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Conceptualizing competency-based curriculum: A critical analysis of CBC implementation among pre-primary schools in rural Kenya

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Abstract

Competency-based curriculum is a new programme in Kenya whose implementation faces a myriad of challenges amid the posted successes. Competency-based curriculum was rolled out in the year 2017 and quite some successes have been posted. This is notwithstanding the various challenges it faces so far. This study examined teachers' level of competencies as a precursor of effective implementation of the CBC. The study focused on all pre-primary school centres in Embu County. The key independent variable of the study was teachers' competencies and preparedness. The study also investigated CBC implementation levels since its inception in 2017. The study was anchored on the *theory of curriculum implementation* (Gross, 1971). Purposive sampling was employed in identifying the study locale whereas simple random sampling was employed to draw a study sample size of 10%. *Ex post facto* research design was adopted since no manipulation of the study variables could be envisaged. Exploratory survey methodology was employed in collecting data. Data was collected using questionnaire, a check-list and an interview schedule. Data was analyzed using descriptive techniques with the help of the SPSS version 29. Results observed that there were low levels of CBC implementation associated and were significantly associated with low levels of teacher competencies. The study recommended to government to upscale teacher competencies and preparedness through training and retooling programmes.

Keywords: Conceptualizing, competency, CBC, implementation

1. Introduction

Globally, most countries are fast realigning their educational programs to innovative curricula which promote the development of desirable competencies and skills. The implementation of the Competence-Based education can be traced back to the United States of America during the 1960s (Takahashi, Waddell, Kennedy & Hodges, 2011) ^[11]. Initially, the competency-based approach was introduced in teachers' training colleges as part of efforts to reform teacher education.

The United States has since witnessed implementation of several concepts related to competency-based education, including competency-based assessments, at the different educational levels (Njeng'ere & Ji, 2017) ^[9].

According to Johnstone and Soares (2014), Competency-Based Education (CBE) is a transformational force and innovation. Accordingly, CBE fundamentally reshapes the educational landscape of a country by emphasizing on the mastery of and practical application of essential knowledge and skills in real-time contexts. The approach emphasizes on connections between academics and employment markets thus leading to a clearer comprehension of the competencies necessary for students to thrive in both their professions and real lives.

In Africa change in educational programs is slow due to the technological limitations and the issue of globalization. Most African countries are experiencing challenges in keeping up with the dynamics in international standards and the advances of the knowledge economy (Cheptoo and Ramadas 2019). Therefore, the need for the adoption of Competency-Based Curriculum should be accelerated to bring new trends to the African education in order to be at par with the global trends. The CBC lays emphasis on competencies of the graduate that are fundamental in employment and the job market.

Teachers form an integral component of any curriculum process. Kenya is in the middle of rolling out CBC effective 2017. This process has been marred with a number of teething challenges among them teacher efficacy and readiness, school-related factors and teacher-child ratio.

Studies on CBC implementation has shown that teachers' pedagogical preparedness play a pivotal role in ensuring smooth roll-out of any curriculum (Momanyi, & Rop, 2019; Muchira, Morris, Wawire, & Oh, 2023) [7, 8].

This paper examined teacher-related factors that plays a precursor to effective implementation of CBC in Kenya. The study was conducted in Embu County Kenya.

The Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to assess teacher-related factors affecting effective and smooth implementation of the CBC in Kenya. Specifically, the study aimed at examining the extent of CBC implementation among lower grades of primary schools in Embu County Kenya.

Literature Review

The concept of competence-based education is fast catching up to with both developed and developing nations globally. Curriculum is the vehicle through which a country empowers its citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that empower and allows for personal and national development: Njeng'ere, David, Lili Ji, (2017) [9]. Therefore, a curriculum should, meet the needs of the individual citizens and those of the nation. Consistent with the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), curriculum change was necessary in the Kenyan.

This is in line with the dynamics witnessed in the job market particularly among developing nations. Nations are fast aligning their educational programmes in a manner that ensures the graduates have the requisite competencies to carry out tasks innovatively and with passion.

Teachers in this regard play a crucial role in curriculum implementation as they provide essential guidance and support. Pedagogically the teachers must be read and prepared for this to help the learner acquire the skills as intended. Tutors impart in the learners the necessary skills and concepts that help to develop their potentials (Syomwene, 2013) [11].

Countries like New Zealand, the new thinking that all Curricula focuses on the how and what the learner should achieve through the schools. The shift in education is now more focused on the future thus laying greater emphasis on enabling learners acquire pertinent competencies outlined in the government's the 2007 document (Harris, E. (2017).

In Tanzania, Komba and Mwandaji (2015) revealed that there

was a significant majority of the teachers (86%) who lacked the necessary understanding of CBC content and pedagogical skills as observed in the curriculum implementation.

