

South Sudan's National Curriculum Framework (2014): A Critique of Change

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Abstract: This theoretical paper uses document analysis to probe South Sudan's new National Curriculum Framework (2014) as an official text and its implications as a change agenda with a view to arriving at a perspective about the task of the school in the world's newest country. The study notes that the country's curriculum change policy seeks to enact a curriculum model that provides both equality and quality with a pedagogic philosophy that is humanistic in essence, transformative in outlook and historical in perspective. The new model shifts from subject-specific to generic curriculum that offers more student choice, relies on environment and accentuates social and life skills in a broader milieu of competencies. The new arrivals on the subject scene are information & communication technology, vocational education & enterprise, and values education in the form of environmental sustainability, life skills and peace studies to consolidate civics and cement the country's diverse society. However, the facility of the Framework to promote inclusive education is constrained by its design possibilities and the practical realities of school education in South Sudan as its official launch date of 2019 approaches. The scope for broader learner experience beyond conventionality will remain largely rhetorical or even inimical in as far as the resources for emancipatory practices are held back by the dual force of curriculum novelty and state priority. The prospect of wide gaps between planned, delivered and experienced curriculum is, therefore, real and vexed. It remains to be seen if the Ministry has a strategy at all to deal with any eventual knock-on effect. The fact remains, too, that the Framework is heavily prescriptive in nature and as such could potentially prove counter-productive to teacher agency with drastic consequences for local teacher appraisal practices. Thus, implementing a new curriculum short of resources and through the political doldrums of shifting timelines is principally an unmitigated disaster. It could lead to a tacit rejection of curriculum change, more out of repulsion than upon reflection. The fortunes of South Sudan's National Curriculum Framework (2014) are thus defined; and the broader discourse of reform duly confined.

Keywords: Curriculum framework, nation, transformation, humanism, text, perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014 South Sudan published a landmark National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for early childhood, primary and secondary education. The framework situates the curriculum of all courses in the country's school education within a construct of harmony and interaction [1]. I seek to present in this paper a conceptual outline and critique of the framework document as "an early follow-up of (South Sudan's) curriculum reform" [2].

Noteworthy, this theoretical study does not cover the curriculum set-up that precedes 2014; nor does it in any manner intend to dwell on the prospects of considering possible adaptations to the framework from the standpoint of its looming official launch in

2019. As is clear from a review of relevant literature on curriculum evaluation in South Sudan, a study such as this could only be "general and theoretical" [1]. The benefit of this study will accrue when it arouses increased interest in tackling "educational issues taking into account the entire curriculum perspective" of South Sudan [3].

The paper is divided into five main sections: introduction, study methods, the ecology of curriculum, discussion and conclusion. The section on discussion contains an elaborate textual evaluation of the NCF 2014 and its implications as a reform agenda.

STUDY METHODS

The method of study here is to interpret the task of the school in South Sudan as based on a centralized system of education that provides a unified curriculum for the nation at large. A suitable framework for this approach is the one developed by Skager and Dave in 1977 [1] which considers the *contextual* and *textual* bearings of an intended curriculum as two distinct categories of evaluation. The first category deals explicitly with the context within which an intended curriculum evolves [ⁱ]. The second set focuses on the curriculum as a given text with an overarching theoretical, intellectual and legal logic [ⁱⁱ] [1].

This study chooses the second category to probe the theoretical framework, intention, content, principles & means, and educational activities of the new National Curriculum Framework [4]. Three main questions spring from this focus:

- What is the theoretical and programmatic logic of the NCF 2014 and how does it relate to the aims of education in South Sudan?
- How does the new curriculum framework cater to inclusion in relation to its intention?
- Where is the space for alternatives to conventionality in the curriculum content and delivery?

The study uses document analysis to probe the above questions. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part includes reading the texts of relevant official documents on the new National Curriculum Framework of 2014 such as briefs, policy statements, strategic plans, and excerpts. The second part deals with reading other countries' and world regions' best practice in curriculum change to arrive at a semblance of understanding that affords perspective [5].

The Ecology of Curriculum

The term "Curriculum" is a troublesome and contested concept that stretches to cover both classical and contemporary meanings. On the one hand, it stands for "the content of a course" as the original Latin word would have it for "a running track". On the other hand, the term "curriculum" lends itself to present-day understanding of "how content is to be learned, the pedagogical approaches to be adopted by the teacher, the resources and assessment methods to be used as well as the overall evaluation of its effectiveness" [6]. As a clear evidence of its importance, curriculum research has come to assume greater autonomy as a field of study dating back to at least the turn of the 19th century [1].

There is considerable recognition with regard to the need to keep changing the school curriculum. This change could take the form of revising and updating existing curricula or initiating a complete overhaul [7]. Hau-Fai & Li [5] contend that curriculum

change sits at the heart of educational development. This is crucial to understand because, as Inlow [8] would assert, "the purposes of education relate directly to the factors that facilitate or hinder curriculum change. These purposes are threefold: cultural transmission, environmental adaptation and total personality development."

