

# THE NEW CURRICULUM OF EDUCATION IN KENYA: A LINGUISTIC AND EDUCATION PARADIGM SHIFT

Lillian Kaviti

PhD, Department of Linguistics and Languages, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Nairobi, Kenya

---

**Abstract:** The current system of education in Kenya is the 8-4-4 structure, where children study for eight years of Basic (primary) education, four years of Secondary education and four years of University education. This system was introduced in 1985 to promote man-power capable of performing blue collar jobs, as compared to the former 7-6-3 system that targeted developing a local workforce to replace the British workforce who largely held white collar jobs in the new, independent Kenya. However, over the years, the 8-4-4 curriculum has been widely criticised for a myriad of reasons. The criticisms against this curriculum are that it is too heavily loaded with content, purely examinations-oriented, and generally violating the Rights of the Child by placing undue physical and psychological pressure on learners. In order to address this problem therefore, a new curriculum was hastily crafted and taken through a rushed pilot drive in April 2017 and is expected to replace the current 8-4-4 system by January 2018. Admittedly, this new education system addresses some of the weaknesses of the current 8-4-4 education system, since it is competency-based and focuses more on skills acquisition as opposed to a purely knowledge-based acquisition system. The issues addressed in this paper is how this new and hurriedly crafted curriculum (as well as the introduction of Free Secondary School Education) will be implemented by teachers who are yet to come to terms with the new paradigm shift of teaching and learning. The second issue addressed is whether the crafters of this system took into consideration children's rights, or whether at all, the system was crafted from a child-centred perspective. The concerns are that apart from the manner in which this syllabus was been crafted and planned for implementation, if not reviewed comprehensively may not only violate the rights of future generations of children, but also enhance negative ethnicity from a linguistic perspective.

**Keywords:** Learners, 8-4-4 system, 2-6-3-3 new curriculum, Continuous Assessment Tests, Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, Montessori Approach, Bests interests of the Child, Indigenous languages.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

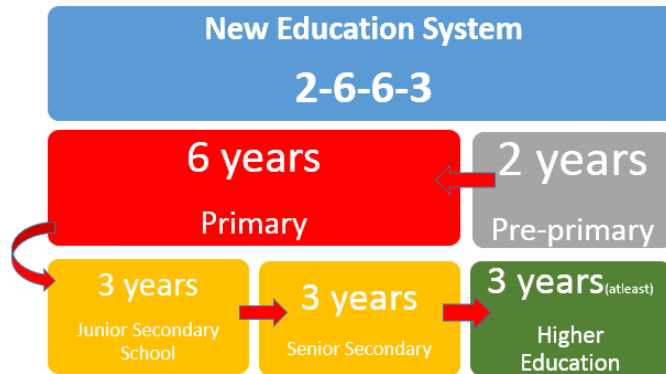
The proposal to scrap the 8-4-4 system was first contained in a 2012 report by a task force which recommended a 2-6-3-3 education system that would, amongst other factors ensure that: "...learners acquire competencies and skills to meet the human resource aspirations of Kenya's Vision 2030 blueprint for development.<sup>1</sup> In addition, UNICEF has constantly urged for reforms in the Kenyan education, especially after funding the East African Community (EAC) member states to develop a competency-based curriculum. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) had long proposed that this 2-6-3-3 education system should replace the current 8-4-4 system which has been in place since 1985. Thereafter, in January 2017, the Education Cabinet Secretary (CS) signalled the end of the 8-4-4 education system and announced the roll out of the new 2-6-3-3 structure. He, assured parents that the Government of Kenya (GOK) was devoted to creating a conducive learning environment in schools.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The Education CS Dr. Fred Matiang'i made this announcement on January 30<sup>th</sup> 2017, while addressing a national conference on curriculum reforms at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC) Nairobi.

The new system was categorized into three phases, namely: (i) Early Year Education, covering Kindergarten (Pre-Primary) Education up to Grade 3; (ii) Middle School Education, covering Grade 4 to Grade 9; and (iii) Senior School Education, covering Grades 10 to Grade 12. Early Childhood Education (ECD) would also be recognised under the new system, with learners being required to spend two years in ECD centres before joining primary schools. This new curriculum was scheduled to be rolled out and implemented in phases from January 2018, and will affect the current group of Pre-primary, Standard One, Two and Three learners. *Table 1* is a graphic representation of the new educational structure:

**Table 1: Basic Education model of Kenya’s new educational curriculum<sup>3</sup>**



Source: [www.kenyayote.com](http://www.kenyayote.com)

From a linguistic perspective, it is obvious that the labelling of educational levels used in the 8-4-4 system have been replaced with more “global” or “international” words, obviously borrowed from developed countries (such as the USA and Canada) with highly developed child-centred education systems. Currently, the labels for basic education under the 8-4-4 system encompass localized words to describe the levels of basic education such as “Standard” 1 to “Standard 8”, whereas the Secondary levels are labelled, “Form 1” to “Form 4”. According to the Education Cabinet Secretary, the new system will replace these terms with “Grade 1” to Grade 12”. The question begged, is what else may have been “borrowed” which may not necessarily fit into the developing country that Kenya is, without consideration carefully the feasibility of the new system and its implications.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The launch of the piloting stage took place from May 2017 to April 2017. In his speech, the Education CS indicated that evaluative studies would be carried out every five years to test the feasibility and validity of the planned curriculum designs, teacher preparation and assessment models.<sup>4</sup> This pilot phase was expected to determine the viability of implementing a new system on a national scale and the testing was conducted in 470 schools from May 2017. Based on the reviews and recommendations of the pilot programme, the Ministry of Education planned to start rolling out the system in phases starting from pre-primary school and lower primary school classes from January 2018. According to the Government, everything was in place for the implementation of the 2-6-3-3 education system after the final induction of teachers. It would then be rolled out in the country’s 28,000 primary schools.<sup>5</sup> The implication is that by January 2018, all the 160,000 teachers currently teaching Pre-primary (Early childhood education); Classes One to Three (in public schools) and Grades 1-3 (Private schools) would have been sufficiently trained to implement this new curriculum.

