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## **Reconstructionist Analysis On The Relevance Of Secondary School Curriculum Content In Promoting National Cohesion Among Students In Machakos Town Sub-County, Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Education is the primary means of promoting national cohesion, international cooperation as well as socio-economic development. Through school curricula, education enables a country to achieve its needs and aspirations. The National Cohesion and Integration Commission has emphasized the importance of education in promoting cohesion and integration among Kenyan communities. However, the country is faced with ethnic divisions, religious intolerance and violence and this raises concerns on relevance of the school curricula content in promoting national cohesion. This study investigated the relevance of secondary school curricula content in promoting national cohesion. The study was based on the ideals and principles of a school curriculum as advocated by reconstructionist philosophy. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. A sample size of 409 respondents comprising of 360 student leaders, 48 teachers and Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer was used. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used in data collection. Validity of research instrument was ascertained by experts in Faculty of Education and Resources Development. Reliability of instruments was estimated using Cronbach coefficient alpha method and the coefficients obtained were 0.78 and 0.81 for teachers and student leaders' questionnaire, respectively. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. Secondary school curricula content gave the students little opportunity to reflect critically on issues affecting national cohesion which is attributed to lack of practical skills on issues related to national cohesion. The study recommends a review of secondary school curricula content to reflect on emerging issues on national cohesion and integration. This study provides critical information to educational stakeholders on the relevance of secondary school curricula content in promoting national cohesion.

**Key words:** *Cohesion, Curriculum design, Re-constructionism philosophy,*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is a vital tool in the developmental process of any given nation (Ojiambo, 2009). Education facilitates development and stability of a nation through schools supporting the existing political and economic system in the nation. Bowers (1997) posits that schools through the prescribed curriculum content develop national unity while promoting economic development. Further, education fosters transmission of values, norms and expectations related to national cohesion. National cohesion is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens to have a sense and a feeling that they are members of the same nation engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and opportunities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Thus, national cohesion presupposes national development in a country.

Since Kenyan independence, the government has recognized the need to promote national unity and appreciation of diversity. The initiatives put in place towards achieving this endeavour focused on the national goals of education which emphasize national unity, moral and religious values, social equality and responsible citizenship as the key in enhancing harmonious co-existence among citizens (MOE, 2010). Education is seen as the primary means of social mobility, national cohesion and socio-economic development. The Ominde Commission Report identified education as a critical pillar in promoting national cohesion in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1964). Education is a central component of the nation's developmental process. The Kenya Vision 2030, which is the blue print of development in Kenya aims at making Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous nation with high quality of life by the year 2030 (ROK, 2007). Kenya recognizes that education and training of all individuals is fundamental to the success of Vision 2030.

Reconstructionism is a philosophy that centers on the idea of constant change and emphasizes on addressing of social questions to create a better society and worldwide democracy through education (Brameld, 1956). Reconstructionism philosophy advocates for a school curriculum content that emphasizes social reform as the aim of education. Brameld (1965) notes that the school curriculum content should focus on student experience by taking social action on real problems, such as violence, hunger, ethnicity, international terrorism, religious intolerance and inequality. Counts (1971) stresses that curriculum content should include units on such issues as religious intolerance, ethnic tension, world poverty, gender differences, and socio economic domination. This is because reconstructionist educators focus on a content of learning that highlights social reform as the aim of education. The curriculum content for the reconstructionism philosophy involves the students being active in the community (Brameld, 1971). Students benefit from interaction in society on specific matters. Social sciences such as anthropology, economics, sociology, political science, and psychology are useful in providing the background and methods for planned social change. This will make the curriculum content to be relevant in promoting national cohesion. This is to enable individuals to become useful citizens in the society.

The objective of secondary school education in Kenya is to prepare students to make a positive contribution to the development of society and to acquire attitudes of national patriotism, self-respect, self-reliance, cooperation, adaptability, a sense of purpose and self-discipline (Sifuna, 1990). Rafique (2009) observed that a national curriculum content of a country is the backbone of educational system and should remain the government's subject for promoting national cohesion. The curriculum content of the school reflects layered cultural understandings of what is considered necessary for young people to know or experience if they are to take their place in the social and cultural order. Counts (1971) points out that the scope and nature of the curriculum content are viewed as critically important for teachers, students and other educational stakeholders. The curriculum content should examine world problems and seek to resolve them so that people can improve the quality of life in the nation as a whole (Dewey, 1944). A core curriculum is a course of study which is deemed central and usually made mandatory for all students in the school system. Curriculum content should thus relate to relevant contemporary issues of a country.