Over the last few decades, different nations have associated curriculum change with realising radical alterations in society. These desired transformations include moving away from an elitist education to one for all; from a highly controlled curriculum to one that is markedly decentralized; from an academic curriculum to one that is comprehensive; and from traditional teacher-centeredness to progressive child-centeredness. The radicality of these measures has covered the notion and governance of education as well as the structure of knowledge and form of learning [5]. Hence, reforms in curriculum constitute a cornerstone in the parlance of educational reform.

To develop a curriculum is, therefore, a vested interest that warrants a historically informed perspective of the value judgments respecting current and future educational needs of a country. Two conceptual models have by and large characterized the landscape of curriculum development. Ralph Tyler crafted a behaviourist model in the 1940s, arguing in favour of a linear objectives-driven and product-focused curriculum. His model conceptualises curriculum development as a mechanistic exercise geared at addressing what is to be accomplished as a result of the school task, what learning experiences are needed to achieve that goal, how these learning experiences can be usefully arranged and how the effectiveness of the resulting learning can be assessed [3].

The product model uses behavioural language, makes assessment precise, relies on structure, provides choice through electives, and is mainly planned by the teacher [9]. Arthur Kornhauser put forward an alternative model based on his work in industrial psychology, promoting the competency-based approach as a more viable means to develop and assess a curriculum. This type of curriculum encourages learners to "acquire competencies to apply knowledge, rather than the knowledge itself. The outcomes are what (learners) can do" [9]. The competency-based model has since been predominant in TVET across the developed world since it suits trade apprenticeship and underlines the "primacy of individual acquisition of capabilities over 'time-in-training'" [6].

Curriculum studies as a field of inquiry has taken issue with both models. The main criticism is that the models are essentially reductionist and oversimplified [6]. A couple more models sprang up in light of the dissatisfaction with Tyler and Kornhauser. In 1960 Jerome Bruner pressed for a curriculum that is

“spiral” whereby a cycle of repetitions is used to engage learners and “improve and deepen skills, concepts, attitudes and values, and extend their reach. The spiral curriculum has coherence, progression and....value” [3]. In 1975 Stenhouse proposed a process approach to curriculum development. He called for a step-by-step process of selecting content, developing teaching strategies, sequencing learning experiences and assessing learners’ weaknesses and strengths using empirical means [3]. Accordingly, this approach

emphasizes more learning activities, more student choice, relies on environment, and accentuates social and life skills [9].

It is clear that the answer as to which model is suitable lies in between. More importantly, nations across the world are striking a balance between an academic focus on specific subject knowledge and a broader perspective of functionings that include problem solving, initiative and creativity [9].

Table-1: Academic versus Comprehensive Curriculum

Academic	Comprehensive
Teacher-centred, high subject content, focus on knowledge	Learner-centred, promotes skills and competencies as well as knowledge
IQ scores/test results	Motivation to learn
Literacy and numeracy	Creativity and initiative
Specific subject knowledge	Independence and self-confidence
Shorter and longer term outcomes	General knowledge
	Longer term outcomes

EU [9]

The polarization remains rife as to the manner in which learning sequences and experiences could be arranged to derive satisfactory outcomes. The bottom line, however, is a continuum of inputs, processes and products [7]. While the technical discourse is tenable, the policy discourse remains painstakingly debatable. Nkosi [10] points out that global policy is currently according prime of place to one discourse, namely, that

“market pressures” trump the institutional and local discourses about curriculum change.

At any rate, developing a national curriculum framework should be aimed at equipping learners with the essential knowledge that they need to succeed in life and thrive as educated citizens.

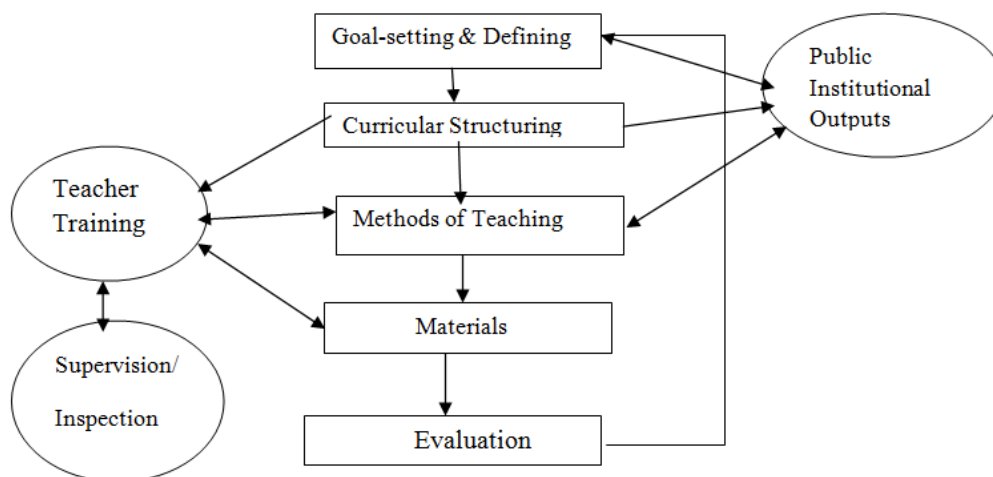


Fig-1: Curriculum Sample Overall Conceptual Framework

Edwards *et al.*, [11]