10 pilot schools were selected from Kenya’s 47 counties based on what was reported in the local media as a “well-balanced and elaborate criteria”. In May 2017, during the same period that the pilot phase was scheduled to take place, head teachers participated in one day induction training on the competency-based curriculum as part of the pilot phase of the new curriculum in their respective schools. The practical aspect of the pilot training to introduce teachers to the new

<sup>3</sup>Junior and Senior Secondary school have been combined to give the 2-6-6-3 structure

<sup>4</sup>Ndonga, Simon., *Capital News*, Nairobi, Apr 20, 2017

<sup>5</sup>Julius Jwan, Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) Director

## International Journal of Novel Research in Education and Learning

Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp: (15-27), Month: January - February 2018, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

system commenced in 470 schools in May 2017, and lasted between 8-10 weeks. The primary aim of this exercise was to induct teachers up to the closest time possible for the implementation of the curriculum, which would be rolled out in stages. The aim was to ensure that the hurdles faced with the introduction of the 8-4-4 system in 1985 were not repeated. The sample consisted of 1,888 teachers drawn from a cluster of Nursery, Standard One, Two and Three teachers. Five Pre-primary and five Primary schools were drawn from each of Kenya's 47 counties.

The sample of educators was then divided into three groups. The first group to undergo this training were 2734 Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs). The second group consisted of head teachers, while the third group were the teachers respectively. The educators were trained on how to In particular, the pilot training focussed on introducing teachers on how to:

- implement a competence-based curriculum;
- Interpret curriculum designs;
- develop schemes of work and lesson plans relevant to the new curriculum
- teach children with special needs education; and
- Integrate ICT in teaching and learning.<sup>6</sup>

In general, this pilot training took them through the new basic education curriculum framework by outlining the rationale for the reforms and expected outcomes, such as administering CATs as opposed to national examinations (summative evaluation). The number of subjects would also be reduced in order to create space for teachers, parents and the learners themselves to identify and nurture not only their academic skills but also their talents and creative strengths and capabilities. The teachers were also taken through the seven skills to equip learners with, namely:

- i. Communication and Collaboration;
- ii. Self-efficacy;
- iii. Critical thinking and Problem solving;
- iv. Creativity and Imagination;
- v. Good citizenship (patriotism);
- vi. Digital Literacy; and
- vii. How to learn/study.

County Directors of Education from each of Kenya's 47 counties were also brought on board to strategize on how best to facilitate the rollout of the new curriculum in each of their respective counties. This was done in collaboration curriculum policy representatives on how best the teachers who handle learners at a formative age could be trained.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that with the Kenyan Constitution (2010), ECDE became a devolved function hence the need for each of the devolved governments to address any potential hurdles that could derail the implantation of this new education system. In defence of the hasty deployment of the new system, the CS claimed that the Government has introduced measures to ensure sustainability of the system. In his words as reported in the local media:

A lot of planning is in place. We have allocated sufficient resources from the National treasury to move this process forward and in working on this curriculum. No one should have any fear because we had a sub-committee costing the implementation of this program... We want to keep an eye on the cost of implementing this curriculum so that we do not make a decision and then later on we cannot live by it because it is too expensive to implement... A sub-committee has been working on the cost of the curriculum has done a fantastic job and by the time we complete this exercise and begin to implement the new curriculum, we will be taking decisions that we know we can live with financially.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Dr. Julius Juan, statement to newsrooms, and reported by Kennedy Kimanthi, *Sunday Nation* 3 December, 2017

<sup>7</sup>ECDE and KICD

<sup>8</sup>Ndonga, Simon., *Capital News*, Nairobi, Apr 20, 2017

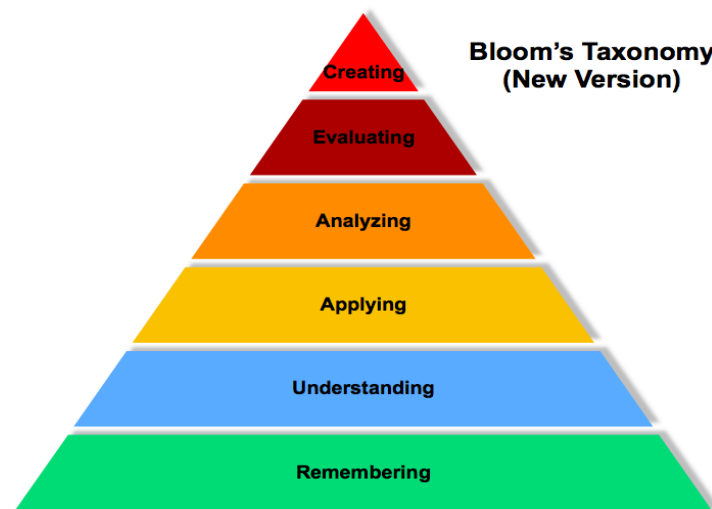
The assumption that can be inferred from this statement was that plans were already in place to fast track the implementation of the Curriculum with or without the approval of all stakeholders. Herein lay the problem- even as the Education CS assured the public that the GoK had undertaken diligence research and availed requisite resources to introduce a new education curriculum.

### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Two models of Learning were applied to evaluate the new curriculum as well as the introduction of Free Secondary Education which are both scheduled to be rolled out simultaneously by January 2018. This section gives a brief summary of the theoretical approaches considered relevant to evaluate these two initiatives and whether or not they are in the best interests of the Child.

