

Curriculum, competences and intercultural education : New approach to the curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is a problem solving process and it involves the consideration of the needs and problems for the improvement of the programs and the implementation of solutions and alternatives for learners and their contexts. Curriculum is a reflection and a product of the society and can contribute to the change in the society. It is necessary to reflect on the issues to reach decisions in a dynamic and responsive curriculum development process. The purpose of this paper is to identify the major curricular issues in Rwanda and to relate them to the universal context in an integrative and collaborative manner and exploring the innovation in the new Competence Based Curriculum in Rwanda.

Keywords : Curriculum, competence based, skills

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

ISSN : 2456-1045 (Online)
(ICV-EDU/Impact Value): 72.30
(GIF) Impact Factor: 5.188
Publishing Copyright @ International Journal Foundation
Journal Code: ARJMD/EDU/V-36.0/I-1/C-1/APRIL-2019
Category : EDUCATION
Volume : 36.0/Chapter- 1/Issue -1 (APRIL-2019)
Journal Website: www.journalresearchhijf.com
Paper Received: 06.04.2019
Paper Accepted: 17.04.2019
Date of Publication: 10-05-2019
Page: 1-8

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CITATION OF THE ARTICLE



Anicet K; (2019) Curriculum, competences and intercultural education: New approach to the curriculum; *Advance Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Discoveries*; 36(1) pp. 1-8

I. INTRODUCTION

The word curriculum derives from the Latin *currere* meaning 'to run'. This implies that one of the functions of a curriculum is to provide a template or design which enables learning to take place. Curricula usually define the learning that is expected to take place during a course or programme of study in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, they should specify the main teaching, learning and assessment methods and provide an indication of the learning resources required to support the effective delivery of the course. A curriculum is more than a syllabus. A syllabus describes the content of a programme and can be seen as one part of a curriculum. Most curricula are not developed from scratch and all operate within organizational and societal constraints.

The common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) insists that the school curriculum is part of wider curriculum, a "path travelled by a learner through a sequence of educational experiences, whether under the control of an institution or not" (CEFR, chapter 8.4). It accordingly sees the "educational" curriculum as part of an "experiential" and "existential" curriculum, which starts before schooling, develops alongside it, and continues after it.

The curriculum that is written and published, for example as course documentation, is the official or formal curriculum. The aim of educational development is to ensure that the official curriculum is delivered as the functional curriculum and there is not a mismatch as development turns into implementation. The official curriculum can also be distinguished from the hidden, unofficial or counter curriculum. Paul Willis' work on the sociology of schooling for example describes how the informal pupil group comprising working class 'lads' has its own sub-culture and counter curriculum which involves 'mucking about', 'doing nothing' and 'having a laff' (Willis, 1977, pp62-63). The hidden curriculum describes those

aspects of the educational environment and student learning (such as values and expectations that students acquire as a result of going through an educational process) which are not formally or explicitly stated but which relate to the culture and ethos of an organisation. This highlights that the process of learning is as important as its product and as teachers we need to be aware of both the formal and informal factors which impact on learning.

A curriculum for the 21st century will reflect an understanding and acknowledgment of the changing nature of young people as learners and the challenges and demands that will continue to shape their learning in the future. Young people will need a wide and adaptive set of skills to meet the changing expectations of society and to contribute to the creation of a more productive, sustainable and just society. Curriculum is only one element that influences how well young Rwandese are prepared for their futures by their education, but it is important because it sets the level of expectation of their learning. Visionary countries set high expectations. They support the fulfillment of those expectations with high-quality teaching, school and system leadership, and commitment and support from families, communities, business and industry. Providing high quality education is valuable to the community.

