



TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT JUNIOR SCHOOL LEVEL, BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA. A PAPER REVIEW

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Abstract:

The study sought to review the teacher perceptions in the implementation of a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) at the junior school level in Bungoma County, Kenya. Implementing the curriculum is the most crucial and sometimes difficult phase of the curriculum development process, as observed by Gonzalez-Mena (2011). The final destination of any curriculum is indeed classroom instruction, which involves learners, teachers, managers and parents. Teaching goes on as the learner acquires the intended experiences, knowledge, skills, values, ideas and attitudes for the learner to be effectively productive in a society (University of Zimbabwe, 1995, p. 8). Effective implementation requires, among other things, the close involvement of parents in the education of their children. In this critical review paper, parents and guardians provide both curricular and co-curricular support to promote effective learning for their children. Parents, therefore, become active collaborators in education matters. From the literature reviewed, a school curriculum is a crucial vehicle through which society transmits its learning intentions, digital literacy, and admirable culture (Wiles, 2011) from adults to children. It is hoped that the findings of this review paper, if well implemented, will provide great insight into creating awareness of teacher perceptions on CBC curriculum implementation, the role of the parents' support and their engagement in the education of their children, education policy improvement and challenges faced. There is a need for commitment from both the Central and County governments regarding the provision of resources, including ICT tools, in our public primary schools for the smooth implementation of the CBC curriculum. The paper suggests that the Ministry of Education (MoE), through TSC, should spend more time on teacher training, as well as including teachers in the curriculum reform process after five years, to foster their positive attitude. This would ensure the effective implementation of Competency Based Curriculum. On the whole, the paper recommends improved resource allocation, including government capitation, effective stakeholder engagement strategies, and substantial investments in school infrastructure, and professional development programs for the CBC teachers.

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1. Introduction

Education is one experience that most children worldwide have in common and the most common means by which societies prepare their young for the future. Therefore, it is a key determinant of learning and an important exit from societal poverty (Simiyu & Wnjala, 2019).

Further, education is the experience that most children worldwide have in common and the means by which societies prepare their young for the future. The underlying goal of all education is to create a positive change in the student's knowledge, achievement, and behaviour for future living (Eyiuche, 2014). Education is not just about getting children into school but also about making sure that all schools work in the best interest of the children entrusted to them in acquiring high-quality education services.

Gonzalez-Mena (2011) defined parental involvement as a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and the child. Parents support their children in schools and in their homes, which directly and positively impacts the educational performance of their children.

The purpose of this review paper was to critically assess the perception of teachers on competency-based curriculum (CBC) at the junior school level in Bungoma County, Kenya, seeing that teachers play a key role in translating the curriculum content to the learners (Lonchner *et al.*, 2015). Teachers' perceptions of a curriculum have some positive impact on the effectiveness of their pedagogical duties. Their background knowledge and life experiences may shape these. They may be thoughts or mental images about their professional activities, their students and the general academic programs in the school. Change is an enduring feature of our education system, be it pedagogical, management or policy.

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) was introduced in Kenya in 2017 to replace the 32 long used 8-4-4 system (KICD, 2021). Kenya Vision 2030 advocates for a link between education and labour markets, aiming at making Kenya a newly industrialized, middle-income country that would provide a high quality of life for all its citizens by the year 2030. The overall objective of the new curriculum, therefore, was to equip learners with skills and knowledge for the 21st century. CBC aims to produce a holistic individual who has the competencies, values, knowledge, and skills necessary to succeed in a highly competitive global world.