#### 3.1: Bloom's (updated) Taxonomy of Learning:

Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) was the main advocate of what he referred to as a 'Taxonomy of learning' which forms a hierarchy in the development of a child's learning style. This hierarchal approach presents a way to classify thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity. Children must first acquire the lower levels of thinking and then move up the hierarchy to acquire the highest levels of thinking. Over the years, Bloom's Taxonomy has been updated and we will only present the latest version which was updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner<sup>9</sup>:



The six levels begin with the acquisition of three lower levels of skills, namely, the acquisition of knowledge, comprehension, and application. The three higher skills are more complex and involve the acquisition of analytical skills, synthesis, and evaluation<sup>10</sup>. In this study, the new curriculum will be evaluated in the sense by which it encourages children to master the highest levels of learning.

#### 3.2: The Montessori Approach to Learning:

The Montessori Approach was conceived by Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and encourages the development of independence, cooperation, and active learning in harmony with each child's unique pace of development. This approach places its greatest strengths in imparting on the Child skills of individuality and independence while learning.<sup>11</sup> Children are considered to be born naturally curious and driven to learning. Any educational system that follows this approach must therefore occur in harmony with the learners' individual developmental pace. It does not only place emphasis on

<sup>9</sup>Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., & Bloom, B. S. (2001). Taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. Allyn& Bacon.

<sup>10</sup>Bloom, B. S. (1956). Taxonomy of Educational objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals.

<sup>11</sup>Montessori, M. (2013). *The Montessori Method*. Transaction publishers.

academics, but is holistic in approach and emphasizes the development of all skills, rather than on attaining specific pieces of information. This approach is Child-centred and views the Best interests of the Child as key to any innovations in education. In stark contrast, all the education systems previously imposed on children in Kenya have largely been Teacher-centred with no serious respect for the learner's individual needs. Within the tenets of Montessori curriculum, the idea of disciplining a child and forcing information on them from above is discouraged. Instead, the approach gives children choices geared at preparing independent thinkers who can make their own decisions, discover the world around them through a hands-on approach, rather than the information being landed upon them from adults. The premise is based on promoting enthusiasm and curiosity driven learning.

One major factor that sets the Montessori approach apart from other models of learning is the physical environment where a child learns. This sets apart Montessori classrooms in terms of their physical organization. Classrooms should be equipped with readily available and well organized learning materials. Moreover, the learning environment needs to be aesthetically pleasing from the learner's perspective, and only include things that the teacher wants the learner to experience. Moreover, this environment ought to contain materials that children from different ages, characteristics, and interests can all engage in. Children are viewed as permanently in learning mode in that even when not in a classroom setting, they constantly absorb information and thereby, naturally learning. What the child absorbs depends largely on what types of information and experiences cross their paths. Montessori classrooms allow free exploration and learning in uninterrupted blocks of time, in order to get the most out of their learning experiences.<sup>12</sup> Montessori teachers are less prominent than in other methods of learning and are simply there to aid a child's independent learning process. The teacher decides which learning materials will be available and how they will be organized then steps back and allow free exploration of the environment for the learner. Moreover, the teacher actively observes the children then assess them when they have reached sensitive periods where new concepts may be introduced.

The Montessori approach recognizes a "critical period" when children become ready to learn different types of skills at specific points in their development. However, this age is not uniform across all learners. The age at which each sensitive period occurs varies from one child to another. Teachers must be acutely aware of when the right time is to introduce concepts to each individual child. The aim is to create independent learners who are trained to "auto-educate" themselves, thus developing the critical skills necessary to grow, develop and survive in life. However, this can only happen once the teachers are aware of the system and are ready and willing to prepare an appropriate learning environment with the freedom to design their own methodology of teaching and assessment. Apparently, when children learn in multi-age groups, they learn from each other and can assist each other in their learning processes. The recognized four 'planes of development' and incorporated them into a child development theory.<sup>13</sup> Within this theory, children through each stage, which has its unique physical and psychological developments, which necessitates their environment to change accordingly and offer appropriate learning experiences. This methodology must therefore be applied distinctly according to where the child is situated in the planes of development. They consist of the following stages:

- (i) From Birth to 6 years (infancy);
- (ii) from 6-12 years (Childhood);
- (iii) From 12-18 years (Adolescence); and
- (iv) From 18-24 years (Transition to Adulthood).

**Infancy (Birth-6years):** This stage is characterized by the Absorbent Mind and Sensitive Periods both of which work in collaboration to cause unparalleled ability for learning.<sup>14</sup> During this stage, learning is intense and enlightening. The first three years of life infants are characterized by children learning through their senses, in what Montessori refers to as 'an unconscious Absorbent Mind'. During the second three years children learn consciously through active hands on experience. Learning will take place when they are allowed to do things on their own.

---

<sup>12</sup>*The Absorbent Mind*, a book by Maria Montessori, featured her most in-depth work on her educational theory, as a result of several years observing children.

<sup>13</sup>Montessori, M. (1936). *The Secret of Childhood*. B. B. Carter (Ed.). Calcutta: Orient Longmans.

<sup>14</sup>Montessori, M. (1949). *The Absorbent Mind* (Vol. 1), Lulu. com



**Childhood (6-12 years):** This stage is characterized by stability, having acquired most of the basic skills he will need. Children grow out of their Absorbent Mind, and learn through cognitive reasoning and imagination. Children are driven to understand the world around them, how things work, and why. This is the time to learn most factual information, as adolescence brings a decline in this learning drive. The sensitive period of this age group centres on social acceptance, and the development of a value system.

**Adolescence (12-18 years):** At this point, adolescents present a decline in energy, and do not want to be bombarded with learning information. Thus, learning should be connected to every-day living skills. Although Montessori never developed this stage into a practical learning system, she had the vision of creating schools which would be self-sustaining environments, where through working on communal activities, learning would occur naturally. Consequently, adolescents would be better placed to adapt to the adult world by becoming independent and learning to live in harmony with others.