The Curricular Cycle

Peyton and Peyton (1998) note that the curricular cycle “involves development through needs assessment, design and implementation phases. After this, outcomes are reviewed and evaluated against the original needs assessment. Needs change with societal expectations. The emphasis on different aspects varies with the participants’ and teachers’ perceived needs. The dynamic curriculum requires change and resource management”

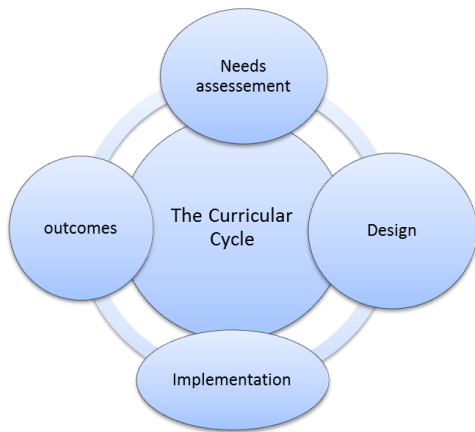


Figure1. Curriculum cycle

Source: Author adapted from Peyton and Peyton, (1998)

In developing a new programme, or modifying an existing one, there are a number of stages which must be completed within the curricular cycle as listed below.

Stages of Curriculum Development

- Determine and agree the educational or professional context in which the programme is to be developed and delivered
- Define the needs of the learners in line with the requirements of professional bodies
- Determine the aims and broad learning outcomes of the programme
- Identify ideas and constraints
- Agree the broad structure and framework of the programme, the main areas of teaching and learning, the sequence of the main topics and the key assessments
- Allocate the detailed development of each topic or course area in terms of defining objectives and learning outcomes to individuals or teams.
- Course teams to develop coherent programmes which have defined learning outcomes, timetables, and content, appropriate teaching, learning and assessment methods and which utilize relevant and available learning resources.
- Implement and refine the programme
- Develop an appropriate and deliverable evaluation strategy
- Review and revise the course in line with feedback – has it met the identified needs of the learners and other stakeholders?

Following the above stages of curriculum design, Rwanda found important to develop new curriculum for the 21st century that reflect an understanding and acknowledgment of the changing nature of Rwandan young people as learners and the challenges and demands that will continue to shape their learning in the future.

Curriculum Design In Rwanda

One of the priorities in the Education sector in Rwanda is ensuring that education quality continues to improve through closer integration of curriculum development, quality assurance and assessment, improved textbook distribution, and improved teaching and learning among others is emphasized. The Ministry of Education in Rwanda reviewed the programmes and teaching methods in order to equip the population with knowledge, skills and attitudes to support the country's development. Rwanda Education Board (REB) the implementing arm of the Ministry of Education has identified a comprehensive review and development of the curriculum, as a goal to be achieved within its business plan. It was envisaged that a revised curriculum will propel Rwanda to the economic development it desires. The intent was to have the new curriculum in place and ready for use by 2016 as the country moves towards the achievement of VISION 2020. This paper will look the response to the following question; at which extent the target of new curriculum called “competence based curriculum” is in place and ready for use by 2016.

ADVANCE RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY DISCOVERIES

Problem Statement

Aim of the review the Rwanda Curriculum required an overhaul to meet the demands of the country's vision and the dynamic global skills market demands. A systematic approach to reviewing the efficacy of each component of the curriculum within a time frame was needed in order to stay up-to-date and therefore, to provide the Rwandan learners with a competitive edge in the world economy and a solid foundation in the development of a knowledge-based and technology-led economy.

Ultimately the new curriculum would be skills based and competency-based. Does the intend of conducting a systematic and comprehensive review and update of the Rwanda national curriculum from Pre-primary to Senior Six with an objective of creating a body of essential knowledge, values and skills that all Rwandan children would learn achieved? The revised curriculum would give the nation confidence that learners are acquiring the necessary skills and competencies at every level of study to make appropriate progress.

II. IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

To review and put in place a Rwandan National Skills and Competency-Based Curriculum that acts as a benchmark for all schools and provides young people with the knowledge, values and skills they need to move confidently and successfully through their education, taking into account the needs of different groups including the most able and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

To design a skills and competency-based curriculum that is relevant to the labour market of the country, the region and globally, ensuring that the content of our National Curriculum compares favorably with some of the best curricula in the developing world especially, reflecting the best collective wisdom there is about how children learn and what they should know.

