

An Assessment of Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Competency Based Curriculum in Primary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate teachers' views on the challenges facing the implementation of competency based curriculum (CBC) in junior secondary in Kenya. Seventy seven school teachers purposively sampled from twenty two junior secondary schools were involved. Descriptive research design was utilized and data was collected using survey questionnaires consisting of closed and open-ended items. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data resulting from comments from open-ended items was analysed thematically. The result indicate that 80% of the teachers rated the progress of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation in their schools as good. However, the following challenges were identified: some school staffing level was less than 25%; large class sizes, suggesting congested classrooms and high teacher- student ratio; inadequate resources and facilities; lack of adequately CBC trained teachers; lack of textbooks for learners; lack of laboratories for grade seven or junior secondary students, suggesting difficulties associated with teaching of science subjects; lack of computer rooms and computers, suggesting that ICT is theoretically taught in class; subjects covered in grade sevens are very many and lack of funds to purchase the resources or materials needed in the delivery of CBC in schools. The study concludes that implementation of CBC in selected junior secondary schools faces serious challenges associated with both human and physical resources constraints. Large class sizes seriously affected productive interaction of students in class during teaching and learning sessions. Also lack of adequate facilities and both human and physical resources undermines the innovative and practical nature of delivery of the competency based curriculum. Therefore, CBC may not be currently achieving its objectives. The recommendation is that government need to act urgently to safe the situation.

Keywords: teachers, junior secondary schools, competency-based curriculum, Kenya, perceptions, assessment

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Introduction

Implementation of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya continues to experience challenges. However, Kenya is not alone in this aspect, for evidence suggest a number of countries are victims, for instance, Tanzania experiences a number of challenges: lack of in-service teacher training for in CBC; lack of adequate instructional materials overcrowded classroom and low ability learners (Makunja (2016). In Ghana Aquash, Frimpong and Kwame (2007), report on the factors undermining the implementation of Competency Based Training and include: inadequate funding of institutions; inadequate funding institutions; lack of infrastructural development and policy guidelines in instruction. In Rwanda, Nsengimana, Mugabo, Ozewa and Nkundabakura (2021), identify the following challenges: inadequate teaching and learning resources; inadequate training of teachers and lack of infrastructural capacity in schools. This study set out to capture teachers' views on the implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum in junior Secondary Schools in Kenya.

Educational reforms and implications in Kenya

Since independence in 1963, the Kenya education system has undergone three reforms (Akala, 2021). The first one was 7-4-2-3 which lasted for twenty years (Cheptoo and Ramdas, 2020). The policy or system consisted of seven years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and two years of high school and 3-5 years of University education. The policy was replaced by 8-4-4 system of education in 1985 (Cheptoo and Ramada, 2020). According to Simuyu (2001), the 7-4-2-3 system of education was attacked for two major reasons:

- a) The policy was being too academic and therefore not suitable for direct employment. In other words the policy lacked orientation to employment;
- b) The policy encouraged elitism and individualistic attitudes among school leavers, something that was not suitable within the African society milieu.

The issue of lack of orientation to employment has been captured in the Gathachi Report (Government of Kenya, 1976). Similar sentiments have been echoed as well (King and McGrath; 2002).

The second reform was the 8-4-4. The system consisted of 8 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education and 4 years of University education. This system of education was introduced in January, 1985, following the Mackay Report of 1982 recommendations. The system of education was introduced with the assumption that it would orient students towards employment (Zajda, King and McGrath, 2002). In other words, that the policy or system would equip pupils with employable skills such that school dropouts at all levels would be enabled to seek either self-employed or secure employment in the formal or informal sector (Zajda, King and McGrath, 2002). In that way the new policy would orient youths towards self-employment (Zajda, King and McGrath, 2002). The policy strongly emphasized attitudes and skills preparation for the world of work and particularly self-employment (Zajda, King and McGrath, 2002).

Sifuna (1990), cites three events that led to the implementation of 8-4-4 system and include: the 1972 Conference on education at Kericho in Kenya, which stressed the need for integration of rural development; labour organization mission report, entitled "Employed, Incomes and Equality: a strategy for increasing productive employment of 1972 and the recommendation of the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies of 1975.

8-4-4 system of education has been described as a major educational reform in the history of Kenya's system since independence in 1963 (Amutabi, 2003). However, according to Amutabi (2003: 136):

The 8-4-4 system of education introduced in 1985 remain the most radical and perhaps mindless change in the education in Kenya since independence. It has already caused a great devastation to Kenya such that even if it were changed today, the toll on the nation will be felt for many years to come. Its devastation is similar to that of the failed Ujamaa in Tanzania many years after it was officially scrapped.

The 8-4-4 system of education has also been criticized for being broad, expensive and burdensome to pupils and parents (Amutabi, 2003).

