

**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 curriculum, education enables a country to achieve its needs and aspirations. Despite the comprehensive school curriculum, the country is faced with ethnic divisions, religious intolerance and violence and this raises concern on relevance of the school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion. The objective of this study was to investigate the relevance of secondary school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion. The study was based on the ideals and principles of a school curriculum as advocated by reconstructionism philosophy. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of four hundred and nine (409) respondents comprising of three hundred and sixty (360) student leaders, Forty eight (48) teachers and Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO) was used for the study. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the respondents. Questionnaires and interview schedule were used for data collection. The study established that the secondary school curriculum 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 on secondary school curriculum content to reflect on emerging issues on national cohesion and integration. The findings of the study will provide critical information to all the educational stakeholders on the important role that the secondary school curriculum content plays in promoting harmonious living in the society.

**Key words:** Reconstructionist analysis, Secondary school curriculum, Curriculum Content, National cohesion.

### **Background Information**

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. 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.

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. 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). 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 is envisioned to achieve the needs and aspirations of all the citizens. 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. Data was presented by use of tables.

### **Objective**

The objective of this study was to investigate the relevance of secondary school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion among students.

### **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 Discussions

The study revealed that there were more female student leaders than male student leaders and there was equal number of male and female teachers. Most of the student leaders were aged between 16-17 years and were in form four classes. The study established that 41.7% of the teachers had a teaching experience of 11-15 years. Most of the respondents indicated that their home county is Machakos. This implies that majority of the respondents shared the same customs, norms, values and traditions. The distribution of the respondents could be attributed to quota system in admission of students to schools as well decentralization of recruitment of teachers to Board of Management which has tended to give priority to employment of teachers from that locality.

An item was included in the student leaders' questionnaire which sought information on the extent to which 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 Responses on Issues Related to National Cohesion

Issues related to national cohesion	Very 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
Ethnic co-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

Information in Table 1 shows that 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, on ethnic co-existence, 36.9% of student leaders indicated that school curriculum content gave them opportunity to a small extent to reflect critically on this issue. As relates to gender equity, 39.7% of the student leaders indicated that school curriculum content did not give them an opportunity to reflect critically. On socio-economic integration, 36.7% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content gave them an opportunity to reflect critically to a small extent on this issue, 28.3% of the student leaders indicated that curriculum content gave them an opportunity reflect critically on racial diversity to a small extent.

A similar item was included in the teachers' instrument which sought information on the extent to which 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 Issues Related to National Cohesion

Issues related to national cohesion	Very 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

Information in 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, on ethnic coexistence, 41.7% of the teachers indicated that school curriculum content gave students an opportunity to reflect critically on the issue to a small extent. Also 35.4% of teachers noted that school curriculum content did not give students an opportunity to reflect critically on gender equity while 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. Also 45.8% of the teachers indicated that school curriculum content did not give students an opportunity to reflect critically on racial diversity

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 further sought to determine from the student leaders the extent to which curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions under different components of national cohesion. The responses of student leaders are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Leaders' Responses on Collaborative Interactions

Components of national cohesion	Very 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 also sought to determine teachers' responses on the extent to which curriculum content promotes collaborative interactions among the students under different components. The responses of teachers are as shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
 Teachers' Responses on Collaborative interactions

Components of national cohesion	Very 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

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. Basing on reconstructionism philosophy, the findings of this study suggest that there is no relevance of school curriculum content in promoting national cohesion under collaborative interactions.

An item was included in the student leaders' questionnaire which sought information on whether the content of specific subjects promotes national cohesion. Table 5 shows responses obtained from student leaders.

Table 5  
Student Leaders' Responses on Subject Content

Subject	Very great Extent		Great Extent		Undecided		Small Extent		No Extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	Mathematics	18	5.0	57	15.8	25	6.9	110	30.6	150
English	132	36.6	103	28.5	94	26.3	28	7.8	3	0.8
Kiswahili	195	54.2	118	32.8	7	1.9	37	10.3	3	0.8
Biology	22	6.1	52	14.4	21	5.8	130	36.1	135	37.5
Chemistry	29	8.1	52	14.4	34	9.4	125	34.7	120	33.3
Physics	42	11.7	48	13.3	57	15.8	112	31.1	101	28.1
History	113	31.4	145	40.3	62	17.2	25	6.9	15	4.2
Geography	10	2.8	27	7.5	22	6.1	127	35.3	174	48.3
Religious studies	99	27.5	195	54.2	50	13.9	13	3.6	3	0.8
Agriculture	6	1.7	38	10.6	45	12.5	145	40.3	126	35.0
Business studies	12	3.3	29	8.1	41	11.4	131	36.4	147	40.8
Home science	12	3.3	67	18.6	77	21.4	143	39.7	61	16.9
Computer studies	33	9.2	53	14.7	57	15.8	112	31.1	105	29.2
Music	40	11.1	72	20.0	38	10.6	118	32.8	92	25.6