To enable parents to contribute to, and understand what their children should be learning throughout their school career and therefore to support their children's education. The process of the review exercise was expected to be completed within 36 months and to be done in phases as detailed below:

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

This paper will look the response to the following question; at which extent the target of new curriculum called "Competence Based Curriculum" is in place and ready for use by 2016 and what is new with new curriculum.

IV. METHODOLOGY USED

a) *Phase I: Planning for and conducting a study / research and evaluation into the strength and weaknesses of existing curriculum and subject syllabuses and draw out recommendations to guide the definition of the skills and competencies for the new curriculum.*

This study should draw heavily from existing theoretical perspectives, or schools of thought of curriculum planning and development, highlighting related literature, and evidence-based case studies, with merits and demerits of various curriculum planning and development models, and their varying levels of success, applicability and explicability from different contexts.

The contemporary debates around cyclical curriculum models, linear curriculum models, and objective based curriculum models, subject based curriculum models, thematic based curriculum models, electrical models, and other post-modern curriculum models need to be explored in relative detail. The evidence based conclusions of this study should in turn be able to inform choice and decision making of Rwanda Education Board, leading to a National Consultative Process on the nature and desired characteristics of the revised curriculum involving all stakeholders.

b) *Phase II: Planning for and holding a National Curriculum Conference (NCC) to disseminate findings of the study on the strength and weaknesses of the existing curriculum and to consult with stakeholders on proposed revised learning objectives and outputs for the new curriculum.*

c) *Phase III: Development of a costed time tabled road map plotting the work to be undertaken and the key deadlines to be achieved in delivering the revised curriculum including processing the approval of the revised curriculum learning objectives and out puts, the national curriculum framework, the required desired methodologies and the key skills and competencies (completed by July 2013). This includes the consideration of the report by the relevant authorities.*

d) *Phase IV: Identification of capacity gaps of the curriculum experts and actual training of the experts a comprehensive report on the existing curriculum covering all aspects identified in the outcomes with concrete recommendations to guide the review of the curriculum, a conference report indicating concrete recommendations on curriculum to be reviewed, a costed road map for the review process and finally, an approved National Skills and Competency-based Curriculum Frame work with detailed curriculum learning objectives and outputs, the required/desired methodologies and the key skills and competencies and approved recommendations ready for use in the review exercise 5.A training plan and training of curriculum experts 6.Approved skills and competency-based curricula and syllabi for all grade levels 7. Overall national teacher training plan and Training of Trainers for teacher orientation.*

Findings from the study conducted before the development of new curriculum

The study finds the followings:

Classroom teaching methods do not properly prepare young people for labor market demands. Too focused on facts and information; insufficient attention is given to skills and competencies. Learning and teaching were found to be teacher centered: teaching is heavily reliant on students copying notes from the teacher/blackboard; Is highly theory based, with little time for problem solving and written exercises, and an absence of practical activity, even in the sciences.

Some Schools with no access to the internet connectivity (no electricity), little exposure to the ICT. Lack of basic reading comprehension skills that may severely limit students' ability to understand new concepts and learn independently. Examinations and assessment are too focused on knowledge and omit competencies. Class contact hours were found to be very limited, especially at primary level due to double shift.

Major recommendations from the study

The followings are the recommendations from the study. The alignment of the curriculum to national aspirations. Preparation for life beyond school. The curriculum content should address the needs of those leaving school after O and A levels for the world of work, or technical vocational, as much as it addresses the needs of those proceeding to University and should therefore become less academic, more practical, more skills and competence-based.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND ASSESSMENT

Elements of the national curriculum

During my research desk review, the followings are the findings:

The national curriculum has been developed as competence based curriculum. The 4 key elements of the national curriculum are curriculum content, achievement standards, Assessment and a curriculum framework. The curriculum content, achievement standards, an assessment and curriculum framework will be presented with other information that sets the context for what is to be taught. This information will be presented in the following sections: Rationale, Aims of the learning area, Organisation of the learning area curriculum, General capabilities, Cross-cutting dimensions.