There is considerable consensus on the modern curriculum as being “dynamic, multi-dimensional and integrated” [6]. It is within this perspective that the National Curriculum Framework [4] of South Sudan should be gauged.

DISCUSSION

This section uses the textual process of curriculum evaluation to offer an overview and critique

of South Sudan’s National Curriculum Framework [12]. It is hoped that the process will highlight the nature and structure of the NCF 2014 [1].

Theoretical Framework, Program Logic, Legality & Ethics

In this subsection, an attempt is made to answer the question regarding the theoretical and programmatic logic of the NCF 2014 and how it relates

to the aims of education in South Sudan. The National Curriculum Framework [4] is based on a modern pedagogic philosophy that seeks to “harness local and global learning” to produce a world-classⁱⁱⁱ programme of study for every South Sudanese learner [13].

The niche of the NCF 2014, therefore, is the consummate marriage between national needs and international expectations. On the one hand, the new programme of study needs to embody South Sudan’s national ideology which sees the education system as tasked to “transform each learner to become a good citizen, who is patriotic and proud of his or her rich culture and heritage; active participants in society for the good of themselves and others; committed to unity, democracy, human rights, gender equity, peace and reconciliation and ready to take their place as global citizens” [14].

South Sudan sees the NCF 2014 as a tool for nation-building, a process that is essentially largely “economic in nature but is also political” [5]. Thus, the country’s pedagogic philosophy of a curriculum for every South Sudanese is the key thought about its curriculum change policy. As Hau-Fai & Li [5] would postulate, this vital thinking seeks to “construct a new curriculum system that pursues both equality and quality.” This is known as democratisation of education, namely, extending and equalising educational opportunity to equip all citizens with the basics of growth and change [11].

On the other hand, the theoretical forte of the NCF 2014 hinges on its international dimension, namely, incorporating the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development^{iv}, particularly SDG 4 which calls for enhancing access to equitable and quality education for all through promoting sustainable development, peace, global citizenship and diversity.

This enterprise also encompasses a regional obligation represented in the AU Agenda 2063^v. Together with South Sudan’s Vision 2040 [vi], these international agenda constitute the moral and legal base for the NCF 2014 [15, 13].

They are further bolstered internally by the Transitional Constitution [vii] of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011, whose Article No. 29 stipulates that education is a right; and Article No. 38 makes provisions for education, art and science. “Moreover, The General Education Act, 2012 and The Child Act, 2008 provide the broad legal framework for the general education system and child protection. The Ministry [of General education & Instruction (MoGEI)] and its stakeholders are legally bound to implement these laws and promote quality education for the benefit of all the citizens of the Republic of South Sudan - children, youth and adults” [15].

On all counts, the NCF 2014 emanates from a humanistic school of thought that considers education as an element of the culture within which it operates and as such an integral part of reproducing society [viii]. In the words of Wahlstrom & Sundberg [2], “the curriculum is not just a ‘technical’ steering instrument, but also a device for the cultural and social reproduction of selected knowledge and values.” Indeed, the NCF 2014 seeks a philosophical grasp of the task of school in South Sudan as geared toward promoting peace and prosperity, growth and development, harmony and justice [13].

It underscores South Sudan’s dire need to “build social cohesion and national identity in (a) global society and preserve cultural heritage” [16]. This quest makes “visible the value judgements regarding present and future [educational] needs and (school) practices” of South Sudan as a new nation [6].

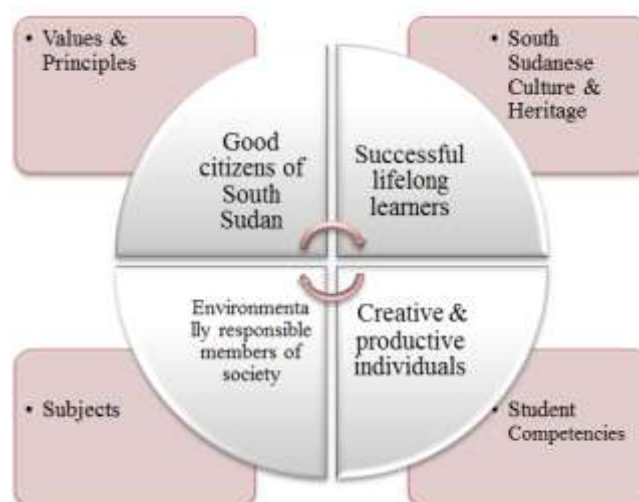


Fig-2: Conceptualising the National Curriculum Framework (2014)

The NCF 2014 embraces a curriculum orientation that revolves around humanism and social efficiency. The fusion is meant to develop a curriculum that fosters personal growth and self-actualisation as well as imparting South Sudanese learners with the skills set and competences critical for economically and socially productive citizens [2]. This particular orientation of curriculum has a historical precedent in many post-war nations.

