

# **Development of Education System in Kenya since Independence**

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This paper deals with system of education in Kenya since 1963. It covers the first education system after Kenya's independence, namely 7-4-2-3 and the second one, 8-4-4 system.

## **2.0 The 7-4-2-3 Education System**

### **2.1 Introduction of 7-4-2-3 System of Education**

According to Ominde (1964), the chairman of the first educational commission in the independent Kenya, "during colonial era, there was no such thing as a nation" only several nations living side by side in the same territory. Education, like society, was stratified along racial lines, there existed an 'African education', a 'European Education', and an 'Asian Education'; three separate systems divided by rigid boundaries (Ominde 1964). This stratification was based on the colonialist's assertion that the mental development of the average African adult was equivalent to that of the average 7-8 year old European boy (Gachathi, 1976). African education' therefore tended to be a hybrid, precariously hovering between a European model with a European subject matter, and an education deemed suitable to the place in colonial life considered 'appropriate' to the African population (Ominde 1964).

Thus the eve of independence brought with it sweeping reforms in the educational system. With the creation of a single nation came the emergence of a single educational system, no longer stratified along racial lines. Ominde Commission was formed to introduce changes that would reflect the nation's sovereignty. The commission focused on identity and unity, which were critical issues at the time. Changes in the subject content of history and geography were made to reflect national cohesion. Between 1964 and 1985, the 7-4-2-3-system was adopted, seven years of primary, four years of lower secondary (form 1 -4), two years of upper secondary (form 5-6), and three years of university. This does not include the 'pre-primary' schooling provided to children under the age of six. The principle preoccupation for Ominde's report was introduce an education system that promoted national unity and inculcated in the learners the desire to serve their nation (Simuyu, 2001).

## **2.2 Criticism of 7-4-2-3 System of Education**

7-4-2-3 system of education lacked the capacity and flexibility to respond to the changing aspirations of individual Kenyans and the labour market needs, in terms of new skills, new technologies and the attitude to work (Owino, 1997).

According to Simuyu (2001), the 7-4-2-3 policy was criticized in two major areas (2001):

- i) The policy was being too academic and therefore not suitable for direct employment. Thus the policy lacked orientation to employment.

- ii) The policy encouraged elitist and individualistic attitudes among school leavers, something that was considered incompatible to the African socialist milieu.

The Gachathi Report (GoK, 1976, p 33-34) raised the issue of unemployment in relation to 7-4-2-3 policy: The report maintained that “One of the largest problems confronting the country is that of unemployment. The problem is aggravated by the annual outputs of school leavers whose number continue to swell following the enormous expansion of the education.

Among those who made calls for change of educational policy were, the Kenya National Assembly’s Select Committee on unemployment (1970) as cited in Maleche (1976, p.13)

Therefore, education, which was regarded by Kenyans as a medium for social mobility and national economic development failed to deliver as the number of unemployed school leavers continued to grow system in the first years of independence. ILO also called for a change to the education system in order to help reduce unemployment. The change consisted of increasing the technical and vocational aspects of the curriculum. The move by ILO towards vocationalising the education system won support from the World Bank.

### **3. 8-4-4 Education System**

#### **3.1 Introduction of 8-4-4 System**

The 8-4-4 system of education was introduced in January 1985, following the Mackay report of 1982. King and McGrath (2002) claims that the 8-4-4 policy arose out of the concerns that a basic academic education might lack the necessary content to promote widespread sustainable (self) employment". Therefore the 8-4-4 policy emanated from the assumption that it would equip pupils with employable skills thereby enabling school dropouts at all levels to be either self-employed or secure employment in the informal sector. King & McGrath, 2002 observes that the new policy would orient youths towards self-employment. The system strongly emphasizes attitudinal and skills preparations for the world of work and especially self-employment.

