
LEVERAGING CURRICULUM REFORMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN KENYAN SCHOOLS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL WORKING PARTY ON EDUCATION REFORM REPORT (2023)

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ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Kenya's education sector is undergoing a major transition from the 8-4-4 system to the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), but effective implementation continues to face challenges related to teacher preparedness, assessment, financing, infrastructure, and stakeholder engagement.

Purpose of the Study: This paper analyzes the Report of the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWPER, 2023) to examine how curriculum reforms can be leveraged to promote sustainable development in Kenyan schools.

Methodology: The study is based on a review of the PWPER Report and relevant academic literature on educational transformation, curriculum reform, and sustainable development.

Findings: The paper establishes that the shift to the 2-6-3-3 structure provides a strong framework for nurturing 21st-century skills, learner competencies, innovation, and talent development. However, its success depends on addressing structural bottlenecks in teacher management, assessment systems, resource allocation, financing, and public participation.

Conclusion: The study concludes that CBC has the potential to align Kenyan education with sustainable development goals if the PWPER recommendations are implemented effectively.

Recommendation: The study recommends strengthening teacher preparation, improving assessment frameworks, increasing equitable financing, expanding infrastructure, and enhancing stakeholder engagement to support effective curriculum reform.

Keywords: *Leveraging, Curriculum Reforms, Sustainable Development, Schools, Presidential Working, Party, Education Reform Report (2023)*

INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most important instruments for national transformation, social mobility, economic development, and democratic consolidation. Across the world, governments increasingly recognize that quality education is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) specifically calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Consequently, many countries have initiated curriculum reforms aimed at equipping learners with competencies relevant to the demands of the twenty-first century. In Kenya, education reforms have historically reflected the country's socio-economic and political aspirations. Since independence, the education system has undergone several transformations beginning with the Ominde Commission (1964), the Gachathi Report (1976), the Mackay Report (1981), the Koech Commission (1999), and more recently the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). The CBC was introduced to replace the 8-4-4 system which had been criticized for encouraging rote learning, examination-oriented instruction, curriculum overload, and inadequate preparation of learners for employment and innovation.

To address emerging challenges in the education sector and provide a roadmap for effective implementation of CBC, President William Ruto established the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWPER) in September 2022 under the chairmanship of Prof. Raphael Munavu. The Working Party was tasked with evaluating the education system and recommending reforms necessary for national development and sustainability. The PWPER Report (2023) provides a comprehensive framework for transforming education, training, and research in Kenya. It addresses curriculum reforms, teacher education, governance, assessment, financing, technology integration, legal reforms, and equity issues. The report acknowledges that curriculum reform is not merely a pedagogical issue but also a developmental strategy intended to produce responsible, innovative, and productive citizens capable of driving socio-economic transformation.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Curriculum reform refers to deliberate efforts aimed at improving educational content, pedagogy, assessment, and learning outcomes to meet societal needs. According to Ornstein and Hunkins (2018), curriculum reform involves restructuring educational experiences to align learning with

contemporary realities. Educational reforms are often influenced by political, economic, technological, and social changes occurring within societies.

The Competency-Based Curriculum in Kenya is largely grounded in constructivist theory, which emphasizes learner-centered approaches, experiential learning, problem-solving, and active participation. Constructivist theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky argue that learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and social experiences. Consequently, CBC emphasizes practical learning, collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking. The reforms are also informed by Human Capital Theory, which posits that education contributes directly to economic productivity by equipping individuals with relevant skills and competencies. Schultz (1961) and Becker (1993) argue that investment in education enhances labour productivity and national economic growth. The CBC therefore seeks to produce graduates who are employable, innovative, entrepreneurial, and adaptable to changing labour market demands.

Furthermore, the reforms align with Sustainable Development Theory which emphasizes balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) promotes responsible citizenship, environmental conservation, social justice, and sustainable lifestyles. UNESCO (2021) argues that education systems must prepare learners not only for employment but also for global citizenship and sustainable living.

