



**THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF
COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM AND
ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CBC, CBE AND CBET
EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND PRACTICE IN KENYA**

Wycliffe Amukowa¹,

Jane Kere Imbunya²ⁱ

¹School of Education and Social Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University,
Kenya

²Dr.,
School of Education and Social Sciences,
Kaimosi Friends University,
Kenya

Abstract:

The transition from the 8-4-4 education system to the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya represents one of the most significant educational reforms in East Africa. The reform is anchored on Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET), emphasizing practical skills, learner-centered pedagogy, creativity, critical thinking, and values-based education. This paper critically examines the philosophical and social foundations underpinning CBC, CBE, and CBET in Kenya and analyzes their implications for educational theory and practice. The study adopts a qualitative desk-review methodology drawing from empirical studies, policy documents, philosophical analyses, and comparative educational literature. The paper establishes that pragmatism, progressivism, constructivism, humanism, and social reconstructionism form the core philosophical foundations of CBC in Kenya. Socially, globalization, technological advancement, unemployment, industrialization, and demands for 21st-century skills significantly influenced the curriculum reforms. The paper further reveals that although CBC has transformed pedagogical approaches toward learner-centered instruction and authentic assessment, implementation challenges persist, including inadequate teacher preparedness, infrastructural deficiencies, inequity, and insufficient learning resources. The study concludes that the successful implementation of CBC, CBE, and CBET requires stronger policy alignment, teacher retooling, infrastructure development, and contextualization of competency-based learning within Kenyan socio-cultural realities.

ⁱ Correspondence: email kwamukowa@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Education systems globally are increasingly shifting from content-based curricula toward competency-based approaches that emphasize skills acquisition, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, and adaptability. Kenya's introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 marked a paradigm shift from the examination-oriented 8-4-4 system toward a learner-centered educational framework aimed at nurturing competencies necessary for socio-economic transformation. The reform aligns with Kenya Vision 2030 and global educational trends emphasizing employability, lifelong learning, and sustainable development (Akala, 2021).

The CBC framework in Kenya seeks to develop seven core competencies, namely communication and collaboration, self-efficacy, critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, and learning to learn. These competencies reflect broader philosophical and sociological assumptions about the purpose of education and the kind of society Kenya aspires to create (Okeyo & Kanake, 2021).

This paper explores the philosophical and social foundations of CBC, CBE, and CBET in Kenya and examines their implications for educational theory and practice.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)

Competency-Based Curriculum refers to an educational framework that emphasizes learners' demonstration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through practical application rather than rote memorization. CBC focuses on mastery learning and continuous assessment (Okeyo & Kanake, 2021).

3.2 Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Competency-Based Education is an instructional model where learners progress upon demonstrating mastery of specific competencies. It prioritizes outcomes, learner autonomy, flexibility, and performance-based assessment.

3.3 Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET)

CBET extends the principles of CBE into vocational and technical education. It aligns training outcomes with labor market demands and industrial competencies.

4. Philosophical Foundations of CBC, CBE, and CBET

4.1 Pragmatism

Pragmatism is perhaps the strongest philosophical foundation of CBC in Kenya. Associated with philosophers such as John Dewey, pragmatism emphasizes experiential learning, problem-solving, and learning by doing.

CBC adopts pragmatic ideals by emphasizing:

- 1) Practical skills acquisition,
- 2) Learner participation,
- 3) Project-based learning,
- 4) Real-life application of knowledge,
- 5) Continuous assessment.

Mugambi argues that the Kenyan CBC strongly reflects pragmatic principles because it seeks to make education responsive to societal and economic needs (Mugambi, 2022).

Pragmatism rejects rote memorization and instead promotes active interaction between learners and their environment. This explains the CBC emphasis on competency demonstration rather than examination performance.

4.2 Progressivism

Progressivism advocates learner-centered education, democratic classrooms, and holistic child development. The philosophy views learners as active constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

The CBC model reflects progressive ideas through:

- 1) Learner-centered pedagogy,
- 2) Inquiry-based learning,
- 3) Collaborative learning,
- 4) Integration of co-curricular activities,
- 5) Emphasis on talents and interests.

