognitive Development Theory-** The theory advances the need to make use of prior experiences of learners to help them construct new ideas or concepts.
- d) **Vygotsky’s Social-Cultural Development Theory-** According to the theory, teaching and learning are social processes in which interactions with teachers, peers and instructional materials promote cognitive and affective developments of learners (Kim and Baylor, 2006). Learning results as learners interact with each other, in the context of curriculum.
- e) **Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory-** The theory notes that learners have different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in diverse ways. To understand the world, Gardner suggests a curriculum that reflects: language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of self.
- f) **Erik Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development-** This theory attempts to describe personality development throughout the entire lifespan of an individual in distinct stages in a predetermined order, each building upon the previous stage.

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1.	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	0 - 1½
2.	Autonomy vs. Shame	Will	1½ - 3
3.	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	3 - 5
4.	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competency	5 - 12
5.	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	12 - 18
6.	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	18 - 40
7.	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	40 - 65
8.	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	65+

To ensure that learner achieve expected learning outcomes, curriculum should relate to learner’s developmental stage.

PRINCIPLES / IDEAS OF PRAGMATISM AND APPLICATION TO CBC IN KENYA

Pragmatic principles/ ideas	Application to CBC
Emphasis is on change- Education is a means of constantly reorganizing or reconstructing experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC emphasizes knowledge, skills and attitudes to be applied by learners rather than solely focusing on what learners are expected to learn about in terms of conventionally defined subject content thus, a move from content to learner-centered curriculum which is adaptive to the changing needs of society, teachers and learners. • The pillar for education in CBC is ‘Learning to do’ which is a shift from ‘Learning to know’.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus of CBC is on what the learner is expected to achieve and provision of immediate feedback on learner progress as opposed to focusing on Examination and results Curriculum approach has shifted from Teacher centered to Learner centered.
Utilitarianism- What is offered should satisfy human needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision of CBC is to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered, ethical citizen. CBC is designed around a set of seven core competencies: communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, imagination and creativity, citizenship, learning to learn, self-efficacy and digital literacy Inclusion of Pre-Technical and Pre-Career Education. Involvement of learners in community service learning exposes them to apply the knowledge acquired during their learning period thus practicing their community development skills. Teaching of Science, Agriculture and Home science, Languages.
Pluralism- according to this, everyone searches truth and aim of life according to his experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning builds on students' prior knowledge, and opportunities are provide for learners to engage with the material in different ways such as through practice, project-based learning and dialogue. CBC engages learners in problem-solving and experiential learning. Teaching of indigenous languages.
Emphasis is on social aspects of life - since man is asocial being; education should aim to make him successful by developing his social personality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious, Moral and Life Skills Education Inclusion of Values based education Community service learning Teaching social sciences and humanities Indigenous Language Activities Business Studies Teaching of languages (local and international) ICT and computer studies to promote the competence of digital literacy necessitated by advancement of technology. Inclusion of Pertinent and Contemporary Issues (PCIs in the curriculum. Cultural Values have been integrated into the Curriculum.
Learning by doing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community service learning.
Individualism/ development of learner individuality - education system should focus on preparing every learner to make adjustments to his/her environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mission of CBC is to nurture every learner's potential which is to be actualized through three specialization pathways ((1) Arts and Sports



	<p>Science (2) Social Sciences (3) Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) with well specified Tracks(A combination of learning areas that the learner takes within the selected pathway) (Republic of Kenya (2017).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special education is given prominence.
Interest of the learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are three career areas which the learner shall select from depending on his/ her interest, ability and aptitude. • Movement and Creative Activities (comprising of art, craft and physical education) as a learning area in lower primary. • Optional Learning Areas/ subjects are offered for learners to choose based on their interest and ability
Experimentalism- pragmatists give more significance to action than ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In CBC gives emphasis to learner-centered approaches among them; experimentation, project method, experiential learning.
Integration- Pragmatic curriculum deals with the integration of subjects, activities, knowledge and skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated learning areas for example Environmental Activities which combines Science, Social and Agriculture Activities at Lower Primary • Community service where students make connections between class work and the community through project work
Practical education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make the learning very practical, most of the learning are now activity-oriented. For instance, in Mathematics is now Mathematical Activities, Kiswahili is now called Kiswahili Language Activities, while English is English Language Activities at pre-primary and lower primary, with a lot of emphasis on learning experiences for learners. • Entrepreneurship
To promote all round development of the learner (physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and aesthetically).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC offers a diversified curriculum
Education as growth- Each child is born with inherent capacities, tendencies and aptitudes which are drawn out and developed by education. One of the aims of education is to develop all the inherent capacities of the child to the fullest extent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by the ‘nurturing every learner’s potential’, key aim of CBC is to help identify learners’ special capabilities then nurturing them through relevant teachings so that learners benefit from their talents. To this end various learning areas are offered
The use of Project method in teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners are expected to identify, design, implement and reflect on projects that they undertake in Community Service Learning in different learning areas/ subjects.



Developing problem solving skills among learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners are engaged in Community service learning
Integration of students' experiences into the curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">BECF adopts a spiral curriculum with ensures continuity in learning through the levels.
Promotion of creativity through education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focus on imagination and creativity, critical thinking and problem solving as core competencies to be developed in learners.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

- CBC comes with increase in number of activities which require more teachers to provide individualized student attention which is made worse by large classes and which in the long run may exacerbate existing challenges of high student-teacher ratios.
- Insufficient infrastructure and human resources for the number of learners in the school system which is more pressurized with the introduction of three specialized pathways for senior secondary education.
- The introduction of a junior secondary level creates entirely new challenges for secondary schools in particular with mixed decisions regarding placement.

The challenges will eventually affect the management of the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion indicates that learner's immediate experiences, felt needs and purposes play an outstanding role in determining educational programmes and policies. This confirms the belief in the worth and improvability of individuals. Pragmatism upholds the supreme value of man and prescribes freedom of experiencing, experimenting and thinking for him. Emphasis should be on free flow of ideas, spirit of inquiry, investigation and discussion. In all human activity, there should be adjustment, flexibility, and utility to promote continuous development of individuals and society at large. Pragmatic philosophy is thus a practical philosophy with no fixed or absolute standards. Education should help mankind create new values. The practical and utilitarian aspects of pragmatism are reflected in CBC to a great extent. Applying the pragmatic ideas, the school is expected to act as a 'miniature society' representing the macro society where learners get real experiences to make them functional members of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To improve and provide additional infrastructure, investment will be required at all levels of education. This should be initiated from the budget making desk.
- For teachers to effectively deliver CBC, thorough and ongoing training will be necessary to address concerns regarding awareness, information, personal concerns, management, consequences, collaboration and refocusing.
- School subject committees should be formed so that teachers can assist each other with planning in a collaborative manner.

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