The PWPER Report reflects these theoretical foundations by emphasizing learner competencies, digital literacy, innovation, ethical values, environmental awareness, and inclusivity.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF CURRICULUM REFORM

Globally, curriculum reforms are increasingly being shaped by technological advancement, globalization, labour market changes, and sustainability concerns. Countries such as Finland, Singapore, Canada, and South Korea have restructured their curricula to prioritize competencies rather than rote memorization. According to UNESCO (2021), modern education systems should promote lifelong learning, adaptability, creativity, and resilience. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the need for education systems to develop future-ready learners capable of navigating complex social and economic challenges.

Kenya's CBC reforms mirror international trends toward learner-centered education. The reforms emphasize:

- i. Critical thinking;
- ii. Communication skills;
- iii. Creativity and innovation;
- iv. Digital literacy;
- v. Citizenship education;
- vi. Collaboration and teamwork;
- vii. Self-efficacy and problem-solving.

The PWPER Report recognizes that globalization and technological change require education systems to produce graduates who can compete internationally while addressing local development needs. Consequently, the report proposes reforms that align Kenyan education with global standards and sustainable development objectives.

ARCHITECTURAL SHIFTS: THE 2-6-3-3 MODEL

One of the most significant recommendations of the PWPER Report is the affirmation and refinement of the 2-6-3-3 education structure consisting of:

Two years of pre-primary education;

Six years of primary education;

Three years of junior secondary education; and

Three years of senior secondary education.

This structure is intended to provide a smooth and developmentally appropriate learning progression. Unlike the 8-4-4 system which emphasized examinations, the 2-6-3-3 model focuses on competency acquisition and talent development.

The senior school pathways represent a major innovation within CBC. Learners are expected to specialize according to their interests, talents, and career aspirations through:

Arts and Sports Science;

Social Sciences; and

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

This differentiation is important for sustainable development because it recognizes diverse learner abilities and promotes specialization in strategic sectors of the economy. The pathways are intended to reduce unemployment by aligning education with labour market demands and talent development.

The report further recommends strengthening career guidance and counseling services to help learners make informed pathway choices. Effective guidance is critical because inappropriate placement may undermine learner motivation and future productivity.

ASSESSMENT REFORMS AND LEARNER EVALUATION

Assessment reforms form a critical component of the CBC implementation process. Traditional examinations under the 8-4-4 system primarily measured memorization and theoretical understanding. The CBC seeks to replace this approach with competency-based assessment.

The PWPER Report recommends balancing formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment focuses on continuous evaluation of learner progress while summative assessment evaluates achievement at the end of a learning cycle. The report specifically recommends that the Kenya Primary School Education Assessment (KPSEA) should serve monitoring purposes rather than high-stakes placement functions. This recommendation addresses public concerns regarding excessive examinations and learner pressure.

Berry (2011) argues that curriculum reforms cannot succeed without corresponding reforms in assessment systems. Teachers tend to teach according to what is tested. Therefore, assessment frameworks must reflect the competencies and values promoted by CBC. The Competency-Based Assessment Framework proposed in the report emphasizes:

Practical application of knowledge;

Problem-solving;

Creativity;

Communication skills;

Collaboration;

Ethical values;

Talent identification.

The report further recommends reducing assessment overload to minimize learner anxiety and teacher burden. This is important because excessive assessment may undermine creativity and learner-centered pedagogy.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers are central to the success of curriculum reforms. The PWPER Report identifies teacher preparedness as one of the greatest challenges facing CBC implementation. Many teachers reportedly lack adequate training in competency-based pedagogy, learner-centered instruction, assessment, and digital integration. The report recommends comprehensive reforms in teacher education and training. Specifically, it proposes:

Alignment of teacher training curricula with CBC philosophy;

Strengthening pre-service teacher preparation;

Continuous Teacher Professional Development (CTPD);

Mentorship and coaching programs;

Enhanced digital literacy among teachers.

