

## **Curriculum Design, Implementation and its Effect on Quality Evaluation of Students Learning Outcomes at the University Level in Kenya.**

By

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### ***Abstract***

*Evaluation is a critical component in the curriculum development process. Through evaluation, the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the curriculum development process are judged of their worth. However, for the methods of evaluation to be effective, they must be seamlessly flawless which means that they must be efficient in order for the evaluators to make adequate judgments of the value of the curriculum. Quite often in Kenya, industry players have criticized universities by asserting that university curriculum is normally not designed in tandem with societal changes. For this reason, stakeholders often chide concerning the skill mismatch between the academic programmes offered at the universities and the requirements of the labour market. It is not uncommon nowadays for the employers to complain that the grade one scores at the university does not correlate positively to performance at work. The purpose of this paper therefore is to discuss the process underlying curriculum design and implementation and its effect on quality evaluation of students learning outcomes at the university level in Kenya. By adopting a desk-based research, this paper uses Elliot Eisner's Connoisseurship model of curriculum evaluation to critically examine, analyze, and synthesize information from a wide range of literature, studies, policy documents and experiential observations to construct arguments on the challenges facing curriculum implementation and evaluation in higher education with particular reference to university education in Kenya. The paper avers that to maintain quality education standards in university education, universities should focus on developing course syllabuses stipulating the depth and breadth of content to be covered in a course as well as establish central examinations boards which will be charged with the responsibility of setting, marking and dissemination of examination results to ensure education standards are not compromised.*

**Key words:** *curriculum, design, implementation, evaluation, learning outcomes.*

## Introduction

Within the education parlance, evaluation is defined as a systematic process of collecting information with the intent of making value judgement on the goodness or badness of the learners achievement in subject matter and deciding what grade is to be assigned to a given score (Githua, Macharia, & Mboroki, 2009). Evaluation uses information based on credible evidence generated through assessment to make judgments of relative value (National academy for academic leadership, 2012). Assessment is defined as the process in which faculty members, administrators and other interested stakeholders get evidence, numerical, or otherwise from which they can develop useful information about their students, institutions, and programmes (National academy for academic leadership, 2012).

In 2012, the government of Kenya through the ministry of education appointed a taskforce on realignment of the education system to the constitution and vision 2030 goals. The task force underscored the role of evaluation in the curriculum development process (Republic of Kenya, 2012). A raft of proposals were suggested towards making evaluation in Kenya's higher education system to be aligned with the county's constitution and vision 2030 philosophy (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The task force also recommended that quality assurance and standards at universities should be the responsibility of the Commission for University Education (CUE) (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Following this mandate, the CUE has drafted guidelines for evaluation of university curriculum and among the aspects to be evaluated in a course are: a) course content; b) instructional process; c) infrastructure and equipment for the delivery of the course; d) instructional and reference materials; and e) assessments. (commission for university education, 2013). This paper, however, undertakes to discuss the aspect of assessment through CATs and examinations in the universities by presenting an argument that if policy frameworks on evaluation through CATS and Examinations continue to exist as they are currently, they will continue perpetuating inefficiencies in the curriculum development process and eventually give misleading pointers with regard to the overall learning outcomes and student achievements. The paper also recognizes the challenges facing university education in Kenya in the wake of university expansion and transformation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the curricular perspective by examining the imperatives of assessing students' academic achievement. The paper is informed by the fact that employers have decried the quality of graduates from the institutions of higher education in Kenya particularly the universities as observed by Amimo in Ponge (2013). This has often been blamed on the mismatch between the

academic skills and the labour market (Riechi, 2008; Ponge, 2013). The paper however argues to the contrary pointing out that the problems threatening the quality of education in higher education could be attributed to the manner of implementing and evaluating the curriculum rather than skill mismatch. The main assumption is that since the process of curriculum development involves all stakeholders wherein the industry players are also involved in the process of curriculum design (commission for university education, 2013); the possibility of mismatch of skill with the labour market is remote.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This paper is based on Elliot Eisner's *Connoisseurship* Model of evaluation which places emphasis on the process of learning and the quality of experiences by those involved in the implementation of the curriculum, namely; students, teachers and administrators. According to the *Connoisseurship* Model, evaluators should provide a description and interpretation of the curriculum plan being implemented (Sowel, 2000). In view of the aforementioned, the paper adopted a desk-based research approach. It critically examines, analyzes, and synthesizes information from a wide range of literature, studies, and policy documents and experiential observations to construct arguments on the challenges facing curriculum implementation and evaluation in higher education with particular reference to university education in Kenya. This review will help inform curriculum theory and practice in Kenya by identifying the key issues facing the process of curriculum development with particular reference to implementation and evaluation of students learning outcomes in university education. It will also help suggest solutions that could help in improving the quality of higher education in Kenya, thus restoring confidence in the higher education sector among the industry players and other education stakeholders.