Indeed, the eagerly coveted good and balanced curriculum needs to align itself with global trends of rapid expansion of knowledge and broadening information and communication technologies, and the result is the constant change in the skills needed by learners to fit in the job market globally (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, CBC captures the aspirations of the country, which emphasizes the learner's competencies, character, patriotism, citizenship, and ability to coexist as a responsible citizen. Further, Rahman *et al.* (2014) assert that CBC was meant to solve unemployment problems among the youth,

apart from equipping learners with vast 21st-century skills in their competency areas and knowledge (Basic Education Curriculum Framework, 2017 & Kim *et al.*, 2019). Given that CBC is learner-centred, problem-solving competencies are essential in driving the whole education system in the 21st century and beyond. Towards the end, learners perform countless investigative, explorative, and experimenting activities in the course of learning. Such soft skills and knowledge give learners a massive competitive advantage when competing for worldwide job and business opportunities upon graduation.

CBC core competencies imparted include competitive soft skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, imagination and creativity, citizenship, learning to learn, self-efficacy, digital literacy and communication, and not leaving aside collaboration. The system requires learners to construct their knowledge, move at their own pace, graduating, based on a demonstration of competencies. The training teachers also learn assessment and pedagogical content. Further, CBC puts more emphasis on learner-centred approaches and practical skills development. The education system also hopes to impart core values such as love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism, social justice, and integrity (Warrior, 2019).

It is an approach to learning where students work at their own pace to demonstrate mastery in the competency recessing their chosen field of study. It promotes individualized learning and accommodates a variety of learning styles, making it a personalized experience.

Further, Simiyu, Masibo and Mutsotso (2018), in their research on teacher pedagogical preparedness in integrating ICT in instruction, observed that paradigm shifts in education in recent years envision a new type of learning culture that demands ICT integration in pedagogical education programmes. ICT, therefore, should be infused into instruction and even teacher training to improve learning and actualization of 21st-century skills. ICT Integration and digital literacy, if efficiently embraced and used well in CBC may help in reducing inequalities and regional imbalances in education. This concurs with the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation Paper (2003-2007), in which the government acknowledges that Kenya has high levels of inequality in education (Ogola, 2010).

Moon (1994) introduces the two facets of education; first, education is responsible for identifying and nurturing the potential ability of a learner (self-actualization), and second, it is responsible for ensuring societal progress and development through the supply of manpower. Like in other countries especially in the US, teachers in Kenya have and are still experiencing challenges in their pedagogical classroom teaching and learning sessions (Brain, 2023). This agrees with Muriuki J. Njeri (2023) in her research on the challenges facing the Pioneer Candidate Class Transiting to Junior Secondary School Under the Competency-Based Curriculum in Nakuru North Sub-County of Nakuru County. The crucial question in this paper is: how are the junior school teachers viewing these ongoing CBC programmes?

Further, from the teachers interviewed, the non-ICT competent teachers in the field, especially those not trained in the CBC curriculum in most schools, still use

traditional teaching methods, denying the learners 21st-century global skills and knowledge (Cheng, 2001). Research has shown that curriculum implementation turns out to be a challenge to teachers who are not professionally well prepared (Lewthwaite, 2016). Teachers, as the curriculum's custodians and technicians, are required first to understand the content and pedagogical professional processes (Mogashoa, 2019) before delivering the lesson content.

The challenges experienced and cited by the teachers, among others, entailed the lack of resources (textbooks). Resources contribute primarily to how CBC content teaching and assessment. It was reported from the ground that teachers hardly access resources such as textbooks, learning material, internet connections, ICT tools and infrastructure in most public junior schools. With a forest of learners in classrooms in some schools, teachers are likely to be faced with many challenges. There is likely to be the inability to acquire resources used in learning, which negatively impacts the classroom instruction and assessment process. Limited resources further can make it difficult to implement the CBC curriculum, especially in rural areas of Bungoma and even in other counties in Kenya. This scenario agrees with a study conducted by Okongo *et al.* (2015) on the effect of the availability of teaching and learning resources on the implementation of inclusive education in preschool centres. The findings revealed that there were inadequate teaching and learning resources, which was a barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. John (2016) discovered a strong positive significant relationship between instructional resources and academic performance in most learning institutions.

