Relevance of Curriculum Content to Radicalization Prevention Amongst Students in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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1. Introduction

Radicalisation and terrorism are among the gravest of threats in the current international security of the 21st century [1]. This is exacerbated by the fact that terrorism knows no boundaries and affects every society. As such, this has caused a lot of destruction and devastation in countries and has hence become a real concern for many nations [2].

What raises even more concern is that those destructions are carried out by young youths who are getting recruited and trained when still in school [3]. “Terrorist organisations have been using schools as recruitment venues in many locations throughout the world, utilising the education system to transmit group ideologies as well as provide mental and physical training and indoctrination” [4]. These terrorist groups have been targeting the school-going adolescents because identity crisis during adolescence makes this group most vulnerable [5]. This is confirmed by [6] whose study findings in Nairobi and Mombasa revealed that 57% of the al-Shabaab group members were recruited when they were adolescents and young adults.

Students or young people radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism have been evident all over the world. For instance, in November 2007, in the United Kingdom, it was reported that people as young as 15 years of age were being involved in terrorist activities. In Canada, [7] found out that principals and teachers promoted extreme Muslim ideologies in different independent Islamic schools in the Greater Toronto area and thus students’ radicalisation kept increasing. In Africa, students’ radicalisation incidences have also been reported in Nigeria where students leave school to join Boko Haram while others traverse from Somalia to join ISIS. Student radicalisation has also been witnessed in Morocco, Libya and other Northern Africa Nations [8]. These youths have been identified to be in primary schools, secondary schools as well as universities and training institutions [3].

Recently in Kenya, many parents have also reported to law enforcement agencies about disappearances of their children to violent extremist groups [8]. Security reports have indicated that recruitment to these groups is taking place in mosques and even in schools. These reports that educational institutions such as secondary schools have now become enrolling centers and feeder institutions for al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups has become very worrying [9]. This phenomenon also alerts us that there is a significant risk of losing a generation of youth to despair and disengagement if urgent measures are not taken [10].

Researchers on radicalisation and terrorism have observed that there is no single solution to this problem [2]. Security responses are essential, but they are not sufficient. They are not able to handle the many underlying factors that breed violent extremism and push the youth towards joining the violent extremist groups [10]. Security measures, as well as soft power approaches such as education, are therefore needed to deal with this significant threat.

This study acknowledges that education is one of the primary activities of all human beings and societies and that all societies depend upon education for the transmission of their values, cultures and even believes [11]. It is through education that individuals’ and societal developments are realised, and this therefore implies that education is a necessity in overcoming personal, societal, national and even international needs.

Every society has goals for its educational system and whatever the young people are taught in schools depend on what the society perceive as valuable [12]. This education is then operationalised through a curriculum which identifies the educational purposes, organises them into goals, objectives, aims and learning outcomes that are achieved at different levels of education and training [13]. There is thus a mutual relationship between education and curriculum in that; the curriculum is the vehicle for driving education to achieve its goals and objectives or a medium for educating, while aims and goals of education direct the path that the education system of a society/country takes [14].

In recent years, the role of education/curriculum in countering radicalisation has been identified as significant by policymakers...
and practitioners. Educating and building skills through the school curriculum assists students to develop cognitively, socially and even emotionally [11]. These aspects have been identified as essential components in preventing violent extremism, radicalisation and other types of violent acts. As such, these preventative measures have been found to reduce the likelihood of schools becoming potential places for radicalisation or recruitment hubs for violent extremists [15]. Schools and the curriculum they represent therefore assume great importance in as far as dealing with violence and youth radicalisation is concerned. Through research, it has also been noted that terrorism and radicalisation tend to thrive in an environment where education system does not provide wholesome training for physical, economic, social and emotional development for a person and even the society as a whole [16].

Several countries have curricula that have been deliberately designed to promote peace and wholesome training. This has been done through the direct teaching of peace education, promoting tolerance, promoting cooperation and negotiation skills such as ‘Learning to Live Together’, promoting civic values and governance through subjects such as History and Social Studies curricula [17]. There are also examples of curricula providing skills training for youth who have either been or are in danger of becoming combatants. These curricula aim to equip the students with economic and social skills that provide them with alternatives to joining armed groups [18].

It was against this background that this study sought to investigate whether the current curriculum at the secondary school level in Kenya has content that is relevant in addressing radicalization issues in schools which are posing great threats to the society. The objectives that guided this study are presented in the section that follows.

II. Objectives
- Determine ways in which the current secondary school curriculum content is relevant in radicalisation prevention in Kenya.
- Identify subjects in the secondary school curriculum that contain relevant content to radicalization prevention.
- Gather suggestions for improving the current secondary school curriculum for radicalisation prevention in schools.

