

A Paradigm Shift: The Introduction of Competency Rather Than Time Based Education Model in Somalia

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Abstract

In this work, we propose a complete change in direction of the education philosophy and the way educational programmes are conducted in Somalia. Somalia has been struggling - and still does - with a prolonged political and socio-economic instability that has negatively impacted on the provision of education as a whole and the way teaching and learning processes are conducted in particular. As Somalia joined EAC, it is imperative to harmonize the education system in line with the education systems across all member states to facilitate a mutual recognition of qualifications, education programmes which will result in compatible skills and training opportunities. Adopting competency-based learning will require a paradigm shift from the old content and time based educational systems to competencies-driven teaching and learning approaches. The concept of competency based education (CBE) defines the mastery of specific and measurable competencies (a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes) that help learners fulfil their potential and succeed in the future. More specifically, CBE differs from the old traditional education model that it offers personalized learning pathways and flexible progression based on the mastery of core competencies, continuous assessments to track progress and alignment with market and industry needs. The re-structuring of the education system is not without challenges and the contributions of all stakeholders must be accommodated.

An Overview: A Paradigm Shift in Education System

With the rapidly advancing technologies of digital transformation and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the way we access information and learn, the education system and hence teaching and learning processes should keep in pace and radically transform in a way that prepares individuals to skilfully navigate in the ever-changing technological landscape. It is increasingly important for the education system to provide the relevant knowledge, critical thinking and market-driven competencies to equip learners with specialised skills and social development that are crucial for fulfilling their potential and for the success in the modern technology-led world [Boahin, 2018; William & Lolelea, 2023].

The concept of competency based education emphasises defining specific and measureable competencies that learners are expected to demonstrate [Sifuna & Obonyo, 2019]. These competencies are intended to encompass not only knowledge but also practical skills and positive attitudes relevant to real world applications and market workplace. Key aspects of competency based educational curriculum include personalized learning pathways and flexible progression based on the mastery of core competencies, continuous assessments to track progress and alignment with market and industry needs [Newmes, 2019; Nilolov et al., 2014].

The competency based learning is founded on new 3 R's: rigour, relevance and respect [Moose, 2015]. Rigour indicates the abilities and capacities students gain as a result of learning; relevance refers to how the learning processes responds to the current real world challenges and future opportunities and; respect reflects

the promotion of healthy relationships among teachers and learners that brings about academic and social competences. This concept also embraces the widely recognized learning domains of cognitive, psychometric and affective aspects in a more balanced manner which reflects on learning experiences and behavioural changes of individuals.

Further to this, a competency based educational system focuses on the acquisition of practical skills, relevant knowledge and the right attitude to ensure that learners are well prepared to meet real world challenges and succeed in their future endeavours. Adopting competency-based learning will require a paradigm shift from the old content and time based educational systems to competencies-driven teaching and learning approaches. This will make it imperative to carry out a holistic review and a change in the way the educational curriculum is designed, teaching instructions are delivered and learning outcomes are assessed and evaluated.

As a game-changing educational model, many countries across the globe including several Western countries such as France, Canada, UK, USA and some African countries in close proximity to us such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania as well as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and Rwanda have already adopted the new competency based curriculum approach in schools. The governments of these countries have realised the intricate link between the economy and the educational outputs.

They have thus juxtaposed their national and developmental goals to education by boldly stepping forward to radically reform their educational systems and the way teaching and learning is conducted and their curricula are structured and designed accordingly.

In addition, the East African Community of which Somalia has recently joined drew up an act in 2012 'A Framework on Harmonization of Curricula, Structure and Examination in EAC' [EAC, 2012] that obliges all member states to reform the basic education, structure and examination system in line with the framework to facilitate the mutual recognition of certificates across EAC region. This harmonization of education system and curricula is meant to ensure free movement of human resources with compatible qualifications, skills and training.

The adoption of competency based learning will not only harmonize education provision in the region but will also pave the way for benchmarking with the best international education practices across the world. As a result, it is crucial for developing countries and those recovering from a long civil war to take on a more innovative view of teaching and learning processes that encourage active intellectual engagement and mastery of practical skills rather than a passive absorption and regurgitation of facts.

For brevity purpose, we will succinctly present in this work the key issues and aspects of competency based curriculum, the overarching objectives of competency based learning, and benefits of competency based curriculum over the traditional curriculum as well as the challenges and constraints that may become an obstacle in the proper implementation of this initiative in Somalia both at Federal Government and Federal Member States levels.

A rigorous and robust curriculum review is exceptionally important in Somalia as the country rebuilds and recovers from a long political instability, social disintegration and economic meltdown.