Curriculum Content

Curriculum content identifies what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. Curriculum content includes knowledge, skills and understanding that students are expected to learn and will be described for a particular learning area at a particular year level (for example, Mathematics, Year 5).

For P4, curriculum content will be presented as 'content descriptions' outlining what students are expected to learn and teachers are expected to teach at each year level. P-4 content descriptions will be accompanied by 'content elaborations' which will illustrate and/or clarify the detail of the content descriptions.

For the senior secondary years, curriculum content will be presented as detailed content descriptions only. The curriculum contents have been developed from Pre-primary level to Secondary level.

Achievement Standards

Achievement standards will describe the quality of learning students should typically demonstrate in relation to the content by a particular point in their schooling (that is, the depth of their understanding, the extent of their knowledge and the sophistication of their skills).

Achievement standards will be designed to support reporting to students and parents and to aid consistency of assessment and reporting across states and territories.

Achievement standards will describe the quality of learning (depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill) expected of students at each year level from Kindergarten to P 6. The set of achievement standards should present a continuum of typical growth expected of students across the years of schooling P6. Each achievement standard will make explicit the quality of learning necessary for students to be well able to progress to the next level.

For each learning area (or strand of learning area as necessary) each achievement standard will comprise a description of the quality of expected learning, and a set of annotated work samples that illustrates the described quality of learning.

For the senior secondary years, course-specific achievement standards have been developed. They will provide an expectation of the quality of learning that students should typically demonstrate (that is, the depth of their understanding, the extent of their knowledge and the sophistication of their skills).

The achievement standards will provide a 5 point scale for describing how well a student has achieved what they were expected to learn in a course. Work samples will illustrate typical learning in relation to the five levels of achievement.

They will be designed to be applicable in jurisdictions with external examinations and with school-based assessment.

Curriculum framework

The Rwanda curriculum Framework has been developed. The Curriculum Framework is the nation's guiding curriculum document, indicating how the curriculum vision is translated into practice at the school level and reflected in learning experiences, in assessment and in monitoring development and evaluation. It is in line

with Vision 2020, Economic Poverty Reduction Strategy 2 and Education Sector Strategic Plan, emphasizing the need for the curriculum to be competence-based to promote knowledge and skills based economy.

The Curriculum and curriculum Framework were developed through a consultative process with stakeholders ranging from learners, teachers, parents, private sector organizations, local administration and policy makers.

Key messages of the framework include: the need to focus on skills and attitudes as well as knowledge, the need to balance academic goals with obtaining skills for the world of work, and the need to build competences into all aspects including teacher development, learning and teaching materials, assessment, examinations and inspection.

Rwanda's new competence-based curriculum matches global trends and is in line with the 2013 Harmonised Curriculum Framework for the East African Community, in which partner states agreed to put in place a curriculum framework with 'a set of policies, regulations and guidelines central to curriculum development and implementation within the East African Community.'

This summary document will serve as a point of reference for all decision-making relating to the curriculum and guide the work of curriculum developers, school principals, teachers, textbook developers, school inspectors, examiners and teacher trainers. It includes information about the principles and competences in the new curriculum, subject syllabuses and rationale, learner profiles, assessments and the implementation of the curriculum.

Assessment

Purposes of Assessment

Assessment is an essential tool for verifying that educational goals have been met and modifying instruction by providing instructors and students with the feedback they need to gauge and improve teaching and learning. Furthermore, Classroom assessment of students' learning is an important component of any education system. The overall aim of assessment is to enhance attainment of educational objectives through meaningful learning.

In the Rwandan new curriculum, the key purposes of assessment have not changed with the new curriculum. These include: monitoring progress and providing feedback, selection, guidance on future courses, certification and promotion. However, it is important that assessment focuses not only on knowledge but also on competences and all the elements of competences.

Competence-based assessment is an assessment process in which the learner is confronted with a relevant learning challenge and asked to put into practice what has been learned in order to resolve or overcome this situation. One of the major purposes of assessment is to assess the extent to which learning objectives including competences have been achieved and to identify which schools and

learners need pedagogical advice and strategic intervention.

