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The role of curriculum in fostering national cohesion and integration: Opportunities and challenges

by

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Curriculum planning emphasizes that education should serve to enable society to achieve its needs and aspirations. One such need in Kenya, which has remained largely elusive, is national cohesion and integration. Research has revealed that education contributes to the development of social capital by increasing individual propensity to trust and be tolerant. Learning as a social activity has a strong influence on the development of shared norms and the value placed on tolerance and understanding within a community. This paper discusses the relationship between education and cohesion. It explores the contemporary conceptualization and practice with respect to the place of national cohesion and integration in the school curriculum. The paper argues that the gap between the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum is too wide, and this especially undermines the affective domain, which is the mainstay of providing learners with opportunities to practice cohesion and integration. The paper further discusses the extent to which the current school curriculum is designed to foster national cohesion and integration, and evaluates achievement of this intention suggesting that the school policies and context do not empower learners with attitudes that facilitate cohesion. Finally, the paper explores the opportunities and challenges that exist within the school curriculum to foster national cohesion and integration.

Introduction

Education is a deliberate, purposeful activity directed at the achievement of a range of ends which could potentially include the development of knowledgeable individuals who are able to think rationally, the formation of a sustainable community, and the realization of economic goals benefiting both individuals and their communities (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). The term education, therefore, has normative implications: it suggests that something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted. This implies that there are some values that education should seek to achieve. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) also note that philosophers have always sought to explain how education should serve moral, social, political and economic ends. Baker and Le Tendre (2005) observe that schools play a crucial role in the making of our social world. Governments, therefore, use schooling to strengthen national identity and inculcate citizenship values. How then does a country determine the specific values that its education system should achieve? How are these values achieved? This is the role of curriculum planning.

Curriculum planning and identification of values

Ralph Tyler (1949) identified four fundamental questions which must be answered in curriculum planning. These are: (i) what educational purposes should the school seek to attain?, (ii) what educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?, (iii) how can these educational experiences be effectively organized?, and (iv) how can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Although there are many curriculum development models that educationists have developed since Tyler's proposal, the principles that Tyler identified have remained largely the same, namely determining education purposes (objectives, goals, aims, competencies, learning outcomes); identification of appropriate learning experiences and pedagogical approaches; organization of the learning experiences; and assessment and evaluation.

Globally, a major purpose that education has been identified to achieve is national cohesion and integration. The Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors, identified four pillars of learning that are very important in the 21st century (Delors et al. 1996). These are:

- ✓ Learning to know: to provide the cognitive tools required to better comprehend the world and its complexities, and to provide an appropriate and adequate foundation for future learning.
- ✓ Learning to do: to provide the skills that would enable individuals to effectively participate in the global economy and society.
- ✓ Learning to be: to provide self-analytical and social skills to enable individuals to develop to their fullest potential psycho-socially, affectively as well as physically, for an all-round 'complete person.
- ✓ Learning to live together: to expose individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony.

It is the pillar of learning to live together that focuses on issues related to cohesion and integration. The Kenya government lays a lot of emphasis on using education as a vehicle towards the achievement of national cohesion and national integration. Indeed, the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on 'A Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research' identifies the national philosophy of education as "Education and training for social cohesion as well as human and economic development." (Republic of Kenya 2005). Thus 'cohesion' is a major purpose of education and training in Kenya.

The role of curriculum is to identify the education purposes and organize them into goals, objectives, aims and learning outcomes to be achieved at the different levels of education and training. In this paper, I am focusing on the primary and secondary education curricula. This is because these two levels of basic education make up the formative stages of education and have received substantial investments from both the government and households.

According to Oluoch (1982) curriculum refers to all that is planned to enable the learner to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes. The curriculum is organized into formal, non-formal and informal dimensions. I will now discuss the opportunities and challenges of fostering national cohesion and integration in the primary and secondary school curricula within these three dimensions.

Opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration

Formal dimension

Oluoch (1982) defines the formal dimension as that aspect of the school curriculum which consists of those learning activities that students undertake formally as a class as well as the curriculum objectives and student assessment methods that relate to them. These activities are normally embodied in what are known as courses of studies in a school, showing the objectives to be aimed at, and the way in which the students will be assessed. This dimension is operationalized through a subject syllabus provided by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), which is the national agency mandated to develop curriculum and curriculum support materials for all levels of education and training, except the university. KICD further provides teacher's handbooks for all syllabuses to help teachers interpret and implement the syllabuses. KICD also evaluates and approves all electronic and non-electronic instructional materials used in schools to ensure their appropriateness with regard to conformity to syllabus requirements and responsiveness to national values. Teachers are expected to develop schemes of work and lesson plans to implement the curriculum.