III. Research Methodology
This study used triangulation mixed method research design. It was carried out in Kamukunji Sub-County in Nairobi County, Kenya. The target was 4139 students, 175 teachers, seven principals and 28 KICD officers. Two hundred and nineteen students were carried out in Kamukunji Sub-County in Nairobi County, Kenya. This study used triangulation mixed method research design. It was against this background that this study sought to investigate whether the current secondary school curriculum content in Kenya contains any information which is helpful in radicalization prevention. Students’, teachers’ and KICD officers’ views concerning this content were sought and are presented in the section that follows. Students’ views were obtained using a questionnaire which contained Likert scale items and students were requested to indicate their level of agreement to some given statements. Results from the Likert Scale item analysis were as presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students have been educated on:</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The importance of respecting people at all times</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.1816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of keeping law and order at all times</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.2858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of keeping peace with one another at all times</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.0894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of being good citizens</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of being fair to each other at all times</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of solving conflicts without violence</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of thinking about the dangers of their actions</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to tolerate each other even when they have differences</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills of solving problems on their own without waiting for their parents, friends or teachers</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of saying no to friends who influence them to do wrong</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid N (list wise) 217   80.82 4.041

Source: Research data 2017

Statements used to assess whether certain concepts relevant to radicalisation prevention had been taught using secondary school curriculum revealed positive results. Students strongly agreed that they had been educated on the importance of respecting people at all times (Mean of 4.39). They also strongly agreed (Mean of 4.25) that they had been taught the importance of keeping law and order at all times and also strongly agreed (Mean of 4.19) that they had been taught the benefits of being good citizens. Most of their views were congruent as shown by their standard deviations of 0.1816, 0.2858 and 0.8169 respectively.

Concerning whether students had been educated on the importance of being fair to each other at all times, students agreed that this had been taught (Mean of 4.0). Their views were however moderately dispersed (SD of 1.116). Students also agreed (Mean of 3.89) that they had been educated on the importance of thinking about the dangers of their actions and have also been educated on methods of solving conflicts without violence (Mean of 3.89). The SDs (1.141...
and 1.169) respectively on those concepts, however, showed that students’ views were moderately dispersed.

When asked whether students had been taught how to tolerate each other even when they have differences, most students agreed (Mean of 3.81) that they had been taught. Their views concerning this aspect were also slightly dispersed as shown by an SD of 1.103. Concerning whether students had been taught skills in solving problems on their own without waiting for their parents, friends or teachers, a Mean of 3.52 and an SD of 1.248 were obtained. This mean also showed that students were in agreement that these concepts had been taught in the curriculum. Finally, students were asked whether they had been educated on the importance of saying no to friends who influence them to do wrong and again, they were in agreement (Mean of 3.24) that this had been done. A few of them however held different opinions as shown by the SD of 1.114 which shows moderate dispersion.

From this analysis, it was clear from the mean values that the current secondary school curriculum in Kenya has some concepts that are relevant in radicalisation prevention. This study however noted that, these concepts in the curriculum had not necessarily been put in the curriculum to cater for radicalisation prevention. They were there for the general moral upgrading of the students with little or no emphasis on radicalisation prevention. The study noted that radicalization and violent extremism is a relatively new phenomenon in the country, and the secondary school curriculum was last reviewed in the year 2002. Since then, there have not been any innovations in most of the subjects except History subject where a few changes had been made (around 2011) to cater for the amendments in the new constitution[22]. The study, therefore noted that, it was by default that some content was relevant to radicalization due to the nature of the general secondary school education objectives.

Teachers also concurred that certain concepts relevant to radicalization prevention had been taught. For instance in Christian Religious Education, teachers argued that this subject helps the learners to appreciate and respect their own and other people’s cultural beliefs and practices. They emphasized that students also learn how to develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others and how to promote international consciousness through the understanding of universal brotherhood and sisterhood.

In Islamic Religious Education (IRE), teachers explained that this subject also contained relevant content to radicalization prevention especially in a topic that teaches about Jihad and Terrorism in form four. Through this topic, the IRE teachers argued that they were able to explain that Jihad is not violence or terrorism. The topic also shuns any form of terrorism and explains the wars that were there in Islamic history. The findings echoed by Religious Education teachers are in line with [23] who observed that, through Religious Education, students acquire the desired beliefs, values and practices of the society, which should enable them to live in harmony with other members of the society.

In History, topics such as democracy and human rights, constitution and constitution making, citizenship and national integration were said by History teachers to contain relevant information applicable in radicalisation prevention. This is supported by [24] who says that topics such as national integration in History provides one with a circle of acquaintances, gives abundant material for analyzing motives and gives one an opportunity to cultivate restraint and tolerance hence unity. [25] also says that History is a subject that helps to inculcate moral values such as sympathy, tolerance, and responsibility and all these concepts are precious in radicalisation prevention.

In Life Skills Education (LSE), teachers observed that topics such as self-awareness, self-esteem, coping with emotions and coping with stress are relevant topics in radicalisation prevention. They emphasized that from these topics, a learner is expected to take home skills of interpersonal relations such as; empathy, effective communication, conflict resolution and negotiation, friendship formation, assertiveness and peer pressure resistance. This subject was thus found to have very relevant information towards radicalisation prevention. This information on LSE as relevant information to radicalisation prevention was also supported by one of the KICD officers from the Cross Cutting Issues Department who said that LSE was started in the year 2008 and was intended to cover emerging issues in schools [26].