Assessment is organized at the following levels: School based assessment, National assessment (such as Learning Assessment in Rwandan Schools), District examinations and National examinations.

Types of Assessment

Continuous assessment

The assessment should also cover assessment of Learning (Summative assessment).

This is daily monitoring of learners progress and collecting information on learners' ability to demonstrate the required competences in carrying out tasks.

What should be assessed in Schools?

a) Knowledge and understanding: Does the child demonstrate an understanding of the subject? Has the child mastered the subject concepts?

Indicators: correctness of answers, coherence of ideas, logical reasoning.

b) Practical skills: How does the child perform on aptitude and practical tests?

Indicators: accuracy, using appropriate methods, quality product, speed and efficiency, coherence.

c) Attitude and values: How does the child respond to a task or a situation? What is the child's behavior?

Indicators: approach to a situation, appreciation of the task given, impression of a situation, manipulation, reasoning, persistence, tolerance.

d) Generic competences: What are the steps taken to perform a given task? What is the reasoning behind it? How does the child overcome each challenge?

Indicators: reasoning, manipulating, presenting, value judgment, applying knowledge.

Summative assessment

Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period-typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year. Information from summative assessments can be used formatively when students or faculty use it to guide their efforts and activities in subsequent courses.

District examinations

Districts will be supported to organize a common end of year examination per class for all the schools to evaluate the performance and the achievement level of the learners in individual schools.

LARS

LARS stands for Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools. It consists of assessing the learners' skills at a given grade or age (P2 and P5 in selected schools) at least after every two years. This will help to evaluate and

improve the quality of education and the policy of education system-in line with EFA goals, MDGs, Vision 2020, EDPRS 2008-12, and the Mission Statement of MINEDUC.

National Examinations

The system and process in setting national examinations should be to encompass competency based assessment and to increase rigour in the robustness of outcomes.

Record Keeping

This is gathering evidence from classroom observation and assessment instruments and using them to judge the student's performance against the set criteria or standards.

Language of learning

The language of learning in pre-primary and lower primary is Kinyarwanda and other languages are taught as subjects. The language of learning from upper primary to upper secondary is English. Kinyarwanda, French and Kiswahili are taught as language subjects.

Vision of developed curriculum

The vision of Rwanda is to establish an inspiring 21st century curriculum, optimizing the potential of all learners and enabling every young Rwandan to make a valuable contribution to the sustained growth of the nation.

Student Aims and Objectives

To develop students as: Patriotic and responsible citizens, ready to play a full part in society; Confident and self-reliant people, ready to take their place in the labour market; Successful life-long learners, ready to adapt to new situations, and be agents of change; Creative and innovative individuals who are curious, adaptive and productive.

Values

The Rwandan curriculum reflects the Basic Values of the nation. These Basic Values permeate the curriculum and all the processes of schooling. The Curriculum Values are those that underpin the curriculum itself and which determine the nature of the subject syllabuses.

National values:

Dignity and integrity, Self-reliance, National and cultural identity, Peace and tolerance, Justice, Respect for others and for human, rights, Solidarity and democracy, Patriotism, Hard work, commitment and resilience,

Curriculum values:

Excellence, aspiration and optimism, Equity and inclusiveness, Learner-centeredness, Openness and transparency, the importance of family, Rwandan culture and heritage.

What is new in the Rwandan curriculum

Curriculum construction

Learner centered

The curriculum must address learners' individual needs interests, abilities and backgrounds, creating an environment where learning activities are organized in a way that encourages learners to construct the knowledge either individually or in groups in an active way.

Competence-based approach

This is an approach where teaching and learning is based on discrete skills rather than dwelling on only knowledge or the cognitive domain of learning.

Inclusive, Flexible, Transparent and Accountable

Learning is organized so that every individual is valued and all learners thrive, including girls, learners with disabilities. Learners with special educational needs regardless of background.

Catering for learners' individual needs and talents helps facilitate horizontal and vertical mobility within and across different education systems. Schools, learners and communities must communicate openly and honestly about the curriculum and learning in the school to ensure successful teaching and learning.