According to Oluoch (2002) secondary education in Kenya covers six major areas of curricula activities: communication, mathematics, science, humanities, applied education and physical education. This is geared towards meeting the needs of both the students who terminate their education after secondary school and those who proceed to higher education. Education equips citizens with understanding and knowledge that enable them to make informed choices about their lives and those facing Kenyan society. However, a critical examination of Kenya's Vision 2030 indicate that there is minimal emphasis on the role of education and especially the curriculum content in enabling Kenya become a one nation by the year 2030 (Ojiambo, 2009). Thus the role of education in the process requires redefinition and more so with emphasis on secondary school curriculum content.

Despite the goal of Kenyan education system of fostering nationalism, patriotism as well as national unity; national harmony has not been achieved (Ojiambo, 2009). A research done by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) on secondary school curriculum in Kenya showed that the current curriculum had not played its role effectively in promoting national cohesion especially in view of the post-election violence that the country experienced in 2008 (KICD, 2013). A summative evaluation of the secondary school curriculum carried out by KICD revealed that the negative practices that learners encounter do not enable them to internalize the values of nationalism, patriotism, national unity and cohesion as spelt out in the national goals of education and the National Cohesion and Integration Act. On the contrary, when children watch opinion leaders in society talk ill of some ethnic groups, defy court orders and get away with it, the children start to internalize values that create national disharmony such as ethnicity, religious intolerance, socio-economic domination and gender differences.

The nation's cohesion and security has continued to disintegrate under the political system founded around ethnic differentiation and segmentation together with reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya (Kenya National Youth charter, 2013). MOE (2010) points out that there is a mismatch between what is taught and what is expected as education products of the society. Indeed there is need to investigate the relevance of secondary school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion as a social and national issue. Machakos Town Sub-County was chosen because it is a cosmopolitan region occupied by people from diverse communities whose children interact together and especially in schools. This study investigated the relevance of secondary school curriculum in promoting national cohesion in Machakos Town Sub-County. The analysis was based on the ideals of a curriculum as advocated by reconstructionism philosophy.

### Statement of the Problem

The Kenyan goals of education underline the importance of education in promoting national cohesion and peaceful coexistence, a prerequisite component for national development. Through the school curriculum content, education enables a country to achieve its needs and aspirations. National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has emphasized the importance of education in the achievement of long term cohesion and integration among Kenyan communities. Despite the emphasis however, ethnic divisions, clashes, religious intolerance and other social ills have been witnessed over the years and worsening with the advent of multi- partism in Kenya; a vice that threatens the development of the country. This raises the question on the relevance of the school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion. Thus the study sought to investigate the relevance of secondary school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion among students in Machakos Town Sub-County.

### METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research design. This design was adopted for this research because it involved studying conditions or events that had already occurred. The description of the phenomenon under study was enriched with philosophical techniques of critical analysis and conceptual analysis to ensure that elaborate analysis and description was done. A sample of 409 respondents was used in the study which comprised of 360 student leaders, 48 teachers and the Sub-County QASO. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze quantitative data obtained using frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data obtained from open ended questions was organized into themes and reported thematically in line with the objectives of the study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study sought to determine the relevance of secondary school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion. Responses were obtained from student leaders on the extent to which the secondary school curriculum content gave students an opportunity to reflect critically on issues related to national cohesion. The responses from student leaders are as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Student Leaders' Responses on Relevance of Curriculum Content in Promoting National Cohesion**

Issues related to national cohesion	V. great extent		Great extent		No opinion		Small extent		No extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious tolerance	15	4.2	44	12.2	28	7.8	117	32.5	156	43.3
Ethnicco-existence	9	2.5	58	16.1	68	18.9	133	36.9	92	25.6
Gender equity	29	8.1	28	7.8	39	10.8	121	33.6	143	39.7
Socio-economic integration	16	4.4	72	20	55	15.3	132	36.7	85	23.6
Racial diversity	36	13.1	47	13.1	88	24.4	102	28.2	87	24.2

Majority (43.3%) of the student leaders indicated that school curriculum content did not give them an opportunity to critically reflect on issues related to religious tolerance, 32.5% indicated that curriculum content gave them opportunity to a small extent, 12.2% indicated great extent, 7.8 % held no opinion, while 4.2% indicated that curriculum content gave them an opportunity to a very great extent (Table 1). On ethnic co-existence, 36.9%, indicated that school curriculum content gave them opportunity to a small extent to reflect critically on this issue while 25.6% indicated no extent. Only 16.1% indicated that curriculum content gave them opportunity to reflect on this issue to a great extent while 2.5% indicated a very great extent.