Thus, it is not surprising that South Sudan should follow the same logic to some extent. To be exact, the United States and former Soviet Union sought to boost their industrial growth and technical sophistication in the aftermath of World War II. Their education systems were re-oriented to unlock the potential for skilled workforce to drive the envisaged productivity [ix] [2].

However, there is an apparent chasm between this curriculum theory and the envisaged practical implementation of the curriculum itself. This seems to emanate from either the conservative manner in which innovation is introduced into the NCF 2014 or the context in which it is introduced [11].

First, with regard to the inherent conservatism of South Sudan's education policy-makers, the NCF 2014 is curtailed by lack of a national commission report on which to base its design possibilities. It is an age-old institutional tradition for nations to set up commissions to study and recommend course of action in relation to critical national issues such as education. This holds true for many countries across the globe. Kenya set up Ominde Commission in 1963 to thoroughly review the system of education and provide counsel to the government on the design and execution of new national policies for educational change [17]. The Castle Commission 1963 laid the groundwork for Uganda's educational policy and trajectory, explicitly calling for providing technical and adult education, expanding girls' education and enhancing agriculture. Its influence lasted until 1992 when the Government White Paper on Education came into existence [18]. Far afield in India, the Kothari Commission 1964 was tasked to study the country's entire education system, define its linkages and devise policy directives for system improvement. India's education system owes its advancement in part to the historical path chalked by the Commission [19].

South Sudan should have followed in the footsteps of these countries, ideally. Renowned academics like Prof. Moses Macar, Prof. Samson Wassara, Dr. Peter Adwok and others could have led a Macar/Wassara/Adwok Commission to examine the entire gamut of the country's education system and authoritatively allocate value across its future prospects. As Edwards & *et al.*, [11] would argue, "even research of apparently no immediate operational application

would be equally legitimate." Alas, the NCF 2014 misses out on the authority of a National Education Commission; and instead, breathes through the windpipes of massive technical literature produced by the UNICEF, World Bank, UNESCO, and other international agencies. The myriad of needs assessment, situational analysis and status reports can never ever substitute the historical and political worth of a national commission. But South Sudanese policy-makers' inherent conservatism is such that all these study reports have passed for adequate substance in as far as informing the country's educational policy is concerned. Of a particular note is the characteristic paternalism of the elite in an under-developed country like South Sudan. Deng [20] arrests this nuance:

"There is a consistent pattern in developing countries of the 'ruling elite' adopting paternalistic approach in setting priorities for the communities....Southern Sudan is not an exception as memories of Jonglei Canal Project are vivid when some Southern ruling elites publicly stated that 'people do not necessarily know what is best for them---and if we have to drive our people to paradise with sticks, we will do so for their good'."

It is arguable that this paternalistic approach has offered policy-makers a blanket agreement on the curriculum theory of the NCF 2014 without worrying about expert opinion generated by commission at the national level. Thus, the design possibilities of the Framework are inherently tied down by this element of "conservatism", so to speak.

Second, with regard to the context in which the NCF 2014 finds its meaning, the supposed innovations in the Framework are unlikely to take off where there is an under-supply of teachers and textbooks. This context is, therefore, a major disincentive to realising the curriculum theory of the NCF 2014. In many respects, the school context in South Sudan is unforgivably unsuitable for a new model of curriculum. "Schools are often located too far away; classes are held at times that are inconvenient for agricultural households in which children's work contributions are seasonally and variably required; and are based on imposed urban-modelled curricula that are considered to be alienating and irrelevant to the life-worlds of children in diverse rural communities" [21].

Novelty alone, therefore, does not warrant outright optimism as may be wished. When Boeing's brand-new wide-body aircraft, 777, rolled off the production line, some airports all over the world had to extend their then "short" runways so as to accommodate the new innovation in flight experience. Similarly, South Sudan must make changes to its school context if it is to be a landing strip for a new curriculum as espoused in the NCF 2014.

In sum, the theoretical and programmatic logic of NCF 2014 is humanistic in essence, transformative in outlook and historical in perspective; but lacks enablers such as an authoritative national technical basis and a well-resourced school context.

Intention

The curriculum covers four main categories with respect to the educational aims and objectives of South Sudan. These categories are values & principles, South Sudanese culture and heritage, student competencies and subjects.

The intention of the National Curriculum Framework 2014 is to present a tailored pattern according to which South Sudan can attain knowledge about “how goals, content and didactics are formed

within educational processes and how these are embedded into society” [2].