A number of commissions were set up to with a view to improving the system of education in Kenya, for instance, the Kamunge Report (Government of Kenya, 1985) and the Koech Report (Government of Kenya, 1999). However, a majority of these reports were either partially implemented or rejected. For instance, the Government of Kenya, (1985) Report on education and training recommended reduction of examination subjects under the 8-4-4 system. This was implemented at the primary school level, therefore it was partially implemented. However, President Moi rejected the Koech Report (Government of Kenya, 1999; (Muya, 2000).

The third educational reform is Competency based Curriculum (CBC). CBC system of education was introduced in Kenya in 2017 and replaced the 8-4-4 policy. The CBC is designed not only to emphasize the significance of developing skills and knowledge but also to apply those competencies to real-life situations (Mulwa; Mwanza; and Kasivu, (2023). It is envisioned that at the end of the learning period every learner should have achieved the following competencies:

- i) Communication and collaboration;
- ii) Critical thinking and problem solving;
- iii) Imagination and creativity;
- iv) Citizenship;
- v) Learning to learn;
- vi) Self-efficacy;
- vii) Digital literacy.

Conceptual understanding of Competency-Based Curriculum

Competency- Based Curriculum (CBC) is a current global educational reform whose implementation cuts across all levels of education including higher institutions of learning, which focuses on acquiring competencies which are defined as ability to do a particular activity to a prescribed standard in solving problems (Mulwa, Mwanza and Kasivu, 2023). A competency-Based Curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than mainly focusing on what they are expected to know (Rothwell, Early and Campbell, 2022). In principle such a curriculum is learner-centered and adaptive to the changing needs of learners, teachers and society (Rothwell, Early and Campbell, 2022). Competency-Based Curriculum means a curriculum in which specific objectives are defined for each of the separate skills taught in training programmes with integrated didactic and practical instructions and successful completion of an examination demonstrating mastery of every skill (Kim, 2015). Competence is a person's ability to practice the knowledge acquired over time ((Jones, Voorhees and Paulson, 2002). Being competent means you don't only have the knowledge to perform a task, but likewise possess the skills to provide solutions that matter to real-life problems (Jones, Voorhees and Paulson, 2002). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022), Competencies are the abilities of a person to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes, demonstrated through behaviour in their performance of tasks in a given context. Further, competence is the state of proficiency of a person to perform the required tasks within a practice activities to a defined standard which equates to having the requisite competencies to do that (WHO) (2022): 11). Also a person's competencies can be observed through the demonstration of the specified behaviours in the context of the tasks performed (WHO, 2022). Further, Competency-Based learning is a self-directed and self-paced student-centered approach (Oyugi, 2015). In other words Competency- Based Education allow learners' progress to new skills as soon as they have demonstrated mastery of the skills at hand (Evans, Landl and Thompson, 2021).

Competency-Based Curriculum was introduced in Kenya in 2017. However, Sifuna and Obonyo (2019) report that it was not systematically planned and implemented. Consequently, several studies have identified a number of challenges facing the implementation of CBC in Kenya and other countries. For instance, Isaboke, Wambiri and Mweru (2021) have identified the following challenges: lack of adequate learning facilities; lack of adequate training of teachers; large class sizes; lack of adequate number of teachers; lack of adequate teaching –learning materials and Ignorance and lack of cooperation on the part of the parents.

Further, in Tanzania, Muneja (2015) identify the following challenges in relationship to CBC: teacher's lack of adequate knowledge on teaching and assessment methods; lack of adequate textbooks and poor quality of instructional materials; lack of ICT tools for instruction; and teachers lack the motivation to implement the curriculum.

In Kenya further challenges have been reported in Machakos County by Wambua and Waweru (2019) and include: inadequate of staff; infrastructure and lack of adequate teaching and learning resources. Also according to KNUT (2019), most public schools did not have PP1 and PP2 classrooms, forcing teaching and learning to be undertaken under a shade or tree. Also majority of the CBC teaching and learning areas lacked approved books, materials and also experienced delayed Government distribution of textbooks to schools.

Further, Marion (2020), reports further challenges and include, large class size and unavailability of teaching materials for practical learning areas such as music and digital literacy tools/resources

In this study, lack of material for digital learning was reported by majority of the teachers. Teachers in the study reported that CBC training was short-lived and not adequate to acquire the prerequisite skills required in the implementation of CBC.

Based on the foregoing reports and highlights, CBC implementation in Kenya and elsewhere is experiencing serious challenges, ranging from inadequate resources and infrastructural development. To large class sizes. The challenges are spread across countries.

Research Method

The study set out to examine challenges associated with the implementation of Competency- Based Curriculum in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design and used survey questionnaires to collect data. The questionnaire format consisted of closed, and open-ended items in order to increase diversity as well as reducing question fatigue (Watson and Coombes) as cited in Makori and Agufana (2020) and Makori and Onderi (2013).