The national goals of education in Kenya provide the curriculum developers with the general intended outcomes of education. Out of the eight goals, five provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration. These are:

- ✓ Foster nationalism, patriotism, and promote national unity (Goal 1).
- ✓ Promote social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national development (Goal 2).
- ✓ Promote sound moral and religious values (Goal 4).
- ✓ Promote social equality and responsibility (Goal 5).
- ✓ Promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures (Goal 6).

These goals have served the education sector since independence, except for two goals that were added during the 2002 curriculum review. Based on these goals, KICD developed the objectives of primary and secondary school. Out of the thirteen primary education level objectives, four provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration. These are:

- ✓ Develop desirable social standards, moral and religious values (Objective 5).
- ✓ Develop aesthetic values and appreciate own and other people's cultures (Objective 7).
- ✓ Instil respect and love for own country and the need for harmonious co-existence (Objective 10).
- ✓ Promote social responsibility and make proper use of leisure time (Objective 12) (MEST 2002a).

Out of the fifteen secondary education level objectives, seven provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration. These are:

- ✓ Acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of self and the nation (Objective 1).
- ✓ Promote love for and loyalty to the nation (Objective 2).
- ✓ Promote harmonious co-existence among the people of Kenya (Objective 3).
- ✓ Develop mentally, socially, morally, physically and spiritually (Objective 4).
- ✓ Enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in contemporary society (Objective 5).
- ✓ Develop into a responsible and socially well-adjusted person (Objective 10).
- ✓ Promote acceptance of and respect for all persons (Objective 11) (MEST 2002b).

The school curriculum (primary and secondary education) is further organized into subjects, and each has a syllabus with well-defined general and specific objectives. The syllabuses provide opportunities for fostering national cohesion and integration through the mainstreaming of the following cross-cutting issues: (i) gender responsiveness, (ii) child and human rights, (iii) social responsibility, (iv) integrity, (v) moral values, and (vi) rights and responsibilities of citizens.

This implies that issues that foster cohesion and integration are expected to be taught across the curriculum in all the school subjects. In 2007, however, KICD carried out a situational analysis on the young people's knowledge, attitudes and practices of psychosocial competencies such as intra-personal, inter-personal skills and selected values. The study revealed that many young people in school lack these skills and that the school curriculum does not provide adequate opportunities for developing the skills in a systematic way.

Tyler (1949) argues that the purpose of schooling should be closely tied to the pressing problems of contemporary society. He sees school as the agency for helping young people to deal effectively with the critical problems of contemporary life. Consequently, KICD developed the Life Skills Education (LSE) programme, which was designed to empower the young people with psychosocial skills and values that would allow them cope with life challenges. LSE was implemented in 2008 in all primary and secondary schools in the country as a compulsory stand-alone subject.

LSE is well placed to foster national cohesion and integration. The general objectives of LSE for primary education are the following:

1. Demonstrate ability to relate amicably with others.
2. Demonstrate ability to make informed rational decisions on issues affecting him/her and others.
3. Demonstrate ability to participate in community development.
4. Acquire attitudes, value and develop psychosocial competencies that promote responsible living.
5. Demonstrate ability to cope with everyday challenges.

With regards to secondary education, the general objectives of LSE are as follows:

1. Acquire values, attitudes and develop skills that will enable him/her to operate effectively in the society
2. Develop and demonstrate ability to cope with stress and emotions in everyday life
3. Appreciate the need for peaceful co-existence and demonstrate ability to apply the acquired skills to relate with other people amicably
4. Develop skills that enable him/her to make informed and appropriate decisions in life
5. Demonstrate ability to apply the relevant life skills and deal with emerging issues and other challenges effectively
6. Appreciate his/her rights and responsibilities and demonstrate ability to respect other people's rights.