**Transition to adulthood (18-24 years):** This stage is characterized by career exploration and beginnings stages of careers. If the individual acquired the necessary cognitive and social skills in the previous stages then he will be able to make exact and satisfying careers choices.

A perusal of the new Kenyan curriculum revealed that its developers borrows heavily from both Bloom's (updated) Taxonomy of learning as well as the Montessori approach in both the curriculum's structure and content. Firstly, the new 2-6-3-3 structure mirrors the Montessori planes of development and the learning style at each stage. Secondly, the emphasis on developing individualized CATs is emphasized in the Montessori Method, where the teacher has the freedom to make individualized choices and how and when their learners will be assessed. Moreover, the emphasis on developing creative and evaluative skills are emphasized in both approaches, particularly in Bloom's taxonomy, where these levels of thinking are considered to be the highest levels which all learners should be encouraged to develop. However, it remains to be seen whether the Kenyan Government actually has adequate resources necessary to develop the necessary infrastructure and environment that is expected to nurture the creative abilities emphasized in the two approaches to learning.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS OF THE PILOT TRAINING STAGE OF THE NEW CURRICULUM

At age 4, all children would be expected to enrol for pre-primary education, which would be a free and compulsory aspect of their basic education.<sup>15</sup> At this stage, they would be introduced to six subject areas that target developing their linguistic/language skills; mathematical skills; appreciation of their environment; psychomotor development; creative abilities; and religious education. Thereafter, learners would then move away from the former class system referred to as 'Standard' to the 'Grade' label. Hence, from Grades 1-3, the subject load would be increased to developing nine subject areas that are anticipated to develop skills in literacy<sup>16</sup>; the acquisition and learning of two of Kenya's national and official languages, namely Kiswahili and English;<sup>17</sup> the acquisition and learning of 'indigenous' (Kenyan/African) language(s);<sup>18</sup> mathematics and environmental studies; hygiene and nutrition; religious education;<sup>19</sup> and further recognition and development of creative skills. From Grade 4, the curriculum would then harness the learners' personal interests and preferences will also include upper primary and lower secondary, where basic skills would be taught. In middle and lower secondary, 11 subject areas have been proposed for classes four through seven. Finally, senior school

<sup>15</sup>The Government of Kenya (GoK) introduced free primary school education for all children in Public schools. However, there have been criticisms about this system, with complaints that this has compromised the quality of education children receive in public schools, over-crowded classrooms, lack of funds to pay teaching and non-teaching staff, etc.

<sup>16</sup>It is not clear exactly what 'Literacy' means in the context of this new curriculum

Under the revised Constitution of Kenya (2010), Kiswahili functions as both a National and Official language, whereas English is and Official language and the language of instruction in institutions of learning. The third Official language which became recognized in the New Constitution is Sign language.

<sup>18</sup>Kenya is a multilingual country, with over 42 languages spoken in different parts of the country. Hence, Kiswahili and to some extent, English serve as lingua franca to enable communication amongst people who, on average, and depending on exposure and level of education, speak on average, 2-3 languages i.e. the Mother tongue, Kiswahili and English.

<sup>19</sup>The major religions in Kenya include Christianity, Islam and traditional religions. However, as a consequence of colonialism by the British over 80% of Kenyans profess Christianity while the influence of Islam was a result of Arabic influence at the Coast and the North-Eastern regions of Kenya that mainly border Somalia.

education would cover tertiary and university education. Throughout the curricular, the needs of special education and special needs education would also be recognized.

#### ***4.1: Paradigm Shift in the Assessment of Learners:***

A major shift in the new system was the proposal to abolish the two standardized national examinations, namely, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examination conducted at the end of Standard 8 (after eight years of basic primary education), with the maximum score being 500 marks. The transition to tertiary (University education) has similarly been conducted through a uniform national examination at the end of Form 4 (after four years of secondary education), where candidates sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). The excessive focus on passing national examinations was one of the factors that has contributed to rampant cheating and leakages of national examinations in the recent past. To this effect, a further significant shift would be anchored on a transitional system which would place more emphasis on administering Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs) rather than the previous system where the transition to secondary education has been determined by the marks learners score under nationally administered examination. The new system places more emphasis on teacher-based CATs, as opposed to the previous uniform national grading system. It is expected to be rolled out by teachers with less than one year of training in administering individual CATs similar to the assessment tests and examinations given in colleges and universities. The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) will be tasked with implementing not only the policy document, but also make recommendations on pupil assessment plans.

One criticism of the 8-4-4 system and the introduction of Free Primary School Education was that the system was overloaded with content geared at only passing national examinations. Moreover, Free Basic education inevitably compromised the quality of education, with crowded classrooms, overworked teachers and inadequate/overstretched resources. Similar to the 8-4-4 system; the new curriculum comes with a package of Free Education at Secondary School Level. Yet the problems affecting Free Basic Education during the 8-4-4 era remain unaddressed.

One critical issue that seems to have been casually treated is the assessment methodology that teachers would use to address their learners. There were no clear mechanisms of exactly how pupils would advance to secondary school through the administering of CATs set by individual teachers. There is a high possibility that left to their own devices; teachers would be biased in their assessments in order to improve their performance ratings. Moreover an environment of negative ethnicity was bound to arise with students seeking higher education in their localities because there would be no mechanism to enable them to progress to high schools of their choices in the absence of a standard unifying national examination. Eventually, this was bound to lead to negative ethnicity discrimination, and social stratification, if most students decided to remain in their ethnic neighbourhoods, thereby, deterring national integration.

#### ***4.2: The introduction of indigenous languages in the new curriculum:***

The promotion of literacy and fluency in indigenous languages was meant to create a positive paradigm shift that would facilitate a change in the social, intellectual and psychological attitudes that both teachers and learners have toward their cultural heritage and world-view. In so doing, space of alternative paradigms for education and language development were anticipated to take place. It is anticipated that this will gradually bring in a gradual decolonization in the transfer and reception of knowledge, teaching and learning within academic institutions and beyond, as advocated by the Montessori approach to learning.