### **Overview of Curriculum Development Process at the University Level**

Universities in Kenya have the freedom to develop their programs and adapt them to the market needs (commission for university education, 2013). This kind of education system tends to borrow from the American education system which is much renowned for its flexibility and academic freedom (Mautusi, 2013). One of the characteristic features of the university education in Kenya is that it has no common curriculum for a specific discipline that is followed by undergraduate and graduate programmes in universities as each university has the freedom to develop its own curricular (commission for university education, 2013). This academic flexibility and freedom is

more often followed by universities that have adopted the American system of education. This view is corroborated by Mautusi (2013) who has observed that universities in Georgia, which largely follow the American system, depict a tendency where there is variation in course content presented in class by two lecturers teaching at two institutions or sometimes teaching the same course in same department. This situation is not different from the Kenyan case which is touted as the prototype of the American system with its problems mirroring those faced by the Georgian Universities (Mautusi, 2013).

In Kenya, there is no central body judged with the responsibility of curriculum development at the university level. Each university designs its curriculum based on its peculiarities and uniqueness. Irrespective of this, however, curriculum design is guided by the commission for university education which is responsible for maintaining quality standards in higher education. According to CUE guidelines, university curriculum is often designed by the individual departments with the more experienced lecturers giving their input regarding the content to be included in the curriculum. The content is often internally peer reviewed at the department and school/faculty before it is presented to the senate for adoption. After the senate has adopted the programme, it is then presented to the commission for university education (CUE) for external review (commission for university education, 2013). Once it has been accepted by the commission for university education, the university can go ahead and implement the curriculum after incorporating the recommendations suggested by the CUE (commission for university education, 2013). The portfolio of course units and programmes that are offered by the university are compiled in the university course catalogue. The catalogue, among others, contains a detailed description of the course content to be covered at a particular time of the programme offering and the respective lecture hours for that particular course. The course description however does not specify the depth and breadth of content coverage in respect of the particular course. This in essence means that the course lecturer has the freedom to design a course outline skewed to his/her competencies in the subject. The other major weakness of this approach is that in the event two lectures get assigned to teach the same course, there are bound to be variations in content coverage (Mautusi, 2013). The bottom-line is that students will end up being exposed to different standards based on the orientation of individual lecturers as opposed to university standards which ought to be universal to all. This situation is even aggravated with the current and rapid expansion of university education. In a study conducted on university expansion in Kenya and issues of quality education, Gudo, Olel, and Oanda, (2013) point out that expansion in

university education has caused universities to adopt coping mechanisms in order to address the challenges they face as a result of increased uptake of university education by the Kenyan populace. Among the coping mechanisms adopted include increased workload to the existing lecturers and employment of incompetent staff who would normally not have qualified to join the university system (Gudo *et.al* 2013). It is not uncommon nowadays, however, to find a university satellite campus being run entirely by part-time faculty. Some of these faculties are assigned courses which they do not have an iota of competency which makes them basically “teacher- learners” (Gudo, Alel, & Oanda, 2013). This approach is like having two learners in class: the teacher-learner and the student-learner. This can be seen as an advanced and modern way of monitorial teaching (Mwebi, 2012). Moreover, the part-timers are not accorded an opportunity for INSET training to develop an understanding on curriculum implementation at the university level (Mwebi, 2012). Universities on the other hand have developed what can be said to be “costs cutting measure mentality” and as such could seek to engage under- qualified part-time lecturers willing to accept lower wages (Gudo, Alel, & Oanda, 2013). The spill over effect however, is the tendency for these lectures to make coursework easier by not covering the content deeply hence minimizing challenging the students intellectually to maintain a good reputation among students during teaching evaluation (Mautusi, 2013) which in the final end lowers academic quality to a significant measure.

### **Overview of Evaluation Systems in University Education in Kenya**

The methodology of evaluation used in higher education is diverse employing both quantitative and qualitative methods (National academy for academic leadership, 2012). Qualitative methods involve surveys, focus group portfolios, and direct observations while the quantitative methods seek to provide numerical data through the use of CATs, examinations including supervision during attachments (National academy for academic leadership, 2012).