What is competency based education?

Competency based education (CBE) is a systematic approach of academic instruction based on students demonstrating their mastery of a subject and skills development [IBE UNESCO, 2017]. CBE focuses on what learners are expected to do rather than emphasizing on what they are expected to know [Faustin & Andala, 2019]. It is a learner-centred approach that helps students get the opportunity to apply what they have learned to real life problems and make differences in their own lives. CBE ensures that the learning and teaching processes to be engaging, dynamic and aligned to the future employment needs and global economy [Kasirye, 2020].

In short, a competency based education (CBE) focuses on specific skills or competencies that learners need to acquire rather than just completing certain number of courses or hours allowing students to progress at their own pace. It is designed to make sure that learners have the practical skills and abilities needed to repeated for success in their chosen field of study or profession.

A competency can be conceptualised as the ability to apply learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) in a defined context, i.e. education, work, personal and professional development [Gruppen, 2012; Kim, 2015]. A competency can also be described as the interrelated skills, knowledge and dispositions that are relevant, measureable, and transferrable

that can be applied throughout the learner's lifetime [Mugiraneza & Andala, 2019; Ministry of Education, Rwanda, 2015]. In essence, a competent learner will possess a combination of relevant knowledge, practical skills and appropriate attitudes and behaviours needed for an effective performance of tasks and activities.

A competency based education (CBE) typically consists of the following key components [Gervais, 2016; William & J. N. Lolelea, 2023]:

- **Competency Framework:** Defines the specific skills, knowledge, and abilities that learners are expected to acquire. This framework serves as the foundation for designing a competency based curriculum.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Clearly defined statements that describe what learners should be able to do upon completion of the curriculum. These outcomes are aligned with the competencies outlined in the framework.
- **Assessment Methods:** Various methods are used to assess learners' mastery of competencies, such as performance assessments, simulations, projects, and portfolios. Assessment is ongoing and focuses on demonstrating proficiency rather than simply completing assignments.
- **Flexible Learning Pathways:** Allows learners to progress at their own pace and customize their learning experience based on their individual needs and prior knowledge. This may include options for accelerated learning or alternative pathways to demonstrate competency.
- **Instructional Design:** Utilizes instructional strategies and resources that are tailored to support competency attainment.

This may involve active learning techniques, real-world applications, and opportunities for practice and feedback.

- **Feedback and Support:** Provides regular feedback to learners on their progress toward mastering competencies and offers additional support or resources as needed to address areas of weakness.
- **Integration of Technology:** Incorporates technology to enhance learning experiences, facilitate assessment, and provide access to resources and support services.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Involves ongoing evaluation and refinement of the curriculum based on feedback from learners, instructors, employers, and other stakeholders to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

By incorporating these components, a competency-based education aims to promote deeper learning, skill development, and readiness for real-world challenges.

Objectives of Competency Based Education

The overarching objectives of competency based education of which the curriculum should be built upon can be summarized as follows [Johnstone & L. Soares, 2014; Thummaphan et al., 2022]:

- **Define clear learning outcomes:** It specifies the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students should attain.
- **Focus on mastery:** Emphasizes mastering skills rather than just completing coursework.
- **Personalize learning:** Allows students to progress at their own pace, focusing on areas where they need improvement.
- **Foster real-world application:** Integrates practical skills and knowledge relevant to future careers or life situations.

- Encourage flexibility: Offers varied pathways to achieve competencies, accommodating diverse learning styles and needs.
- Promote continuous assessment: Uses ongoing assessment to track progress and provide feedback for improvement.
- Align with industry needs: Ensures graduates possess the skills required by employers or relevant to further education.

Categories of Competencies:

In general, there are two categories of competencies in competency based curriculum built into the subject syllabi: basic competencies and generic competencies [IBE UNESCO, 2017; O'Sullivan & Burce, 2014; Ministry of Education, Rwanda, 2015; William & Lolelea, 2023].

The basic competencies are the key competencies clearly specified in the expectations and aspirations of education policy documents. The learner's profile in each level of education, both subjects and subject competencies to be taught, and learning areas are built on detailed descriptors that identify the requirements that each basic competency should meet at each of level and subject of the curriculum on a year by year basis. Competency descriptors provide insight into the broader learning outcomes that are expected for each of the competencies, e.g. what learners are expected to demonstrate during the learning process.

