

Parental Preparedness and Participation in the Implementation of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum: Evidence from Bungoma North and Ruiru Sub-Counties

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ABSTRACT

As part of curriculum reforms, the Kenyan government, through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), adopted the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 and rolled it out in early years' education in 2019. The CBC emphasizes active parental engagement in children's learning. This study assessed the preparedness of parents for effective implementation of CBC in Bungoma and Ruiru Sub-Counties. Specifically, it examined parents' awareness of their roles, the extent of their participation, their perceptions of CBC, and the challenges they face in supporting implementation. Using a descriptive survey design, the study targeted 75 primary schools and sampled 20 schools, 126 parents, and 21 lower primary teachers. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that most parents were not adequately prepared to perform their roles in CBC implementation. Many lacked a clear understanding of CBC expectations, faced financial and time constraints, and experienced limited communication from schools. Despite these challenges, parents generally held a positive attitude towards the curriculum. The study concludes that sustained parental sensitization and engagement are crucial for successful CBC implementation. It recommends continuous monitoring and evaluation, with structured feedback from implementers and stakeholders to strengthen and refine the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum implementation literature consistently emphasizes teacher preparedness as a critical determinant of educational reform success (Fullan, 2007; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Accordingly, when Kenya adopted the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 and rolled it out in early years' education in 2019, significant attention was directed toward retraining and retooling teachers through in-service programs organized by the Ministry of Education (Republic of Kenya, 2017). However, while teacher preparation received substantial focus, comparable attention has not been extended to parents—despite their pivotal role in supporting CBC implementation.

From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), the parent occupies a central position within the child's microsystem, directly influencing learning and development. Curriculum reforms such as the CBC cannot succeed without acknowledging the interconnected nature of the child's home and school environments. Effective implementation thus demands an active partnership between parents and teachers. Within the CBC framework, parents are expected to engage with their children's learning both at home and in school, serving as co-educators who reinforce knowledge, skills, and values introduced in the classroom.

Analogous to how society embraced a "new normal" during the COVID-19 pandemic through behavioral adaptation, CBC introduces a new normal for parents in the educational sphere. Traditionally, parental involvement was limited to signing report cards and monitoring homework; roles that were largely supervisory and confirmatory. The CBC, however, redefines this engagement by positioning parents as integral

contributors to their children's holistic learning experiences. The Curriculum Framework explicitly emphasizes community-based learning, encouraging parents to help learners connect classroom knowledge to real-life contexts and appreciate their societal roles (Republic of Kenya, 2017).

This conceptualization aligns with Epstein's (1995) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which posits that learner success is optimized when the family, school, and community collaborate. Empirical evidence supports that parental engagement enhances academic performance, teacher morale, and overall school effectiveness (Jeynes, 2012; Wilder, 2014). The present study's findings corroborate these insights, indicating that when parents work closely with teachers, they help identify learning gaps, reinforce positive behaviors, and provide home-based learning experiences that complement formal instruction. However, data also revealed that many parents remain ill-prepared for this expanded role, largely due to limited understanding of CBC expectations, inadequate guidance, and persistent beliefs that teaching is solely the teacher's responsibility.

Historically, many Kenyan parents have delegated the educational process to schools by enrolling children in boarding institutions or engaging private tutors without direct involvement in their learning. While wellintentioned, such practices have distanced parents from active participation and undermined opportunities for holistic development. In contrast, the 21st-century learning paradigm emphasizes lifelong learning, adaptability, and collaborative knowledge construction (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Parents, therefore, must also embrace lifelong learning by engaging alongside their children, modeling curiosity, resilience, and moral integrity.

The fifth guiding principle of the CBC (Parental Empowerment and Engagement) highlights the centrality of the parent-teacher partnership in nurturing learners' potential (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Parents are expected to provide basic needs, nurture values, instill responsibility, communicate with teachers, and identify and develop their children's talents. Findings from this study, however, reveal that while parents generally acknowledge these responsibilities, many struggle to fulfill them effectively. This indicates a gap between policy expectations and parental capacity, underscoring the need for structured parental training and sensitization programs.

Previous studies (e.g., Kibaara & Ndirangu, 2014) have documented the positive relationship between parental involvement and student outcomes within the 8-4-4 education system. Yet, empirical evidence on parental preparedness under the CBC remains limited. This study contributes to this emerging discourse by demonstrating that curriculum reform requires a dual investment in both teachers and parents. Strengthening parental capacity is not merely a supplementary task but a fundamental component of sustainable CBC implementation. As Kenya moves toward the full realization of the CBC by 2029, deliberate policies and institutional mechanisms are essential to ensure parents are empowered as co-educators, thereby bridging the gap between home and school learning environments