Children possess the ability to competently acquire their mother tongue and simultaneously acquire other languages, including a national lingua franca (for regional and national communication) and a language such as English (for global communication). Fluency and literacy in a mother tongue establishes the necessary cognitive and linguistic foundation needed to learn other languages. Incorporating a mother tongue as a language of instruction has proven to be effective, particularly when this language is also the primary language. However, the problem emerges on what criteria will be used for selecting the medium of instruction to be used in multi-lingual communities.

The proposed curriculum anticipates the teaching and learning of indigenous languages as opposed to the previous 8-4-4 system where only Kiswahili and English were taught and examined in the two national examinations. Although the criteria of what Indigenous languages will be taught is not clearly stipulated, it can be inferred that children will have to learn the language of the catchment area spoken in each of the 47 Kenyan counties. However, by the end of December

2017, there were no policy structures explicitly stating exactly what languages would be taught. Moreover, there are no explicit policy guidelines on which agencies would monitor and ensure that there would be uniformity in the interpretation, translation and delivery of content in each of the counties. The challenge herein is to ensure that there is accuracy in translating textbooks, codification and standardisation of the selected ethnic languages. According to Williams and Stroud (2001), one way to enhance the educational use of indigenous languages lies in a “management-oriented” approach to programme diagnosis and remediation<sup>20</sup>. It is important to note that most of the indigenous language used and which the greatest lack of materials and appropriate grammar texts are also the ones that historically been considered politically and thus marginalized to the point that they hardly merit any attention from textbook writers. Furthermore, the introduction of fluency and Literacy in indigenous languages into the education system would be costly in terms of printing materials for the various languages spoken in Kenya. An additional challenge would be changing the mindset of the teachers who previously taught in English and Kiswahili under the 8-4-4 system. The language policy, under this system was that children should be taught in their various indigenous languages (the language spoken in the catchment area) during the first three years of basic education, followed, by a transition to use English as the medium of instruction.

In Kenya, children born and bred particularly in the capital city of Nairobi are raised in multi-lingual settings, where they are typically exposed to their mother tongue, English and Kiswahili. Within this multilingual setting, urban codes or hybrid languages have evolved in different parts of the city. Since a detailed discussion of these codes falls beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that the urban codes Sheng developed in the Eastern part of the city, whereas English developed in the Western part of Nairobi. While the precise boundaries between these two hybrid codes is a major subject of debate in language Studies, Sheng hears the underlying language of Kiswahili, English is mainly used by youth with good competence in English. Both hybrid codes have borrowed heavily from the major indigenous languages used in Kenya, American slang, and numerous other languages.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4.3: Overview of the strengths of the new Curriculum:**

The curriculum designers were definitely making a positive effort to match global standards –not only in the labelling of levels, but also in the drastic shift from an education system that placed greater emphasis on theoretical acquisition of knowledge – to one that is skills-based in orientation. According to Tirima (2017) an expert on curriculum development, this system identifies and nurtures the creative abilities of a child and makes an effort at making information real and relevant.<sup>22</sup> The curriculum further engages parents (and the society as a whole) to participate in the academic progress of learners. Previously, this role was solely delegated to teachers, who focused mainly on drilling learners towards passing national examinations. This resulted in creating learners who were good at reading, memorizing (“cramming”) knowledge and recalling the same knowledge only relevant to exams but poor at individualized critical thinking or creative thought.

The assessment through CATs as opposed to a single national examination gives learners an advantage in that failing one test does not translate into the learner being a total failure. The new curriculum promises to free learners from an examination-oriented curriculum in favour of developing their individual skill and talents. It also gives learners a chance to redeem poor scores in two ways—firstly, by working hard and achieving better scores in subsequent tests or secondly, by focusing their strengths on developing skills in areas that they are good at. In the earlier 8-4-4 system, failing either the KCPE or KCSE meant the end of a child’s education. However, with the introduction of Free Basic and Secondary Education and the abolition of summative national examinations, more students have a chance of advancing their education right up to college or university education. This is definitely a positive initiative that propels Kenya to the ranks of countries that have humanized exams and respect the rights of learners in distress. According to the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) learners who miss or fail their examinations due to circumstances beyond their control will have the opportunity to re-sit for their examinations. Currently in Kenya, special examinations were a preserve of only universities, which allow traumatized students the chance to be re-tested instead of waiting for a year to sit for fresh

---

<sup>21</sup>For a detailed discussion on the two hybrid languages, see Kaviti (2016; 2015) on *the development of urban codes In Nairobi*.

<sup>22</sup>Esther Tirima, in an interview with Agnes Aineah, *The Standard*, Thursday Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, pg. 3.



examinations. Universities also give supplementary exams to students who fail the one examination, albeit with penalties in grading.<sup>23</sup>

The new system promises to be interdisciplinary in approach-seeking to develop the learners language skills, numerical skills, creative abilities, build the learner's self worth, just to name a few. It also takes into consideration learners with special needs and keeps abreast with global developments in ICT and other modern form of digitized information. It also promises to ensure that talents and skills of children are nurtured from an early age. However, therein lies the question – does Kenya have the necessary infrastructure and capacity to handle these ambitious goals contained in this new curriculum? Are Kenyan teachers adequately prepared for the drastic changes this system brings on board? Have all teachers had access to peruse the new textbooks that they will be expected to teach from? Finally, what indigenous languages will be taught and what will be the long term effects of this drive towards County-based ethnicity? The next section focuses on the shortfalls of introducing a new curriculum in a haphazard manner.