The open-ended items of the questionnaire, allowed respondents to expand or clarify some of their closed-ended responses. And in that way, offered some insights to researchers and readers regarding their perspectives in terms of factors that undermine the implementation of Competency- Based Curriculum in primary schools in Kenya.

The study respondents consisted of 77 teachers purposively selected from 22 junior secondary schools in Nyamira County, Kenya. Nyamira County is one of the 47 counties in Kenya. Respondents were made aware of the purpose of the study and the implications of their involvement. They consented to be involved in the study and completed a consent form. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) resulting in descriptive data. The open-ended information or data resulted in qualitative data which was analysed thematically or categorically.

Results

Characteristics of respondents

Table1: Gender characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	35	46
Female	42	54
Total	77	100

Table2: School Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Student population	less than 200	8	10
	401-600	26	34
	601-800	36	47
	over 1000	7	9
Total		77	100
School location	Rural	59	77
	Urban	18	23

Total		77	100
School sponsorship	Catholic	43	56
	SDA	16	21
	others	18	23
Total		77	100
School nature	Public	50	65
	Private	23	30
	Other	4	5
Total		77	100
KCPE performance	Poor	2	3
	Average	47	61
	Good	22	29
	Excellent	6	8
Total		77	101

Challenges associated with CBC implementation in Kenya.

The result indicate that 80% of the teachers rated the progress of Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation in their schools as good. However, further investigation reveals serious challenges facing the implementation of the curriculum. Some of the challenges or concerns include: some school staffing level was less than 25%; large class sizes, suggesting congested classrooms and high teacher- student ratio; inadequate resources and facilities; lack of adequately CBC trained teachers; lack of textbooks for learners; lack of laboratories for grade seven or junior secondary students, suggesting difficulties associated with teaching of science subjects and that learners experience limited hands on experience; lack of computer rooms and computers, suggesting that ICT is theoretically taught in class; subjects covered in grade sevens are very many and lack of funds to purchase the resources or materials needed in the delivery of CBC in schools.

Inadequate learning and teaching materials and inadequate quality textbooks is also a challenge in the implementation of the CBC. One of the respondents commented that: “the government has not provided the required resources for proper implementation of CBC. He further noted that the resources for the implementation are not adequate”. (Mean=2.21, SD=0.713).

Inadequate human resource is one of the greatest challenges of the implementation of the CBC. Another respondent also responded that “the understaffing of teachers in public schools in Kenya is an issue that has persisted in the education system for a very long time and the Teachers Service Commission has acknowledged this and said that primary schools alone across the country has a shortage of about fifty thousand teachers”.

This study finds that the teaching capacity of staff is approximately 50% (mean=2.86, SD=0.899) with a skewness of -0.157 implying that the staff capacity is quite low.

Large class sizes, which are classes that have more than the optimum number recommended by the government are a challenge to the implementation of the CBC and they arise due to the policies of provision of access to education and free primary education/free secondary education. This study established that the average number of learners per class was approximately 37 – 42 (mean=3.66, SD=1.188). This could have an issue in delivery of content to learners since the human resource noted from the study is low.

Discussion and interpretation

This study has established inadequate teaching and learning resources as key challenge affecting the implementation of CBC among the schools that participated in the study. This has also been supported in the literature (Isaboke, Wambui and Mweru, 2021). For instance, lack of laboratories for grade seven or junior secondary students, reflects difficulties associated with teaching of science subjects and that learners experience limited hands on experience opportunities; lack of computer rooms and computers, suggesting that ICT is theoretically taught in class. There is also the issue of lack of adequately CBC trained teachers. On this Parker, et al., (2018) observe that the quality of the educational experience offered by the instructor is the most important element that influences learners’ attitude towards school science (Parker, et al., 2018). One explanation for positive student attitudes towards classroom science is a dearth of skilled science teachers (Dorsah, et al., 2024).

The other challenge identified in the study is lack of adequate human resource. This is also supported in the literature (Isaboke, Wambui and Mweru, 2021). They observe that the country does not have adequately trained teachers to handle CBC implementation.

The other challenge is large class sizes. This has also been captured by Isaboke, Wambui and Mweru (2021). In their study, they have reported large size as a major challenge affecting the implementation of CBC in Kenya.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the study is that implementation of CBC in junior secondary schools in the selected junior secondary schools faces serious challenges associated with both human and physical resources. Large class sizes seriously affected productive interaction of students in class during the lesson. Also lack of adequate facilities and both human and physical resources undermines the innovative and practical nature of delivery of the competency based curriculum. Therefore, CBC may not be currently achieving its objectives.

Recommendation

The government to support schools by providing adequate teaching and learning resources. Also the government to consider moving junior secondary from primary schools to secondary schools and primary schools have no laboratories for handling science subjects.

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