Examples of basic competencies include:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- ICT & digital competencies
- Science & Technology
- Entrepreneurship and Business Development

- Communication in official languages
- Citizenship and National Identity

On the other hand, the generic competencies impart students with higher order thinking and enhance subject learning through highly important themselves. These competencies help students understand their subjects and enable them to apply them in a range of situations. Therefore, generic competencies contribute to the development of basic competencies and subject learning. They also help student develop lifelong skills and prepare them for the job market in the dynamic and fast changing world as well as the uncertain future.

Examples of generic competencies include:

- Critical thinking
- Creativity and innovation
- Research and problem solving
- Communication
- Interpersonal relations and life skills
- Lifelong learning skills

Key Differences between CBE & Traditional Education Model

Competency based education (CBE) considerably differs from the traditional education model currently adopted in school systems [Gervais, 2016, Sifuna & Obonyo, 2019]. Generally speaking, CBE shifts the focus from time-based progression to competency mastery of their learning and helps students reach their proficiency so they learn what they need to as they advance to graduation. In short, CBE aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to thrive in their chosen fields of study while at the same time allowing for flexibility and individualized learning experiences.

The key differences between traditional educational system and CBE can be summarized as follows:

- **Mastery vs. seat time:** Traditional education relies on credit hours or seat time as a measure of progress while CBE focuses on the mastery of competencies. In CBE, students must demonstrate a high level of proficiency in each competency before they move to the next level regardless of the time it takes.
- **Individualised learning & flexibility:** In CBE, students are deemed to have different starting points, learning styles and pace. Competency based curriculum (CBC) offers diversified learning paths that allow students manage their learning and progress at their own pace focusing on the areas they need more support and spending more time on challenging concepts, i.e. allows for flexibility. In other words, CBE allows students to accelerate through concepts they have already mastered and spend additional time on areas they need support and further development. However, in traditional education system students typically progress through a predetermined curriculum at a fixed pace, i.e. time based rather than competency based progress.
- **Competency based assessment:** In traditional education model, assessments heavily rely on standardized tests and exams. In CBE, however, a variety of assessment methods are employed including performance based assessments, projects, portfolios and real-world applications which provide more authentic and comprehensive view of what students can know and do, i.e. assessing competencies.

- **Real-world relevance:** CBE strives to ensure that competencies identified match industry standards and workforce needs by focusing on developing skills, attitudes and knowledge that are directly applicable in real-world contexts. Mastering these carefully identified competencies prepare students to succeed in their chosen career paths and future professions.
- **Continuous feedback:** CBE strongly emphasizes an on-going and constructive feedback and support for students and provides guidance and targeted interventions to help students progress in their learning. Teachers, mentors and peers all take part and play an active role in the process of providing constructive feedback and feed-forward.

A Need for a Curriculum Reform

Educational curriculum is a vital vehicle through which countries use to empower their citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable them to be engaged in both social and economic developments [IBE UNESCO, 2017]. An effective curriculum is a roadmap that provides teachers, learners, schools and the wider community with a measurable plan and structure for the delivery of quality education by identifying the learning outcomes, standards and key competencies that students must show and develop before moving to the next level. It also prepares learners for future success whether in further education, building a professional career or lifelong skills.

A need for curriculum change is prompted by many factors of which having an updated curriculum that aligns basic education goals with children's future career interests, aptitudes and abilities is a paramount to future success.

In the dynamic and rapidly changing world we live in, there is no country that is pre-occupied to design its education system with the aim of preparing all children to join universities for few traditional careers. Other significant factors for the need to a curriculum reform include the advancement of knowledge, progression of technology and the changing needs, interests and abilities of learners.

In Somalia, though there are some updates made in terms of contents, accessibility and inclusivity aspects of the education policies, the current curriculum is traditional in nature and has been in place for decades – there is no significant changes that can be observed since the independence from colonial powers. The educational model employed also is too rigid and seems to serve those learners who score high in traditional subjects (part of STEM subjects) and can be described as inconsistent with the global trend and the demands of the marketplace as noted by some researchers [Mohamed & Mohamud, 2024]. For the education system in Somalia to be harmonized with the regional and global education systems, a holistic review of the curriculum philosophy, content and structure should be made.

The curriculum re-structuring requires the modification of the whole school system and demands teachers to adopt new concepts of the teaching role, new curriculum content and textbooks. When planning a change in the curriculum, educators are supposed to observe the following key questions:

- What educational goals should be attained?
- What educational experiences should be provided that are likely to attain those goals?

- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can it be determined whether these educational goals can be attained?

To ensure effectiveness, relevance, ownership and commitment, any attempt for a curriculum reform and change should be guided by a holistic approach based on broad consultations with all stakeholders to foster ownership and inclusivity.

