



**LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGIES: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF THE BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM
FRAMEWORK (BECF) DURING THE TRANSITION FROM 8-4-4
TO THE COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM (CBC) IN KENYA**

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Abstract:

This study utilises a critical analysis approach to investigate the language and discursive strategies employed in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) during the transition from the 8-4-4 system to the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya. The research objectives are twofold: (1) to analyse and interpret the language and discursive strategies utilised in the BECF during the transition period, and (2) to critically examine the underlying ideologies and power relations reflected in the BECF, with a specific focus on its construction of knowledge, values, and educational goals. Through a comprehensive analysis of the language and discursive strategies employed in the BECF, this study aims to uncover the nuances and implications of the transitional period. It examines how language choices and discursive techniques are utilised to shape and convey educational concepts and objectives during this period of curriculum reform. By analysing these linguistic features, the study seeks to provide insights into the broader social and political dimensions embedded within the BECF. By closely analysing the language and discursive strategies, the study aims to identify and deconstruct the ideological perspectives that influence the BECF. This analysis will provide valuable insights into the values and beliefs embedded within the curriculum, shedding light on how knowledge is framed, and educational goals are shaped.

Keywords: Basic Education Curriculum Framework, 8-4-4 system, Competence-Based Curriculum, language analysis, discursive strategies, ideologies, power relations, knowledge construction, values, educational goals

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1. Introduction

Curriculum reform is a dynamic and ongoing process that seeks to transform the objectives and methods of education. It involves a deliberate and systematic effort to revise, update, and improve the content, structure, and delivery of educational programs. The primary goal of curriculum reform is to ensure that learning outcomes align with the changing needs of learners and society. This process often involves rethinking and redefining educational goals, adjusting instructional strategies, incorporating new technologies and pedagogies, and responding to emerging trends and challenges. By embracing curriculum reform, educational institutions and systems can adapt to the evolving demands of the knowledge-based economy, promote critical thinking and creativity, foster inclusive and equitable education, and empower learners to thrive in a rapidly changing world (Gouëdard et al., 2020).

The Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) represents a comprehensive educational roadmap in Kenya, developed through extensive stakeholder engagement, national needs assessments, curriculum reform conferences, and benchmarking studies. Aligned with key national documents such as the Constitution of Kenya, Vision 2030, and the East African Community Curriculum Harmonization Structures and Framework, the BECF embodies the aspirations of the country in shaping the future of basic education (KICD, 2017). It serves as a guiding framework for implementing curriculum reforms across pre-primary, primary, secondary, and inclusive education. The BECF encompasses crucial components such as the vision, mission, pillars, organization, core competencies, curriculum approaches, learning outcomes, subjects, pedagogical practices, assessment approaches, teaching and learning resources, and other essential elements necessary for the success of the reforms.

The purpose of the BECF is to translate the goals of the curriculum reforms into practical implementation strategies, ultimately propelling the achievement of Vision 2030. By adhering to the BECF, educators at all levels of education and training can align their practices with the framework's guidelines and ensure that their provision of basic and teacher education aligns with the national objectives. As a transformative tool, the BECF plays a crucial role in reshaping education in Kenya and fostering the development of a knowledgeable and skilled citizenry capable of actively contributing to the nation's growth and development.

Furthermore, the development of the BECF was influenced by the 2012 "Report of the Task Force on the Re-alignment of the Education Sector to the Kenya Vision 2030 and Constitution of Kenya 2010," led by Professor Odhiambo (Odhiambo, 2012). This report prompted the Government of Kenya to formulate Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015, titled "Reforming Education and Training in Kenya." The sessional paper reflects the national philosophy that places education at the forefront of the country's human and economic development. It highlights the need for holistic and integrated development of learners, emphasizing intellectual, emotional, and physical balance. The sessional paper

recommends key reforms, including the adoption of a competency-based curriculum, establishment of a national learning assessment system, early identification and nurturing of talents, integration of national values and cohesion into the curriculum, and the introduction of three learning pathways at the senior school level. These reforms aim to enhance the quality and relevance of education in Kenya, nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of contributing effectively to society and achieving the goals outlined in Vision 2030. However, there is a need to analyze the language and discursive strategies employed during the transition from the 8-4-4 system to the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). Furthermore, a critical examination of the underlying ideologies and power relations reflected in the BECF is necessary to understand how knowledge, values, and educational goals are constructed within the framework. This research aims to address these gaps by analyzing the language choices, discursive strategies, and underlying ideologies within the BECF, providing insights into the transition process and its impact on educational practices and outcomes. By understanding the complexities and implications of the BECF, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can make informed decisions to enhance the quality and relevance of education in Kenya.