According to a report conducted by *Uwezo Trust, Kenya (2015)*, about one third of Std Five and Six pupils across Kenya cannot read or write with clarity. The report revealed that out of every four learners in Kenya, only four of Class five pupils and three out of every ten Class six pupils did not have writing challenges.<sup>24</sup> The results demonstrated that only 13 per cent of the sample investigated could write a relevant passage with fewer than five mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation. The numeracy and literacy levels were significantly higher in Private than in Public schools. The reason given for this difference was the lower number of students in Private schools and the better management of resources. It should be noted that while Public schools in Kenya offer Free Primary Education (courtesy of the Kenyan government), Public Schools still charge fees-both at primary and secondary school levels. In light of this marked difference therefore, the GoK ought to review the quality of education it promises to offer with the expected influx in student numbers, which is expected with the offer of Free Secondary School Education.

#### ***4.4: Criticisms of the new Curriculum and Provision of Free Secondary Education:***

One of the criticisms of the previous 8-4-4 system and the introduction of Free Basic Education in Kenyan schools is the haphazard and rushed way in which it was introduced with inadequate infrastructure and ill-prepared teachers. Yet exactly the same mistake is being replicated with the implementation of the 2-6-3-3 system to be rolled out in the country's 28,000 primary schools. . This new education system is presents a major paradigm shift for which not all stakeholders were consulted or engaged in its design and orientation and has been previously mentioned, is set to be implemented by January 2018. Head teachers have urged the Kenyan government not to rush into implementing a new system which may be targeting achieving political mileage rather than seeking the Best interests of the Child. According to the Kenya Primary Schools Head teachers Association, most tutors and schools were not ready for the new syllabus during the 2017 Annual Conference which brought together over 10,000 school heads. Parents and other education stakeholders similarly expressed their concern. In the words of Shem Ndolo the KPSHA chairman:

Our worry is the lack of preparedness. Parents want to know where they can get the books to be used in the new syllabus. Teachers want to know how it will work....if the challenges are addressed, there will be a way forward. However, it is not easy to start something new without being adequately prepared. That is our main worry.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Prior to the release of the KCPE examination results in December 2017, the President of Kenya (His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta) directed the Education CS and KNEC officers and directed them to allow resits to cushion candidates in difficult and traumatic conditions. This group includes teenage mothers still in school, learner who face trauma such as death of close relative, accidents, children exposed to terrorist attacks, election violence, etc. In 2017, 43 candidates sat the KCPE exam in hospital down from 50 in 2016.The current practice of only one exam disadvantages candidates in trauma. However, according to KNEC this presidential directive given in 2017 can only be implemented from the end of 2018 since national examinations have already been conducted.

<sup>24</sup>The report by *Uwezo Trust Kenya (2015)* was titled: 'Are Our Children learning Beyond the Basic Skills?'This investigation evaluated the children's writing, listening, spelling and ability to perform mathematical problems involving combined operations.

<sup>25</sup>Shem Ndolo, the KPSHA chairman speaking during According to the Kenya Primary Schools Head teachers Association, most tutors and schools were not ready for the new syllabus during the 2017 Annual Conference as reported in a feature titled: "Do Not Rush the new Syllabus, Heads Warn," by Winnie Atieno, *Daily Nation*, Pg. 2.

**International Journal of Novel Research in Education and Learning**Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp: (15-27), Month: January - February 2018, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

As has been previously discussed, the pilot system for this new curriculum took an average of ten weeks, training less than 2000 of the total 160,000 teachers imparting basic education in Kenyan schools. What that implies therefore is that the majority of Kenyan teachers the average teacher has not looked at the new curriculum and yet, they are expected to implement it By January 2018! Although the exercise made an effort to be representative and nationalistic in approach, not all key stakeholders were consulted. Many parents too, have no idea concerning this paradigm shift in the overall education system and are expected to contribute in identifying and nurturing their children's talents. Within previous educational systems, the teacher was the authority and centre of knowledge. Parental engagement will only succeed if teachers are trained on new skills to communicate with parents.

The Kenyan government pledged to provide textbooks to every child, irrespective of whether they go through a public or private system. However, teachers have not had the time to go through them or even seen them. Hence, apart from the 470 teachers and heads that were part of the pilot study, the rest were totally ignorant of the content of the new text books that they are expected to use in teaching. Universities too, have not updated their curricula to fit this new system and yet they will be expected to receive this new cohort of learners. A well planned implantation of any education system (especially one as drastic as this new curriculum) needs time and comprehensive planning to give all levels of education – from pre-primary to university - time to incorporate in their training changes introduced by the 2-6-3-3 structure.

A further challenge was the rushed training of a select group of teachers on how to develop individualized CATs for their learners. It is envisioned that the abolition of national examinations may subject learners to haphazard and biased assessment by teachers, who were previously trained on administering standard nationally examinations. Moreover, what criteria will be used to assess “trauma” in learners for them to warrant special examinations? Will psychological trauma or physical trauma merit special attention? This provision may likely be abuse by lazy students who fake adversity to take advantage of the offer. An alternative mechanism is needed to determine how pupils will progress. Moreover, issues to do with when CATs would be conducted, where they would be marked in a secure environment, the moderation of grades, within a tight, academic calendar, were not considered comprehensively.

Advocates of this new system proposed that it would positively reform education in Kenya and puts it on a global scale. This issue rains contentious since the current infrastructure (particularly in public schools) is severely overstretched, with crowded classrooms and a ratio of 1:5 children on average sharing the few text books provided by the Government. Head teachers expressed concern particularly with the lack of infrastructure, shortage of well-trained teachers familiar with the new content, and a comprehensive orientation of all stakeholders to the new curriculum. Besides the lack of basic infrastructure such as lack of laboratories, adequate classrooms, digital equipment and facilities to nurture creative skills such as sports, music equipment, photography is a privilege of high cost private schools. Yet the curriculum expects teachers to give equal weight to both academic as well as creative skills and talents! Moreover, although the new curriculum promises to reduce the number of academic subjects learned, a glance at the seven skills to be imparted suggests a contrary position. The course content is actually set to increase for Basic Education learners as well as a reduction in the learning time. The 8-4-4 system in total has taken sixteen years to complete, whereas the 2-6-3-3 structure reduces two years of learning. This is bound to increase the number of subjects, while reducing the learners' time in school.

