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Full Length Research Paper

Home Science Education in Kenya: The need for review

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While Home Science education in Kenya has been reviewed each time there has been a commission of inquiry into the curriculum in Kenya, the framework, and therefore, the methodology for review have remained relatively unchanged over the years. The literature indicates that the country has always relied on a group of experts to review educational provision and make recommendations on the way forward. The input of stakeholders, especially teachers is not given much prominence. Reasons for review of the curriculum have focused on the quest for relevance and quality in line with both the development and educational goals of the country at various stages. Changes made have affected the content, organization and evaluation of Home Science to some extent. The purpose of this study was therefore to evaluate the way in which Home Science education in Kenya has been previously reviewed and to document the resultant changes.

Key words: Home Science Curriculum, policy, evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Home Science is classified as a technical and vocational subject (Ministry of Education, 2003). Technical and vocational subjects at secondary school offer knowledge and prevocational skills directly applicable to the world of work. Policy formulation, implementation and evaluation in relation to Home Science education raises fundamental questions of the efficacy of the process of change. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines a policy as a plan or a set of ideas that direct actions in a particular situation, and are officially agreed on by a group of people (Cambridge University, 2005, p.1091). This definition implies that policy formulation follows a clearly defined process involving consultation, and results in a written document that stipulates exactly how the policy will be implemented.

In Kenya, there have been several commissions to review education provision (Ramani, 2002). Since independence there have been the Kenya Education Commission (Republic of Kenya, 1964); the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Republic of Kenya, 1976); the Presidential Working

Party on the Second University (Republic of Kenya, 1981); the Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond (Republic of Kenya, 1988) and the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1999). The common thread over the years has been in the emphasis on quality, relevance and vocationalization of education as key to industrialization of the country. The continual reviews indicate that the terms "quality" and "relevance" are interpreted differently due to the changing development goals.

Ball (1994) suggests that policy formulation and implementation are based on policy contexts. The context of influence refers to the setting in which the change takes place, and factors that led to debate about existing policy, resulting in deliberations on construction of policy. In this paper four settings are examined: national and education goals, socio-political structures, the economy and interest groups.

The context of policy text production analyzes written policy statements in official documents. The documents analyzed in this study included reports of educational commissions, Sessional papers in education and national development plans, syllabi and Home Science textbooks.

The context of practice relates to the interpretation and re-creation of policy according to the implementers. In

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Kenya education is controlled by the Ministry of Education (MoE), which determines the content of the curriculum. The syllabi are produced by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), a Government parastatal, and distributed to all schools in the republic. In this context therefore, KIE acts as an interpreter and re-creator of policy, while the implementers are teachers in the schools. This is a top-down bureaucratic model of policy implementation with the MoE and KIE as experts and the teachers having little or no input.

The commissions that reviewed education in Kenya worked within a given mandate to make recommendations for education. The Ministry of Education then used these recommendations as frameworks to develop directives for future decisions and guide the implementation of these decisions. Policy making in Kenya is centralized and therefore educational policies made at National or Ministerial level impact directly or indirectly on the education sector in terms of the curriculum and the teaching and learning of individual subjects. Haddad (1996: p23) looks at the education system as a complicated network. Therefore any policy decisions in one sector can have strong repercussions throughout the system. Evaluation of the frameworks used in policymaking and subsequent curriculum review may lead to informed decisions about changes that are necessary and the interventions that would in future be of most benefit to the students studying Home Science.

Curriculum review and reform are possible responses to specific circumstances such as public dissatisfaction with prevailing educational systems, emerging economic, social and technological requirements, or new priorities in national development (Tyler, 1949; O'Donnell, 2001). Review of the education sector in Kenya in these years focused on whole system review. The premise of change is that it is supposed to improve existing theory and practice. The curriculum needs to adapt to changing realities in order to remain valid and be relevant to changing expectations. While the changes to curriculum may have impacted on Home Science, it is apparent that the guidelines for change have remained relatively the same over the years, and may not be effective currently.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the need for review of Home Science education in Kenya. The evaluation focused on context analysis of documents relating to Home Science education in Kenya between 1981 and 2005. Reports of the various commissions of inquiry into the education sector, Ministry of Education papers, Sessional Papers and Development Plans from this period were analyzed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework (Figure 1 below) that guided this study was adapted from Haddad (1996:11) which consists of pre-policy decision activities, the decision

process itself and the post-decision activities set out in six steps: Analysis of the prevailing situation; Evaluation of the policy decision; Policy implementation; Policy impact assessment; Adjustment of policy; and Adoption of the new policy. The framework was adapted to suit the study at hand by narrowing impact assessment to Home Science, and selecting only those variables that were core to the research questions.