Research shows that school textbooks, curriculum designs, and other instructional materials are crucial for quality CBC learning (Gichura, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Kalmus, 2004; UNESCO, 2004). With the inception of CBC in junior schools, textbook resources were not initially promptly supplied, which contributed to teachers' negative perceptions. Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) develops curriculum support materials, which include textbooks, course books, and electronic materials, including digital materials, through known certified publishers.

Digital equity is a significant issue in CBC learning. Whenever learners struggle to access essential digital devices or internet connectivity, curriculum implementers are frustrated, and therefore, no learning takes place, which affects their perception.

The unavailability of ICT integration in lessons and the lack of internet connectivity in some public schools are significant challenges to classroom instruction. This agrees with what Simiyu (2020), in his research on infrastructural support available for ICT integration in curriculum practices at lower primary school classes in Bungoma County, observed that the use of ICT tools in education has the potential to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, the research productivity of teachers and students, the management and effectiveness of institutions. ICT innovations today have indeed expanded the instructional space beyond four-walled classrooms. This calls for modern teaching methodologies to integrate social and digital technologies for online active interactions with learners (Simiyu, 2024). Technology plays a pivotal role in CBC

education's success. Adequate digital infrastructure ensures smooth access to digital tools and resources. The unavailability of learning materials in junior schools is supported by UNESCO (2016) that despite the provision of learners' capitation in Kenya, there is still limited access to textbooks and other instructional resources. Some junior school teachers agreed that despite the majority of them having some knowledge and skills for digital curriculum implementation, lack of instructional resources has been a big barrier on the ground, particularly at the inception of CBC curriculum implementation in most junior schools, not only in Bungoma but likely in other counties.

Inadequate teacher preparedness was cited as a challenge but still can be felt currently in most junior schools. Studies have shown that there is a need for effective professional development for teachers (Mukwa, 2011; Simiyu, Mutsotso & Masibo, 2019). Poor teacher preparedness is disastrous to the learners, denying them the acquisition of significant 21st-century skills and knowledge, such as collaborative learning in teaching languages. Collaborative learning, which can be applied by well-trained teachers, is recognized as an effective instructional approach to enhancing academic performance, social skills and motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Indeed, good quality professional development plays a key role in facilitating teachers to adapt to new emerging global trends in pedagogy and the use of technology. Adequate training further may influence the attitude of teachers positively (Van Dijk & Van der Meijden, 2016).

Understaffing of teachers has been and still is a challenge in junior schools. The gross understaffing of teachers in public schools makes it difficult for teachers to attend to learners in case of emergency issues that call for teacher absenteeism. One teacher has to cover many overwhelming lessons. On the whole, teachers were overwhelmed with the workload as a result of understaffing, especially in sports, fine arts, and even swimming, to mention but a few. Some have resorted to leaving some classes and subjects untaught. Critically, some even claim that they did not have enough time to complete the syllabus, especially in combined subjects like integrated science. This agrees with Ogola (2010), in his study on free education in Kenya's public primary schools, observed that the overload on the part of the teachers was noted well in the phrase "*we feel frustrated since the government knows so well there is an increase in enrolment in schools, but it doesn't want to employ more teachers. We can't cope with the workload.*". This has added more injury to pain, culminating in poor perception on the side of the CBC curriculum implementers. Teacher frustrations have denied them professional motivation, which may make them not implement the CBC curriculum to the best of their ability. They may lack self-drive.

Further, there are other challenges encountered by teachers while implementing competency-based assessment in learning. Indeed, well-organized teacher training through retooling improves curriculum implementation and classroom instructional processes (Kiprotich *et al.*, 2022). The recent ongoing retooling training of junior school teachers is well thought out and of good intention by the Ministry of Education. This concurs with the findings in the research done by Simiyu, Masibo & Mutstso (2019) on Teacher pedagogical preparedness in integrating ICT in instruction in public primary schools in Bungoma County, who alluded that there is a need for providing teachers with

professional training opportunities to enhance on their professional capacity in lesson delivery. This was also emphasized in the research done by Wanjala & Chililia (2020) on mathematics teachers' conceptions of problem-solving and their influence on their classroom practices in secondary schools in Kenya.

