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Original Article

### Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Junior Schools in Kenya

Betty Cheruiyot, PhD<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Eldoret, P. O. Box 1125-30100 Eldoret, Kenya.

\* Author for Correspondence ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5935-1915>; Email: [bettycheruiyot77@gmail.com](mailto:bettycheruiyot77@gmail.com)

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This study explores the challenges encountered in implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in junior schools in Kenya, which aims to shift educational focus from rote memorization to the development of critical competencies essential for lifelong learning. Despite its potential benefits, the transition to CBC has been hindered by several significant challenges. This is a qualitative research study that collected primary and secondary data through conducting observation and reviewing research findings from previous research. Analysis of data has been done using thematic content analysis. Findings from literature reviews, surveys, and interviews with educators and stakeholders highlight inadequate teacher training as a critical barrier, where many educators feel ill-prepared to effectively deliver CBC. Limited resources, including shortages of textbooks, digital tools, and adequate infrastructure, further hamper CBC implementation, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Resistance to change among educators, parents, and students, stemming from unfamiliarity with CBC methodologies and concerns about its impact on academic outcomes, presents another obstacle. Moreover, infrastructural deficits such as inadequate classroom space and unreliable internet connectivity complicate the delivery of CBC-aligned education. In conclusion, overcoming these challenges requires enhanced teacher training programs, improved resource allocation, effective stakeholder engagement strategies, and substantial investments in school infrastructure. By addressing these issues proactively, Kenya can pave the way for a successful and inclusive implementation of CBC, ensuring that students acquire the skills and competencies necessary for future success in a globalized world.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Globally, the shift towards Competency-Based Education (CBE) has been driven by the need to align educational outcomes with the demands of the 21st-century workforce and society. Countries like Finland, Canada, and Singapore have been at the forefront of implementing competency-based education systems that prioritize skills and competencies over rote memorization. Research shows that such systems can lead to improved student engagement, better learning outcomes, and greater preparedness for the complexities of modern life and work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). However, the transition to CBE is not without its challenges. Common issues include resistance from educators accustomed to traditional teaching methods, the need for extensive teacher training, and the requirement for significant changes in assessment methods (Levy & Murnane, 2013). Additionally, there is often a substantial initial investment in resources and infrastructure required to support the new curriculum.

In the African context, several countries have embarked on educational reforms to introduce competency-based curricula. Countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania have adopted similar approaches, aiming to improve educational outcomes and better prepare students for the labor market. In Rwanda, for example, the Competence-Based Curriculum was introduced in 2016 to address the gaps in the traditional education system, such as inadequate focus on practical skills and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations (Ministry of Education, Rwanda, 2016). Despite the potential benefits, these regional efforts have faced significant obstacles. In Uganda, the implementation of a new curriculum has been hampered by insufficient teacher training and a lack of necessary teaching materials (Bunoti, 2019). Similarly, Tanzania has struggled with inadequate funding and infrastructural deficits, which have affected the

smooth rollout of its competency-based education reforms (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015).

Kenya's introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 represents a major shift from the 8-4-4 system to the 2-6-3-3 system. The CBC aims to address the shortcomings of the previous system by focusing on the learner's ability to apply knowledge and skills in various contexts, thereby preparing students for the challenges of the modern world (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017). Kenya's education system has undergone significant reforms with the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) aimed at fostering holistic development and skill acquisition among students. Unlike the traditional knowledge-based curriculum, CBC emphasizes the development of competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration. However, the implementation of CBC in junior schools has encountered several challenges that threaten its efficacy.

**Background of the Study**

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) was officially rolled out in Kenya in 2017, representing a significant shift from the previous 8-4-4 system to the new 2-6-3-3 structure. This reform aims to create a more learner-centered and adaptive educational framework that aligns with the dynamic needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The CBC focuses on equipping students with practical skills and competencies essential for personal development and employability in a rapidly changing world. Under the new CBC structure, the education system is organized into several phases. Pre-primary education spans two years, encompassing Pre-Primary 1 and Pre-Primary 2, which focus on early childhood development and foundational skills. This is followed by six years of primary education, divided into two segments: Lower Primary (Grades 1 to 3) and Upper Primary (Grades 4 to 6). Junior Secondary Education covers Grades 7 to 9, building on the

competencies acquired in primary education. Senior Secondary Education, which includes Grades 10 to 12, allows students to specialize in areas of interest, preparing them for tertiary education or vocational training. Finally, tertiary and higher education encompasses vocational training, college, and university education (Republic of Kenya, 2017).