According to Sifuna (1990), there are three events that led to implementation of the 8-4-4 system: the 1966 conference on education at Kericho in Kenya, which stressed the need for integrating rural development; the International Labor Organization mission report entitled "Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment of 1972;" and the recommendation of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies of 1975. In 1979 the Ministry of Education was changed to the Ministry of Basic Education with an introductory nine-year basic education system program. The rationale was that the previous program was too short and not rigorous enough to give graduates enough practical education. It also recommended that the first six years of primary were to concentrate on numeric and literacy skills and the last two years on basic education with practical orientation. This represented a shift from a focus on enrollment to restructuring the program as a means to cater to the influx of unemployed.

### **3.2 The structure of 8-4-4 System**

The 8-4-4 System is divided into primary, secondary and university excluding the pre-school years. This sections gives a brief description of the structure.

#### ***a) Primary Education***

It starts at age of six years and consists of eight years of schooling, out of which first three may be in the mother tongue, while English is invariably the language of instruction from standards 4 to 8. Most schools are public and run on the basis of harambee system, but the number of private schools, though small as yet, is rising very fast. Most schools are co-ed though a few only-girls schools also exist. The primary education ends with an exam for Kenya Certificate of primary education. Enrolment levels in primary education are reasonable by third world standards - partly a result of the making it free.

#### ***b) Secondary School***

Secondary school consists of four years. Majority of secondary schools are run on the Harambee system. About one fourth are Government schools, but only the most meritorious are able to enter them. The private schools charge high fees and many offer British O-levels, followed by A-levels or the International Baccalaureate. The enrolment in secondary school is far less compared to the primary school, as it is not free, though some plans to do that are being prepared.

#### ***c) University and College Education***

Since the establishment of University of Nairobi in 1970, the first public University in Kenya, seven more general public Universities and an estimated number of 17 private Universities have been introduced, most of them run by religious organizations. Only about 2% of children actually reach the Universities. One of the reasons is the outflow of students belonging to the higher socioeconomic strata, who often prefer foreign Universities.

### **3.3 Debate over 8-4-4 System**

However, although the 8-4-4 policy has been described a major educational reform in the history of Kenya's education system since independence in 1963, there are views that it is a great devastation. For instance, Amutabi (2003, p.136) notes that:

*The 8-4-4 system of education introduced in 1985 still remain the most radical and perhaps mindless change in the education in Kenya since independence. It has already caused great devastation to Kenya that even if it were changed today, the toll on the nation will be felt for many years to come. Its devastation is similar to that of the failed Ujamaa in Tanzania many years after it was officially scrapped.*

The 8-4-4 system has been the subject of national debate since its inception. It has been criticized for being broad, expensive and burdensome to pupils and parents". The new education policy has also been implicated in the worst strikes that engulfed a number of

schools in Kenya during the year 2001 and the general poor quality of education (Amutabi, 2003).

Since its inception, 8-4-4 system has been changed to be more accommodative. Several commission have been formed with the view of improving the system: The Wanjigi Report (GoK, 1983); The Kamunge Report (GoK, 1985), The Mungai Report (GoK, 1995); The Ndegwa Report (GoK, 1991) and The Koech Report (GoK, 1999). A majority of these reports were either rejected or partially implemented. For instance (Muya, 2000): The Kamunge Report (GoK, 1985) on Education and training which recommended the reduction of examination subjects under the 8-4-4, was implemented in secondary schools but ignored at the primary schools level; The president (Moi) rejected the Koech Report.

Those commissions' reports, that were implemented, made profound contributions to certain aspects of the education system in Kenya, for instance, the Gachathi and Mackay Reports contributed to the change of education policy from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4. The

Gathachi report noted with great concern the rising rate of unemployment among school leavers and recommended the restructuring of the education system curriculum in order to have more streams of science, mathematics and, technical and vocational subjects

(Republic of Kenya, 1976). The Mackay Report influenced the extension of primary education from seven to eight years and thus influenced the restructuring of the education system from 7-4-2-3 to 8-4-4 and hence the introduction of technical and vocational i.e.

practical subjects in primary schools. They both commission reports emphasized the integration of technical and vocational education in the entire Kenyan educational system right from primary to tertiary levels (Simiyu, 2001).

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