As relates to gender equity, 39.7% indicated that school curriculum content did not give them an opportunity to reflect critically on gender equity, 33.6% indicated a small extent, 10.8% held no opinion, 8.1% and 7.8% of the respondents indicated a great extent and very great extent respectively. On socio-economic integration, 36.7% indicated that curriculum content gave them an opportunity to reflect critically to a small extent on this issue, while 23.6% indicated no extent. A total of 20% indicated a great extent, while 4.4% indicated a very great extent. Table 1 further showed that 28.3% indicated that curriculum content gave them an opportunity reflect critically on racial diversity to a small extent, 24.4% held no opinion, 24.2% indicated no extent while 13.1% and 10.0% indicated a great extent and very great extent respectively. A similar item was included in the teachers' instrument which sought information on the extent to which secondary school curriculum content gave students an opportunity to reflect critically on issues related to national cohesion. The responses from teachers were as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Teachers' Responses on Relevance of Curriculum Content in Promoting National Cohesion**

Issues related to national cohesion	V. great extent		Great extent		No opinion		Small extent		No extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious tolerance	2	4.2	5	10.4	7	14.6	10	20.8	24	50
Ethnic co-existence	3	6.2	2	4.2	5	10.4	20	41.7	18	37.5
Gender equity	5	10.4	6	12.5	8	16.7	12	25	17	35.4
Socio-economic integration	3	6.3	4	8.3	4	8.3	26	54.2	11	22.9
Racial diversity	3	6.3	7	14.6	8	16.7	8	16.7	22	45.8

Table 2 shows that 50% of the teachers indicated that school curriculum content did not give students an opportunity to reflect critically on religion tolerance, 20.8% indicated a small extent, 14.6% held no opinion while 10.4% and 4.2% indicated a great extent and a very great extent respectively. On ethnic coexistence, 41.7% indicated that school curriculum content gave students an opportunity to reflect critically on the issue to a small extent, 37.5% indicated no extent, 10.4% held no opinion while 4.2% and 6.2% indicated a great extent and very great extent respectively. Table 2 further shows that 35.4% of teachers noted that school curriculum content did not give students an opportunity to reflect critically on gender equity while 25% indicated a small extent; this is in comparison to 12.5% and 10.4% who indicated great extent and very great extent respectively. On socio-economic integration, majority (54.2%) of the teachers indicated that the school curriculum content gave them an opportunity to reflect critically on the issues to a small extent, 22.9% indicated no extent while 6.3% indicated a very great extent. Table 2 further showed that 45.8% of the teachers indicated that school curriculum content did not give students an opportunity to reflect critically on racial diversity, 16.7% indicated that the curriculum content gave students opportunity to a small extent, 14.6% indicated a great extent while 6.3% indicated a very great extent.

The information in Table 1 and Table 2 shows that in most of the issues the student leaders and teachers responses concur. The findings suggest that the curriculum content gave students little opportunity to reflect critically on issues related to national cohesion, that is, religious tolerance, ethnic co-existence, gender equity, socio economic integration and racial diversity. This means that the curriculum content does not consider the philosophical questions such as what knowledge is considered most worthwhile and its relevance to the contemporary issues of the country. The content taught should be selected for its relevance and fitness to the emerging needs of students and to the society it is intended to serve. The curriculum content should enable an individual to develop in all aspects through identifying and solving social problems affecting national cohesions. According to Brameld (1966) teachers should develop constructive social change and reform among students by exploring social problems, suggesting alternative perspectives and facilitating students on analysis of these problems through content presentation.

According to reconstructionism philosophy, the curriculum content should involve practical application of skills for the learners to relate what they learn in solving problems in the society. Lack of application of practical skills could have probably led to this observation as majority of respondents noted it as a weakness of curriculum content in promoting national cohesion. Basing on the ideals of curriculum as advocated by reconstructionism philosophy, the study concludes that curriculum content gave the respondents little opportunity to reflect critically on issues related to national cohesion suggesting that there is no relevance of curriculum content in promoting national cohesion.