This, in short, is the curriculum intention of the NCF 2014 when it comes to the four categories it has created to reflect the aims of schooling in South Sudan. The first two categories of *Values & Principles* and *South Sudanese culture and heritage* stand at the general societal level where knowledge is purposely organized in relation to the country’s history, culture, and structure of political and social life. The vantage point of this categorization is to demonstrate the measure of interaction between national and international policy influences and thus present a transnational perspective of curriculum development [2].

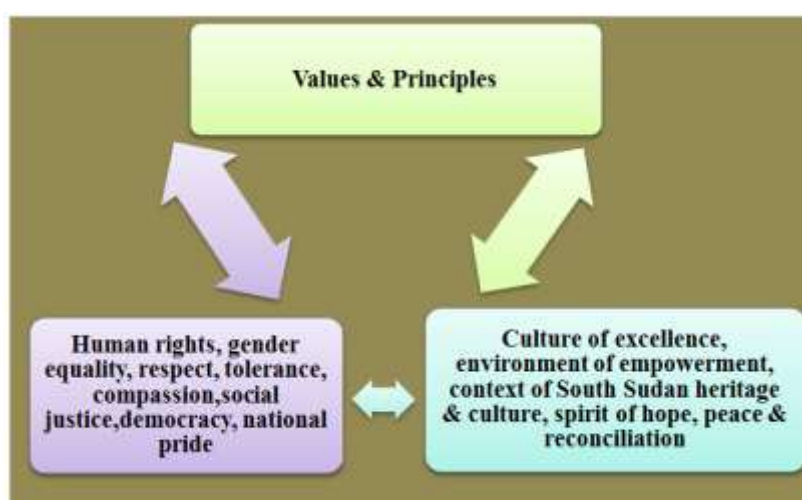


Fig-3: A Layout of NCF 2014 Values & Principles
Pendry [13]

The third category of *student competencies* emphasises translation of the transnational perspective into tangible actual curriculum texts so as to create focus for the control and monitoring of the school system in South Sudan. The fourth and last category is about *subjects* and it pinpoints how the NCF 2014 directs learning in the classroom. This is a powerful category of intention that has consequences for different cohorts of learners within the actual school curriculum as well as within the parameters of citizenship education for the entire country.

When lay people talk of school curriculum, it is probable that they often mean school subjects. That is how visible and valued this category is. The NCF 2014 uses these three levels (macro, meso and micro) to depict its intention of connecting what happens in the classroom with that which obtains in society at large [2].

Content

Here the study highlights how the NCF 2014 defines its content; that is, “the learning outcomes at the programme level, the selection and integration of the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired [x]” [3]. This content will be outlined under three subheadings: strategic choices about content; the structure and sequence; and learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The *strategic choices about the NCF 2014 content* are informed by a crucial argument in the text of the curriculum and other supporting official documentation. The argument runs as follows: for South Sudan to attain economic development, social empowerment and technological advancement, it is important that any reformed or restructured curriculum should embed key future competencies that explicitly reflect an orderly dose of generic and specialised skills. The strategic choices of content for the NCF 2014, therefore, have shifted from “subject-specific to generic curriculum criteria and to an increased focus on learning outcomes” [2].

An immense piece of groundwork led to this conclusion. In 2012, the UNICEF accessed funding from the Global Partnership for Education; and used it to enlist the services of UK-based *The Curriculum Foundation* to provide curriculum support and counsel to South Sudan's Ministry of Education & Instruction (MoGEI). A review process ensued that touched on curriculum framework development, subject syllabus review, examinations and assessment arrangements, national consultation, piloting & evaluation and training of teachers [13]. As a result, choices were made for a new content with a high set of usability characteristics [3].

The *structure and sequence* of that content has striven for a coherent programme of study at the school level. The NCF 2014 is presented as a content that suits all levels of education right from Early Childhood Development (ECD) to Secondary Education. The content covers three main clusters: integrated subjects, cross-cutting issues and student competencies.

The subjects will integrate features of ICT and TVET from ECD to Primary 8 at which stage primary education ends. Life skills, peace education and environmental awareness are designated as cross-cutting issues from P1 to S4 at which secondary education culminates into tertiary education. Learners are expected to demonstrate exit skills^{xi} at the respective exit points [13]. The introduction of the elements of technology, aesthetics, and life skills into general education programme is meant to signal a quest for progressively attaining an industrial and ultimately a "post-industrial" society in South Sudan [11].

The content is structured using the cross-thematic approach which basically looks for "conceptual interconnections between the respective courses for each grade and the organisation of cross-thematic activities that contribute to the holistic approach of knowledge" [1]. This approach explains the presence of student competencies in the cluster as a point of reference for cross-themes.