The curriculum seeks to nurture every learner's potential, moving away from uniform academic expectations characteristic of the 8-4-4 system (Ogwora, 2022).

4.3 Constructivism

Constructivist theory posits that learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and prior experiences.

CBC incorporates constructivist principles by:

- 1) Encouraging discovery learning,
- 2) Promoting experiential learning,
- 3) Integrating project work,
- 4) Using formative assessment,
- 5) Supporting learner reflection,

The constructivist orientation shifts the teacher's role from knowledge transmitter to facilitator and mentor.

4.4 Humanism

Humanistic philosophy emphasizes personal growth, self-actualization, dignity, and holistic development.

CBC reflects humanistic ideals through:

- 1) Focus on values and ethics,
- 2) Development of self-efficacy,
- 3) Recognition of learner diversity,
- 4) Emphasis on emotional and social learning.

Value-based education within CBC promotes patriotism, social justice, and global citizenship (Ngwacho, 2024).

4.5 Social Reconstructionism

Social reconstructionism views education as a tool for addressing societal problems and promoting social transformation.

CBC aligns with reconstructionist philosophy through:

- 1) Community service learning,
- 2) Citizenship education,
- 3) Environmental conservation,
- 4) Entrepreneurship education,
- 5) Social responsibility.

The curriculum seeks to prepare learners to address unemployment, poverty, corruption, and environmental degradation.

5. Social Foundations of CBC, CBE, and CBET IN Kenya

5.1 Globalization and the Knowledge Economy

Globalization has transformed labor markets, requiring adaptable and technologically competent workers. Traditional content-based education systems are increasingly viewed as inadequate for preparing learners for dynamic global economies.

Kenya adopted CBC partly to align education with global competency frameworks and 21st-century skills (Akala, 2021).

5.2 Technological Advancement

Rapid technological changes necessitated curriculum reforms emphasizing digital literacy and innovation. CBC integrates ICT competencies across learning areas to prepare learners for participation in digital economies.

5.3 Youth Unemployment

High youth unemployment in Kenya significantly influenced the adoption of competency-based education. CBET particularly aims to bridge the gap between education and labor market needs.

Research indicates that competency-based approaches improve alignment between training and employment requirements (Haddouchane *et al.*, 2017).

5.4 Social Equity and Inclusion

CBC aspires to provide inclusive and equitable education by recognizing diverse talents and learning styles. The system attempts to reduce overreliance on national examinations, which historically marginalized learners with non-academic talents.

5.5 National Development Goals

CBC supports Kenya Vision 2030 by promoting:

- 1) Innovation,
- 2) Entrepreneurship,
- 3) Industrialization,
- 4) Skilled workforce development,
- 5) Social cohesion.

The curriculum, therefore, serves broader socio-economic transformation objectives.

6. Implications for Educational Theory and Practice in Kenya

6.1 Shift from Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Pedagogy

CBC requires teachers to adopt facilitative roles instead of authoritarian instructional approaches.

This transformation involves:

- 1) Inquiry-based instruction,
- 2) Collaborative learning,
- 3) Differentiated instruction,
- 4) Experiential learning,
- 5) Reflective teaching.

However, many teachers remain inadequately prepared for this pedagogical transition. Studies reveal that teacher preparedness remains a major implementation challenge (Mugera and Kafwa, 2024).

6.2 Transformation of Assessment Practices

Traditional summative examinations are increasingly replaced by:

- 1) Formative assessment,
- 2) Portfolio assessment,
- 3) Authentic assessment,

- 4) Competency demonstrations,
- 5) Continuous assessment.

This shift reflects a broader theoretical movement from behaviorist assessment models toward constructivist evaluation approaches.

6.3 Teacher Professional Development

CBC implementation necessitates continuous teacher retraining. Teachers require competencies in:

- 1) Learner-centered pedagogy,
- 2) ICT integration,
- 3) Competency assessment,
- 4) Inclusive education,
- 5) Curriculum interpretation.