The Implementation Process of Curriculum Change

A major challenge in implementing a curriculum reform is to embark on an ambitious transformation without a proper planning [Nsengimana, 2021; Thummaphan et al., 2022]. Before going ahead to the implementation of the curriculum change, it is extremely important that policy-makers and other stakeholders to conduct a thorough understanding of the roles, expectations and interests of various actors and local and international institutions affected by the change process in a cost-effective and efficient way. This wide consultation with all stakeholders and actors on-board will help mobilise the human and non-human resources to support the change process and will facilitate to adopt a balanced stance between both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

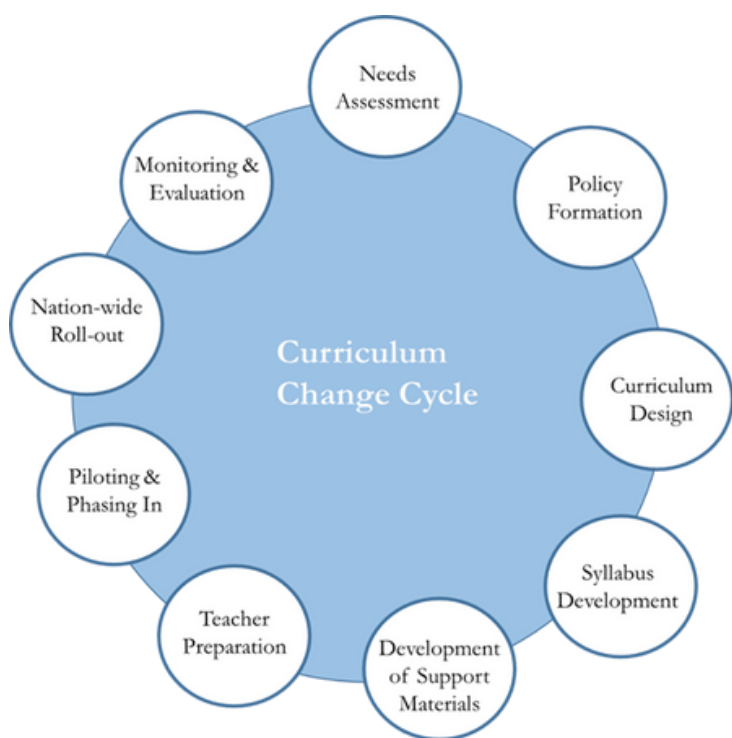


Figure 1: Curriculum Change Cycle

Figure 1 summarizes and helps visualise a curriculum change cycle that guides a realistic and manageable nine-step curriculum reform process (IBE UNESCO, 2017). The change cycle starts with the needs assessment (data collection), policy formulation (review of national goals) through curriculum design, syllabus development and the development of curriculum support materials (teaching materials), teacher training, piloting and ends with distribution of materials and monitoring and evaluation. Each step is a process on its own and involves a range of key activities. During the implementation process, the contributions of all stakeholders should be carefully considered to address any challenges that may impede the process.

Challenges to Curriculum Reform & Possible Solutions

It is noteworthy that the curriculum change process is never easy and may face critical challenges that might derail the entire process and risk its failure, particularly when

the proposed reform involves a paradigm shift in the entire education system or approach. For essence, the curriculum change is a form of a social change and if not well understood and supported by the society it may not be effectively implemented.

Another challenge that may constitute an obstacle to the curriculum reform is a shortage or lack of adequate resources especially if the technology plays a great part in the system restructuring. Teachers and other school staff may also resist to adopt the new practice. Above all, an effective leadership and political will is the starting point of any change otherwise politicians may not facilitate or support the curriculum reform which may result in failure. "If there is a will, there is a way".

Valuable lessons can be learned from the challenges and constraints faced by the implementation process of CBE in neighbouring countries such as Kenya. In Kenya, the introduction of CBE has commenced in 2017 and still continues to be rolled out [IBE UNESCO, 2017; Sifuna & Obonyo, 2019]. One of the key challenges encountered during the implementation of CBE in Kenya was the acute shortage of teachers that few of them were effectively trained to implement the newly introduced programme at the time of roll-out [Sifuna & Obonyo, 2019]. This shortage of talent resource posed serious challenge in the successful implementation of CBE. To avoid such a setback, adequate resources and funds should be secured before the implementation of such game-changing programme.

