

# Parental Perceptions on the Introduction of Competence-Based Curriculum in Public Day Primary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) is being adopted in Kenya, emphasizing practical skills for real-world application. While the effects of CBC on learners have been studied, its impact on parents' mental health remains unexplored. This study explores the perceptions of parents on the CBC in Nairobi County, Kenya. Using Epstein's parental involvement model and Cognitive Behavioral Theory as the theoretical framework, a qualitative research approach was employed. The researcher targeted parents with children who are CBC learners of upper primary in Public Day Schools in Nairobi County. Data was collected from 12 participants sampled through multi stage sampling technique. Data was collected using detailed interviews and questionnaires on parents' perceptions of CBC and analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that parents generally view CBC positively, believing it equips children with practical skills and values essential for their future success. Parents also appreciate CBC for strengthening family bonds and fostering innovative learning approaches. However, they also encounter challenges like feeling overwhelmed by CBC's demands, confusion over assessment methods, and struggles to support their children due to educational and cultural barriers. The study recommends improving CBC implementation and parental involvement by focusing on clear communication between schools and parents, supporting those without skills to support their children's projects.

**Keywords:** Competency-Based Curriculum, Parental involvement, Parental perceptions, Communication, Challenges, Emotional connection

## INTRODUCTION

Competence Based Curriculum is an approach that emphasizes the acquisition of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, as well as the application of these skills in real-world contexts. According to Ndiokubwayo and Habiyaemye (2018), the curriculum serves as a conduit through which a nation instills vital knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in its populace.

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) originated in America in 1957 (Curry & Docherty, 2017), and was later adopted in Australia in 1990 due to technological and economic advancements. In Europe, particularly the UK, CBC was embraced to combat high youth unemployment during economic downturns (Sotco et al., 2018). In Africa, CBC has historical roots that predate colonial times. Since 2005, developing countries have increasingly adopted CBC from developed nations. In Africa, CBC is seen as a curriculum improvement that meets local and global learner needs and addresses emerging societal issues (Mogere & Mbataru, 2023).

In Kenya, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), introduced in 2017 by KICD to replace the 8-4-4 system, emphasizes the crucial role of parental involvement. Principles like Parental Empowerment and Engagement (PE&E) underscore the importance of parents working with schools to help children develop fully. The Guidelines aim to boost parents' ability to nurture their child's potential by enhancing their skills and motivation. Teachers and parents are expected to collaborate closely to achieve CBC's mission. Piliyesi et al. (2020) agree

that both parents and schools share the responsibility of creating a supportive environment for children to reach their full potential.

Nigussie (2021) explored parental perspectives on involvement in their children's academic success, drawing on Epstein's theory of parental involvement and Moll's funds of knowledge theory. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively sampled participants, the study revealed inconsistencies in parental involvement due to unfamiliarity with school activities, time constraints, and scheduling conflicts. These findings underscore the importance of addressing barriers to parental engagement to enhance the effectiveness of CBC.

Jory (2023) conducted a descriptive study to assess the extent of parental and guardian comprehension and endorsement of British Columbia's New Curriculum. Using an electronic survey with 210 participants, the findings indicated moderate levels of understanding and support among parents and guardians. This study highlights the necessity of enhancing parental comprehension to foster better support for curriculum implementation.

Yulianti and Droop (2018) examined socioeconomic, demographic, and parental engagement variables influencing children's academic achievement in Indonesia. They found that parents prioritize education more at home than in formal schooling, with higher involvement from urban and highly educated parents. These findings highlight the varying degrees of parental engagement and its impact on educational outcomes, stressing the need for inclusive strategies in CBC to accommodate diverse parental backgrounds.

Sadeq et al. (2020) scrutinized factors hindering CBC progression in Kuwait's English curriculum through a mixed-method design. Teachers reported high satisfaction with CBC's evaluation schemes and educational enrichment but expressed moderate satisfaction regarding its accommodation of different learning styles and its role in developing students' skills. The study also highlighted general resistance to change and insufficient parental awareness of CBC. This points to the necessity for comprehensive training and sensitization programs for both teachers and parents.