Findings and contentious issues in this critical review paper show that although teachers were and are still being retooled in CBC assessment and content, such programmes only take less than a week (3 to 4 days) during holidays. Such short training enables teachers only to have an idea of CBC content/assessment but would lack sufficient knowledge and skills in CBC classroom pedagogy. Further, you retool a teacher who already has the mastery of the subject content. Such rushy training programmes in terms of content, assessment and delivery methods may turn out to be unpopular with time, especially to the young graduate CBC implementers, particularly when it comes to efficiently conducting learner assessments (Robert o, Jane, Lucy n. & Kamau, 2023). It is said that guidance on how to conduct learning and assessment in CBC is usually not given properly in most retooling centres due to inadequate time allocated for training. The question here is: *Is it because of inadequate funds allocated or lack of time?* In CBC, learners take both formative (pre-assessment) and summative (proctored) examinations. There is a lack of properly written guidelines/policies to enable teachers to assess learners.

Assessment may remain a thorny issue for most CBC teachers, although some selected teachers are being trained by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) as head of class 9 assessments next year. In this training, it is said issues on the challenges of the Kenya Junior Secondary Education Assessment (KJSEA) are being brainstormed upon. Usually, teachers' training in CBC assessment may turn out to be minimal. Further still, the training is likely to be done through peer training at most. Sometimes, only a few teachers may be selected for training per school, 2 or at most 3 and then deployed to teach others using the slides given out. In this review paper, such usually produces incompetent curriculum implementers who lack the mastery of the curriculum content and assessment knowledge and skills in professional classroom instruction for this 21st century and beyond.

In addition, a few teachers interviewed sometimes reported that teachers' empowerment in setting and handling assessments in the CBC curriculum was still minimal, especially testing all subjects put together in one examination paper. For example, creative arts have home science, PE, music and others to be taught and question items set and done in one examination paper have turned out to be unpopular, creating poor perception among some junior school teachers. Integrated science has physics, biology, and chemistry to be taught still with teachers monitoring performance per student. Worse still, in these papers, some current CBC teachers may find it a challenge, given that such subjects were never studied at the former secondary level, where some science subjects were elective, although they may have been covered slightly at lower grades. Even teachers teaching them may not understand the content for all combined strands may be for not studying such in the old secondary school system. On the ongoing retooling, the government, through the Ministry of Education requires proper policy,

planning and strategies for empowering CBC-implementing teachers not only at junior schools but at the grades too.

The large class size may also derail CBC pedagogy and assessment and other pedagogical programmes. From the reviewed literature, most Kenyan Public primary schools have a large number of students/pupils per classroom, ranging from 60 to 80 learners in their classrooms. Given that CBC assessment is a continuous process, teachers find it challenging when it comes to assessing individual learners. Large class sizes make it impossible to conduct frequent assessments and provide timely online feedback to students, which are crucial in improving students' performance. A study conducted by Cuseo (2007) shows that large class sizes have a significant and sizeable negative effect on students' performance, which affects teacher perceptions.

In this review paper, the lack of parental support towards school programs has been cited as a thorny challenge. Gonzalez-Mena (2011) defined parental involvement as a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and child (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Effective implementation of the curriculum and monitoring requires the involvement of parents in the education of their children. This is a commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and child. Most parents in the rural villages are still illiterate. They have little knowledge of the new CBC curriculum. This makes it difficult for them to understand what is going on in the curriculum, and they are not able to assist their children even with homework and other required home supervision. This makes the implementation of the CBC curriculum difficult. Lack of parental support and involvement impacts negatively on instruction. This is because studies have confirmed that there is a direct and positive correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement or motivation (Crozier & Reay, 2005).

