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## Curriculum and expected learning outcomes

### BRIEF 1

#### Curriculum development

#### **The development, dissemination, and implementation of relevant and effective curriculum and expected learning outcomes can improve teaching and learning.**

The curriculum framework, including the expected learning outcomes, communicates what teachers and learners should know and do. Curriculum is a description of what, why, how, and how well students should learn in a systematic and intentional way.(14) Expected learning outcomes define the totality of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, or behaviours a learner should master upon the successful completion of the curriculum.(14) To improve education quality special efforts are needed to align the intended curriculum (the official guidance), the implemented curriculum (what teachers and learners actually do), and the attained curriculum (what students actually learn).(14) An extensive collection of resources on improving the quality and relevance of the curriculum, as well as its linkage to teaching, learning, and assessment processes, is available through the [International Bureau of Education \(IBE-UNESCO\)](#).

#### **Issues and Discussion**

Curriculum organization: Curriculum frameworks reflect the political and social agreements of education and aim to guide regulation, implementation, and evaluation of curricula.(1) They can be organized by competencies, disciplinary subjects, learning areas, and interdisciplinary or cross-curricular topics.(1) They also define the appropriate learning objectives, or expected learning outcomes, for successive levels of learning. Competency-based curriculum focuses on learners demonstrating mastery of certain interconnected knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In addition to subject-specific competencies, curriculum frameworks may address cross-cutting competencies such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, and principles such as personalization, inclusive systems, sustainable development, and social justice.(1)

Curriculum development: The development of curricula and expected learning outcomes is a dynamic cyclical process requiring reassessment and adaptation over time.(5)(11)(23) Because it involves deciding what knowledge is legitimate and important, it can be a highly political process.(26) In some countries, curriculum is defined primarily at the national level, while in other education systems curriculum is more a matter for local and even classroom-based decision-making, often guided by a framework of learning standards.(9)(23)(26) In today's context of global education goals and international assessments, questions of universality versus contextualization are becoming increasingly important.(3)(5)(7) While some learning goals may be universally appropriate, there are also specific national, local, and minority concerns that the curriculum needs to take into account. At

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all levels of curriculum development, relevance is improved when teachers are involved—as long as they are given chances to develop their curricular literacy, and are provided the required resources, time, and incentives for extensive deliberation.(17) New curricula can be tested and refined through feasibility studies and by piloting in select schools.(13)

**Ensuring effectiveness and relevance:** Effective curriculum is based on backwards planning, which starts from the identification of desired learning results and how these can be measured, and then determines the learning experiences that can lead to these outcomes.(24) There has long been a debate about the relative merits of traditional didactic approaches, versus constructivist or student-centred approaches to curriculum. However, research on learning shows that this is a false dichotomy: for curriculum to be effective, it needs to include a balanced and integrated use of teacher-led guided learning, student-led action learning, and whole context-dependent experiential learning.(18) To be relevant, the curriculum also needs to connect to learners' daily lives, interests, and motivations, and allow for differentiation of learning experiences to meet different students' needs.(1)(21)(24) In addition to stating what should be learned, the curriculum therefore needs to give teachers guidance on how to structure teaching and learning activities and how to assess learning achievement.(22)

**Dissemination:** Specific plans must be laid for the dissemination of new curricula and expected learning outcomes, in order to make educators aware of their existence and of the needed changes in teaching practices. Alignment of textbooks and other pedagogical materials is also a special concern, and the distribution and adoption of any new or revised materials should be addressed as part of the curriculum planning process. Curriculum dissemination plans should also take into account the development of curricular literacy at the level of districts, schools, and individual teachers.(4)

**Implementation:** The implementation of the curriculum framework is a complex process which occurs over time and through many mechanisms.(10) Some policy levers to facilitate implementation include: teacher training, providing incentives for school districts, providing external facilitators to assist in implementation, encouraging demonstrations, and sharing ideas, information, and expertise between educators.(17) Education planners may need to decide on the relative importance of fidelity—precise application of the curriculum in its original form—versus allowing teachers to make adaptations that meet their learners' needs.(17) Planners can monitor implementation to understand how to support the process, by asking four essential questions: what are teachers doing?, what are students doing?, how are materials being used?, and what kind of data should be collected to answer these questions? Potential methods for data collection can include direct observation, checklists, self-reports, and student portfolios.(17)

**Teacher professional development:** In order for changes in curriculum and expected learning outcomes to be carried into practice, ongoing teacher development must be central to curriculum policy. Teachers' commitment to change can vary from committed to resistant, due to differences in teachers' curricular literacy, competence, and confidence, as well as whether the curriculum development process included teacher perspectives.(16)(17) Pre-service teacher training systems will often need to be revised to reflect new curriculum frameworks. In addition, interactive professional development is necessary to build understanding of learning outcomes, curriculum, and teaching practices while allowing multiple cycles for assimilation of knowledge, practice, and reflection on experience.(16)(20) Teachers also need to learn how to use learning outcomes and curriculum frameworks to develop formative assessments that can provide evidence of student understanding and skills and allow teachers to interpret evidence and change classroom practices, closing the gap between desired and actual understandings.(2)(12)(25)

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## Inclusiveness Considerations

Participation of indigenous and minority populations in creating curriculum: Contemporary forms of education are strongly based on a Western model of schooling that spread along with missionary activity and colonialism, in many cases irrevocably altering or replacing indigenous forms of education and socialization. With this legacy in mind, it is important to give indigenous and minority populations new opportunities to decide what knowledge and abilities are to be valued and included in the official curriculum.(19)

Gender: Learning outcomes, curricula, assessments, and teaching practices should be either gender neutral or gender inclusive and non-discriminatory.(8)

Language Minority Students: Providing a quality education to all students means taking special considerations for learners whose mother-tongue is not the language of instruction. Curricula should support teachers in understanding and implementing appropriate practices for these students.(6)

### Policy examples:

- National Curriculum Framework in England [\[PDF\]](#)
- A National Curriculum Framework for All in Malta [\[PDF\]](#)
- National Curriculum Framework in Mauritius [\[PDF\]](#)

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