Hasnat (2016) investigated parental involvement in children's education in rural Bangladesh, employing a qualitative case study approach. The study revealed discomfort among parents in approaching schools and a lack of recognition of their roles in their children's education. This underscores the need for greater informational support to empower parents in educational settings, a crucial aspect for successful CBC implementation.

Mwarari et al. (2020) examined the challenges and opportunities in parental collaboration with schools in Kenya, focusing on parents of early-year students. Grounded in Epstein's theory, the study revealed that parents recognized the importance of home-school collaboration but faced barriers in effective engagement. This emphasizes the need for strategies to enhance parental involvement in CBC, fostering holistic development in children.

Sifuna and Obonyo (2019) addressed the lack of parental engagement in CBC implementation in Kenya. The study highlighted the insufficient induction of parents by schools, resulting in uncooperative attitudes. This calls for more structured induction and engagement processes to improve parental support and cooperation.

Kubai (2020) investigated obstacles in implementing Competency-Based Assessment within CBC in Nairobi County, focusing on grade 6 teachers. The study revealed a negative attitude among educational stakeholders and emphasized the pivotal role of parents. This finding stresses the importance of addressing stakeholder attitudes and involving parents as key partners in the educational process.

## **Theoretical framework**

The study was grounded on Epstein's Parental Involvement Model and Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT). Epstein's model highlights the importance of school-family collaboration, suggesting that active parental involvement in education enhances children's academic and social outcomes (Epstein, et al.2019). CBT focuses on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, offering insights into how parents' perceptions of CBC influence their perspectives.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was employed. The target population was parents of upper primary learners in public day schools in Nairobi County. Multi-stage sampling resulted in 12 participants. Data was collected using detailed interview guide. Supplementary data from sources like libraries and the internet were also gathered. Data was analyzed thematically and presented in themes. Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Psychology and Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, as well as from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Prior to participation, all individual participants provided informed consent for their involvement in the study.

## RESULTS

### Sample Characteristics

The study interviewed 12 participants selected purposefully to reflect a diverse demographic profile. Participants included 5 males and 7 females, covering a range of ages primarily centered around 37 years old. The majority were married, with significant representation from single individuals, and smaller numbers of divorced and widowed participants. Religious diversity was evident, with Christians comprising the majority, alongside Muslims and Hindus. Education levels varied, with several participants having tertiary education backgrounds, potentially influencing their perspectives on CBC. Occupationally, participants were employed across different sectors, influencing their availability, perspectives on education, and financial resources for supporting their children's education.

### Findings

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of parents on CBC. The results are presented in terms of themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes highlight various aspects of parents' views and experiences with the CBC framework. Participants were asked about their insights on educating a child within the CBC framework. The analysis revealed the following themes:

**Hopefulness:** Parents were optimistic about CBC, believing it provided a holistic and practical education that prepared their children for real-world challenges. Here are several quotes taken from the discussion.

*"It's been interesting to see how my child engages with the curriculum, and I think it's preparing them for the future in a different way than before."* (Participant L02, Personal Communication, November 23, 2023).

*"I believe CBC offers a more well-rounded education for my child. It's exciting to see a child learning in a way that's relevant to the real world."* (Participant L06, Personal Communication, December 13, 2023).

**Overwhelming:** Many parents felt overwhelmed by the curriculum's demands, finding it challenging and burdensome to support their children's learning effectively.

A participant mentioned:

*"It seems like the curriculum requires parents to take on assignments rather than the children themselves, with the children acting more as coordinators. Personally, I find this challenging and overwhelming."* (Participant L04, Personal Communication, December, 01 2023).

**Resourcefulness:** Parents may invent ways to support their children in the journey of their education. One participant disclosed that CBC makes parents to think outside the box and engage in unconventional activities. The participant mentioned:

*"A competency-based curriculum has the potential to inspire remarkable creativity. My son and I recently embarked on a unique quest at the shopping center in search of bottle tops for a make a shaker."* (Participant L05, Personal Communication, December 06, 2023).