Table-2: Structure of the National Curriculum Framework 2014

Particulars	Pre-School	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Age	4-5	6-8	9-11	12-13	14-17
Year Groups	Lower & Upper Kindergarten	P1-P3	P4-P6	P7-P8	S1-S4
Integrated Subjects					
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X
Science	X	X	X	X	X
English	X	X	X	X	X
Social Studies	X	X	X	X	X
The Arts		X	X	X	X
Religious Education	X	X	X	X	X
Physical Education & Health	X	X	X	X	X
Cross-cutting Issues					
ICT		X	X	X	X
TVET		X	X	X	X
Life Skills		X	X	X	X
Environment & Sustainability		X	X	X	X
Peace Studies		X	X	X	X
Student Competencies					
Critical & Creative Thinking					
Communication					
Cooperation					
Culture					

As can be seen in the above table, the new curriculum has introduced new subjects. The most prominent of these are information technology, vocational education & enterprise, and values education in the form of peace studies to consolidate civics and cement the country's pluralistic society [16]. It will be interesting to follow up on these changes with an empirical study on how they have fared in the implementation phase of the new curriculum. TVET is particularly intriguing because of its low status in the perception of South Sudanese; and the fragmented pattern of its provision in the country. With private actors making up the bulk of TVET provision, the

challenge for the NCF 2014 is to craft unified standards pertaining to training, assessment and qualifications [22].

The learning, teaching and assessment strategies of the NCF 2014 are meant to provide student learning according to the best that has been thought and said, including celebrating human ingenuity and accomplishment. The NCF 2014 tries to capture a range of attributes such as linking objectives, content and activities to teaching units; encouraging project-works within and among the courses; offering multiple ways of assessing learning; enhancing basic literacy and

numeracy; and providing flexible linkages between what students learn in the classroom and what they experience outside school [1].

Examinations, however, are bound to remain “the single most significant influence on what is taught, tested, and consequently valued” [5]. A country with a highly controlled education structure such as South Sudan is more likely to exercise complete control on all student outcomes in the areas of subject-matter, lesson time and assessments. This highly prescriptive regulatory environment extends its influence onto textbook development and provision [16].

The challenge, however, comes from the issue of resource constraints which may not support a consistent and sustained delivery of the content in all schools across South Sudan [13]. This calls into question the Ministry’s capacity to deliver on the promise of the NCF 2014. The prospect of wide gaps between planned, delivered and experienced curriculum is, therefore, real and vexed. It remains to be seen if the Ministry has a strategy at all to deal with the interplay that may surface between the hidden curriculum and null curriculum [^{xiii}].

The fact that South Sudan prefers a heavily centralised curriculum speaks to its policy makers’ admission that “resources are limited and the teaching force is not highly skilled, educated or motivated.” Therefore, the most appropriate approach to addressing these gaps is to offer limited discretion for schools and teachers in the delivery of the NCF 2014 [9]. A helpful strategy would be to engage in a continuous cycle of aligning the content of the NCF 2014 with its delivery record and assess both against the lived experiences of school graduates in South Sudan [3]. This takes time and needs foresight.

Intellectual Emancipation

Perhaps, nothing diminishes the capacity of curriculum content for intellectual emancipation more than the reality or perception that learners risk falling through the cracks in the chasm resulting from planned versus experienced curriculum [^{xiii}]. A framework document such as the NCF 2014 should compel policy makers and scholars alike in South Sudan to ponder the task of the school with regard to what is arranged to be taught, what actually transpires in the classroom and what ends up being learned. In other words, what future awaits the educated citizens of South Sudan if gaps in vision and provision cause the school system to gloss over equipping students with the competence of critical and creative thinking [6]?

As Totte *et al.*, [3] argue forcefully, “outcomes of a curriculum should be defined in terms of

intellectual development and cognitive functioning rather than in terms of quantities of knowledge absorbed or in terms of behavioural changes.” Curriculum content should promote multiple ways of thinking and acting, referred to as the level of conventionality [1].

The NCF 2014 is fragile in this aspect for a number of reasons. First, it does not actively pursue a social reconstructionist approach in the same manner it accords prime place to humanism and social efficiency as co-orientation of the curriculum. The school teacher who is supposed to empower students to “reconstruct their own standpoints and actions” suffers as a result of the General Education Act 2012 suggesting “a political culture that sees schooling as strongly paternalist and utilitarian; downplaying the emancipatory dimension of teachers’ assumed role. That is a coup de grace to the fortunes of teacher education in South Sudan [2, 14]. The fact remains that the NCF 2014 is heavily prescriptive in nature and as such could possibly prove counterproductive to teacher agency. Largely top-down curricula usually produce this effect [23].

Second, current teacher specializations in South Sudan do not meet the requirements of the NCF 2014 [1, 14]. While the new national curriculum framework is transformative in outlook, it lacks a corresponding knack in the country’s teacher education curriculum. The school teacher in South Sudan remains largely a source of information in his/her role in the classroom. For all practical reasons, this insular condition is difficult to break and replace with the changing role of the teacher as a “facilitator” as the NCF 2014 wishes [22]. This fact leaves open the question of the “implications of national curriculum reforms for local teacher assessment practices” which could make a mockery of intellectual emancipation [14, 2].