2. Problem Statement

The Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) is based on learners demonstrating the ability to apply the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they acquire as they progress through their education. Successful implementation of this curriculum requires the concerted efforts of teachers and parents. Proponents of this curriculum emphasize that parental involvement has a positive impact on a child's academic success. However, the reality on the ground is that parents are contending with their increased new role as coeducators as stipulated in the CBC. Media reports indicating the negative perception majority of the parents have towards CBC cannot just be swept under the rug. Parents claim they have neither the time to spend at the end of a long day to help with homework, nor the money to buy the materials needed especially with the reality occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which parents are aware of their roles in successful implementation of CBC
2. To establish the perceptions of parents about CBC and their opinions regarding their role in CBC implementation To identify some the challenges parents encounter in executing their role as co-educators

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study targeted 75 primary schools: 40 schools in Bungoma North Sub County, Bungoma County and 35 schools in Ruiru Sub County; 1860 parents with children in grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 and 212 lower primary school teachers. The sample for this study included 20 primary schools: 10 schools in Bungoma North Sub County, Bungoma County and 10 schools in Ruiru Sub County; 126 parents and 21 lower primary teachers. The study employed stratified sampling to select the 20 schools out of the 75 primary schools in the two sub- Counties. The researcher used simple random sampling to select the 126 parents from the selected schools. Purposive sampling was used to select 21 teachers from the sampled schools. Data was collected through questionnaires for parents shared via a link sent to the 21 teachers who later printed and gave to the pupils to take to their parents. Interviews for the teachers were conducted via phone calls. Pilot-testing was done in two primary schools. Reliability of the instruments was assessed by using the test-retest method, and their validity was ensured by constructing them in line with the set objectives. These research tools helped the researcher to obtain qualitative data that was categorized under various themes and concepts, earlier discussed on the basis of opinions from the various respondents and presented via narration. From these discussions, the researcher was able to make conclusions with regard to the challenges encountered by Student Councils. Quantitative data was gathered from questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics e.g. percentages and frequencies and presented using frequency distribution tables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was carried out to explore the preparedness of parents for the successful implementation of the Competency Based Curriculum in Bungoma and Ruiru Sub Counties. From the study, the researcher found out that parents were not well prepared to undertake their roles in CBC implementation and that they were faced by different challenges, some of which emanated from the school administration and the teachers and others were related to themselves. The researcher, therefore, categorized the findings and discussed them under the following themes:

I. Parents' Awareness of their Roles in CBC

When the parents were asked to indicate the level at which they were aware of their roles in CBC implementation, majority of them indicated that they were actually not aware of these roles.

Table 1: Parents' Awareness of their Roles in CBC

Level of parents' awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Aware of the all the roles	11	10.6%
Aware of most of the roles	18	17.3%
Aware of some of the roles	25	24.0%
Not aware of the roles	28	26.9%
Not sure of my role	22	21.1%
Total	104	100.0

From the findings, 24.0 % of the parents indicated that they were aware of some of their roles in CBC implementation. However, 26.9% stated they were not aware of their roles in CBC implementation yet they are considered as a key component in CBC implementation. Consequently, 21.1% of the parents admitted that they were not sure of their role in CBC. This is a high figure to be ignored.

In an interview with one of the teachers, reported that majority of the parents did not even know CBC in full yet the Ministry of Education through KICD had spent a lot of resources creating awareness about CBC. They just knew that there is a new system of education called CBC which is very expensive. The teacher said:

‘It is very unfortunate that most of the parents seem not to understand what CBC is and their role in its implementation. They just know CBC as a new education system; very expensive compared with the 8.4.4 system and a system that has turned them into learners. Some parents especially here in the rural areas are not making any effort in trying to understand what CBC is and its benefits to the learners.’

II. Extent to which Parents Helped their Children in Doing Homework and Assignments

When the parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they helped their children in doing homework and assignments, the following were the findings:

Table 2: Extent of Assistance Given by Parents in Homework and Assignments

Extent of Assistance Given	Frequency	Percentage
Do all the work	24	23.1%
Do most of the work	38	36.5%
Do some of the work	18	17.3%
Only provide resources	9	8.7%
Child does the work alone	15	14.4%
Total	104	100.0

From the table above, 36.5% of the parents reported that they did most of the work given to their children as homework by the teachers. A substantive 23.1% admitted that they did all the homework on behalf of their children. This is unfortunate because it is a wrong interpretation of what is expected from parents in CBC. They are only required to provide guidance and required materials as the children carry out the assignments and not do the assignments. Parents are only required to enhance the learning achievements of their kids as guided by the teacher (KICD, 2020). Those who did most of the work for their children justified their actions indicating that some of the assignments were beyond the level of the learners. Some required printing, recording and some advanced practical skills which the children could not handle at their age. Some did it just to save on time to work on other duties in the house.