The steps in the policy process were used to study the context of change to determine why there was change in the curriculum, and the factors that might have influenced the policy decision. The policy implementation process was examined and then changes that occurred thereafter analyzed. Adjustment of policy was studied by looking at the changes that were subsequently instituted in the Home Science syllabus, and what issues prevailed during implementation.

The national development priorities prevailing in the country at the time that the education system is being evaluated or reviewed have the greatest impact on the resultant educational policies. However, the national priorities have to be considered alongside the educational goals of the country, the social and political set up of the time and the economic realities prevailing. In addition most educational commissions of inquiry seek the opinions of interest groups such as religious and civil society as well as parents.

Each of the factors above is subject to research, negotiations, ad hoc opinions and value judgments. These four elements are expressed in the conceptual framework as a filter through which policy ideas and decisions pass. Research is carried out by the commissions of inquiry to solicit the views of interest groups as well as to find out the current practices in institutions of learning. For example members of the Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond (Republic of Kenya, 1988: iii) visited all the provinces, held interviews and discussions with senior administrators, leading educationists and professional personnel, religious leaders and members of the public. In addition they visited selected foreign countries to learn about their education and training models and approaches.

Different theoretical frameworks have been used to study policy issues (Boyd and Plank, 1994; McLendon, 2003; Rhoads et al., 2005). These frameworks are based on varying conceptual and methodological designs, and provide useful guidelines for assessment of the policy process but fall short in their ability to assess the policy cycle fully: they do not adequately address policy impact assessment. The conceptual framework above was used to evaluate policy change and formed the basis for recommendations for future review:

Several authors contend that most policy decisions arise out of formal research, but they are also influenced by factors such as the opinions of influential stakeholders, statements made by politicians or the views

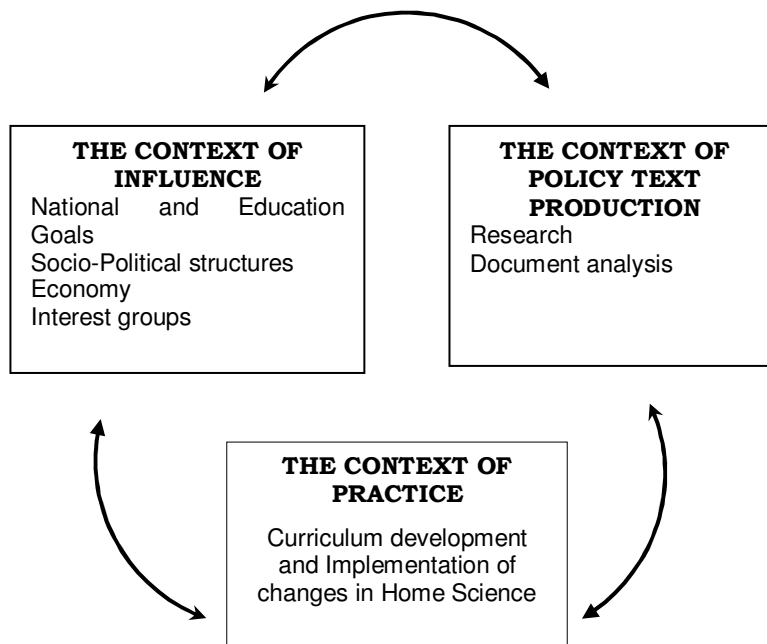


Figure 1. Framework for Analysis of Change in Home Science Education
(SOURCE: Adapted from Haddad, 1996)

of the general public (Haddad, 1996; Mulholland and Shakespeare, 2005). Their perspectives build on and influence the way in which the country's educational aims are interpreted and therefore impact on what policy options are considered suitable.

Once policy options are generated, decisions are made as to which options best fit the expectations of the country at that particular time. Experts plan how the policy will be implemented. Ideally implementation takes place on a pilot basis after which the impacts of the policy are documented. All necessary adjustments are carried out, followed by full-scale implementation. While theoretically the process seems simple, the input from various sectors with vested interests may complicate the process. Ball (1988: p126) contends that policy decisions are often an amalgamation of theories, research, trends and fashions and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks like it might work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The conceptual framework guided the development of a document analysis guide. The guide consists of six sections and was adapted from the Content Analysis Guidebook (Nuendorf, 2001). These sections are: Theory and Rationale; Conceptualization Decisions; Operationalization Measures; Document Sampling; Thematic Arrangement; Analysis of Trends, and Relationships and Impact.