To its credit, the GoK on September 21, 2010 honoured its election pledge to provide complete free day secondary education starting January 2018, after it allocated Sh25billion for the programme. A cabinet meeting chaired by the President resolved that requisite infrastructure will be provided through government initiative and would lead to 100 per cent transition from primary to secondary school. Hence, all the 2017 examination candidates are expected to join secondary school in 2018. Apparently, this would ensure that there is 100 per cent transition of primary school students to high school.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to underscore the fact that funds and resources to finance the construction of facilities (such as classrooms and laboratories), as well as the space to create capacity in secondary schools to absorb all learners is extremely ambitious on the part of the Kenyan government. The trend has been that every year, the GoK

---

<sup>26</sup> Free day School to start in January 2018' *Daily Nation* Fri, Sept 22, 2017

predictably delays the release of capitation funds for ongoing infrastructural development programmes.<sup>27</sup> Public, primary and secondary schools have often faced a cash crisis that has threatened to grind operations in these institutions to a halt. This cash supports free primary and secondary education. Head teachers have often been unable to pay suppliers, non-teaching staff and teacher employed by boards of management. Suppliers of foodstuffs, textbooks and essential materials have also borne the brunt of delays in the release of funds from the Government. Head teachers constantly complain of finding it hard to manage students as they constantly try to evade suppliers, no-teaching staff and teachers employed by boards of management.<sup>28</sup> The question begged is this: if the GoK cannot get its act together to release funds on time, will it be able to provide Free Secondary School Education and a new and expensive curriculum? There is also an acute shortage of teachers with teachers unions constantly on strike demanding the hiring of more teachers. Currently, the country faces a shortage of about 90,000 teachers (KNUT, KUPPET). In addition, the resources allocated to public schools do not include all school emoluments/hidden charges.

## 5. VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND LINGUISTIC RIGHTS IN THE NEW CURRICULUM

The recommended curriculum violates the rights of the child under the Kenya Constitution (2010) because it imposes heavier burdens on them, subjects them to possible bias and is being implemented haphazardly, without the participation of all relevant stakeholders including the general public. The proposed syllabus abolishes national examination in favour of teacher-based assessments to enable learners to graduate from primary to secondary school. The rush at which this new system is being implemented raises critical more questions than answers. Is there an alternative mechanism to determine how pupils will advance from one stage to another? Has the syllabus been well thought out by the widest array of stakeholders to merit the sudden abolition of national assessments, which would subject pupils to haphazard and biased assessments by teachers and tutors/ why are certain subjects such as boxing, fire fighting and photography been given equal weight to subjects like geography and chemistry when determining entry into national universities?

Although some head teachers were selected for a pilot run of the new curriculum, it is questionable whether the Ministry of Education took all their criticisms into consideration. Yet the outcome of this new educational system is largely expected to be directed by them. Furthermore, little consideration was given to the fact that abolishing national examinations without building enough secondary schools to absorb all the primary school graduates is a disaster in the making. The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) Secretary-General pointed out that the implementation of a competency-based curriculum had failed in Tanzania - one of Kenya's neighbouring countries.<sup>29</sup> This is just one amongst other developing countries, which had rushed to implement a system without the necessary infrastructure in place. Countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia and Finland had implemented curriculum reforms that have since proved to be successful in terms of developing holistic learners. However, each of these countries took adequate time to develop what Kenya hopes to roll out in less than three months of planning, piloting and training teachers on the new curriculum! Best practices in Education require that a curriculum needs to be piloted comprehensively (full cycle) to allow for adequate evaluation and revision. As of December 2017, less than one month before the scheduled roll-out in January 2018) there was no syllabus, textbooks and other learning materials. In addition, the effort to provide free secondary education has forced all public secondary schools to take in additional students, which obviously will lead to overcrowded classrooms, overstretched resources, overworked teachers and an inevitable fall in the quality of Secondary school education. This scenario was witnessed with the roll-out of free primary school (Basic) education in public schools.

---

<sup>27</sup>Currently, the GoK pays a subsidy of Ksh12, 870, with parents paying Ksh56, 554 for students in boarding schools, while for those in day schools; the government pays sh12870 while parents pay Ksh9370. The *KilemiMwiria Report* on "Affordable Secondary Education" recommended an increase in capitation grant per child from the current figure, estimating that the unit cost at day schools to be Sh.23975 per year, per child.

<sup>28</sup> 'Schools face funds crisis over late cash' *Daily Nation*, Thursday September 28, 2017

<sup>29</sup>Sossion, W. "Rush to roll out new education system is fraught with perils" in the *Daily Nation*, Wednesday December 13, 2017, Pg. 15.

A further violation of Children's Rights mainly concerns children learning in urbanized areas (such as the capital city of Nairobi). UNESCO's mandate is to provide and support quality education for all as well to reinforce cultural and linguistic diversity in education. It for this reason that UNESCO reinforced the use of mother tongue instruction in early childhood since 1953.<sup>30</sup> As previously mentioned, Kenya has three Official languages, with Kiswahili as the primary lingua franca used during cross-cultural communication. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) affirms the right to education without discrimination. Article 2 of the same Declaration establishes the basic principle against discrimination on the grounds of language. Article 5 of the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960) specifically recognizes the rights of minority groups to carry out their own educational activities, including the use of teaching and learning in their own language, provided that this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minority groups from understanding the culture and language of these minority groups from understanding the language of the community as a whole.,