Third, the greatest sections of South Sudanese live in rural areas which pose a unique challenge of accessibility and availability of learning resources to accomplish the NCF 2014. One straight question is what kind of educational material^{xiv} is readily available for cohorts of learners in rural South Sudan? What chance do they stand to use supportive material to change their ways of thinking and acting as learners in the classroom? The trend in budget allocation suggests that the government is placing little priority on education to warrant optimism regarding the provision of learning resources that can galvanize learners to draw out contradictions in prevailing societal conventions. Implementing a new curriculum short of resources is an unmitigated disaster [1, 14, 22].

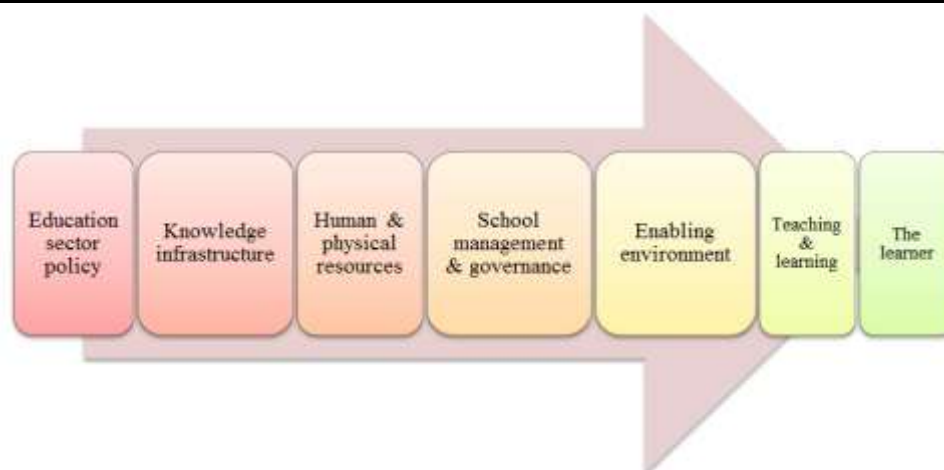


Fig-4: Policy Framework for Improving the Quality of Teaching & Learning
Frank & Lynch [7]

Studies have confirmed that converting the rhetoric of a new curriculum into school reality could be adversely handicapped by resource constraints in addition to inherent inhibitions in design, learner diversity and teachers' reluctance to part ways with their hitherto old practices. Poorly trained teachers have to grapple with a class size^{xv} that averages about 100 in primary schools of rural South Sudan; forcing a low time on task for students [14, 24, 22].

The World Bank [22] [xiii] notes with concern that in Sub-Saharan Africa "facilities in schools are often sub-standard, especially in rural areas where the barest necessities for adequate teaching are lacking." It is going to prove rather elusive to supply those rural schools in South Sudan with tangible resources that could "serve as a frame of reference for the intended educational change" ushered in by the NCF 2014. It is most unlikely that school teachers, particularly in primary schools of the country, will have "opportunities to experiment with exemplary activities, thereby gaining insight into the consequences of the change" [22] [xvii].

Fourth, does the NCF 2014 have a content that is explicit, valid and alternative to empower differently challenged students? The curriculum underscores inclusion but its implementation may prove anything but academic. It is likely that under the stress of novelty, the agenda of students with special needs or learning disabilities may not be actively taken up. There is no clarity as to how differentiation will happen in relation to the content of the curriculum and its teaching and learning strategies. Thus, the question of who will be eventually heard or left out in the cold will negate the claim of intellectual emancipation that the NCF 2014 may wish to make [6]. This will be further rendered problematic by the introduction of active learning approaches which are only ideal in the text of the framework document but have no measured import in practice [22].

Fifth, the curriculum is as good as who delivers it; particularly so in the case of addressing gender inequality which is rampant in South Sudan's school education. The NCF 2014 could hold new promise to girl children in South Sudan if the ways of teaching it consider gender equality as central in practice. For example, if teachers accept that girl children can be good at mathematics, then their expectations of girls' achievement will be high and in turn inform approach to teaching Mathematics as a subject.

In the same vein, considering learners as constructors will offer teachers a more open acceptance of their obligation to make sure that all schoolchildren learn [25]. In stronger emancipatory terms, delivering a new curriculum such as the NCF 2014 requires a gender-equitable mode that will essentially confront the "culture of authority, hierarchy, and social control in the majority of schools....Head teachers and teachers would have a greater understanding of the conditions which lead to bullying, racism, sexism and homophobic behaviour, replacing them with more successful forms of intervention" [25].