The study determined from the student leaders the extent to which curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions under different components of national cohesion. The responses of student leaders is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Student Leaders' Responses on Collaborative Interactions**

Components of national cohesion n= 360	V. great extent		Great extent		No opinion		Small extent		No extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious practices and beliefs	11	3.1	47	13.1	18	5.0	117	32.5	167	46.4
Cultural backgrounds	24	6.7	28	7.8	64	17.8	90	25.0	154	42.8
Gender differences	44	12.2	49	13.6	79	21.9	101	28.1	87	24.2
Socio-economic backgrounds	21	5.8	24	6.7	85	23.6	123	34.2	107	29.7
Racial diversity	45	12.5	43	11.9	53	14.7	93	25.8	126	35.0

The information in Table 3 shows that 46.4% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content does not promote collaborative interactions as relates to religious practices and beliefs. On cultural backgrounds, 42.8% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content do not promote collaborative interactions on this issue while 28.1% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions under gender differences to a small extent. On socio-economic backgrounds, 34.2% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions under socio-economic backgrounds to a small extent 25.8% indicated it does so to a small extent.

The study determined teachers' responses on the extent to which curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions among students. The responses of teachers are as shown in Table 4. Information in Table 4 shows that, majority (50%) of the teachers indicated that school curriculum content do not promote collaborative interactions under religious practices and beliefs while 37.5% indicated that curriculum content promote collaborative interactions under cultural backgrounds to a small extent. On gender difference, 41.7% of the teachers indicated that curriculum content did not promote collaborative interactions on this issue while 47.9% of the teachers indicated that curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions under socio-economic backgrounds to a small extent.

The findings presented in Table 3 and 4 shows that there is concurrence among the respondents that curriculum content does not promote collaborative interactions under religious practices and beliefs, cultural backgrounds, gender differences, socio-economic backgrounds and racial diversity. This implies that the students are not fully involved in sharing knowledge among themselves. A critical characteristic of collaborative interactions in classrooms is that students are not segregated according to supposed ability, achievement, interests, or any other characteristic. Segregation weakens collaboration and impoverishes the classroom by depriving all students of opportunities to learn from and with each other. Shared knowledge mediates learning, and heterogeneous groups of students are essential characteristics of collaborative interactions which promote national cohesion. This is in line with Woolman (2001) who observed that national stability and collaborative interactions within a country depend on effective integration of curriculum content with a sustainable policy of national cohesion in relation to socio-economic integration, religion tolerance, gender, ethnic background and racial diversity. This study suggests that there is no relevance of school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion under collaborative interactions.

**Table 4. Teachers' Responses on Collaborative interactions**

Components of national cohesion, n=48	V. great extent		Great extent		No opinion		Small extent		No extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Religious practices and beliefs	1	2.1	4	8.3	8	16.7	11	22.9	24	50
Cultural backgrounds	3	6.3	4	8.3	8	16.7	18	37.5	14	29.2
Gender differences	2	4.2	5	10.4	12	25.0	9	18.8	20	41.7
Socio-economic backgrounds	5	10.4	4	8.3	3	6.3	23	47.9	13	27.1
Racial diversity	5	10.4	6	12.5	6	12.5	13	27.5	18	37.5

## CONCLUSION

The researcher explored on the relevance of secondary school curriculum in promoting national cohesion among students in Machakos Town Sub-County. From the findings, the researcher concluded that the curriculum content gave students little opportunity to reflect critically on issues related to national cohesion. This could be attributed to lack of practical skills on issues related to national cohesion. The secondary school curriculum content does not enable the learners to internalize the values of nationalism and patriotism through the curriculum content. The curriculum content did not promote collaborative interactions under issues related to national cohesion

## RECOMMENDATION

There is need to review the secondary curriculum content to enhance flexibility and responsiveness to the needs and

interests of all learners towards promoting national cohesion. All subjects taught in secondary schools should include content related to issues of national cohesion. The study also recommends review on secondary school curriculum content to reflect on emerging issues on national cohesion and sensitization on all educational stakeholders on the importance of the role that education and in particular secondary school curriculum content plays in promoting harmonious living in the society.

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