

## Perceptions of Bachelor of Education Students on the Sociological Influences of the Kenya School Curriculum

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**ABSTRACT:** It is common today to hear parents, political leaders and even church leaders complaining that education and training in general are not facilitating the partakers to become reliable and dependable citizens. This is an evaluative statement on the sociological influences of the school curriculum. This paper is a report of a study that was carried out among Bachelor of Education (B.ED) students in a public university in Kenya. The objectives explored were to: Find out the perceptions of students on the sociological influences of the Kenya School curriculum; Find out the perceptions of the students on how the Kenya school curriculum prepared them to cope with emerging issues in the society; How the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their understanding and appreciation of their culture; The ways through which religious organizations and families influence school curriculum in Kenya and their perceptions on how the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their self-actualization. The study was driven by the Structural Functionalism theory and the Sociological foundations of curriculum. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were used in selecting the research sample. A total of 198 students participated in the study and out of these 100 were males and 98 females. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Questionnaires were used in collection of data. Data was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Among the major findings the study revealed that the Kenya school curriculum does not adequately facilitate learners to understand the cultures of other communities in Kenya, to appreciate other peoples' cultures, and to understand the challenges generally affecting the Kenya society. That the teaching methods adopted by teachers and the methods of evaluation used are inadequate in helping the learners to understand and appreciate their culture. This explains why Kenya is lagging behind in economic growth. Our school leavers are ill prepared to cope with the challenges affecting the society. Therefore, teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities on teaching methods that are learner centred especially those that facilitate problem solving, discovery learning and self-directed approaches.

**KEYWORDS:** curriculum, sociology, culture, emerging issues, curriculum foundations.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

From a sociological perspective, education is a process of transmission of culture. Culture refers to the way of life of a society. Schools are formal institutions whose main purpose is to preserve and transmit the culture of the society. Schools discharge this function through the curriculum. Curriculum is the sum total of all the experience provided to the learners under the guidance of the school (Bishop, 1985). Auguste Comte (1798-1857), the founder of the discipline of sociology, define sociology as the study of interaction between human institutions such as the family, education, religion as well as their development and the manner of transformation of societies (Kibera and Kimokoti, 2007:1).

A society is a system whereby people live together in organized communities. Taba (1962) highlights three main functions of education thus: to preserve and transmit culture, to transform culture and as a means of individual development. The first two functions are embodied on the society and its culture.

Education is a value based activity engaging individuals in experiencing and accepting what is valued in society. In favour of this, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) contend:

Schools exist within not apart from social context. Through their curricula, schools influence the culture of the people that the schools serve. Likewise, the culture affects and shapes the schools and the curricula. Schools through their teaching of the curriculum can alter society and the society can model the school and its curriculum (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1998:137)

This paper is a report of a study that was undertaken among Bachelor of Education (B.ED) students in a public university in Kenya on their perceptions on the sociological influences of the Kenya School Curriculum.

### **1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study was to find out the perceptions of B.Ed students on the sociological influences of the Kenya School curriculum.

### **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

These were to find out the perceptions of the B.Ed students on:

- i) How the Kenya school curriculum had prepared them to cope with emerging issues in the society.
- ii) How the Kenya school curriculum had facilitated their understanding and appreciation of their culture.
- iii) How religious organizations influenced the school curriculum in Kenya.
- iv) How students' families influenced the school curriculum in Kenya.
- v) How the Kenya school curriculum had facilitated their self actualization.

### **1.3 FOUNDATIONS OF CURRICULUM**

These are forces that influence curriculum planners and developers when deciding on what to include in the curriculum and how to structure it (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, 2006). Curriculum foundations are the determinants of the school curriculum. They influence the choice of the learning experiences provided in schools.

There are four foundations of curriculum: historical foundations that deal with past events that influence the school curriculum; psychological foundations that are concerned with human behaviour and its effects on curriculum; philosophical foundations that encompass the values and beliefs about life and education and sociological foundations that deal with the society and its influence on the school curriculum. This paper was drawn from the sociological foundations of curriculum. Society is of great influence to school curriculum because as Taba (1962) argues, curriculum developers should look into the moral and artistic development of the society. Dewey quoted in Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) concurs with this when he says that it is the primary responsibility of educators to reflect and determine learning experiences that enhance individual personal social growth and lead to the improvement of society.

Tyler (1949) in his curriculum development model recognizes the society as a major influence of the school curriculum and identifies it as an important determinant of educational objectives. Various curriculum scholars (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992; Bishop, 1985; Otunga et al 2011) recognize the curriculum development process should begin by undertaking a situational analysis during which the context is established. The circumstances in the schools and in the society are reflected on. In the society a number of factors are considered like the values, norms of the society, the culture, ideologies, changes in knowledge among others.

