

Curriculum Reforms (Reviews/Revisions) and Innovative Research for Sustainable Development in Modern Africa: The Kenyan Experience

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Abstract

Curriculum development, reforms (reviews/revisions) and research activities are expected developments in education and society. Though complex and education-packed in nature, these processes are required for promotion of quality in education. They are normally highly professional and academic activities that require specialized expertise. These processes usually provide opportunity for generating and nurturing creativity and innovativeness in members of the society. In other words, curriculum reviews/revisions indicate the purpose of the study and innovative research are the basis of initiating, developing and propagating the desired cultural practices in education and society. Besides, the two processes serve as agents of change in the society. That is, they mould the character of the society. In view of the above discussion, the present paper is designed to examine the relationship between curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development. The role of these processes in spurring sustainable development in modern Kenya, the impact of the processes of curriculum and innovative research on sustainable development in modern Kenya, strategies for harnessing curriculum reforms (reviews/revisions) and innovative research for sustainable development in Kenya, the challenges of these processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research on initiating and promoting sustainable development in modern Kenya and the contributions of sustainable development to development and sustenance of curriculum reforms (reviews/revisions) and innovative research in modern Kenya. It is hoped that through the narrative that follows, new and more rigorous inertia will emerge in Kenya to embrace the culture of conducting curriculum reviews/revisions in a more professional and innovative manner than the case is at present.

Key Words: Curriculum Review, Innovative Research, Development, Modern Africa

INTRODUCTION

This paper is designed to discuss the processes of curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development as critical components of the development and survival of the society. These are the tools that a society harnesses to generate and expand frontiers of knowledge and competencies needed for development in such a society. They determine and establish the culture and character of the society. However, it is important to understand what these three concepts mean in the context of this paper.

Curriculum reforms is the process of re-tooling, re-examining the existing curriculum with a view to introducing or injecting new ideas in the practiced education system in order to promote the quality of education (Ssenteza –Kajjubi, 1969). Normally curriculum reformation takes two forms namely, revision and review (ibid). Revision of the curriculum involves conducting minor/limited/ changes in the existing curriculum as a response to the recommendations of the curriculum monitoring team. This process targets identified specific weaknesses in such a curriculum. However, this sort of approach to curriculum reform weakens the established structures of the curriculum since the introduced challenges are haphazardly done or not in tandem with the original design and development of the curriculum. Standard curriculum review involves total over-haul of the existing curriculum in response to the emerging issues/ /developments/needs in education and society (Lucas, 1968). This is normally conducted after needs assessment process/situational analysis in the practiced education system, commonly referred to as Education Commission, is carried out. The process involves total changes in the established design and structures in the existing curriculum (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992; Taylor, 1978). This process is necessitated by and as a response to new developments in education and society.

While innovative research is an emerging trend in the design and administration of research activities (Simala, 2004). It is a form of research that is a departure from the established practices in traditional or conventional models of conducting research. It involves innovative designs, approaches, methodologies and examining researchable issues or problems that are somehow at variance with those conducted in basic or action oriented-research models. However, the similarity between innovative research and other established models of research is that they all focus on investigating identified problems or issues and establishing the desired information or knowledge. That is, they seek solutions to identified, researchable issues or problems. Generally innovative philosophical paradigms, research employs philosophical paradigms, pragmatic methods of administering research such as mixed methods of conducting research. However, sustainable development is a form of development that is designed to remain relevant period or process that ensures continuous development because of the designed, development and administered structures by society. These are issues that form the theme of this paper.

Relationship between Curriculum Reforms, Innovative Research and Sustainable Development in Modern Kenya

In order to discuss this aspect of the paper adequately, it is necessary to examine briefly the historical development of curriculum reforms and innovative research in modern Kenya. The first documented curriculum reform was in 1925 when the Phelps-Stoke

(1925) education commission was formed by the British colonial office to review education practices in British Tropical Africa which included Colonial Kenya. For Kenya, this education commission was not only timely but appropriate. It came after “the 1923 White Paper” which had categorically declared that Colonial Kenya shall never be a “White Man’s Land” and the actions of the African soldier- returnees from the First World War of 1914 – 1919 who agitated for academic education for africans. This commission recommended the design and development of relevant education curriculum for Africans in Kenya and the expansion of educational opportunities in the country to meet increased demand.

The second landmark education commission was the Beecher Education commission of 1955 that was established by the Colonial Office in London. Its main mandate was to investigate and recommend the education system that was to prepare Africans in Kenya for the inevitable independence in which they were expected to run their affairs. Further, the commission was also mandated to examine the possibility of expanding educational opportunities horizontally (increase opportunities) and vertically (extend levels of education) so as to prepare and produce skilled manpower to manage the affairs of the expected independent Kenya. Characteristically, these two commissions of education never made mention of or talked of research as component of their recommendations (Pheps – Stoke Report, 1925; Beecher Education Report, 1955). The first education commission to be set in independent Kenya was the Ominde Education commission of 1965. This commission was ostensibly established to review the inherited colonial education system in Kenya.