1.2 Objectives

- 1) To analyze and interpret the language and discursive strategies employed in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) during the transition from the 8-4-4 system to the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC).
- 2) To critically examine the underlying ideologies and power relations reflected in the BECF, particularly in terms of its construction of knowledge, values, and educational goals.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of language and discursive strategies employed in educational frameworks and curriculum transitions has garnered considerable attention in the field of education research. Researchers have explored the role of language in shaping educational policies and frameworks, highlighting its influence on pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and educational outcomes. For instance, Smith (2010) examined language choices and discursive strategies in curriculum documents, emphasizing how linguistic features contribute to the construction of educational discourses. Similarly, Jones and Brown (2015) conducted a comparative analysis of curriculum transitions in different countries, investigating the role of language and its impact on curriculum implementation. These studies provide insights into the importance of analyzing language and discursive strategies in educational frameworks, shedding light on their role in shaping curriculum transitions and reform processes.

The critical examination of educational frameworks and their underlying ideologies and power relations has been a focal point in educational research (Grant et

al., 2015; Marbach-Ad et al., 2010). Scholars have highlighted the need to critically analyze the construction of knowledge, values, and educational goals in curriculum documents to understand their implications for educational practices and societal development. For instance, Apple (2004) discussed the ideological nature of curriculum, emphasizing the role of education in perpetuating or challenging existing power structures. Giroux (2010) explored the intersection of power, ideology, and educational policies, shedding light on the ways in which curriculum frameworks reflect dominant ideologies and reproduce social inequalities. These critical perspectives provide a foundation for examining the underlying ideologies and power relations within a curriculum framework enabling researchers to identify how knowledge, values, and educational goals are constructed and negotiated within the framework (Apple, 2004; Fajardo-Dack, 2016).

The literature on language and discursive strategies in curriculum documents and the critical examination of educational ideologies and power relations provide valuable insights for this research. By analyzing language choices, discursive strategies, and underlying ideologies in the BECF, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by uncovering the complexities of curriculum transitions and critically examining the construction of knowledge, values, and educational goals within the framework.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology, with a focus on uncovering hidden meanings, social inequalities, and dominant discourses within texts (Mullet, 2018). CDA can be employed to analyze and interpret the language choices and discursive strategies employed in the BECF during the transition from the 8-4-4 system to the CBC. By examining linguistic features, discursive techniques, and their implications, CDA can reveal how language is utilized to shape and construct educational discourses, revealing power dynamics and underlying ideologies (Anderson & Holloway, 2020).

Similarly, CDA can critically examine the underlying ideologies and power relations reflected in the BECF. By closely analyzing the construction of knowledge, values, and educational goals within the framework, CDA can uncover hidden biases, social hierarchies, and the reproduction of dominant ideologies (Wodak, 2011). This critical perspective enables researchers to identify how power is exercised, marginalized perspectives are silenced, and social inequalities are perpetuated within the BECF.

Drawing from the literature on language and discursive strategies in curriculum documents and the critical examination of educational ideologies, CDA provides a theoretical and methodological framework that aligns with the research objectives (Willey-Sthapit et al., 2022). By utilizing CDA, this study aims to contribute to the field by uncovering the complexities of curriculum transitions, critically analyzing the construction of knowledge and values, and shedding light on the power dynamics inherent in educational frameworks.

3. Research Methodology

Data for this study was generated using document analysis and then analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis CDA.

Document analysis involves carefully examining the language used, identifying discursive strategies employed, and interpreting their implications (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Key elements to analyze include the curriculum content, objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment guidelines.

(CDA) on the other hand is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities (Ziskin, 2019). CDA rests on the notion that the way we use language is purposeful, regardless of whether discursive choices are conscious or unconscious.

In the context of analyzing the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF), CDA enables researchers to go beyond surface-level analysis and delve into the underlying meanings and power dynamics embedded in the language and discourses of the framework.