The factors in the society should be considered when developing the school curriculum because the society has its own expectations about the aims and objectives that should be considered when designing the school curriculum. It has its own perception of what the product of the school system should look like. The school curriculum is the device used to transmit worthwhile aspects of the society's culture as it reflects cultural and social needs of the society. In addition it should cater for the needs and interests of the different categories of people in the society.

#### **1.4 SOCIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES OF THE KENYA SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

The school curriculum in Kenya caters for the emerging issues in the Kenya Society. In Kenya the current emerging issues are the HIV/AIDS epidemic, environmental conservation, ethnic violence, technology changes, unemployment, poverty, drug and substance abuse, population control and gender issues among others.

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2006) propose that the use of technology promotes investigative skills, makes learning more exciting, provides opportunities to apply knowledge and prepares students for an increasingly technologically advanced world. Schools in Kenya have continually revised the school curriculum to later for technological changes in the world. This is because as Schever (1999: 16) observe:

The computer application is already changing how students acquire and use information. If our schools do not rise to their technological opportunity and challenge, they risk becoming completely anachronistic.

It is this thinking that has led to the teaching of computer studies in primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Other innovations in the school curriculum in Kenya that have been driven by technology changes are the use of calculators and Computer Assisted Instruction.

HIV/AIDS is a major disease that affects a large number of people in Africa, Kenya included. Its spread and effects are increasing daily at an alarming rate. It has thus become a major health and social issue in Africa attracting the attention of governments and their various agencies, and the donor communities (Indabawn & Mpofu, 2006).

Environmental degradation is an emerging issue in Kenya. Environment refers to the surrounding of an object. The current environmental issues affecting Kenya are deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, water shortage and degraded water quality, poaching, and domestic and industrial pollution. Faculties and departments on environmental management have been enacted in Kenyan tertiary institutions and Universities.

Kenya is also affected by ethnic violence. This has greatly affected its economic growth because violence leads to loss of lives and property. In the school curriculum in Kenya, messages on national cohesion and co-existence are passed through an integrated approach in the teaching and learning of all subject areas.

Unemployment is a critical problem affecting the citizens of Kenya. When addressing Kenyans during the 47<sup>th</sup> Madaraka day celebrations at Nyayo national stadium in Nairobi on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010, president Kibaki cited unemployment as the biggest hurdle in Kenya's quest to transform into a middle income country in East Africa (Otieno, 2010). Kenya is a country affected by poverty too. Kenya is one of the countries in the world with lowest income. Drug and substance abuse is a major issue in Kenya affecting Kenya. Population control is another issue. Despite the governments' population control efforts and strategies, Kenya's population growth rate is still amongst the highest in the world (Central Bureau of statistics, 2004)

Gender issues affect the society in Kenya as well. To promote women education in Kenya, there has been the enactment of gender policy in education which states that: By 2015, all children, with emphasis on girls, should have access to and complete free and compulsory education of good quality to achieve gender equality in education (MOE, 2007). This is in line with Millennium Development Goals and Education for all on: Delivering Quality education and Training to all as a priority.

#### **1.5 STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM THEORY**

This study was informed by the structural functionalism theory. The major proponents of structural functionalism theory include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer and Talcott Parsons (Kibera and Kimokoti, 2007). This theory emphasises that the society has a specific structure of various institutions which function in harmony. Each institution has a specific function(s) and the different institutions in the society are dependent upon one another for various services. In this case, the school is one of the institutions in the society and is charged with the responsibility of effectively preparing learners for life in the society. Schools preserve and transmit the culture of the society

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This was a quantitative study. It utilized a descriptive survey design. Stratified and simple random sampling methods were used to select the research sample. Stratified sampling provides more reliable and detailed information (Kothari, 2004). This is partly because a stratified sample comprises of a blend of randomization and categorization. Simple random sampling on the other hand ensures that each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Gall,

2005). A total of 198 students participated in the study and out of these 100 were males and 98 females. Questionnaires were used in collection of data.

### 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data that was obtained from the study.

#### 3.1 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

The study sought the biographical information of the respondents to confirm if the respondents were reliable in giving the information that was sought in this study. A total of 198 students participated in the study. The findings revealed that 100 respondents (50.5%) were males and the remaining 98 (49.5%) were females. In addition, 41 respondents (20.7%) were in the age bracket of 18-20 years; 73 (36.9%) fell in the age bracket of between 21-22 years, 65 of them (32.8%) between 23-25 years and the rest 19 (9.6%) were in the age bracket of more than 25 years.

On the area of specialization, 91 students (46.0%) were pursuing Bachelor of Education (Arts); 77 of them (38.9%) were pursuing Bachelor of Education (Science). 10 students (5.1%) were selected from each of the rest of the specializations under Bachelor of Education thus: Early Childhood and Primary Education, Guidance & Counselling and Technology Education. Concerning the students year of study, 50 students each were in first and second year while 49 students each were in third and fourth year. The implication of the students' biographic data was that the respondents were from varied specialities, gender, age and levels of study.