Studies reveal that children who are offered opportunities to learn in mother tongue are more likely to enrol and perform successfully in school. Moreover, it is easier for the parents to better engage with their children using concepts familiar to them.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of this paper, the new curriculum and the introduction of free secondary school education – despite its merits and noble in intentions - is borrowed from developed countries, without taking into account the local education hurdles currently faced. Although well intended with an effort at being Child-centred, has been criticized as being too futuristic and impractical to implement in Kenya by January 2018. This paper has demonstrated that during the planning stages, key stakeholders were not brought on board. It would be critical for a commission comprising of all stakeholders – including teachers representing all levels of education, parents/guardians, curriculum experts, the Ministry of Education as well as donor (who hopefully will fund this ambitious endeavour) be brought on board to thoroughly investigate the new curriculum.. The general public also needs to be allowed to critique the curriculum, particularly in regard to the need to switch to a new curriculum, generation and provision of funds, the design and development of new syllabus, teaching, learning aids, etc. Teachers too, need to go through a full cycle of piloting, summative evaluation and implementation as well as in-service training before this education system can be successfully rolled out. Even some of those brought on board (such as head teachers and teachers) are not all in agreement or even understand the drastic paradigm shift in the delivery of education.

It would be advisable for the Government of Kenya- through its organs (the Education Ministry and constituent departments of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) not to repeat the mistakes previously made during the roll-out of the 8-4-4 system. One major criticism of the out-going system is the hurried way in which it was implemented. Yet the same haphazard implementation may interfere with the smooth implementation of the 2-6-3-3 system if its rollout is not delayed deliberately to ensure that all teachers are adequately informed about the content of delivery, especially with regard to the shift from national examinations to individualized CATs. The shift in assessment style also needs to be carefully scrutinized. CATs administered subjectively at a teacher's whim could end up disastrously, especially when administered by teachers who were used to preparing students for national exams after 8 years of Basic education and 4 years of Secondary school education. As summative as they were, these national examinations have their positive aspects, in that they keep learners on their toes and refresh them on what they had learnt at appropriate intervals. It is questionable whether the Ministry of Education and the Curriculum developers analyzed exactly how objectivity would be maintained in the administering of CATs within each count and nationally.

Moreover, a national committee needs to be convened prior to the implementation of the system which will include all key stakeholders such as more teachers and parent representatives, universities, textbook publishers and count representatives from the GoK to ensure a harmonious rollout of a devolved function of education. The present hurdles

---

<sup>30</sup>This is in line with the international targets for universal education articulate in the "Education For All" goals. The UNESCO Constitution underscores the principle that language should not be used to discriminate any learner. Similarly linguistic rights and fundamental freedoms are and fundamental freedoms are affirmed for every community without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.

## International Journal of Novel Research in Education and Learning

Vol. 5, Issue 1, pp: (15-27), Month: January - February 2018, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

facing the Education sector need to be addressed prior to introducing a new educational system. Before inducing this new system, certain issues need to be addressed including the lack of adequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, recruitment of more teachers (and support staff). Finally, the establishment of educational centres to identify and nurture creative talents should not give certain counties advantages over others in terms of Educational development.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Anderson, L.W., Krathwohl, D.R., et al (2001). *Taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing*. New York, NY: Longman.
- [2] Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S. (2001). *Taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. City. Allyn & Bacon.
- [3] Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. New York: Longman Green.
- [4] Government of Kenya. 2010. *Constitution of Kenya*. Government Printer.
- [5] David, L, 'Bloom's Taxonomy' in *Learning Theories*, July 24, 2014, <https://www.learning-theories.com/blooms-taxonomy-bloom.html>.
- [6] David, L. 'Montessori Method' in *Learning Theories*, February 1, 2016. <http://www.learning-theories.com/montessori.html>.
- [7] Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(4), 212-218.
- [8] Montessori, M. (2013). *The Montessori Method*. Transaction publishers.
- [9] Montessori, M. (1936). *The Secret of Childhood*. B. B. Carter (Ed.). Calcutta: Orient Longmans.
- [10] Montessori, M. (1949). *The Absorbent Mind* (Vol. 1), Lulu. Com
- [11] Ministry of Education (2015) *Kilemi Mwiraria Taskforce Report on Affordable Secondary Education in Kenya*. Republic of Kenya, Nairobi
- [12] Ndonga, S. (2017) 'Do Not Rush the new Syllabus, Heads Warn,' In *Daily Nation*, Nairobi: Nation Media Group.
- [13] Sossion, W. (December 13, 2017). *Rush to roll out new education system is fraught with perils* Daily Nation, Nairobi.
- [14] Williams, Q & Stroud: *Journal of Language and Politics*, Volume 14, Issue 3, 2015, pages: 406 –430, DOI: 10.1075/jlp.14.3.05wi
- [15] Tirima, E. (Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017). 'The Average Teacher has not even looked at the Curriculum they will teach'. In *The Standard*, Nairobi. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/prof-tirima-the-average-teacher-has-not-even-looked-at-the-curriculum-they-will-teach>.
- [16] *United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights. 1948*
- [17] *United Nations Convention and Recommendation Against Discrimination in Education. 1960*
- [18] UNESCO (2014) 'Report on Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Kenya'. *Ministry of Education, Science and Technology*. Nairobi: UNESCO [efa2015reviews@unesco.org](mailto:efa2015reviews@unesco.org).
- [19] Uwezo (2015): *Are Our Children Learning? The State of Education in Kenya in 2015 and Beyond*. Nairobi: Twaweza East Africa.
- [20] Wanzala, W. (2013). 'Quest for Quality and Relevant Higher Education, Training and learning in Kenya: An Overview'. In *Education Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 36-49. Science Publishing group
- [21] (Sept 22, 2017) *Free day School to start in January 2018* Daily Nation, Nairobi: Nation Media group.
- [22] (September 28, 2017) 'Schools face funds crisis over late cash' Daily Nation. Nairobi, Nation Media group.