The variables studied were the national and educational goals, the socio-political structures, the economy and the input of interest groups, which formed the conceptualization decisions. Policy was used as the unit of operationalization. Policy documents that were sampled included reports of educational commissions, Sessional

Papers, Five Year Development Plans, memoranda and strategic papers from the MoE, syllabi and text books. The information collected was thereafter arranged thematically and analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis enabled evaluation and interpretation of the reform process in Home Science education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Review of Home Science education in Kenya is of necessity a review of the whole curriculum. This is because review in Kenya is carried out throughout the whole curriculum and does not focus only on one subject. In the early 1980's there was growing concern over the large numbers of students unable to further their education after completion of High School since at the time the Nairobi University was the only national university. The demand for university education had outstripped its capacity to absorb students who qualified. In addition there was a need to introduce new courses to meet manpower needs, especially in the areas of technology.

The government set up a working party to look into the establishment of a second university in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1981). While the TOR of the commission was to make general recommendations on the government decision to establish a second university in Kenya, the commission also recommended that the structure of education should change from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4 in terms of primary, secondary and university education. The committee consulted widely, as evidenced by the acknowledgement of submissions from individuals and

institutions. Public hearings were held in every province to obtain input, and the members of the working party also visited various educational institutions. In addition meetings were held with Government Ministers, Members of Parliament and senior government officials. It is clear therefore that stakeholders were given an opportunity to influence the recommendations made in the subsequent report, although it is not clear what they were asked, and to what extent their submissions were utilized.

At this time, there were three distinct subjects referred to as Home Economics (Kenya Institute of Education, 1981). These were Clothing and Textiles, Foods and Nutrition and Home Management. A student studied only one of the three, leading to specialization at secondary school. However, students who went to university for a three year Bachelor of Education degree in Home Economics, where all three subjects were integrated. The implication of this lack of specialization at university level is that students had three years only to gain competence in two subjects of Home Economics so as to be able to teach all three when posted to secondary schools.

The system of education in Kenya changed from the 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4 with respect to primary, secondary and university education in 1985. The Presidential Working Party on the Second University (Republic of Kenya, 1981) had suggested that education at each stage be terminal and therefore equip students with enough knowledge and skills to be self employed. In a move to decentralize the provision of education, the government set up District Education Boards to manage education provision (Republic of Kenya, 1988). However they focused mainly on primary education, leaving the management of secondary schools to the provincial education offices. The policy guiding secondary education was two-fold: to prepare the student for self-reliance, training and further education, and to lay a foundation for the development of self-discipline, integrity, adaptability, cooperation and patriotism (Kenya Institute of Education, 1986).

With the introduction of the new system of education fundamental changes were made to Home Science in secondary schools. Firstly, all three Home Economics subjects were integrated. It is notable that the Kenya Institute of Education (1986) justifies this integration by stating that early specialization caused "problems" during post-secondary education. While these problems are not elucidated, it may be possible to extrapolate that Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) was referring to the difficulties experienced by having to study all three subjects at university level. This does not take into account the scope of the syllabus. Kenya Institute of Education merely merged the topics in the three subjects without due consideration of the content load and the reduction in the secondary school cycle from six years to four years. The result a syllabus so wide it is doubtful that students would have acquired the skills in line with the objective of the 8-4-4 of enabling students to take up employment

after their secondary education (Kenya Institute of Education, 1986).

Prior to 1985, revisions to the education sector were made based on recommendations from Government appointed commissions. This was not the case when the 8-4-4 system of education was introduced. Abagi (1997) asserted that this implementation was carried out without first consulting with, and preparing of the stakeholders, especially the teachers and parents. Rather a review was carried out three years later. In 1988 a committee was set up to address some of the issues that had arisen since the implementation of the 8-4-4 (Republic of Kenya, 1988). The commission had ten terms of reference, focusing around the need to improve education with regard to financing, quality and relevance. Policy emphasis was maintained on teaching of science and technology.

The commission noted that the development of secondary schools was skewed in favor of boys, especially with regard to facilities for technical subjects. It was recommended that the opportunities for girls to study technical subjects be increased. Were this recommendation implemented it would have led to an increase in opportunities for more girls to study Home Science since this was the main technical subject offered in girls' schools. However one drawback of this suggestion was lack of a policy guideline regarding how facilities would be provided, and therefore a lack of documentation on the extent of its implementation and success.

One noteworthy policy was the prominence given to the localization of education with regard to use of locally available resources, improvisation of learning equipment and on the localization of textbooks. This would enable students to apply what they learnt to their everyday lives. In addition localization of the textbooks used ensured that they were in line with the experiences of the students. The large proportion of the syllabus was taken up by practical activities that helped to build up the students' competence. Prior to 1985, text books used for Home Science were written by foreigners. Kenya Institute of Education published text books and teachers' guides written locally by panels of subject experts and whose content more familiar to the life circumstances of students (Kenya Institute of Education, 1986).