Both teachers and parents are supposed to work hand in hand as collaborators and co-educators in helping children to learn well. Adequate parental involvement in their children's education increases the children's academic motivation and achievement.

It also promotes better behaviour and social adjustment and children may grow up well into productive, responsible members of society. Parents should provide schools with financial resources to purchase required curriculum materials. The unavailability of parental support is discouraging to teachers in junior schools, resulting in poor perception. In this paper, most parents interviewed in villages have not agreed to migrate psychologically from the 8-4-4 education system to fully implement the new CBC curriculum. A lot is yet to be done by both the national and county governments in this important area. Worse still, CBC by emphasizing immediate employer needs, the new education system is less focused on preparing learners with the flexibility needed for a more uncertain future.

Still, there are grey hair issues that junior school teachers are not sure of addressing in CBC. Such unknown areas have left teachers wondering about the curriculum they are implementing. They entail the amalgamation of subjects to form one big unit that most

teachers who have been in the field never trained in at college. Examples include Social Studies Integrated Science and Creative Arts. This affects teacher perceptions.

Other challenges affecting the teacher's perceptions include inadequate funds, lack of internet connection, and ICT tools. The infrastructure available in primary schools was insufficient for the successful implementation of a competency-based curriculum. Inadequate teaching and learning materials, as well as an unfavourable teaching and learning atmosphere, are discouraging both to the teachers and learners.

2. Recommendations

There is thus a need for the government to give priority to providing teachers with access to ICT skills and knowledge through professional development, quality digital content and ICT infrastructure. Institutions must also invest in professional development programs to train educators to explore the potential of CBC's digital tools and platforms. Educators at higher institutions of learning and teacher diploma colleges should focus on skills development rather than rote learning tactics, using necessary resources and time to design efficient evaluations.

The MoE should urgently design an effective communication strategy to create awareness about the CBC policy, what it entails and how it is to be implemented, particularly for teacher preparedness. Mass media and the national and county administration should popularize CBC and inform parents and communities of what they are expected to do to make it successful. Teachers, parents, pupils and communities, plus other education stakeholders, need to team up to ensure that CBC succeeds.

The government should consider employing more CBC-trained professional teachers to ease the shortage at the junior school level. The government and stakeholders should further devise ways of motivating teachers, including promotion, sponsorship for professional development and rewarding the best performers. The government should, as a matter of priority, design an effective and user-friendly communication strategy whereby teachers, parents, pupils and communities are regularly informed of what they should do to guarantee the success of the programme. In this way, misconceptions on CBC will be eliminated. Institution managers should help parents understand why their involvement in CBC curriculum implementation is so important to their children's school success. Parental involvement in this review paper is a strategy for the enhancement of academic quality and continuous improvement in the learning opportunities and experiences offered by CBC junior schools in Kenya.

3. Conclusion

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) implemented in Kenyan schools is a revolutionary step towards modifying the paradigm of education for the contemporary world. By promoting values such as practicality, creativity, and critical thinking, CBC aims to produce competent learners who are equipped with effective problem-solving

strategies for the current global environment. It is not based on memorization only, as students' abilities, creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork are also developed. Nevertheless, the shift to CBC has revealed important issues. Some of the challenges that have emerged include poor infrastructure, lack of adequate teacher training, unequal distribution of resources, and high costs of implementation. Further, the success and effective delivery of a sustainable education model has also highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement, especially in policy formulation and implementation. Nonetheless, the challenges highlighted should not detract from the potential of CBC to provide guidance on how to grow learners capable of competing internationally and being socially conscious as well. The government and other key stakeholders must direct their efforts towards addressing structural deficiencies, providing a fair distribution of resources, and improving frameworks for educators and parents. Stakeholder involvement and regular review/monitoring will be essential to its effectiveness. If well practised, CBC can put Kenya at the forefront of educational reforms, a model that other wanting nations can emulate in their quest to close the gap between conventional school systems and the contemporary world.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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