Integrated with ICT as a Tool

The curriculum must enable educators and students to use ICT as a tool to improve the quality of education in all subjects at all levels in teaching and learning practices.

ICT must support the emergence of teaching and pedagogical student-centred approaches as well as encourage research, communication and collaborative learning.

Interconnected with Cross-Cutting Issues

The curriculum reflects the significance of connections between different subject areas, integrating them across years and cycles. Cross-cutting issues are integrated across learning areas appropriately. They are all important for students to learn about, but they are not confined to one subject. The cross-cutting issues, which have been integrated in the curriculum, are described below:

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The primary goal of a school based Comprehensive Sexuality Education curriculum is to equip children, adolescents, and young people with knowledge, skills and values in an age appropriate and culturally gender sensitive manner so as to enable them to make responsible choices about their sexual and social relationships, explain and clarify feelings, values and attitudes, and promote and sustain risk reducing behaviour. Comprehensive sexuality is imbedded in SET, Social Studies, History and Citizenship, Biology, General Studies, English, French, kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, RE, ICT, Music, PE.

Environment and sustainability

Integration of Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability in the curriculum focuses on and advocates for the need to balance economic growth, society well-being and ecological systems. Learners need basic knowledge from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities to understand to interpret principles of sustainability. Environment and Sustainability has been integrated into SET, Social Studies, Geography, Biology and General Studies.

Financial Education

The integration of Financial Education into the curriculum is aimed at a comprehensive Financial Education programme as a precondition for achieving financial inclusion targets and improving the financial capability of Rwandans so that they can make appropriate financial decisions that best fit the circumstances of one's life.

Gender

Gender will be understood in schools beginning with family complementarities, gender roles and responsibilities, the need for gender equality and equity, gender stereotypes, gender sensitivity, gender mainstreaming, gender-blind/gender-unaware.

Genocide Studies

Rwandan children should know about the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi alongside the Holocaust and other genocides. They should know what caused the genocide in Rwanda, its planning and execution, how it was stopped and what the consequences have been. Rwandan children should take part in fighting genocide ideology and genocide denial. Rwandan students will remember the genocide, which is a means to protect the memory of those that were lost.

Peace and Values Education

Peace and Values Education (PVE) is defined as education that promotes social cohesion, positive values, including pluralism and personal responsibility, empathy, critical thinking and action in order to build a more peaceful society. It has been imbedded into all subjects.

Standardisation Culture

Standardisation Culture in Rwanda will be promoted through formal education and plays a vital role in terms of health improvement, economic growth, industrialization, trade and general welfare of the people through the effective implementation of Standardization, Quality Assurance, Metrology and Testing. It has been imbedded into all subjects.

Inclusive Education

Inclusion is based on the right of all learners to a quality and equitable education that meets their basic learning needs, and understands the diversity of backgrounds and abilities as a learning opportunity. Inclusive education is imbedded in all subjects. It has been imbedded into all subjects.

VI. CONCLUSION

Change is an important component of curriculum dynamics and we have to study and manage change for a better future. In order to cope with change and the emerging problems, we have to accept a contemporary and proactive conception of problem solving in a life-long process, predicting future problems, thinking of their solutions and the actualization of these processes for the betterment of individuals, society and culture.

Curriculum development as a problem solving process involves the critical consideration of resources, needs and problems for improvement purposes. Curriculum is a reflection and a product of the society and can contribute to changing the society. In this respect it is necessary to reflect on the issues to reach decisions in a dynamic and responsive curriculum development and education process.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- To train teachers, head teachers and other intermediaries on new curriculum.
- To continue to integrate the teachers in taking part into curriculum design.
- To make civil society and the immediate community aware of new curriculum.
- To ensure communication and co-ordination between educational decision-makers, civil society and the local and regional community: language teachers, teachers of other subjects, parents of pupils, and local authorities.
- To back the changes with scientific research, e.g. action-research projects involving teachers, networking of research bodies and schools, etc.;

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