Student evaluation and assessment is equally affected by the approach taken towards curriculum implementation. Quite often, student evaluation in this kind of education system, amplifies the discrepancies of the curriculum implementation process as the students will struggle to meet the individual needs of the lecturers than those of the university (Mautusi, 2013).

Evaluation of students’ academic achievement at the university level in Kenya has two components. The formative component relates to Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs) and other means of evaluation during semester/trimester course uptake and in most instances accounts to 30% of the

total marks. The summative component on the other hand comprises of end of semester examination constituting 70% of the final marks. There are however variations in weighting of CATs and end of semester examination depending on the programme offered and examination policy of each university. The common practice however, is that the CATs weighting is often less than the weighting for end of semester examination. The final examination is therefore a combination of the CAT marks and end of semester/trimester examination marks and is marked out of 100 as the base percentage. The CATs and end of semester examinations are set and marked by course lecturers. The only difference is that the end of semester examination is moderated by external examiners during setting and marking. These external examiners are often senior faculty members drawn from other universities. The workload for most of them is so heavy that they cannot do effective marking of the scripts involving, especially, large classes. They therefore, resort to marking by sampling scripts which have been marked by the course lecturer. In most instances, the marks and grades awarded by the internal examiner/ course lecturer remain unchanged. This view is corroborated by the research done by Gudo, Olel, and Oanda (2013) who found that external examiners are faced with a number of challenges during marking. Among the challenges identified were: the large number of exam scripts which could make them not go through each of them and mark as many papers as required and the pressure of work from their regular work stations besides being external examiners in other universities. The implication of these findings is that the marks allocated by the internal examiner are in most cases adopted as the final marks by the respective faculty boards and university senate for award of degrees and diplomas. Eventually, the internal examiner ends up solely determining the destiny of students' academic achievement and outcomes. Rogue lecturers often find their field day by exploiting this loophole to achieve their selfish ends to the detriment of quality and standards in education. In the process of the student working to meet the demands of the individual lecturer (Mautusi, 2013) who could occasionally brag to be the *alpha* and *omega* in university education, some students who are keen to have better grades will always go a long way to have their way. They thus end up engaging in vices which tend to compromise the quality of education. Literature is awash regarding grades and marks for sex at the universities popularly referred to as sexually transmitted grades according to Eshiwani (2009) and Mutisya, (2010). In their study Gudo *et al* (2013) found out that 9.779% and 14.179% of students in public and private universities respectively used money to influence lecturers and fellow students to get undeserved grades. Further, the study found that 26.846% and 27.692% of students in public and private universities respectively used sex to obtain undeserved grades and that sex was a more popular tool

in the hands of students than money to influence the grades obtained (Gudo *et al*, 2013). If this trend continues unabated, universities are likely to churn out half baked graduates as asserted by Kiptoon (1996) cited in Mwebi (2012). This in essence will mean that university graduands will graduate having very nice papers but without adequate skills to perform in their place of work. The lack of skill however, as noted earlier is not due to skill mismatch as a result of the deficiencies in curriculum offered at universities but can be attributed to the use of shortcuts to obtain better grades which end up giving a false impression to employers about the abilities of the students, since there is normally thought to be a positive correlation between the grade one scores and the skill acquired.

### **Issues in Curriculum Development and Evaluation in Kenyan Universities**

From the foregoing literature, it can be argued that the curriculum development process at the university level in Kenya is facing a myriad of challenges in this century where university expansion and enrolment has reached an all time high. With the continuous exponential growth of university education, there ought to be a paradigm shift in light of curriculum design and development so that quality and standards in university education are not compromised. The above literature has raised issues worth of consideration by all the concerned stakeholders:

- Curriculum at university level in Kenya adopts a flexible approach that is modeled on the American system (Mautusi, 2013). It is not standardized and varies across and within universities.
- Course syllabuses are mere descriptions of content which do not provide the extent of syllabus coverage in depth and breadth. This gives room for a course lecturer to design a course outline often skewed to their competencies in the subject. In the wake of university expansion, it then means that no two lecturers teaching same course are likely to teach similar content. These teaching variations are experienced in campuses across all universities.
- Similarly, evaluation of student learning outcomes is also left exclusively to the lecturer who is also the designer and implementer of the curriculum.
- Despite the universities using external examiners, as per the CUE guidelines, they( examiners) are overwhelmed by the huge workload owing to the fact that they are also demanded to meet other obligations especially in their formal work stations (Gudo, Olel, &

Oanda ,2013).Thus, they end up marking samples and eventually adopting the marks of internal examiners. Thus making the internal examiner the “*alpha and omega*” in the curriculum development process.