According to Darling-Hammond (2017), successful educational reforms depend largely on teacher competence and professional support systems. Teachers require continuous learning opportunities to adapt to changing curriculum demands. The report further highlights staffing shortages in many schools, especially in marginalized and rural regions. Unequal teacher distribution contributes to educational inequities and undermines sustainable development goals. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) is therefore expected to strengthen recruitment, deployment, and retention policies to ensure equitable access to qualified teachers across the country. Additionally, the report recommends improving teacher motivation through better working conditions, career progression opportunities, and psychosocial support. Motivated teachers are more likely to embrace reforms and deliver quality education.

CURRICULUM REFORMS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Curriculum reforms are closely linked to sustainable development because education shapes attitudes, values, skills, and behaviours necessary for societal transformation. The CBC integrates competencies that support sustainable development in several ways.

Economic Sustainability

CBC promotes entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation, and technical skills necessary for economic productivity. By emphasizing practical learning and talent development, the curriculum seeks to reduce graduate unemployment and dependency. The inclusion of STEM education and technical pathways supports industrialization and technological advancement envisioned under Kenya Vision 2030.

Social Sustainability

The CBC integrates values such as citizenship, integrity, social responsibility, peace, and inclusivity. These competencies are essential for social cohesion and democratic participation. The curriculum also promotes inclusivity by recognizing diverse learner needs and talents. Learners with disabilities and those from marginalized communities are expected to benefit from differentiated learning approaches.

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental conservation and climate change awareness are integrated into CBC learning areas. Learners are encouraged to develop sustainable lifestyles and environmental responsibility. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that education systems must equip learners with knowledge and values necessary for environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

Technological Sustainability

Digital literacy is a core competency within CBC. The PWPER Report emphasizes integrating ICT in teaching and learning to prepare learners for participation in the digital economy.

Technology supports:

Access to learning resources;

Innovation;

Research and communication;

Online learning;

Administrative efficiency.

FINANCING CURRICULUM REFORMS

The implementation of CBC requires substantial financial investment. The PWPER Report acknowledges that inadequate financing remains one of the greatest threats to successful implementation.

The reforms require investment in:

Classrooms;

Laboratories;

Workshops;

Digital devices;

Internet connectivity;

Learning materials;

Teacher recruitment and training.

The report recommends reviewing capitation grants to reflect the actual cost of implementing CBC. It further proposes partnerships between government, private sector actors, development partners, and communities. The World Bank (2018) notes that insufficient financing often leads to policy failure in developing countries. Sustainable curriculum reforms therefore require predictable and equitable funding mechanisms. The report also addresses the “double transition” challenge where Grade 6 and Standard 8 learners transitioned simultaneously, placing pressure on school infrastructure and staffing. Investment in infrastructure is particularly critical for junior secondary schools because CBC emphasizes practical learning requiring laboratories, workshops, studios, and sports facilities.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The integration of technology in education is a major theme in the PWPER Report. The report recognizes that digital transformation is necessary for preparing learners for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed technological inequalities within Kenya's education sector. Many learners lacked access to devices, electricity, and internet connectivity during school closures.

The report therefore recommends:

Expanding digital infrastructure in schools;

Providing learner digital devices;

Training teachers in ICT integration;

Enhancing internet connectivity;

Developing digital learning content.

Technology can support personalized learning, improve access to educational resources, and facilitate assessment and communication. However, digital transformation must be accompanied by policies addressing inequality and accessibility. Schools in rural and marginalized areas particularly require targeted support to bridge the digital divide.

GOVERNANCE, POLICY, AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Effective governance is essential for sustainable curriculum implementation. The PWPER Report recommends harmonizing legal and policy frameworks governing education in Kenya. The report proposes amendments to:

The Basic Education Act (2013);

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) Act;

The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Act.

Legal harmonization is necessary to eliminate institutional conflicts and clarify roles among education stakeholders.