Parents and educators were the main motivators for curriculum revision in 1992. The relevance of education was being questioned as was the heavy burden the curriculum placed on students. The 8-4-4 system of education was in its 5th year. In light of the country's poor economic performance, and increasing demands on parents to meet the costs of education, there were declining enrollment and completion rates. The transition rate from secondary schools into university was only 7% (Republic of Kenya 1996).

The secondary education curriculum goals remained the same as in 1985: to prepare the student for self-

reliance, training and further education, while laying a foundation for the development of self-discipline, integrity, adaptability, cooperation and patriotism (Kenya Institute of Education, 1992). In addition, the emphasis remained on equipping the student for whom secondary education would be terminal for employment. Although, Kenya Institute of Education claimed that the Home Science syllabus released in that year was revised, comparison with the 1986 syllabus shows that there was no difference in the two syllabi. Thus, the Home Science syllabus continued to be overloaded and poorly sequenced (Sigot, 1987; Mwiria, 2002).

In 1998, the government set up a commission of inquiry into the education system of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1999). The mandate of the commission was to recommend ways of enabling the education system to achieve national unity and mutual social responsibility, and to speed up industrial and technological development. The resultant report came to be known by the acronym TIQET that stood for Total Integrated Quality Education and Training. The emphasis of the report was that learning should be relevant and lifelong. The TIQET report was not implemented since the Government argued that report was too costly to implement and that it would require extensive structural and institutional adjustments (Abagi et al., 2000). However, several of the recommendations from the report influenced the changes that occurred in the syllabus in 2002 and in subsequent years.

The 2002 syllabus was the first to include the goals of education and try to match them with the objectives of Home Science. The revision of the curriculum also attempted to address the issue of overload by reducing the content taught. It was also meant to reorganize the syllabus in such a way that better mastery of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required at the end of the secondary school cycle were assured. The issue of cost was also addressed so that the resources required to implement the curriculum were obtainable locally at low cost or could be improvised. The MoE also gave consideration to emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS education, health and environment (Abagi et al, 2000). These topics were included in the Home Science syllabus. Once again, however, it is clear that curriculum developers found themselves in a dilemma as to what content to reduce, and they retained what was initially in the curriculum and simply shifted topics from one level to another. One notable change was in the reduction of practical experiences, a decision at odds with the country's development goals that focus on achieving industrialization (Republic of Kenya, 1996; Otunga, 2010). Otunga goes on to contend that the emphasis on technical and vocational subjects like Home Science has waned due to the academic workload and the emphasis on passing written examinations.

In 2005, the Government launched the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) 2005-2010,

adopting a sector wide approach to program planning (SWAP). The SWAP process was meant to ensure that all stakeholders were involved in order to foster national ownership, alignment of objectives, harmonization of procedures and a coherent financing arrangement (Republic of Kenya, 2005). For the first time the government set up a directorate of planning and policy in the Ministry of Education to plan, develop and review policies for the education sector and coordinate education projects in the country. This would eliminate the need for presidential mandated commissions of inquiry as had been the case in the past, and also ensure continual monitoring and evaluation of existing policy.

In regard to TIVET, the government acknowledged that the growth in the sub-sector had been haphazard and uncoordinated due to a lack of unified policy and legal constraints. In order to begin rationalizing TIVET a national symposium was held in 2003 to build consensus with stakeholders on the reform process (Ibid). As had happened in previous years, the participants recommended the establishment of a National Training Authority to oversee the development and coordination of TIVET. A total of KShs 185 million for the years 2005-2007 was recommended for the establishment of a National Training Authority the authority has so far not been set up.

CONCLUSION

Home Science has been reviewed each time the curriculum has undergone change in Kenya. The basis for review has been the need to ensure that education remains relevant and is of quality in order to meet the country's development targets. The evaluation of policies related to, and the syllabus of Home Science indicates that the changes made have not resulted in change so much as in the shifting of the scope and sequence of the topics.

The current education policies and practices put into doubt the place of vocational subjects such as Home Science in Kenya. If Kenya hopes to use technology to industrialize the nation, Home Science is well placed to be a part of this development because the subject encompasses skills that are directly useful to generate employment through the use of applied technology.

While internal changes are important in improving the status of Home Science education, the policy framework that governs Home Science at national level needs reform. It was noted that with two ministries dealing with Home Science: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology, there may be overlap or disregard of the development of Home Science. In its policy framework for education, training and research of 2004, the Government pledged to put into place a National Training Authority but this has not been implemented, and needs to be urgently considered.

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