

The “Africanized” Competency-Based Curriculum: The Twenty-First Century Strides

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Abstract

African education still changes due to the influence of technological advancement and globalization. Many African countries are struggling to be at the breast with the international standards in the knowledge economy progress. Adoption of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) brings new trends on the leverage of African education with the rest of the world. CBC emphasis is on the attainment of competencies among the graduates, which is fundamental to the employability in the job market.

Moreover, it is mostly concerned with skills and attitudes that learners need to apply in their professional life. Many countries in Africa that have adopted CBC are now getting solutions to the local needs of the populace though faced with diverse challenges. CBC, as implemented in the developed countries, has shown instrumental progress in the contribution to the standards of the graduates. This paper discusses the general adoption of CBC in different Africa countries, description of paradigm shifts of CBC, factors that call for the need to africanise CBC, This calls for Africa to rethink realignment of the adopted CBC to the African context.

Keywords: Competency-based curriculum (CBC), Africanize, competence.

Introduction

Curriculum reform in education is a worldwide-practiced phenomenon that is involved in striving for the best educational practices, primarily with the demands of the twenty-first-century knowledge economy. African countries immediately after independence had to inherit the colonial education system, which was discriminative and which demanded realignment to societal and cultural demands of the nation. Coincidentally curriculum reforms in most African nations adopted the content or knowledge-based approach. Not long, the Knowledge-based curriculum dissatisfied most countries for its products were too academic, but lacking skills and knowledge in the applicability as required by the demands from the workplace. Kenya and Tanzania adopted curriculum with the philosophy of education for self-reliance, but due to the inadequately trained teachers and insufficient resources, it ended up being too examinable and losing its goal. That led to unemployment, increased vices, and rampant dropouts, among other factors. Currently, due to technological advancement, most countries have opted for a competency-based curriculum (CBC), which appears as worldwide trends in offering skills that match with the requirements of companies’ employers. The question shall be: does the job market currently determine the curriculum reforms in education?

CBC adoption in most African countries is a modification or either similar framework from the developed countries. The implementation has either been imposed on the countries following directives of the government or due to the support from western non-governmental organizations. In East Africa, for instance, they had to sign the East Africa harmonization policies which require the countries to adopt CBC. However, the adoption has been done amid challenges like lack of expertise to the nature of the African classrooms. Generally, many studies findings on the implementation of CBC indicate shortcomings. For instance, in 2010, South Africa had to quit the Outcome-Based Education. Studies have majorly been on the implementation of CBC, challenges facing CBC, attitude towards CBC, but the actual nature and meaning of CBC in African context need proper scrutiny. This paper discusses the need to “Africanize” CBC in line with the real situations in Africa to attain CBC successful implementation.

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

CBC is a curriculum reform that recently has gained popularity in African countries. CBC emphasizes on the paradigm shift of pedagogical practices from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches. Ideally, regarding objectives one should think of competency, instead of content, more emphasis is on the outcome while employing entirely formative evaluation instead of summative. This demands teachers to change from the traditional way of instruction to the use of the CBC approaches. Hence, the teaching methodology, assessment approaches, instructional materials, classroom organization, etc. majorly shift. Thereof, this raises questions like, are the teachers competent to meet the demands of implementation of the CBC? Do they get the appropriate training on the CBC? are there proper structures to support teachers in the implementation of the CBC?

The crucial Centre point in CBC is the acquisition and application of learned knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and values in real-life situations. Learners are meant to construct knowledge while actively involved in the learning process. The progression of learners is based on the acquisition,

development, demonstration, and accomplishment of competency. The role of the teacher turns to the cognitive coach, facilitator, and guider. To this, the question is: are the African teachers competent enough to handle CBC as intended?

CBC learning goes beyond the closed classrooms, teaching and learning instructions aims or life-long skills that help learners solve complex problems in their future profession Recall of information will transcend to the ability to act and perform to the standards of the expertise. Learning is more personalized, practical, and requires reflection among teachers and learners to facilitate the appropriate provision of feedback. CBC focusses on the development of the entire individual competence different from the knowledge-based curriculum; it is designed based on what students can do in performing tasks rather than what they know about the functions. In respect to this, competency becomes the keyword. A student is said to be competent if he/she has specific skill and knowledge required for effectively performing a real-life task, it is on this factor among others that countries like Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, Tanzania, and Ethiopia among others in Africa have decided to adopt CBC.