**Confusion in Assessment Methods:** There was significant confusion and concern about CBC's assessment methods, with parents unsure how their children's progress was being evaluated. The following statements were replicated verbatim:

*"I'm concerned about the assessment methods. It seems less clear how CBC will evaluate my child's progress compared to traditional exams. I worry that this could affect their future opportunities."* (Participant L01, Personal Communication, November 20, 2023).

*"I worry about how they'll assess my child's progress under CBC. Will it be fair, and will it adequately reflect their learning?"* (Participant L04, Personal Communication, December, 01 2023).

**Communication Breakdown:** Effective communication between schools and parents yields multiple benefits. Participants expressed concern about receiving last-minute instructions. They stated:

*"On several occasions, I have gone home after work only to find my child with a list of several items I was supposed to buy for the next day's lesson which had not been communicated earlier."* (Participant L05, Personal Communication, December 06, 2023).

*"CBC lacks a clear roadmap. The government communicates last minutes after so much speculations from the public."* (Participant L12, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

**Incompetence:** Parents who have limited education themselves may struggle to comprehend complex learning materials or teaching methods, making it difficult for them to assist their children with homework or school projects. Participants expressed struggling to comprehend their children's learning process and effectively assist with extended home activities.

*"Sometimes, I struggle to understand what my child is learning or how to help him with his home assignments."* (Participant L07, Personal Communication, December 13, 2023).

The second question prompted participants to share any particular positive occurrences or observations they experienced with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). The themes that was reported were interpersonal connection and intergenerational learning.

**Disconnection:** Participants expressed a sense of cultural disconnection or loss due to their inability to fluently engage with their native language and traditions.

*"The most daunting task I faced was composing a traditional wedding song. I struggled particularly because I lack fluency in my native language. When my daughter inquired about the reason behind this difficulty, I found myself at a loss for words."* (Participant L10, Personal Communication, December 27, 2023).

**Interpersonal connection:** Another aspect entailed participants articulating how CBC affected their relationship with their children. Participants highlighted how CBC activities provided them with opportunities for quality bonding time with their children. The following statements were quoted verbatim:

*"Sitting and making these scarecrows was a great bonding time for us."* (Participant L02, Personal Communication, November 23, 2023).

*"CBC has given my child and me platforms for discussion, bringing us closer and providing opportunities for quality time together."* (Participant L09, Personal Communication, December 22, 2023).

**Intergenerational learning:** The technological proficiency and methods of knowledge management, retrieval, and dissemination vary across different generations. The present cohort of learners in grades 4 to 6 represents the Alpha generation, which comprises our primary school learners who grow up with lots of digital stuff like smartphones and tablets. One participant joyfully conveyed:

*"I'm grateful that my child is so good with technology. Honestly, I barely know how to turn on a computer. But*



*he helps me with everything, from setting up emails to paying bills online. It's like having my own personal tech support! Thanks to CBC.*" (Participant L04, Personal Communication, December 01, 2023).

Participants were also asked to describe any specific negative occurrences or observations they had with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). The revealed themes mentioned were:

**Disappointment:** Participants expressed that the need for specific materials for assignments or projects can pose logistical challenges, especially for parents living in urban areas where such resources may not be readily available. One quotation was:

*My daughter came home late and asked for a branch of sisal for a class activity. The fact that we live in town made it challenging. The only available source at that time was the flower bed at the church which was quite a distance. It was a compromising and inconvenient situation for both of us. I couldn't help but feel frustrated since I couldn't go to church at the time.*" (Participant L08, Personal Communication, December 18, 2023).

**Anxiety:** Assessment is critical in helping parents understand and support their children's learning. Participants expressed that they found the assessment methods complex and struggled to understand their impact on their child's education. A parent echoed:

*"Despite our resources, CBC has presented its share of challenges for us. The assessment methods are complex, and it's been difficult to understand how they impact my child's education. I've had to spend a lot of time researching and seeking out additional support to help my child succeed. It's been stressful at times, and I worry about the long-term effects of this uncertainty on my child's academic journey."* (Participant L03, Personal Communication, November 29, 2023).

Another question asked participants to express how the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) had impacted their relationship with their children. The themes revealed from the narratives were: parental support, emotional connection, intellectual growth, and strain and relationship enhancement.