The first step in giving high priority to a curriculum change is to create a conducive context in which an effective reform can happen. This priority can be clearly demonstrated as follows:

- Ensuring that any changes to the curriculum are explicit in strategic, operational and development plans.
- Placing curriculum change at the top of agendas for policy-making meetings, and make it a standing item through the development, implementation and evaluation phases.
- Providing a clear picture of how the change will affect key players such head teachers, teachers, staff and students, and the various educational institutions (e.g. schools) as a whole.
- Allocating senior responsibility for making change happen (rather than creating complex and time-consuming reporting procedures and systems).
- Providing adequate resources, based on realistic and achievable targets, to make sure that the change actually happens.

To ease the transformation in the education system and adopt the shift from traditional education model to competency based curriculum, the curriculum reform should be conducted in phases over 3 to 5 years period depending on the availability and the affordability of resources. For example, the teaching and learning process are to be planned in such a way that learners study the complete particular stage programmes before they are assessed in the new national examinations aligned to the curriculum.

This phased introduction of curriculum reform will provide a timeframe to set up strategies for:

- Teacher training programme.
- The phased delivery of new textbooks based on CBE.
- New national examinations to be prepared.
- School heads and inspectors need to be trained for their role aligned to the new curriculum.
- Resourcing of schools for teaching a competency based curriculum.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The implementation of the new CBC requires careful monitoring to identify and address any barriers to the successful reform to be carried out. The responsibility for monitoring and evaluation lies at each level of the education system from individual teaching staff up to the highest ranks of the Ministry of Education. Following are a set of typical principles to be applied to the monitoring and evaluation framework during the implementation process of the curriculum change [Nilolov et al., 2014; IBE UNESCO, 2017; Ministry of Education, Rwanda, 2015]:

- Recording, analysing and reporting annually monitoring indicators through existing education system structures, e.g. schools, curriculum development and quality assurance units.
- These monitoring indicators are designed to focus on teaching and learning methodologies, assessment approaches, the utilization of instructional materials and the intended outcomes of the overall teaching and learning processes.
- The monitoring and the evaluation responsibility mainly lies with the national quality assurance and inspection unit to ensure regular reevaluation of monitoring reports.

- In the early phases of the curriculum reform process, the monitoring and evaluation activities will focus on how teachers and students perceive the changes made as well as the impact the change may have had on the learning and attitudes to learning. Once the curriculum change has been in effect for a full cycle, it will then be possible to judge and compare the outcomes with hard outcome measures.

Concluding Remarks

A competency based education and/or curriculum is a learner-centred, market-driven education system that focuses on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards learning. It emphasizes more on what learners are expected to do rather than narrowly focusing on what learners are expected to know. Moreover, the competency based education implies that learners should acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to find solutions for everyday life problems. Adopting competency based curriculum requires a paradigm shift and a change in the teaching, learning and assessment approaches.

The key features of the competency based education which makes it different from the traditional education system include personalized learning pathways and flexible progression based on the mastery of core competencies, continuous assessments to track progress and alignment with market and industry needs. The concept of competency can be described as the interrelated skills, knowledge and dispositions that are relevant, measureable, and transferrable that can be applied throughout the learner's lifetime.

There are two main categories of competencies: subject specific competencies and generic competencies that impart learners with high thinking and analytical abilities.

There is always a pressing and a compelling need to periodically review and revise the educational curriculum as the technological, economic and socio-political contexts change in which the learning and teaching processes happen. Departing from traditional education system that has been in place for decades is not a trivial endeavour. For instance, a curriculum change is considered as a kind of a social change that entails a wide acceptance among all players and key actors in the education and political spheres. The implementation of such a change may not result in the desired and predicted reform if not well understood by the all interested sectors of the society as a whole.

In a country such as Somalia where resources are very limited, carefully planned changes in the education curriculum should be carried out in phases and over a reasonable duration where piloting and gradual introduction of the new concepts are conducted and presented to learners depending on the resources and funding available. Training school teachers and administrations will be needed as well as preparation of teaching and learning materials.

A robust monitoring and evaluation process should be put in place in all phases during the implementation of any new curriculum to remove and address any barriers that the introduction of the new curriculum may encounter.

For the education system in Somalia to be compatible and aligned with the global trend, it is highly recommend to reform the current curricula at all levels of learning processes (schools and universities). These curricula are outdated and inconsistent with market demand and the pace of advance in knowledge and technology. Authorities of decision-making at both Federal and State level governments and other concerned ministries and agencies are suggested to introduce

competency based curricula to impart the new generations the right knowledge, skills and attitudes that can enable and empower them to live up to the challenges of the rapidly changing world and grab the opportunities it offers in the best possible way. It is the competencies learners are supposed to acquire not just learning contents that will eventually enable them to be good thinkers and high performers.

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