CBC emphasizes the attainment of competencies by learners. Competency, according to European Qualification Framework means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills, and personal social or methodological skills in work or study situation for professional and personal development. Tuning educational structures in Europe defines competencies as a dynamic combination of knowledge understanding, skills, and abilities. Recently Haddouchane cited by Kellie (2019) defines competence as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. To acquire power, learners need to combine and integrate into their behavior (their know-how) the element of skills and knowledge of professional and personal qualities of experience. In other words, competence is an expression of the individual ability to perform well at work.

Overview of CBC in Selected Countries

CBC prominence is on the development of capabilities and not certification among graduates.

Rwanda changed to CBC to attain education transformation while ensuring that learning is profound, enjoyable, and habit formation leading to high standards and levels of achievements. That confirms the fact that the relationship between education and the world of work is through the CBC. It provides curriculum framework which links practice to the theory that avoids dichotomy between knowing “that” and knowing “how,” this intends to raise graduates’ capabilities and employability skills which enhance the practical application of knowledge. There are still some doubts whether CBC has brought changes in Rwanda as it did intend or it is facing challenges like any other developing countries.

Introduction of CBC in Cameroon was created by the need to produce school leavers with capabilities in phrases of knowledge, skills, and attitudes useful for solving social and economic challenges of the contemporary society. CBC helps align the education provided to the dynamic social and economic demands of the community. This curriculum enhances mastery of skills, knowledge, and developing self-confidence in problem-solving, which is a significant fit in the job market.

In Indonesia the CBC shifted the role of the teacher from head to education facilitator which compares teachers to following parents who always play a leading role in the classroom where they are required to encourage learners to set goals for their learning, supporting development of critical reflection by supporting learners to retrieve and retain knowledge and use it in practices which will help learners develop habits of lifelong training. That involves a massive mandate of curriculum implementation on teachers who are supposed to be retrained and equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge about CBC. But several scholars opined that teachers in African countries were ill-trained in CBC for even the policy developers has no clear understanding of CBC (KNUT, 2019).

Wongnaa & Boachie (2018) pointed out that there was skill deficiency in graduates from the institution of higher learning to the job market. The requisite skills required by industry and those acquired from university appeared substandard when viewed against the competencies required for

the performance of the job. He further explained that there is a need to increase the skills level of the workforce to support industrial fertility, which would help address unemployment challenges.

In the USA the CBC was introduced due to concern about low student achievement and poor quality of teacher training. Here promoted a need to structure the outcome of learning in a manner that will encourage teachers to express their teaching objectives in terms of observable student behaviors. It was thought that the approach would improve the effectiveness of schools, teachers, teacher educators, and serve to address society’s concern about unsatisfactory performance in the development of programs in teacher education in the USA. Though to date, the CBC is not thoroughly utilized in USA primary schools.

Sotco et al. (2018) observed that CBC concept moved to European countries due to the economic recession caused by the widespread unemployment among the youth people in the United Kingdom. The main criticism was on the Education system, which was blamed for low attainment of necessary skills by school graduates. The has seen commendable progress in the Europe educational system.

Tanzanian development and adoption of CBC resulted from the problem arising in the training system that negatively affected the quality of graduates to the job market. The then-existing education system did not specify the required competencies to be attained by the students by the end of the course of study. Moreover, with the adoption of CBC, the question is: can these competencies be acquired in a classroom of a large number of students? CBC prepares scholars for life and career skills, which addresses leadership, interpersonal, flexibility, adaptability, self-drive initiative, responsibility, productivity, accountability, social, and cross-cultural skills. These attributes are essential in the transition to the job market.

The CBC fosters positive emotions to fellow learners. The student is made aware of human rights and respect for and kindness towards others. He/ She avoids all forms of prejudice. Teachers are provided knowledgeable of disability mainstreaming so that learners with disabilities are accepted and treated with respect, equality, and dignity.

Likisa (2018) said CBC is characterized by responsiveness to a constantly changing world of work or technological advances in society, focusing both on method and product. Process transfers to experiences and activities within the school setting. Product is the effect of these adventures and activities on former classmates and employment opportunities that exist for the graduates. CBC also takes into account employment-related success, such as practical job skills, technical skills, occupation survival skills, job search skills, and entrepreneurial skills. CBC requires high levels of critical thinking and reflection that is thinking about thinking. Such skills are learned best with some form of discovery as the learners construct their knowledge. CBC is a self-employment principle declined from the Behavioral Objective Movement in that it is responsive and open to change. The focus is on improving knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and performance in the labor context. Its evaluation focuses on education, skills, philosophy, and actual performance. These features suit the needs of the twenty-first-century worldview sufficiently.