4. Critical Analysis of the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF)

4.1 Language Choices and Discursive Strategies Used in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF)

Language choices encompass vocabulary, terminology, and language patterns used in communication. These choices play a crucial role in shaping meaning, conveying messages, and influencing the audience's understanding and interpretation (Bonvillain, 2019). Analyzing language choices provides valuable insights into power dynamics, ideologies, and cultural values inherent in communication. By examining language choices, researchers can uncover underlying meanings, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute to a deeper understanding of various social, cultural, and academic contexts.

Table 1: Comparison of Language choices between the 8-4-4 System and CBC System

8-4-4 System	CBC System
Content based	Competence based
Focus on summative assessment	Focus on formative assessment
Grade A- Excellent	Grade A- Exceeds Expectation (EE)
Grade B- Good	Meet Expectations (ME)
Grade C- Fair	Approaching Expectations (AE)
Grade D- Poor	Below Expectations (BE)
Grade E- Fail	N/A

The choice of words in the (BECF) are meant to emphasize the need to focus on the learner's ability rather than judging them as having passed or failed. From the choice of words, it is indicative that all learners achieve some level of competence as opposed to grouping them as those who have passed and failed.

4.2 Discursive Strategies

Discursive strategies extend beyond language choices to encompass the broader patterns and structures of communication (Oliveri et al., 2021). This includes the tone, style, and voice employed in the framework, which influence the reception, interpretation, and impact of the information. Analyzing these discursive strategies sheds light on the framework's intentions, goals, and communicative approach, enabling a deeper understanding of how it shapes educational practices and policies.

4.2.1 Argumentation

Argumentation involves the use of reasoning, evidence, and persuasive techniques to support and justify specific claims or positions put forward in the framework (Oliveri et al., 2021).

In the BECF, argumentation serves the purpose of presenting a coherent and convincing case for the adoption of relevant educational approaches, policies, or curriculum designs. Some of the claims include:

"The Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) is the outcome of extensive stakeholder engagement, a national needs assessment study, deliberations from a national curriculum reform conference and several benchmarking studies.

...aligned to the Constitution of Kenya and is expected to catalyse the achievement of the goals of Vision 2030.

...is to enable every Kenyan to become an engaged, empowered, and ethical citizen."

These statements are meant to persuade the citizens of the need to adopt the new system of education. By using terms like outcome of stakeholder engagements it points to the fact that it is a product of the people. It also promises to be a panacea to many other ills affecting the Kenyan society.

4.2.2 Tone

The tone refers to the overall attitude and emotion conveyed through the language used in the document (Redman & Maples, 2017). It reflects the author's stance on the subject matter and influences how the framework is perceived by its readers. The tone can be authoritative, persuasive, informative, inclusive, or encouraging, depending on the intended audience and the purpose of the document. For example, the BECF adopted an inclusive and encouraging tone to motivate educators and stakeholders to participate actively in curriculum implementation and development.

"This Framework is expected to catalyse the achievement of the goals of Vision 2030. It is my hope that all educators at all levels of education and training will anchor their provision of basic and teacher education on this Framework." (pg. 3)

"The Framework is aligned to the Constitution of Kenya, Vision 2030, the East African Community Curriculum Harmonization Structures and Framework, and other policy documents that express the aspirations of the country." (pg. 4)

"I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the various individuals and organisations in the development of the Basic Education Curriculum Framework." (pg. 4)

These statements are meant to persuade the various stakeholders to embrace the reforms envisaged in the document.

4.2.3 Voice

Voice refers to the grammatical construction of sentences, which can be active or passive (Carter, 2011). In active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action, making the writing more direct and engaging. Passive voice, on the other hand, places the emphasis on the object of the sentence, often sounding more detached or less engaging.

"The BECF has been developed to actualise the curriculum reforms. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive Conceptualisation of reforms in basic education, pre-primary education, primary education, secondary education, and inclusive education." (pg. 3)

"The Framework outlines the vision for the curriculum reforms, including the overarching mission, the pillars of the reforms..." (pg. 3)

"The BECF is based on pillars which are anchored on values and underpinned by theoretical approaches and guiding principles." (pg. 10)

"The teaching of values will facilitate the achievement of the curriculum reforms' vision, particularly with respect to developing ethical citizens." (pg. 13)

The choice of active voice in the BECF demonstrates how the framework addresses various stakeholders and emphasizes the responsibilities of different entities involved in implementing the curriculum.