Unfortunately delivery of this subject was pinpointed as one of the reasons as to why LSE was not helping students against radicalisation. In fact, most LSE teachers supported that the subject is not well taught in schools and most cases, LSE lessons are used to teach other subjects. This concurred with research done by[27] which noted that whereas all primary and secondary schools are expected to offer at least one LSE lesson a week, these lessons were timetabled but during the actual teaching, a different subject like Mathematics was most often taught.

In Applied Sciences where subjects such as Agriculture, Computer, Business Studies, Home Science, Music, Art, and Design are concerned, some little relevance was found in at least a subtopic in some subjects. In Computer Studies, for example, topics such as; Use of internet to access information on emerging issues, Issues resulting from the use of ICT (Cultural effects, Computer crimes, and Moral effects) were found to be relevant in radicalisation prevention.

In Business Studies, the topics on international trade and entrepreneurship were found to be relevant whereas in Home Science a topic on adolescence and dangers of adolescence was found to be important in radicalisation prevention. Concerning Music subject, it was found out that, through music, learners can educate society on issues affecting them. However, most of the students do not benefit from such aspects since Music is a rare subject in most schools. In Agriculture, teachers argued that the subject promotes self-reliance, which helps to reduce radicalisation. Teachers as well as an officer from KICD, however, noted that Agriculture syllabus does not have any content that can be used directly for radicalisation prevention.

Concerning science subjects, teachers from various schools concurred that; subjects such as Mathematics, Biology, Physics and Chemistry had no content in their syllabuses that can help in radicalisation prevention. This was a similar case in languages where no relevant content on radicalisation was found.

For collaboration purposes the researcher also did an investigation with the students to find out the subjects in which the concepts relevant to radicalisation prevention had been taught. Students gave their responses on these subjects and the results were as presented in Table 2.
Most of the students 96 (44.2%) mentioned Religious Education as the subject where most of the content related to radicalisation prevention was covered. On the other hand, Life Skills Education (LSE) was reported by 65 (30%) students to have covered many of the aspects relevant in radicalisation prevention. Twelve (5.5%) reported that a combination of both Religious Education and LSE had been used to teach relevant information to radicalisation prevention while History subject was also reported by 10 (4.6%) of the respondents to have taught some useful information in radicalisation prevention in schools. A cumulative of 34 (15.7%) students reported that other different subjects (including Home Science, Agriculture, Business Studies, English, Music and Computer) had been used to teach relevant information in radicalisation prevention.

Report on subjects with relevant information (Religious Education, Life Skill Education, and History) as reported by student participants, concurred with findings from teachers in Humanities department. Similarly students’ findings just like the teacher findings did not find anything relevant in radicalization prevention in science subjects.

The researcher did further investigation to find percentage representation of topics per subject that contained relevant information to radicalisation prevention using content analysis. The findings were as presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of topics with relevant information</th>
<th>Percentage representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>24/36</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Religious Education</td>
<td>6/29</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Religious Education</td>
<td>5/36</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4/32</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Education</td>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other subjects</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data 2017

These results indicated that LSE had the highest percentage of relevant topics (66.67%) towards radicalisation prevention. Christian Religious Education (CRE) had 20.6% of its topics being relevant while Islamic Religious Education (IRE) had 13.8% relevant topics towards radicalisation prevention. Computer Studies had 14.2%, History and Government had 12.5%, and Business Studies had 3.2% relevant topics in radicalisation prevention while the rest of the subjects had none. Findings from teachers, students and the content analysis concurred that, Religious Education, LSE, History, Business Education and Computer contain some relevant content in radicalisation prevention though in limited topics. These findings therefore confirmed that relevant content to radicalisation prevention in the current secondary school curriculum in Kenya is minimal and more needs to be added to enhance radicalization prevention in schools.

A. Suggestions for Improvement

Different study participants (students, principals, teachers, and KICD officers) gave their suggestions on how to improve the current secondary curriculum for effective radicalization prevention in schools. Students suggestions included; introduction of a new topic in different subjects to specifically teach radicalisation and terrorism, make LSE an examinable subject or use guidance and counselling to handle radicalisation issues in schools. Teachers and principals agreed that integrating a new topic in subjects such as History, Religious Education, LSE or even Business Studies and Computer Studies could help in radicalisation prevention. They also agreed that guidance and counseling is a powerful method for dealing with radicalisation issues in schools.

The researcher hopes that curriculum developers and other relevant education agencies in Kenya will use these suggestions to make the education curriculum in Kenya more relevant in radicalisation prevention in-order to safeguard our youth and our future generation.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The need for a relevant curriculum on the prevention of radicalisation is immense as established in this study. This relevance was found to be minimal in the current secondary school curriculum content. Again this relevant content was only available in very few subjects and was not directly related to radicalisation. This study recommends that the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should revise the curriculum to include relevant information on radicalisation prevention at all levels in secondary schools and in all subjects. Ministry of Education should ensure that teaching-learning resources with content relevant to radicalisation prevention are also availed in all schools to make the teaching/learning of these concepts easy.

VI. Acknowledgement

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