Need to Africanize Competency-based Curriculum

The diverse political and socio-economic difference in Africa display different countries with varied educational challenges. The adoption of CBC is a noble move but in the midst of the existing realities that most implementation happens with little regard for available capacities or resources; especially teachers' values, practices and beliefs that majorly shape the outcomes of application and that the way to understand implementation is to start with an examination of the context. Globalization process forms discourse on the impact of local context on considerable African diversity. The political economy and role of decisive donors and multilateral agencies play significant external force to consider in internal curriculum implementation in Africa countries. The resilience of distinctively African interwoven social organization and educational politics need a deep understanding. For instance, scholars have argued that failure in attempts to introduce learner-centered education in Botswana has much to do with the strength of agreement

between traditional and colonial approaches to learning. A sophisticated variation on this theme, which examines the complexity of local educational practices in Ghana, has demonstrated how different international, national and local discourses jostle alongside one another in the same school, where teaching can remain lackluster and rote-learning-centered. But opportunities can nonetheless be created where students do learn from one another has emphasized in the CBC. Harley et al. as cited by Kellie have highlighted the contradictions between pedagogical and political ideals and the great diversity in the context of practice. Mulder has underscored the socially reproductive role of schools and the centrality of variations in teacher knowledge. It might be a pessimist, but life and death of innovation are not merely a matter of providing appropriate supports for the change and making mutual adjustments as it is being offered. Instead, life and death of innovation depend on the unique arrangement of social, historical, administrative and ideological parts that make up the school and its social, community setting especially for the African countries which it can imply the internalize modification of the reform to emulsify it with the African context.

Several factors that can restrict curriculum reform have been recognized, and these relate to both the academic and the context in which the innovation is practicing place. They involve issues of time, parental expectations, public reviews, unavailability of required instructional materials, lack of clarity about curriculum reform, teachers' lack of skills and knowledge, and the initial mismatch between the teacher's "residual philosophies" and the policies underlying the curriculum modification. Other restrictions relate to organizational arrangements such as role overload, rigid scheduling of time, reporting systems, and failure of the administration to recognize and understand its role in change. All of these factors need to be discussed in the context of Africa. The reforms and core competencies in primary education are expected to transcend into both Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and university education levels. Following the Science Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) 2024, whose mission is

to “Accelerate Africa’s transition to an innovation-led, competence-based economy,” Kenya and other countries in Africa, will need to find a nexus between primary education and TVET which would be achieved through appropriate adoption and implementation of CBC into African context. These will help achieve continental Agenda goals 2063, which aims to address youth employment through quality and relevant education that will result in skills revolution.

The curriculum in Africa starting point is that CBC is a demand-driven where employers need to serve as curriculum advisory committees, provide internships and to shadow experiences of students. The CBC needs to look into the African countries actual learning environment, its financial ability, human resources ability, philosophy, job market needs, and vision. The African classrooms face diverse challenges ranging from infrastructures, resource, teachers’ capabilities, leadership, and types of students’ cohort with classes swollen with learners eager to learn in admit to background problems. The education systems in the African states have made efforts to adopt world/global class education model (CBC), but still, questions should be asked: do the adopting countries consider their “own” existing challenges? Are the states ready to face the challenges brought by that the new curriculum? Do the countries involve the curriculum implementors in the initial stages of curriculum reforms decisions? For example, in Kenya, the entire curriculum development lies with the Kenya institute of education (KICED) while implementation lies on teachers.

Africa needs to align the well-documented duplicated curriculum designs from developed countries to their educational philosophy and vision. That will only require the use of local experts who understand the actual classroom challenges in the development of the curriculum. The long-experienced serving teachers would be in a better position to bring real rich classroom discourse in the curriculum reform. CBC requires learners to construct their knowledge, moving in their own pace, graduating based on demonstration of competencies. Teachers being facilitators may face myriad challenges with the large numbers of learners. The

vision 2030, sustainable goals, continental goals 2063 among African states will only be delivered if educators consider adopting CBC in the African context. The adoption should go beyond the cultural and socio-economic limitations, deeply rooted in the local and international trends. This will help in knowledge development, increase employment, income generation, the gross domestic product, and flow of foreign currency in the African countries.

Conclusion

CBC adoption in Africa countries gives the potential to the future generation on the establishment and attainment of competencies needed at the job market. The states should envisage the proper implementation of CBC in the classroom to enhance the goals of the curriculum. CBC whip hand brings the African education achievement to the global bar on only if the required implementation is realized. The unique Africa countries need to see their CBC through the African lenses. Teachers should be involved in the crucial stage of curriculum reform, and their professional development is developed satisfactorily before the implementation of CBC. Retraining of teachers should be critical in every curriculum adoption. More so, the realignment of CBC into the African context should be maintained.

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