**Parental Support:** Participants highlighted how CBC led to increased parental involvement in their children's education. They reported spending more time assisting their children with CBC-related activities, such as homework and projects. Two participants echoed:

*"I've become more involved in my child's education because of CBC. We discuss their activities, and it's brought us closer."* (Participant L04, Personal Communication, December 01, 2023).

*"The teacher gives me regular updates on my child's progress which have helped me be more involved in their education."* (Participant L07, Personal Communication, December 13, 2023).

**Emotional Connection:** Many participants described how CBC strengthened their bond with their children. Engaging in educational activities together, such as completing assignments or discussing schoolwork, provided opportunities for quality time and meaningful interactions. The responses echoed were:

*"CBC has given my child and me platforms for discussion, bringing us closer and providing opportunities for quality time together."* (Participant L05, Personal Communication, December 06, 2023).

*"Sitting and making these scarecrows was a great bonding time for us."* (Participant L09, Personal Communication, December 22, 2023).

**Intellectual growth:** The narratives revealed that CBC facilitated educational discussions between parents and their children. Parents reported engaging in conversations about CBC-related topics, such as assignments, learning objectives, and academic progress. Some of the quotations from the discussion are indicated below:

*"I enjoy helping them with their schoolwork and watching them grow academically."* (Participant L11, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

"CBC activities have broadened my own knowledge." (Participant L12, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

**Strain:** Some participants expressed experiencing challenges and tension in their relationship with their children due to CBC. These challenges stemmed from disagreements over schoolwork, academic pressure, or difficulty understanding CBC concepts. The following statements were copied verbatim:

"Sometimes, I struggle to help them with their schoolwork because of my own limited education, but we've found ways to overcome those challenges together." (Participant L03, Personal Communication, November 29, 2023).

"There have been moments of tension when we disagree on how to approach certain assignments or when the workload becomes overwhelming." (Participant L06, Personal Communication, December 13, 2023).

**Relationship Enhancement:** Participants indicated that CBC had a positive impact on their relationship with their children. The majority of participants viewed CBC as an opportunity to strengthen their bond and engage more actively in their children's education. The following statements were duplicated without alteration:

"CBC has become a source of family activities for us. It has created cherished memories and strengthened our connection." (Participant L01, Personal Communication, November 20, 2023).

"Since CBC started, I've noticed a positive change in my relationship with my child. We spend more time together working on homework and discussing what they're learning in school." (Participant L09, Personal Communication, December 22, 2023).

The researcher also asked participants about the impact of assisting their child with CBC-related activities on their individual selves. Themes that came out include; self-development, emotional wellbeing and doubt.

**Self-Development:** Participants reported experiencing personal growth and learning as a result of assisting their child with CBC tasks. They mentioned that engaging in educational discussions and activities challenged them to think critically, discover new interests, and broaden their knowledge. The following statements were replicated verbatim:

"Supporting my child with CBC tasks has sharpened my critical thinking skills. Their questions and analysis often lead us to have insightful discussions, which challenge me to think more critically as well." (Participant L12, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

"Thanks to CBC activities, I have discovered new interests and passions I initially knew little about." (Participant L12, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

**Emotional wellbeing:** Participants described experiencing moments of satisfaction and progress while assisting their child with CBC-related activities. The following statements were replicated exactly as stated:

"CBC has pushed me out of my comfort zone, but I've learned to adapt." (Participant L03, Personal Communication, November 29, 2023).

"Assisting my child with CBC activities has been a mixed experience. There are moments of satisfaction when I see my child making progress, but there's also pressure to ensure they meet the curriculum requirements. It's a constant juggle, and I often find myself feeling stressed about meeting expectations." (Participant L04, Personal Communication, December 01, 2023).

"There's a sense of fulfillment in seeing my child thrive academically, but it can also be demanding to maintain high standards." (Participant L07, Personal Communication, December 13, 2023).

**Uncertainty:** There were concerns about their adequacy in supporting their child's academic success under the CBC framework. Some participants worried about whether they were doing enough to help their child succeed academically and felt pressure to meet curriculum expectations. A participant uttered:

*"Sometimes, I worry that I'm not doing enough to help my child succeed academically."* (Participant L12, Personal Communication, December 28, 2023).