In Kenya, a study conducted by Waweru (2018) [14] examined the implementation of CBC in lower primary schools and found that 98.8 percent of the teachers were unprepared to implement the competency-based curriculum. This brings into question the readiness and effectiveness of teachers to implement CBC in our schools. Other studies in Kenya (Momanyi & Rop, 2019 & Gesare, Mweru and Wambiri, 2021) [7] have established that teachers were inadequately prepared for CBC implementation besides inadequate teaching/learning resources. This revelation formed the basis of the current study that sought to determine teachers' levels of preparedness and as a precursor to CBC implementation.

Research Methodology

This research adopted ex -post facto design. The researchers could not envisage actual manipulation of the independent variables. The design was deemed appropriate since the study could not envisage manipulation of the study variables whose effects have already been felt. It is also known as "after-the-fact" design. The locale of the study was Embu County which according to Uwezo, (2012-2019) [13] assessment reports was achieving below the National grid. Mixed methods approach was employed that enabled the researchers to collect, collate and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswel, 2009) [2]. Questionnaire, interview schedule, and observation check-list were used to generate data on the contextual constraints affecting the implementation of CBC in pre-primary school centres and information on teachers' training and competence.

Findings of the Study

This report was based on the following two null hypotheses;

1. There is no a significant difference in the implementation of CBC between public and private pre-primary schools in Embu County.
2. There no significant relationship between teachers' competency in CBC and its implementation among pre-primary schools.

The following section below presents the results and discussions of the findings.

Implementation of CBC in both public and private pre-primary schools analysis showed that although overall CBC implementation was still below expectation, public pre-primary schools emerged well compared with their public counterparts. The table below illustrates the findings.

Table 1: Implementation of CBC in Public and Private Pre-primary Schools

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
CBC	Equal variances assumed	12.3	.001	2.2	60	.033	.228	.105	.018	.437
	Equal variances not assumed			2.7	59.0	.011	.228	.086	.054	.401

The table above shows a mean difference of 0.228 in the implementation of CBC between public and private pre-primary teachers' responses while the p-value of 0.033 indicates some difference of CBC implementation between the two categories of schools, with a significance level of

P=0.001. The null hypothesis was rejected meaning that public pre-primary school teachers had an upper hand on CBC implementation as opposed to those in private pre-primary schools.

To further understand the levels of curriculum

implementation the researchers conducted a non-participant observation on how teachers prepared and conducted their

day-to-day classroom lessons in the CBC context. Table 2 below further illustrate the findings.

Table 2: Classroom observation Mean Scores on Teachers Implementation of CBC

Individual Mean Scores in Teachers Implementation of CBC					
Aspect of Implementation	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
1. Draws CBC schemes of work	62	1	3	2.74	.510
2. Develops CBC lesson plans	62	1	3	2.56	.643
3. Uses CBC lesson plans	62	1	3	2.35	.680
4. Uses learner centred approaches in teaching	62	1	3	2.66	.571
5. Understands the CBC core values	62	1	3	2.31	.692
6. Evaluates learners using competency-based assessments	62	1	3	2.29	.755
7. Keeps up-to date individual records	62	1	3	2.53	.646
8. Engages learners in hands on experience activities	62	1	3	2.60	.613
9. Infuses pertinent and contemporary issues	62	1	3	2.32	.647
10. Employs collaborative learning	62	1	3	2.69	.531
11. Promotes critical thinking	62	1	3	2.39	.636
12. Uses individualized learning	62	1	3	2.24	.803
13. Uses criterion assessment	62	1	3	2.05	.858
14. Uses formative evaluations	62	1	3	2.34	.676
15. Uses collaborative learning	62	1	3	2.47	.646
16. Engages parents in enhancing learning activities	62	1	3	2.26	.571
17. Uses digital devices to enhance learning	62	1	3	1.37	.683
18. Valid (N)	62				

Teachers were rated on a scale of 1- 3 regarding various aspects of implementing CBC where, 1 was never, 2 rarely while 3 always. These aspects were assumed to be teachers' levels of competencies. Of particular importance are the items; the teachers' use of CBC lesson plans had a computed mean of 2.35; whereas, whether the teachers understand the CBC core values had a mean of 2.31 and further whether the teachers engaged learners in hands-on-experience activities, the mean was 2.26. All the means across the activities shows that none of the observed attributes scored near the expected maximum mean score of 3. This means that CBC implementation is still far from being fully embraced and implemented by the teachers. The study is consistent with Komba and Mwandaji (2015) whose study explored the challenges teachers encountered in implementing the competence-based education curriculum in secondary schools in Tanzania. The study findings indicated that teachers encountered various challenges hence did not effectively roll out the CBE as would be expected, partly due to inadequate training. Similar challenges are evident in other similar studies (Muchira, Morris, Wawire, & Oh, 2023) [8].

Recommendations of the Study

This study recommended that the government of Kenya escalate teacher-training and induction programmes on CBC content and pedagogical skills in order to achieve the desired level of CBC implementation at all the educational levels. The findings reveals that there is some level of apathy and ill-preparedness among teachers in CBC roll-out. The teachers need proper training on both content and pedagogical approaches in CBC implementation.

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