4.3 Key Themes and Patterns BECF

4.3.1 Dominant Knowledge Paradigms

Dominant knowledge paradigms refer to the prevailing frameworks, theories, and perspectives that shape how knowledge is generated, validated, and transmitted within a particular field or discipline. These paradigms influence the way information is conceptualized, organized, and understood, guiding the direction and focus of research and scholarship (Banks, 2015). In the context of BECF, dominant knowledge paradigms identified include: Vocational and Skills-Based Paradigm, Inquiry-Based and Experiential Learning Paradigm and Cultural and Indigenous Knowledge Paradigm.

- 1) Vocational and Skills-Based Paradigm: This paradigm emphasizes the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to specific occupations or industries. It prioritizes vocational subjects, technical training, and practical competencies.
- 2) Inquiry-Based and Experiential Learning Paradigm: This paradigm promotes active learning, where students engage in inquiry, investigation, and hands-on experiences. It emphasizes student-centered learning, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills through real-world applications.
- 3) Cultural and Indigenous Knowledge Paradigm: This paradigm recognizes and values the knowledge, traditions, and practices of local communities and indigenous cultures. It aims to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems and cultural perspectives into the curriculum to promote cultural diversity, identity, and inclusivity.

4.3.2 Cultural and Social Values

- 1) Respect for Diversity: The BECF emphasizes the appreciation and respect for diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds. It encourages students to develop an understanding and acceptance of different perspectives and values.
- 2) Social Cohesion and National Identity: The BECF seeks to cultivate a sense of national unity and pride, fostering social cohesion and a shared national identity. It aims to promote values such as patriotism, citizenship, and a sense of belonging to the wider society.
- 3) Ethical and Moral Values: The BECF emphasizes the importance of ethical behavior, honesty, integrity, and respect for others. It aims to instill moral values and ethical principles in students, guiding their actions and decisions.
- 4) Environmental Awareness and Sustainability: The BECF promotes environmental consciousness and the importance of sustainable development. It aims to raise students' awareness of environmental issues and their responsibility towards protecting and conserving the environment.
- 5) Gender Equality and Inclusivity: The BECF emphasizes the principles of gender equality and inclusivity. It seeks to challenge gender stereotypes and biases,

promoting equal opportunities and fair treatment for all students, regardless of their gender.

- 6) Civic Responsibility and Active Citizenship: The BECF encourages students to be active and responsible citizens, engaging in civic activities, community service, and democratic participation. It promotes the values of social justice, human rights, and democracy.

5. Recommendations

To enable effective implementation of the Framework (BECF), the following recommendations can be helpful:

- 1) There is need to Promote a culture of ethical leadership. Leaders should act as role models by demonstrating integrity, transparency, and a commitment to ethical behavior. Establish clear lines of accountability and responsibility for the implementation of the BECF, including mechanisms for reporting and addressing ethical concerns.
- 2) The government should also provide ongoing education and training on ethics, responsible practices at all levels of the organization. This training should raise awareness about the underlying ideologies and power relations at play, fostering a better understanding of the implications and importance of ethical decision-making.
- 3) Continuously assess the effectiveness and relevance of the BECF in light of changing societal expectations, evolving ideologies, and power dynamics. Regularly review and update the framework to ensure it remains aligned with the organization's values and reflects current best practices.
- 4) Foster a culture of transparency by proactively communicating the organization's progress, challenges, and successes in implementing the BECF. Transparent reporting and disclosure practices can enhance accountability and build trust with stakeholders. Regularly engage with stakeholders through multiple communication channels to gather feedback and address concerns.

6. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) is that it plays a vital role in the curriculum reforms in basic education, encompassing pre-primary, primary, secondary, and inclusive education. The BECF provides a comprehensive conceptualization of the reforms, outlining the vision, mission, pillars, and organization of basic education. It identifies core competencies, curriculum approaches, learning outcomes, subjects, policies, pedagogical practices, assessment approaches, teaching and learning resources, and other critical factors necessary for the success of the reforms. The BECF is expected to catalyze the achievement of the goals

outlined in Vision 2030. It is recommended that educators at all levels of education and training align their provision of basic and teacher education with the BECF, recognizing it as a guiding framework to ensure the effective implementation of curriculum reforms and the attainment of the desired educational outcomes.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

About the Author

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