

CURRICLUM REFORM IS AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

May 17th

By Julius Jwan, PhD

Director/CEO

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development

The ongoing curriculum reforms just like any other process has been open to critique, which is important to help identify areas that require further scrutiny, before its final roll out.

In the process, Kenyans have been treated to diverse interpretations with some arguments misleading. Some have questioned the experts who have supported the thinking behind the inquiry and competency based curriculum. They are wary of the process, and therefore cast doubts on the overall implementation plan.

The proposed curriculum is ambitious, futuristic and in tune with the global directions. Many countries, be they industrialised or emerging economies have already embraced such a competency based, and learner focussed curriculum approach. Since 2003, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has been seeking information from people and partners of good will, bilateral organisation, and indeed teachers, including nursery school teachers.

They have come from within the borders and outside. Their reflection and thoughtful deliberation has resulted, for the first time in the history of education in this country in a Basic Education Curriculum Framework document. This document has been arrived at in a participatory and inclusive manner in a process entirely driven by curriculum developers at KICD and the ministry of education.

Another first in Kenya, is that the proposed curriculum is being piloted. A pilot is a key step in any curriculum development cycle. It has often been skipped, but not this time round. The approach that the institute has taken is to stagger the implementation. Hence the focus is now on the early years, these being two years of pre-school education, and the first two years of primary education.

Pre-school education is very critical. Many researchers have observed that due to varied quality, access to pre-school acts as a double edged sword because while it has the potential to reduce inequalities, it is actually exacerbating differences between the haves and the have nots due to the lack of quality preschools for all children, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

A child's brain is very nimble, elastic and responsive to stimulants to learn. If you do not exploit this natural condition in a child, by the age of five, then an opportunity is lost, hence the need for an education system that lays emphasis on the Early Childhood Development.

The KICD Act 2013 prescribes the persons authorized to develop curricula and curriculum support materials. KICD develops curriculum using a panel system comprising of practicing teachers, teacher educators, university lecturers, quality assurance and standards officers and curriculum support officers from Teachers Service Commission, among others.

The curriculum that has been developed for pre-primary 1 and 2, was done by panels which had practicing pre-school teachers as required by law.

There is still room for fine-tuning the ‘Basic Education Curriculum Framework,’ (BECF). Indeed the task ahead is daunting. Teachers need to be prepared to embrace a new ethos as facilitators in the inquiry based approach of learning. Let us however desist from public lynching of individuals or institutions charged with that responsibility.

For instance, the author of an article in the Standard Newspaper (May 13, 2017), ‘How nursery school teacher was hired to develop new curriculum,’ wrongfully insinuated that nursery teachers have no tangible role to play in shaping the country’s education system. In Kenya and in many parts of the world, nursery school teachers are highly skilled and trained and their input in the curriculum development cannot be underestimated

Kenya is not an island. Our education system is intended to serve our needs as Kenya, but it is also outward looking with an intention of tooling our children with competencies that allows them to compete in the global market. The development of the curriculum is guided by the national goals of education, which recognize the need to have international consciousness embedded in learning to ensure Kenyans fit into the global arena. We cannot develop the curriculum in isolation, by being blind to global standards.

The institute is in the process of revamping its website. This notwithstanding we know how crucial it is that citizens are availed with the relevant information. The document guiding the reform process (BECF) is available on the internet. The institute is also open for any member of the public who want more information.

We invite all Kenyans of good will to participate in discussions on the curriculum. As an institute we affirm that we are professional, efficient and able to deliver a new curriculum to Kenyan children, starting with the early year’s education. We urge you to critique in good faith as opposed to being a naysayer.

Dr Jwan is the Director/CEO, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development

Email: jjwan@kicd.ac.ke