The commission, among the many recommendations it made, proposed abolition of racialism and discrimination in education. Further, the commission reinforced the Beecher Education commission (1955) recommendation which emphasized the preparation of skilled manpower to run the independent Kenyan economy. Thirdly, this commission recommended the establishment of the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) as a research unit of the Ministry of Education. The second post independence education commission was the Gachathi Education commission of 1976 which was mandated to review the then existing education system as a response to the increased unemployment in the country. The Gachathi Education Report (1976) recommended the introduction of a new education structure of 8.4.2.3 (that is 8 years of Primary school education, 4 years of “Ordinary” secondary school education, 2 years of “Advanced” secondary school education and 3 years of University,. Besides, as a practical solution to the issue of unemployment, this commission recommended the introduction of Technical and Vocational education in Kenyan education curriculum. The commission also recommended the development of a strong culture of conducting continuous research in education to determine the emerging issues in education and society. However due to political reasons, the Gachathi Education report was never implemented.

The third education commission was the Mackay Education Commission of 1984. This commission was set up to review the need for the establishment of the second university in Kenya. But, it was also mandated to review the implementation of the Gachathi Education report (1976). The fourth education commission Koech education commission of 1999 which made, a raft of recommendations concerning the review of the education system that were not implemented at all. However the commission emphasized the need for the design and use of research in education to promote and

maintain its quality. Consequently, from this discourse, the relationship between curriculum reforms and innovative research seems quite apparent. Relationships, as defined by Kerlinger (1973) and Kothari (2004), refer to commonness (interms of characteristics/features/actions) among objects or phenomena. In the case of curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development relationship that exists is that these processes have their common origin in education and society and. Secondly, curriculum reforms and innovative research normally inform the development agenda of a country. These two processes provide a strong basis for setting the development agenda, including sustainable development in Kenya. Thirdly, the development agenda of the society demonstrates the efficiency/relevancy of the undertaken curriculum reforms and the designed and conducted innovative research.

Normally, curriculum reforms and innovative research create opportunities and provides the basis for responding to emerging issues, including sustainable development, in the society. In a changing environment like the one obtaining in of Kenya, curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development is a necessary, expected occurrence. Finally, the relationship between all these three processes is both symbiotic and reciprocal and, inter-dependent. Curriculum reforms usually prepare and produce creative and innovative personnel and introduce new and sophisticated competencies that can be used to spur the expected innovative research and sustainable development. From the above discussion, the role of curriculum reforms and innovative research in sustainable development can now be examined.

Role of Curriculum Reforms and Innovative Research in Sustainable Development

This refers to the place and functions of curriculum reforms and innovative research in spurring sustainable development in the society. Generally, the role of these two processes in the sustainable development includes provision of essential information and guidance for setting the sustainable development agenda. Information is normally the tool and the major soft-ware in conducting any operation including sustainable development. Curriculum reforms and innovative research usually determine the level, quality, rate and direction of the designed development including sustainable development in the society. The more relevant and sophisticated the processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research are, the better the foundations for sustainable development in the society is, by extension, the longer this development lasts. Further, curriculum reforms and innovative research are expected to lay the foundation or basis for determining the level of efficiency of designing and conducting sustainable development in the society. Besides, curriculum reforms and innovative research establish new grounds for designing and conducting sustainable, development and they also serve as the stimuli, facilitators and the litmus test for establishing and conducting sustainable development as these processes promote the desired strategies of established and modernizing development including sustainable development in the society.

The above described the situation that was the norm in Kenya between the years of 1964 and 1981 (GoK, 1980) though not quite vigorous. Examination of the commissions (Phelps –Stoke Education commission of 1925 and the Beecher Education Report, 1955) it is noted that the focus was on Economic and Human resource development. The other elements of sustainable development were not seriously considered. The

scrutiny of the membership of these two education commission confirms this fact. After independence in 1963 and taking into account the Organisation of African Unity declaration on education of 1963 (O.A.U., 1963), Kenya embarked on strategies of promoting its development agenda through education. The envisaged development was more comprehensive than the one conducted during the Colonial era. It covered political, social, economic, technological etc. in nature. To emphasise the role of curriculum reforms and research in this process, the Kenya government organized and conducted curriculum reforms professionally and inclusively made use of research results in its development agenda. The government departments were made to establish units that conducted collaborative research with relevant departments at the University of Nairobi. The results of these studies were incorporated in the strategic planning outlays of the country. Besides, the Ministry of Education established the Kenya Institute of Education in 1968 as its Research Unit (Republic of Kenya, 1968). This was meant to facilitate the development and administration of efficient curriculum reforms based on researched information that could spur innovative research for sustainable development and also serve as the measure for determining the impact of the processes of curriculum reforms, and innovative research and development especially sustainable development in modern Kenya.