## DISCUSSION

The perceptions of parents on the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reveal a mix of optimism, challenges, and adaptability. Parents are generally hopeful about CBC, seeing it as a practical and holistic approach that prepares their children for real-world challenges (Amunga et al., 2020). They believe CBC helps students develop the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values for future success. This aligns with Epstein's Parental Involvement Model, which emphasizes the importance of school-family collaboration in enhancing children's academic and social outcomes (Epstein et al., 2019).

However, many parents feel overwhelmed by the demands of CBC. They find it challenging to support their children, especially those with low literacy levels or low-income backgrounds (Orina, 2020). Parental involvement in homework can lead to fatigue, frustration, and conflict between parents and children (O'Toole et al., 2019). These emotional responses resonate with Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), which focuses on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The challenges parents face in supporting CBC can affect their perceptions and interactions, influencing their overall experience.

Despite these challenges, some parents show remarkable resourcefulness, finding creative ways to support their children's education. This fosters a collaborative and innovative family environment. This resourcefulness aligns with the principles of CBT, as parents adapt their strategies to cope with the demands of CBC, thereby positively influencing their children's learning outcomes.

A significant concern among parents is the confusion surrounding CBC's assessment methods. They are unsure how their children's progress is evaluated, leading to anxiety about the fairness and effectiveness of these assessments (Kubai, 2023). Effective communication between schools and parents is crucial for CBC's success. However, many parents express frustration over receiving last-minute instructions and unclear communication from schools, highlighting the need for better coordination and transparency. These concerns about communication and assessment methods are consistent with Epstein's model, which underscores the importance of clear and consistent communication between schools and families.

Parents with limited education struggle to understand complex learning materials and teaching methods, making it difficult to help their children with homework. This issue is particularly pronounced for parents educated under the previous 8:4:4 system (Jesse and Olela, 2022). Some parents feel a cultural disconnection due to their inability to engage fluently with their native language and traditions. This can lead to a reevaluation of cultural identity and heritage.

On a positive note, CBC activities provide opportunities for quality bonding time between parents and children, strengthening their relationships (Doctoroff and Arnold, 2017). CBC also facilitates intergenerational learning, particularly in technology, helping parents enhance their own skills. This intergenerational learning reflects the collaborative aspects of Epstein's model, where family involvement extends beyond traditional roles to include mutual learning experiences.

Parents face logistical challenges in acquiring specific materials for assignments, especially in urban areas. This can lead to frustration and compromise educational activities. The complexity of CBC's assessment methods also causes anxiety among parents. While CBC has many positive impacts, it can also strain parent-child relationships. Disagreements over schoolwork and academic pressure contribute to tension within families. However, parents also report moments of emotional connection and intellectual growth.

Helping children with CBC tasks leads to personal growth for parents. Engaging in educational discussions and activities challenges them to think critically and discover new interests. Despite the stress, parents experience moments of satisfaction and fulfillment, reflecting the value they place on their children's education. This personal growth and satisfaction align with the principles of CBT, highlighting how positive interactions and accomplishments can enhance parents' perceptions and well-being.

Parents often feel uncertain about their ability to support their children's academic success under CBC. This highlights the need for additional resources and support.

## CONCLUSION

Parents have mixed feelings about CBC. They are hopeful about its ability to prepare their children for the future but feel overwhelmed by its demands. This often leads to fatigue, frustration, and conflicts, especially among parents with low literacy or low-income backgrounds. Despite these challenges, some parents are resourceful and find creative ways to support their children's education, creating a positive family environment.

Confusion about CBC's assessment methods and poor communication from schools add to parents' difficulties. Parents with limited education struggle to understand the new curriculum, and some feel disconnected from their cultural roots. However, CBC also offers chances for parents to bond with their children, learn new skills, and experience personal growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends to enhance communication channels between schools and parents, ensuring clarity and timeliness in information sharing. Schools should provide support programs for parents, especially those with lower educational backgrounds, to help them understand and engage effectively with CBC. Additionally, simplifying assessment methods and addressing logistical challenges in accessing educational materials can alleviate parental concerns and enhance their involvement in children's education under CBC.

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