Concerning the skills that students are expected to develop, the LSE syllabuses for primary and secondary education are organized as outlined below:

Skills of living with one self	Skills of living with others	Decision making skills	Living values
Self- awareness; Self-esteem; Coping with emotions; Coping with stress	Interpersonal relationships; Friendship formation; Empathy; Non-violent conflict resolution; Negotiation; Peer pressure resistance; Effective communication; Assertiveness	Problem solving; Decision making; Creative thinking; Critical thinking	Cooperation; Simplicity; Tolerance; Respect; Peace; Freedom; Unity; Love; Honesty; Responsibility; Humility; Integrity

The above shows that opportunities available in the LSE programme to foster national cohesion and integration are very rich.

Baker and Le Tendre (2005) argue that beyond the curriculum documents, pedagogy also has a role to play in national cohesion and integration. They explain that the use of teaching methods like group work, collaborative learning, team work and other participatory and interactive approaches promote cohesion and integration. The KICD handbooks provided to teachers emphasize the use of such pedagogy.

Non-formal dimension

Oluoch (1982) explains that learning activities in the non-formal dimension of the curriculum are organized in a less rigid manner than in the formal dimension. The non-formal activities include debating, drama, music and dance, writing/poetry clubs, human/child rights clubs and other related activities. They are commonly referred to

as co-curricular activities. The prefix co- in this word implies that the activities are part of the curriculum. These are organized to enhance achievement of the curriculum goals and objectives. For example, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission sponsors music, poetry and drama items during the schools music and drama festivals. Students are expected to learn about cohesion and integration through the items presented through the transfer of knowledge and skills.

In Kenya the Ministry of Education (MOE) places a high premium on the co-curricular activities. Budget provisions for organizing drama and music festivals are made in the capitation grants provided for every primary and secondary school student. Time is also allocated for these activities. Indeed, the East African Community has also adopted this approach in enhancing regional integration. Secondary school students from the member countries participate in essay writing competitions and winners travel to all member countries.

Informal dimension

Oluoch (1982) explains that the in-formal dimension entails interaction between learners and the environment where they are growing up, either in school or other environments. This is one of the most powerful curriculum dimensions. Learners in primary and secondary school are at the formative age and are highly impressionable. Their value systems form at around this age, and are difficult to change later in life. The education system, therefore, has to identify all the available opportunities to help the learners acquire desirable values. The same author argues that whereas informal interactions go on all the time, not all the interactions form desirable informal learning activities.

The MOE has made significant investments in training school managers and teachers on Child Friendly Schools. The concept is supposed to ensure that every school environment is created to be conducive for learning not only in the classrooms, but also within all the learner's experiences in the school. The creation of national schools, with students being admitted from every County is also supposed to enhance national cohesion and integration. It is expected that as the students interact with others from different parts of the country they will learn, appreciate and respect each other's' cultures. Consequently, the richer the learners' environment the more opportunities they have of benefiting from this curriculum dimension. Rules and regulations are part of the informal dimension and are important in shaping the children's lives. They mould them to appreciate order and respect authority. School uniform also helps to create cohesion among learners.

Challenges of fostering national cohesion and integration

There are many challenges the education sector faces in fostering national cohesion and integration through the curriculum. Some of these include the gradual subordination of social capital to human capital; the gap between the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum; and the context in which the curriculum is implemented.

Subordination of social capital to human capital

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that there is a global shift towards neoliberal values orientation, manifested most clearly in privatization policies and in policies that assume the validity of market mechanisms to solve the various problems and crises facing governments. This has affected curriculum design in the sense that there is a push for reorientation from a focus on the values of democracy and equality to the values of efficiency and accountability. There is even a greater emphasis on human capital formation allegedly demanded by the new knowledge economy and required by countries in order to participate and compete successfully in the global economy.

As a consequence, the social values of equality and democracy are gradually being subordinated to dominant economic concerns. The human capital theory views education and training only as an investment to meet the requirements of the global economy. In Kenya, there have been moments of prioritizing and motivating teaching and learning of science and mathematics at the expense of the arts, which are the main channels of developing social capital by increasing individual propensity to trust and be tolerant (World Bank 2005). In the 1990s, teachers of science and mathematics were paid more than teachers of arts subjects. Further, there is a national centre for strengthening the teaching of mathematics and science, but none of such efforts exists for the teaching of the arts. The net effect of such policies is that today there is a serious shortage of teachers of history and government, and religious education. These subjects are very instrumental in enabling learners to achieve most of the cohesion and integration objectives.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) observe that there is enormous pressure on education systems to adopt corporatization and marketization approaches. In Kenya, this has led to a proliferation of foreign curricula. Such curricula do not promote national cohesion and integration. Learners study the history of foreign countries at the expense of learning the history of their own country. Such learners are unlikely to be patriotic. The instructional materials used in such schools may not expose the learners to experiences that foster national values. Eventually, most of these children become alienated in their own country.