Majority of the teachers (78%) of the teachers confirmed that most of the work they gave was actually done by the parents. The children reported so to the teachers. One of the teachers said:

‘We give the assignments so that parents can guide their children and not to be done by parents. Some parents say they do them because they want to save on time and do other things. Some do them to avoid the materials being wasted by the children. Some do them so that their children can emerge the best. We also have parents who do not understand anything and so their children just come back to school with untouched assignments.’

III. Parents' Perceptions of CBC

When parents were asked to describe what their perceptions regarding CBC were, majority (60%) of them did not seem to understand it except being a new syllabus. This same group did not quite understand their role in CBC implementation. They knew CBC as an expensive system of education that has taken away play time for the children as they had to work on assignments all the time on weekdays and even weekends. One parent wrote:

'To me CBC is just a burden. The teachers are giving children assignments that are ridiculous. We don't have some of the materials required to work on the assignments. It has made parents to be doing homework yet we have to cater for the needs of our families.'

Another parent wrote:

"The new syllabus is costly and too demanding. We spend a lot of time to monitor the children's homework. Many of the parents are still unaware of their duties under the new education system."

During the interviews with the teachers, it was noted across the board that parents had not fully accepted CBC. They did not also understand clearly what their role was. Most of the parents complained about the CBC expensive books they are required to buy especially in the private schools. One of the teachers said:

"I don't think CBC is as costly as parents claim. Some of the assignments do not require spending any money. For instance, an assignment that simply requires drawing a family tree diagram does not involve any money. It only requires parents to spare some time to help their children do this; something parents are resisting because of their busy schedules and pressures at the work place."

These findings are in agreement with those of Oduor (2020); that there is confusion in the CBC implementation in schools as many parents are still unaware of what their responsibilities are; parents keep visiting schools to inquire what their obligations under CBC are as they are not sure how to manage their children when they return home early. Consequently, Waihiga (2021) also reported that parents were finding it difficult adjusting to the requirements of CBC. He said most parents were financially constrained, especially with the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, and could not, therefore, meet requirements of CBC.

However, there was a set of parents (30%) of the parents who commented positively about CBC. To them, CBC was a good system as it enabled them to create time for their children. It also enables them to identify not only the strengths and weaknesses of their children but also the talents, hence nurture them from an early age. One of the parents wrote:

"CBC is a great system as it encourages bonding between children and their parents. From the homework, you get to understand your child more and she/he also gets to know you."

Another parent added that:

"Homework activities keep children busy. They don't spend much time on the screen. I really do not understand the CBC, but I think it is a good system. The only challenge with it is that it is quite costly."

IV. Challenges Encountered by Parents in CBC Implementation

When parents and teachers were asked to mention some of the challenges they encountered while discharging their roles in CBC implementation, several challenges were cited. Parents reported high financial costs associated with materials and assignments, inadequate sensitization regarding their roles, and limited time due to household and work responsibilities. Teachers added that some assignments were overly demanding and unrealistic given the learners' developmental levels. Additional challenges included resistance to change, negative parental attitudes toward CBC, and inequities arising from socioeconomic disparities among families.

These challenges underscore the need for systematic interventions to support parents, including targeted training, policy clarification, and resource accessibility measures.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that parents lack a clear understanding of their roles in CBC implementation and often hold negative perceptions about the curriculum. Many parents are inadequately prepared to meet the demands of CBC, particularly in private schools where the associated costs are higher. Urban parents appear to have a greater understanding of CBC than those in rural areas. Overall, the findings suggest that strengthening parental awareness, improving communication between schools and families, and addressing cost-related concerns are critical to enhancing CBC implementation in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are presented to enhance parental preparedness and strengthen the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Bungoma North, Ruiru Sub Counties, and across Kenya. The Ministry of Education (MoE), through the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards, should establish regulatory guidelines to streamline parental involvement in school assignments, ensuring parents are not overburdened by excessive tasks or costs. Collaboration among teachers, parents' representatives, and quality assurance officers is essential to align home-based learning activities with available local resources.

The MoE should also implement a national sensitization and capacity-building program for parents through community workshops, barazas, and digital platforms to clarify CBC's philosophy and parents' roles in supporting learning. Continuous professional development for teachers should integrate modules on effective parent-teacher collaboration to ensure realistic and pedagogically sound home-based tasks. Schools should further institutionalize regular parent-teacher conferences to promote dialogue, shared understanding, and accountability in CBC implementation.

In addition, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), in collaboration with the MoE and Teachers Service Commission (TSC), should develop a *Parental Empowerment and Engagement Handbook* outlining parental roles, rights, and strategies for supporting learners. A continuous monitoring and evaluation framework should also be established to assess the impact of parental engagement and inform curriculum and policy revisions.

Finally, policies on parental engagement must promote equity between public and private schools and across urban and rural settings. Targeted community-based training programs should be introduced to strengthen participation in marginalized areas. Overall, the recommendations highlight that effective CBC implementation depends on institutionalizing parental engagement through structured policy, capacity building, and sustained collaboration between schools and communities.

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