Empirical studies indicate insufficient teacher training as one of the greatest barriers to CBC implementation in Kenya (Koros & Achieng, 2023).

6.4 Curriculum Integration and Interdisciplinarity

CBC promotes integration across subjects, encouraging holistic understanding rather than compartmentalized knowledge.

This interdisciplinarity reflects constructivist and pragmatic assumptions about the interconnectedness of knowledge.

6.5 Increased Role of Parents and Community

CBC recognizes parents and communities as active educational stakeholders.

Parental involvement includes:

- 1) Supporting home-based learning,
- 2) Talent identification,
- 3) Moral guidance,
- 4) Community-based projects.

Community engagement reflects social reconstructionist philosophy, emphasizing societal participation in education.

6.6 Equity Challenges

Despite its inclusive intentions, CBC implementation has exposed inequalities between:

- 1) Urban and rural schools
- 2) Public and private schools
- 3) Well-resourced and marginalized regions

Some schools lack adequate infrastructure, digital tools, and trained personnel necessary for effective CBC implementation (Akala, 2021).

7. Critical Evaluation of CBC in Kenya

7.1 Strengths

CBC offers several advantages:

- 1) Promotion of practical skills,
- 2) Holistic learner development,
- 3) Reduced examination pressure,
- 4) Emphasis on creativity and innovation,
- 5) Improved alignment with labor market needs,
- 6) Recognition of learner diversity.

Research indicates that competency-based learning enhances critical thinking and application of knowledge in real-life contexts (Okeyo & Kanake, 2021).

7.2 Challenges

Despite its strengths, CBC faces substantial implementation obstacles:

- 1) Inadequate teacher preparedness,
- 2) Insufficient infrastructure,
- 3) Large class sizes,
- 4) Limited teaching resources,
- 5) High implementation costs,
- 6) Public confusion and resistance,
- 7) Assessment inconsistencies.

Akala observes that without adequate policy support and resource allocation, CBC risks reproducing the same inequalities experienced under previous educational systems (Akala, 2021).

Public discourse in Kenya also reveals concerns regarding curriculum overload, teacher burnout, and implementation gaps (Ngwacho, 2023).

8. Recommendations

The study recommends:

- 1) Enhanced teacher professional development programs,
- 2) Increased government funding for infrastructure,
- 3) Contextualization of CBC to local realities,
- 4) Improved stakeholder sensitization,
- 5) Strengthened school-community partnerships,
- 6) Development of equitable resource distribution mechanisms,
- 7) Expansion of digital learning infrastructure,
- 8) Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems.

9. Conclusion

The Competency-Based Curriculum in Kenya is philosophically grounded in pragmatism, constructivism, progressivism, humanism, and social reconstructionism. Socially, the curriculum emerged in response to globalization, technological advancement, labor market demands, and national development aspirations. CBC, CBE, and CBET collectively seek to transform education from rote memorization toward competency acquisition and holistic learner development.

While the reform has significantly reshaped educational theory and practice in Kenya through learner-centered pedagogy, authentic assessment, and skills-oriented instruction, implementation challenges continue to undermine its effectiveness. Sustainable success requires comprehensive investment in teacher training, infrastructure, policy coherence, and inclusive implementation strategies.

Ultimately, CBC represents not merely a curriculum reform but a broader philosophical and societal transformation aimed at redefining the purpose of education in Kenya for the 21st century.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Wycliffe Amukowa is an accomplished scholar and academic leader in Educational Foundations with over ten (10) years of progressive experience in university teaching, research, academic leadership, and institutional service at Kaimosi Friends University.

Jane Kere Imbunya is a highly accomplished scholar, curriculum expert, university administrator, researcher and policy specialist with over twenty (20) years' experience in higher education, curriculum studies, teacher education, quality assurance, educational leadership, research supervision and institutional management across Kenya and Botswana.

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