#### 3.2 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE B.ED STUDENTS ON HOW THE KENYA SCHOOL CURRICULUM HAS PREPARED THEM TO COPE WITH EMERGING ISSUES IN THE SOCIETY

The students were asked to indicate how the Kenya school curriculum has prepared them to cope with emerging issues in the society. The responses are indicated on Table 1.

*Table 1: The perceptions of the B.Ed students on the extent to which the Kenya school curriculum has prepared them to cope with emerging issues in the society*

N=198

Aspects	Adequately prepared		Inadequately prepared	
	f	%	F	%
HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention	80	40.4	118	59.6
Eradication of ethnic violence	72	36.4	126	63.6
Embracing technology changes	101	51.0	97	49.0
Coping with unemployment	65	32.8	133	67.2
Environmental conservation	67	33.8	131	66.2
Poverty reduction	69	34.8	129	65.2
Abstinence to drug and substance abuse	82	41.4	116	58.6
Population control	109	55.1	89	44.9
Gender issues	92	46.5	106	53.5

#### 3.3 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE B.ED STUDENTS ON HOW THE KENYA SCHOOL CURRICULUM HAS FACILITATED THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THEIR CULTURE

The students were asked to indicate the extent to which the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their understanding and appreciation of their culture. The responses are indicated on Table 2.

**Table 2: The perceptions of the B.Ed students on the extent to which the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their understanding and appreciation of their culture**

N=198

Aspects	Responses				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>The Kenya school curriculum:</b>					
Has helped me understand the economic activities of the people of Kenya	56(28.2)	56(28.2)	0(0.0)	45(22.8)	41(20.7)
Has helped me understand the social groups/communities found in Kenya	70(35.4)	72(36.4)	0(0.0)	26(13.1)	30(15.2)
Has helped me understand the political organization in Kenya	69(34.9)	67(33.9)	2(1.0)	25(12.6)	35(17.7)
Has helped me understand the culture of other communities apart from my own	50(25.2)	27(13.6)	11(5.6)	60(30.3)	50(25.2)
Has helped me appreciate other peoples cultures	28(14.1)	19(9.6)	9(4.5)	67(33.8)	75(37.9)
Has helped me understand the challenges generally affecting the Kenya society	50(25.2)	40(20.2)	5(2.5)	43(21.7)	60(30.3)

The students were asked to indicate the extent to which various aspects of the school curriculum have facilitated their understanding of the Kenya society. The responses are indicated on Table 3.

**Table 3: Perceptions of B.Ed students on how various aspects of the school curriculum have facilitated their understanding of the Kenya society**

N=198

Aspects	Adequately prepared		Inadequately prepared	
	f	%	F	%
The curriculum objectives	106	53.5	92	46.5
The content in the subjects	102	51.5	96	48.5
The teaching methods	72	36.4	126	63.6
The methods of evaluation	95	48.0	103	52.0

### 3.4 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE B.ED STUDENTS ON THE WAYS THROUGH WHICH RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS INFLUENCE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN KENYA

The students were asked to indicate how religious organizations influence school curriculum in Kenya. The findings are presented on Table 8.

**Table 4: The perceptions of the B.Ed students on the ways through which religious organizations influence school curriculum in Kenya**

N=198

Aspects	F	%
Provision of resources	138	69.7
Teacher training	142	71.7
Developing Religious Education curriculum	123	62.1
Provision of guidance and counselling services	101	51.0

### 3.5 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE B.ED STUDENTS ON THE WAYS THROUGH WHICH THEIR FAMILIES INFLUENCE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN KENYA

The students were asked to indicate how their families influence school curriculum in Kenya. The findings are indicated on table 9.

**Table 5: The perceptions of the B.Ed students on the ways through which their families influence school curriculum in Kenya**

N=198

Aspects	F	%
Payment of school levies	198	100
Provision of resources like books	196	99.0
Motivating learners	109	55.1
Providing the learner's background information	115	58.1

### 3.6 THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE B.ED STUDENTS ON HOW THE KENYA SCHOOL CURRICULUM HAS FACILITATED THEIR SELF ACTUALIZATION

The students were asked to indicate how the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their self-actualization. The responses are indicated on Table 10.