Gap between the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum

The intended curriculum is a set of formal documents which specify what the relevant national education authorities and society expect that students will learn at school in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, values, attitudes and competences to be acquired and developed, and how the outcomes of the teaching and learning process will be assessed. It is usually embodied in curriculum framework(s) and guides, syllabi, teacher's guides, content of tests and examinations, regulations, policies and other official documents. The implemented curriculum refers to the actual teaching and learning activities taking place in schools, e.g. how the intended curriculum is translated into practice and actually delivered. It is also defined as the 'curriculum in action' or the 'taught curriculum'. The achieved curriculum indicates the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that learners actually acquire as a result of teaching and learning, or as a result of the process of implementation of the intended curriculum (see, for example, UNESCO IBE 2013).

The gap between the intended, implemented and achieved curriculum in Kenya is too wide (KIE 2011). With the increased enrolment in schools and limited number of places in 'quality' secondary schools, and limited places in universities that offer medicine, engineering, law and other 'high stakes' courses, educational competition has almost reached a breaking point. Schools and families have responded by devising strategies of 'teaching to the test'. Any knowledge, skills and attitudes that are not likely to be tested either in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) or the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) are not taught. Inevitably, the type of knowledge, skills and attitudes that would foster national cohesion and integration may not necessarily be tested in a formal examination, and so they are not taught in many schools. A major victim of this is LSE. Whereas all primary and secondary schools are expected to offer at least one LSE lesson a week, these lessons are timetabled but during the actual teaching a different subject like mathematics is most often taught (KIE 2011).

Another factor that contributes to this state of affairs is that whereas the KICD is expected to offer orientation to teachers on how to teach new or revised curricula, this is either inadequately done or sometimes not done at all. For example, although LSE syllabuses were issued to schools in 2008, to date, very few teachers have been oriented on the contents and methodology of teaching the subject. Consequently, the few who venture to teach LSE find it difficult to achieve the intended objectives.

Context of curriculum implementation

A summative evaluation of the primary and secondary school curricula carried out by KICD revealed that the negative practices learners encounter outside of school do not enable them to internalize the values of nationalism, patriotism and national unity as spelt out in the national goals of education. On the contrary, when children watch opinion leaders in society talk ill of some ethnic groups, defy court orders and get away with it, the children start to internalise that it is not wrong to stereotype ethnic groups and disobey authority. This undermines the opportunity to foster cohesion and integration.

In the non-formal dimension, although many schools participate in music and drama festivals, these are reduced to a competition rather than a dimension to inculcate the intended cohesion and integration values. The evidence shows that schools only put on plays and practice songs for the festivals but rarely do the same outside the festival calendar. The unintended outcome is that many schools that do not stand a chance to win in the festivals do not have an active drama or music presence at schools. It is possible for a student to go through a rural day secondary or primary school without ever having participated in drama, music, poems recitation and other related non-formal dimension activities.

The government uses the national schools as a strategy for fostering national cohesion and integration. However, there is a major challenge associated with staffing in most schools. Very often the school principal, teaching staff and support staff will be drawn from the community where the school is located. The children therefore are the only ones drawn from different ethnic communities. In some

instances, some children may feel alienated. There have even been cases of children who come from communities that do not undergo the rite of circumcision and because of this are bullied and discriminated by other students. Therefore, the government needs to ensure that national schools draw both teaching and non-teaching staff from across the country, if the intended outcome of fostering national cohesion and integration is to be achieved.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that education is still a very important vehicle for fostering national cohesion and integration. However, there is need to reflect a little more on the strategies that have been adopted in curriculum design, implementation and the context of implementation. Some curriculum dimensions like the informal are very critical and need to be planned in a holistic way to include policies of school staffing and the role models the society is creating for the children. Finally, social capital should not be subordinated to human capital as both are equally important for national development.

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