The Impact of the Processes of Curriculum Reforms and Innovative Research on Sustainable Development in Modern Kenya

The impact of curriculum reforms and Innovative research on development and particularly sustainable development in the society is measured and demonstrated by the level, quality and nature of out-comes. This may be seen in the manner the development agenda of the society is organized and administered by the products of these processes and the kind of facilitation available for this operation from the established authority. The critical facilitations include human resource (skilled manpower), financial, technical and logistical support. These are the basis for carrying out successful curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development respectively. In the case of Kenya this impact can be looked at from three levels – Colonial phase, the thirty years (1963-83) of independence phase and thereafter experience until to-day.

During the Colonial era education curriculum reforms focused on promoting economic gains for Britain. The interest was to design and administer an education system that was mainly to promote economic development in Kenya based on the production of raw materials for the British industries. Therefore, the designed and administered education system which was, characteristically racial to provide basic education to the Africans to work as clerical staff in Colonial administration and as farm hands on European farms in the so called “White “Highlands” (OHMS, 1948). Besides, the practiced education did not encourage the design and administration of research as facilitator of development. However, on attaining independence in 1963, Kenya like many other independent African countries reformed its education system and placed great emphasis on research as emphasized in the first O.A.U (1963) meeting in Addis Ababa. The impact of this development was noted in the rapid and comprehensive (political, social, economic and technological) development (Transition, 1976).

This feature became the trade mark of Kenya. The country was seen as the perfect role model in development programmes in Africa. The secret was that during this period

(1963 – 1983) Kenya did not only invest in education but in research in government departments and the University of Nairobi. This strategy boosted the development of research as the basis of national development and, by extension, sustainable development. In relation to this point, the third phase examines the development and conduct of curriculum reforms and innovative research for sustainable development during the period after 1983.

After 1983, the conduct of curriculum reforms was not technically and professionally undertaken and the investment in education and especially research was drastically reduced because of the then prevailing economic situation in Kenya. The process of curriculum reformation was highly politicized and, therefore, not conducive for the development and administration of a research expected component. Besides limited investment in education, the existing political climate forced most of the seasoned scholars who would have spearheaded and promoted research in the country into exile. This development and the mismanagement of curriculum reforms dealt a big blow to the development and administration of research as a potential facilitator of sustainable development in the country. Kenya is yet to recover from this serious setback. Curriculum reforms are still being haphazardly conducted and investments in research have drastically reduced. The consequence of this development has been poor net development in Kenya. The country is now a shadow of its past in development during the 1963-83 period (Economic Survey, 2009). But what should be done to regain this lost glory of Kenya in Curriculum reforms, development and conduct of meaningful research and development and maintain sustainable development that used to be made mark of the country? That is, what strategies does Kenya need to harness the potential of curriculum reforms and innovative research to promote and accelerate its development especially sustainable development? The section that follows discusses some of these strategies.

Strategies of Harnessing Curriculum Reforms and Innovative Research for Sustainable Development in Modern Kenya

Strategies are methods and procedures of doing something. In the case of harnessing curriculum reforms and innovative research for sustainable development in Kenya, the following strategies should be explored and adopted for the purpose. There is need to understand well the concepts of curriculum reforms innovative research and sustainable development before doing anything else. This understanding facilitates the planning for and administration of these processes. Apart from this, the other strategic considerations are planning for conducting curriculum reforms and innovative research. This involves determining and establishing the required investment, infrastructure, technical operational systems and logistical support for these processes. This should be followed by consideration of the necessary investments to facilitate the development and administration of the processes of the innovative research, curriculum reforms and sustainable development. These investments include finance, expertise and information systems. This strategy should then be followed by conducting proper identification, selection and harnessing of the proper expertise for the efficient administration of these processes. The first two processes, namely, curriculum reforms and innovative research are education-packed, professional and technical operations that require well trained qualified and experienced personnel to conduct them. This stage should be followed by purposeful administration of the three processes. The administration of these processes

should be based on set objectives and guidelines if the desired out-comes are to be realized. Then finally, there should be well organised and conducted evaluation to determine and establish their performance. When these strategies are well designed and conducted Kenya should be able to harness curriculum reforms and research, especially innovative research, efficiently for rapid and sustainable development. On the basis of the preceding discussions on relationships between curriculum reforms, innovative research and sustainable development; the role, impact and strategies of harnessing curriculum reforms and innovative research in modern Kenya, a clear picture of contributions of sustainable development on curriculum reforms and innovative research processes emerge as presented here below.