The issues raised above are likely to have serious ramifications on the overall quality of education if they are left unattended. Some of the implications are:

- Students are likely to end up being exposed to a curriculum that is not intellectually stimulating thus leading to half baked graduates ( Kiptoon ,1996)
- Lack of standardization of teaching content results in variations among students of same university drawn from different campuses (Mautusi, 2013).
- Evaluation pointers which do not give a clear and fair view as to the achievement levels of the learners hence leading to vices such as sexually transmitted grades (Eshiwani ,2009; Mutisya, 2010; Gudo *et al* (2013) implying that students end up satisfying the requirements of the lecturer other than those of university senate.
- The actual grade attained by the student does not match with the students’ abilities which can easily be mistaken for a “skills mismatch”.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The attainment of Kenya’s vision 2030 demands that the education system produces graduates who are trained in the *mind*, the *heart* and the *hand*. This means that the system ought to produce a good citizen capable of applying his/her intellect by putting it into practice for the transformation of the society. The quality of these intellectuals can only be determined when there are good and effective measures for quality evaluation. Examinations are often seen as an effective tool for measuring the achievement level of a graduate and making value judgement about the worth of a curriculum. However if the tool is defective or if the users of the tool are not well trained on the effective use of the tool, quality of the product cannot be assured. The foregoing literature is a demonstration that our university education requires an overhaul in the curriculum development process. For the higher education curriculum to be efficient and effective there must be a paradigm shift in curriculum implementation and evaluation so that quality of university education can be guaranteed. As the country seeks to attain vision 2030 goals, education stakeholders need to interrogate the higher education system and benchmark with some of the successful systems in the world which guarantee

quality standards in the curriculum by having a paradigm shift in curriculum design, implementation and evaluation. In Europe and some countries in Asia for example, external evaluation in higher education is done by an accreditation board. Europe has a central university or national board for academic evaluation. External Examinations are often centrally set and marked at the universities under the auspices of the controller of examinations (Mautusi, 2013). As Kenya's university education keeps expanding, there is need to have a central university board for academic evaluation in each university for quality assurance and standards in higher education to be maintained. Such boards when they exist will imply that external examination are centrally managed through the setting and marking of university examinations which will be common to all the students thus ensuring that the grading system is standard for all campuses, collaborating institutions and university colleges. The adoption of this approach will ensure that universities redesign their curriculum so that they have comprehensive syllabuses for each course unit which stipulates clearly the depth and breadth of content to be covered at each level. Through this, the lecturers' weaknesses cannot be passed over to the students. This approach will also be beneficial to the extent that it will minimize the differences between students of the same university who study and graduate from various campuses and colleges of the respective universities. Secondly, when marking of examinations are centrally managed, vices such as those pointed by Eshiwani (2009) regarding sexually transmitted grades will be a thing of the past, and students will seek to satisfy university senate rather than individual lecturers. In this way, the university will move towards improving standards of education by ensuring there are little differences among the graduates that are churned out from the various campuses of the university which is often witnessed in the present order where there are higher possibilities of incompetent lecturers passing over their weaknesses to the students under their ward by designing weak content which is not intellectually stimulating and challenging. It is against this backdrop that I recommend the following measures to be adopted as a way forward in order to correct the anomalies inherent in the current system of curriculum development and evaluation with the sole aim of improving the quality of education:

- There is need therefore to have uniformity in the curriculum design, implementation and evaluation in university education so as to maintain quality standards in the wake of university expansion. This means, universities will have to redesign their curriculum programmes so that they have comprehensive syllabuses for each course unit which stipulates clearly the depth and breadth of content to be covered at each level.

- Establishment of a central university or national board for university academic evaluation modelled on the system of evaluation adopted by universities in the European Union community (Mautusi, 2013).
- Adopting a central setting and marking of university exams under the auspices of the controller of university examinations to avoid a situation of lecturers setting different exams for same level of students and also avoid the tendency of lecturers marking exams from their own closets to avoid instances of complicity in award of grades as mentioned elsewhere in this paper.

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