The report further emphasizes accountability, transparency, and coordination among:

The Ministry of Education;

Teachers Service Commission;

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD);

Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC);

County governments;

School management boards.

Good governance strengthens policy implementation and enhances public confidence in education reforms.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Curriculum reforms cannot succeed without stakeholder support. The PWPER Report involved extensive public participation across the forty-seven counties of Kenya. Stakeholders including parents, teachers, learners, religious organizations, civil society, employers, and professional associations expressed support for CBC while raising concerns regarding:

Cost implications;

Teacher preparedness;

Infrastructure inadequacies;

Assessment confusion;

Communication gaps.

Fullan (2007) argues that educational reforms succeed when stakeholders feel ownership of the process. Sustainable implementation therefore requires continuous dialogue, consultation, and public sensitization.

Parents in particular require adequate information regarding:

Senior school pathways;

Assessment procedures;

Career opportunities;

Learner support mechanisms.

Stakeholder engagement also promotes accountability and policy legitimacy.

CHALLENGES FACING CBC IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the transformative potential of CBC, several challenges continue to affect implementation:

Inadequate Infrastructure: Many schools lack classrooms, laboratories, workshops, libraries, and sanitation facilities necessary for CBC implementation.

Teacher Shortages: There remains a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in science subjects and marginalized areas.

Limited Resources: Some schools lack adequate instructional materials and digital devices.

Public Misunderstanding: Many parents and stakeholders still have limited understanding of CBC structures and expectations.

Inequality: Regional disparities continue to affect equitable access to quality education.

Financial Constraints: The cost of implementation remains high for both government and households.

Addressing these challenges requires sustained political commitment and coordinated implementation strategies.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CURRICULUM REFORMS IN KENYA

Despite implementation challenges, CBC presents significant opportunities for transforming Kenya's education system. If implemented effectively, the reforms can:

Enhance employability;

Promote innovation and entrepreneurship;

Strengthen national cohesion;

Improve digital literacy;

Support industrialization;

Reduce social inequalities;

Promote environmental sustainability.

The success of CBC will depend on policy consistency, adequate financing, stakeholder support, institutional coordination, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The PWPER Report therefore provides a strategic roadmap capable of positioning Kenya as a competitive knowledge-based economy.

CONCLUSION

The Report of the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (2023) provides a comprehensive framework for transforming education, training, and research in Kenya. The report confirms that curriculum reforms are central to sustainable development because education shapes human capital, social values, innovation, and productivity. The Competency-Based Curriculum represents a major paradigm shift from examination-oriented education toward competency acquisition, creativity, and learner-centered instruction. Through the 2-6-3-3 structure, assessment reforms, teacher development, technology integration, and talent nurturing, the reforms have the potential to transform Kenyan schools into centres of innovation and sustainable development.

However, successful implementation requires addressing persistent challenges related to financing, infrastructure, teacher preparedness, governance, inequality, and stakeholder engagement. Curriculum reforms cannot succeed through policy declarations alone; they require sustained investment, coordination, and political goodwill. If the recommendations of the PWPER Report are implemented faithfully, Kenya's education system can become a powerful instrument for achieving sustainable development, social transformation, and economic prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Teacher preparation institutions should align their programmes with CBC requirements while government agencies should institutionalize continuous teacher professional development.
- ii. The government should increase capitation grants and establish sustainable financing models for CBC implementation.

- iii. Schools should be equipped with adequate classrooms, laboratories, workshops, ICT infrastructure, and learning resources.
- iv. The Competency-Based Assessment Framework should be fully operationalized and standardized nationally.
- v. Special attention should be given to marginalized regions, learners with disabilities, and vulnerable groups.
- vi. Continuous public sensitization and stakeholder participation should be prioritized to build trust and support for CBC reforms.
- vii. Government and stakeholders should invest in digital infrastructure and ICT integration to support teaching and learning.
- viii. Mechanisms for tracking curriculum implementation and learning outcomes should be institutionalized.

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