Contributions of Sustainable Development to the Development and Maintenance of the Processes of Curriculum Reforms and Innovative Research in Modern Kenya

This refers to the benefits of, value- addition and of sustainable development to the development and maintenance of the processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research in modern Kenya. The contributions or benefits of sustainable development to these two processes are immense. The processes of sustainable development are the source of investment (finance and human resource) in the designed and development of curriculum reforms and innovative research. It is reservoir of critical facilitators to the said two processes. Further, this process guarantees continued administration of curriculum reforms and innovative research in Kenya by continuously supporting these processes.. This is because it will ensure there is steady flow of financial support expertise and logistical backing for these processes. Besides, sustainable development motivates, excites and encourages active participation by stakeholders in the processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research because they feel they own the processes and that their efforts are reward (Kadenyi and Kisirkoi, 2014; Kafu and Simwelo, 2014). The stable and steady development in society, as affirmed by Courtis (1975), spurs creativity and innovativeness both in the society and education which are the main basis for conducting efficient processes of curriculum reforms and research, especially innovative research. This is because this form of development provides the expected prosperity in the society which, in turn, encourages adventurous exploits in education by members of the society, hence influencing the introduction of new percepts in the administration of education in the country.

This practice was well demonstrated during the prosperous era of Kenya (1963-1983). Curriculum reforms and research activities were enthusiastically received by the public and were carried as well as out and in the government circles and the University of Nairobi with great zeal (African Studies Bureau, 1976). This was because the required support for administration of these academic activities always was readily available in addition there was increased need for new knowledge and competencies for the emerging developments in the country. However, all the above discussed issues have had their own unique and potential challenges as discussed in the section that follows.

Challenges of Curriculum Reforms (Reviews/Revisions) and Innovative Research on Initiating and Promoting Sustainable Development in Modern Kenya

The impact of curriculum reforms and research on the society and development is well discussed by King (1961) and David (2007). According to these two authorities, education is generally dynamic and sensitive to developments in the society which poses a big challenge to the processes. This feature provides the first challenge of the processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research on initiating and promoting sustainable development in the society. The processes of curriculum reforms and innovative research are, by their nature and character, dynamic. They are sensitive and responsive to situations including to the emerging issues in education and society a characteristic that makes it difficult to plan efficiently for and manage them competently. This is because of the ever-changing environment in the society that affects the developments in education and society which in most cases happens unexpectedly. Closely related to this challenge is that of the required investments in the two processes. Because of the nature and character of these two processes, it is always not possible to correctly identify, select and appropriate the required investments to them in terms of finance, expertise, time, effort, infrastructure and technical as well as logistical support. This is normally a formidable challenge to many societies including Kenya. The third challenge of curriculum reforms and innovative research on initiating and promoting sustainable development in modern Kenya is related to the co-ordination of designing and developing these operations in the society. More often than not, these processes are organized, treated and conducted in isolation of each other and by different organs of the society that hardly interact. The consequence of this structural design is that unnecessary conflict, confusion and or duplication of functions and operations occur. This results in wastage of resources, redundancy and occasional collapse of development in the society. The fourth challenge of curriculum reforms and innovative research is the need for highly specialised operations which require equally specialised expertise. This seems to be an omission in present, modern Kenya. For example curriculum reforms should be managed by specialists in education with distinguished record in administration of education. This involves bringing on board players from all sections of education to harmonise the intended educational issues. This has never been the case in Kenya since the colonial era. What is observed is that curriculum reforms has been entrusted to “hecklers” in education and “amateurish” individuals on educational issues The consequences has been disastrous especially for sustainable development. In the case of research, since 1983, this activity has been consigned to students pursuing post-graduate studies which can not be used to promote innovative research for sustainable development. The Ministry of Education has even dismantled the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) which was initially established as the research unit of this Ministry and between the latter and other government Ministries as well as the Universities no longer work closely on matter related to research. Therefore, the possibility of using curriculum reforms and innovative reforms for initiating and promoting sustainable development in Kenya is dim. This is the total opposite of what Ssentenza-Kajjubi (1969) said of Makerere University. Last but not least, Kenya has not embraced the globalization process in education which would be the best channel for modernizing curriculum reforms and adopt innovative research for sustainable development. This problem is exasperated by the limited development of technological infrastructure in the country which is a major component of globalization process in education and society. If this sector is not properly harnessed it can hamper the adoption

of globalization process in education (Kafu, 2013). This problem, associated with the apparent conflict of what should be treated as national interests and global perspective in curriculum reforms and research is a major impediment to promoting sustainable development not only in modern Kenya but the whole of Africa (UNESCO, 2007).

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to discuss issues that are related to curriculum reforms and innovative research for sustainable development in modern Kenya. The narrative demonstrates that these issues have strong influence on development agenda of this country. Although surmountable but they require proper planning and management strategies if Kenya is to benefit from the initiated and conducted curriculum reforms and innovative research for sustainable development.

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