**Table 6: The perceptions of the B.Ed students on how the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their self-actualization**

N=198

Aspects	Responses				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>The learning experiences provided in school:</b>					
Inspire be to perform to the best of my ability	26(13.1)	34(17.2)	12(6.1)	66(33.3)	60(30.3)
Are in line with my needs and interests	49(24.7)	46(23.2)	4(2.0)	45(22.7)	54(27.2)
Encourage me to pursue university education	52(26.3)	51(25.8)	7(3.5)	43(21.7)	45(22.7)
Are within my abilities	46(23.2)	50(25.2)	3(1.5)	45(22.7)	54(27.2)

### 3.7 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The first research objective investigated the perceptions of the B.Ed students on the extent to which the Kenya school curriculum had prepared them to cope with emerging issues in the society. Majority of the students indicated that the Kenya school curriculum had inadequately prepared them to cope with most of the emerging issues in the society like HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, eradication of ethnic violence, coping with unemployment, environmental conservation, poverty reduction, abstinence to drug and substance abuse and gender issues. The only aspects that the students indicated the Kenya school curriculum had helped them in are embracing technology changes and population control.

The second research objective was an investigation of the perceptions of the B.Ed students on the extent to which the Kenya school curriculum had facilitated their understanding and appreciation of their culture. The students were of the feeling that the curriculum had failed to facilitate them in understanding the culture of other communities, to appreciate other peoples' cultures and to understand the challenges affecting the Kenya society. Majority indicated that the Kenya school curriculum had effectively assisted them to understand the economic activities of the people of Kenya, the social groups/communities found in Kenya as well as the political organization in Kenya. In addition, the students felt that the aspects of the curriculum that have greatly facilitated the understanding of the Kenya society were the curriculum objectives, and the content in the subject areas. The aspects that the students found inhibiting in the understanding of the Kenya society were the teaching methods and the methods of evaluation.

The third research objective was an investigation of the perceptions of the B.Ed students on how religious organizations influenced school curriculum in Kenya. Majority of the students agreed that the religious organizations greatly influenced school curriculum in Kenya through provision of resources, teacher training, development and implementation of Religious Education curriculum as well as the provision of guidance and counselling services.

The fourth research objective was an investigation of the perceptions of the B.Ed students on how their families influenced school curriculum in Kenya. Majority of the students agreed that their families greatly influenced school curriculum in Kenya through payment of school levies, provision of resources, motivating learners and by providing the learner's background information

The fifth research objective was an investigation of the perceptions of the B.Ed students on how the Kenya school curriculum has facilitated their self-actualization. Majority of the students indicated that the learning experiences provided in school did not inspire them to perform to the best of their abilities, that the learning experiences were not in line with their

needs and interests and that they were not within their abilities. The only aspect that majority of the students agreed on was the fact that the learning experiences provided in school encouraged them to pursue university education.

#### **4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **4.1 CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were arrived at:

- i) The Kenya school curriculum fails to adequately prepare learners to cope with most of the emerging issues in the society like HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, eradication of ethnic violence, coping with unemployment, environmental conservation, poverty reduction, abstinence to drug and substance abuse and gender issues.
- ii) The Kenya school curriculum does not adequately facilitate learners to understand the cultures of other communities in Kenya, to appreciate other peoples' cultures, and to understand the challenges generally affecting the Kenya society. That the teaching methods adopted by teachers and the methods of evaluation used are inadequate in helping the learners to understand and appreciate their culture. This explains why Kenya is lagging behind in economic growth. Our school leavers are ill prepared to cope with the challenges affecting the society.
- iii) Religious organizations positively influence school curriculum in Kenya through provision of resources, teacher training, development and implementation of Religious Education curriculum as well as the provision of guidance and counselling services.
- iv) Parents positively influence school curriculum in Kenya through payment of school levies, provision of resources like books, motivating learners and by providing the learner's background information.
- v) The Kenya school curriculum is inadequate in enhancing the learners self-actualization.

##### **4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i) Learners need to be sensitized more on how to cope with the emerging issues in the society. Although the school curriculum in Kenya has been reviewed in favour of these issues, most of the learners indicated that they are not well versed in coping with the challenges. Some of the ways through which this can be done is through talks, seminars, provision of books and other materials on the same. The integrated approach recommended in the teaching of the emerging issues should be reviewed as well. In addition, the implementation of Life Skills Education which was enacted in 2002 need to be investigated on. Life Skills Education aims at preparing the learners to cope with the challenges affecting the Kenya society.
- ii) Continuous curriculum reviews on national cohesion should be done. Most students indicated that they lacked knowledge on other peoples' culture and appreciation of the same.
- iii) Schools should partner with religious organizations more in the curriculum development and implementation process. Most of the students indicated that religious organizations positively influenced the school curriculum in Kenya.
- iv) Schools should partner with parents more because parents are very influential in the implementation of the school curriculum.
- v) Teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities on teaching methods that are learner centred especially those that facilitate problem solving, discovery learning and self-directed approaches. Such teaching methods allow the exploration of learners' abilities and interests thereby facilitating self-actualization.

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