Sixth, the manner of diffusing the NCF 2014 is equally questionable from the standpoint of garnering stakeholders' support. The anecdotal evidence suggests the curriculum is being rolled out more as scoring of political points than one of duly informing teachers about the curriculum and notifying of "basic curriculum principles to educational and non-educational institutions [xvi]" [1]. Given the small pool of potential teachers for curriculum training, it is likely the NCF 2014 may prove disempowering through the manner in which it has been introduced. There is already visible and potent teacher dissatisfaction to the extent of undermining the school system in South Sudan through teacher absenteeism and teacher turnover [14].

An atmosphere like this constitutes fertile ground for making teachers more insecure and resistant to curriculum change. This fundamentally weakens any payload of intellectual emancipation in the content of the NCF 2014. The Ministry should have introduced it gradually to secure teacher ownership which is critical to exposing their students to emancipatory thoughts and ideals. Otherwise, it could lead to rejection of the authoritative base for curriculum change, more out of repulsion than reflection. As the World Bank (2008: [xvii] notes with aptness, “political pressures often dictate short timelines, leading to limited design possibilities and often little attention for implementation.”

CONCLUSION

While the theoretical and programmatic logic of the National Curriculum Framework 2014 and how it relates to the aims of education in South Sudan springs from a consideration of humanism and pragmatism, its service to promote inclusive education is constrained by its design possibilities and the practical realities of school education in South Sudan. The scope for broader learner experience and the stakes for challenging conventions in the delivery of curriculum content remain rhetorical in as far as the resources for emancipatory practices are held back by the dual force of curriculum novelty and state priority. The fortunes of South Sudan's National Curriculum framework 2014 are thus defined; and the broader reform discourse duly confined.

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Endnotes

ⁱ This category covers a diverse range of aspects such as cost (seeking out a suitable mix of quality and economy), background (how much influence the previous curriculum has on the new one), design and support (the national scope and international import of the curriculum), supportive material (embodying the curriculum in material aspects), training (whether existing teacher profiles match the rigours of a new curriculum), and diffusion (notifying stakeholders) (Krikas, 2009).

ⁱⁱ This includes aspects such as the theoretical framework (whether the curriculum is informed by modern pedagogic theories), program theory (explains which educational theory is embedded in the curriculum and why), correspondence (how relevant the text is to the country's aims of education), legality and ethics (the moral basis of the design itself), inclusiveness (how are different learner categories represented and catered for), intention (categories covered with regard to objectives of educational activities), content (how valid, clear and comprehensive is the content) and intellectual emancipation (what are the stakes for challenging conventions in the curriculum) (Krikas, 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ A world-class curriculum here is taken to mean a curriculum that "is rooted in its own locality and context, meets the needs of its own learners and puts national requirements and international expectations in a local setting" (Pendry, 2014).

^{iv} As adopted by all nations at the 70th UN General Assembly in New York in September 2015, the universal blueprint of action obliges all the Member States to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MoGEI, 2017: 15).

^v A 50-year, Pan-African vision of the African Union (AU) which seeks to attain higher levels of literacy and education across Africa. The African Union Heads of State and Government, during their 26th Ordinary Session on 31/01/2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted the Continental Education Strategy (CESA, 2016-2025) (MoGEI, 2017).

^{vi} "The South Sudan Vision 2040 is as follows: "To build an educated and informed nation by providing quality education for all". It identifies quality education, training and ICT as key enablers of human capital development, and the means of reducing poverty, disease and ignorance, and also for improving the citizens' standards of living (MoGEI, 2017: 15).

^{vii} "The right to education guarantees access to education for all citizens without discrimination based

on religion; race and ethnicity; health status, including HIV/AIDS; gender or disability. The Constitution stipulates that education will be promoted at all levels of government and free and compulsory education at primary level will be provided alongside free illiteracy eradication programmes" (MoGEI, 2017: 13).

^{viii} This focuses on "development of 'complete' person not only in cognitive but affective, moral/ethical, [and] aesthetic terms" (Frank & Lynch, 2006: 11).

^{ix} The main area of focus was to preserve their human resources and "sort the students 'at the right time' in the education system so that 'everyone could be utilised' "(Wahlstrom & Sundberg, 2015: 5).

^x Content mainly consists of articulating competencies [as objectives, outcomes or attributes], selecting learning activities, resources and assessment tasks designed to produce these competencies (Steketee et al., 2013: 64).

^{xi} These are "minimal learning outcomes required to proceed from one educational level to the next" (World Bank, 2008: xii).

^{xii} The hidden curriculum is about "unconsciously transmitted and received messages by instructors and students"; while the null curriculum is "what is not taught" (Totte et al., 2014).

^{xiv} How suitable, current and sufficient are such material?

^{xv} The World Bank contends that "extreme class sizes point at inefficiencies in the system" (World Bank, 2008: xiii).

^{xvi} For example, "what are the first reactions of teachers and social institutions regarding the curriculum?" (Krikas, 2009: 184).