Information in Table 5 shows that the subjects that were reported to carry content that are relevant to promotion of national cohesion by majority of the student leaders were: Kiswahili (87%), history (71.7%) and religious studies (71.7%). The subjects identified as having no or carrying very little content relevant to promotion of national cohesion include Mathematics, Biology, Business studies, geography and chemistry.

The teachers' responses regarding the extent to which specific subject content promotes national cohesion were sought and the data obtained is presented in Table 6.



Table 6  
Teachers' Responses on Subject Content

Subject	Very great Extent		Great Extent		Undecided		Small Extent		No Extent	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	Mathematics	3	6.3	6	12.5	5	10.4	15	31.2	29
English	21	43.7	11	22.9	3	6.3	8	16.7	5	10.4
Kiswahili	25	52.1	10	20.3	8	16.7	3	6.3	2	4.2
Biology	5	10.4	7	14.6	9	18.8	13	27.0	14	29.2
Chemistry	7	14.6	5	10.4	8	16.7	14	29.2	14	29.2
Physics	4	8.3	6	12.5	11	22.9	14	29.2	13	27.1
History	16	33.3	17	35.4	3	6.3	8	16.7	4	8.3
Geography	3	6.3	7	14.6	7	14.6	13	27.1	18	37.5
Religious studies	19	39.6	16	33.3	4	8.3	5	10.4	5	10.4
Agriculture	5	10.4	9	18.8	10	20.8	12	25.0	12	25.0
Business studies	3	6.3	6	12.5	9	18.8	14	29.2	16	33.3
Home science	4	8.3	4	8.3	10	20.8	14	29.2	16	33.3
Computer studies	7	14.6	7	14.6	8	16.7	10	20.8	16	33.3
Music	6	12.5	9	18.8	6	12.5	12	25.0	15	31.3

Information in Table 6 concur with the responses from the students, indicating that religious studies (72.9%), Kiswahili (72.4%), history (68.7%) and English (66.6%) are the subjects that contain content relevant for promotion of national cohesion to some extent. According to the teachers responses, subjects that carry the least amount of content relevant to promotion of national cohesion include mathematics, geography, business studies, computer studies, music, chemistry and biology.

Information in Table 5 and 6 shows that most of the subjects do not include content that promotes national cohesion. This implies that the curriculum content that determines student's attitudes and behaviors of tolerance, harmony, respect, peace and stability as far as national cohesion and integration is concerned should be made explicit in all subjects and topics of study. The content should be interpreted and utilized to solve real life problems like national disharmony. By so doing the subjects become more practical and useful which will go a long way in demystifying its relevance to real life issues and its crucial role in the education of the young.

According to Counts (1971) the primary purpose of school curriculum is to enable the learner to deal with social problems that humankind faces. These problems are not exclusive concern of one subject but of every subject that is undertaken in the education system in order to promote national cohesion and integration. This is because the crisis is universal and the widespread nature of the crisis must be emphasized in the curriculum on all the subjects. Woolman (2001) on a comparative study about educational reconstruction and post-colonial curriculum development of four African countries, Mali, Nigeria, Mozambique and Kenya, noted that the study of geography, business

studies and economics, history and government among other related are important in the cultivation of self-esteem and creation of national unity.

Multi-ethnic nationalism in Africa requires innovative forms of religious studies and history that balance an understanding of particular cultures with recognition of the commonalities in tradition that make for unity (Woolman, 2001). Cultivation of oral and written fluency in different languages is important in building self-esteem and desired values. Building tolerance, socio-economic integration and understanding of cultural diversity should be a major goal of any curriculum in order to promote national cohesion. Basing on the ideals of reconstructionism philosophy, the findings of this study suggests that there was no relevance of most subject content in promoting national cohesion.

### **Conclusions**

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 curriculum content did not promote collaborative interactions under issues related to national cohesion and also most of the subjects did not have content relevant to promotion of national cohesion. The secondary school curriculum does not enable the learners to internalize the values of nationalism and patriotism through the curriculum content.

### **Recommendations**

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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