Junior schools, comprising Grades 4 to 6, play a critical role in the CBC framework. These grades are pivotal in transitioning students from lower primary education to junior secondary education, where they begin to engage with more complex concepts and skills. The curriculum in junior schools is designed to foster a range of competencies that are crucial for higher-level learning and personal development. These competencies include critical thinking and problem-solving, encouraging students to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and make reasoned decisions (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes creativity and innovation, fostering an environment where students can express their ideas creatively and develop innovative solutions to problems (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017). Communication and collaboration are also enhanced, improving students' ability to communicate effectively and work collaboratively with peers (Orodho, 2017). Digital literacy is another focus, preparing students to navigate and utilize digital technologies effectively, which is essential in the modern world (Ministry of Education, Kenya, 2020).

The CBC emphasizes a learner-centered approach, which contrasts with the traditional teacher-centered methods of the 8-4-4 system. This approach involves active learning, encouraging students to actively participate in their learning process through activities, projects, and practical experiences (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2009). Differentiated instruction is another key aspect, adapting teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of students (Bunoti, 2019). Continuous assessment is used to monitor student progress and provide

feedback, rather than relying solely on end-of-term examinations (Levy & Murnane, 2013).

Designed to be adaptive to the dynamic needs of the 21st century, the CBC integrates skills that are relevant to today's world. This includes life skills education, teaching students essential life skills such as financial literacy, health education, and environmental awareness (Republic of Kenya, 2017). The curriculum also emphasizes STEM education, preparing students for careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Ministry of Education, Kenya, 2020). Furthermore, it promotes global citizenship by instilling values such as respect, empathy, and responsibility, preparing students to be active and responsible global citizens (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017).

In conclusion, the CBC represents a transformative approach to education in Kenya, aiming to develop well-rounded individuals equipped with the skills and competencies necessary for the 21st century. Junior schools are crucial in this transition, laying the foundation for advanced learning and personal development. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by the CBC, Kenya can create an education system that meets the needs of its students and society.

### Objectives

The primary objective of this paper was to identify and analyze the challenges faced in the implementation of CBC in junior schools in Kenya. Specific objectives include:

- Assessing the adequacy of teacher preparation and training for CBC.
- Evaluating the availability of resources and infrastructure necessary for CBC.
- Understanding the attitudes and perceptions of educators and stakeholders towards CBC.
- Proposing solutions to overcome identified challenges.

## Methodology

This study qualitative data collection techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in junior schools in Kenya. Data were gathered through various methods to ensure a robust analysis. The literature review involved analyzing existing research on CBC implementation in Kenya and other countries. This provided a foundation of knowledge on the subject and helped identify key issues and themes that informed the subsequent stages of data collection. By reviewing studies, reports, and academic papers, the literature review offered insights into the successes and challenges encountered in different contexts, thus allowing for a comparative perspective.

Observations were made by visiting junior schools to witness CBC implementation firsthand. This method provided direct evidence of how the curriculum is being applied in classroom settings. Observations included examining teaching methods, classroom interactions, and the availability of resources. The combination of secondary and primary research analytical techniques ensured a comprehensive understanding of the CBC implementation challenges in Kenyan junior schools.

## Findings and Discussions

### Adequacy of teacher preparation and training for CBC

The study found that inadequate teacher training emerges as a prominent challenge in the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenyan junior schools. The transition from the previous content-based approach to a competency-based model requires educators to adopt new teaching methods and approaches. However, many teachers have reported feeling ill-equipped and lacking the necessary professional development to effectively deliver the CBC. According to Orodho (2017), inadequate teacher training hampers the successful implementation of educational reforms, as teachers struggle to grasp the

pedagogical shifts and adapt their instructional practices accordingly. This sentiment is echoed in various studies and reports, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and ongoing training programs tailored to CBC principles (Republic of Kenya, 2017).

### Availability of resources and infrastructure necessary for CBC.

Limited resources and infrastructure present another formidable obstacle to the effective rollout of CBC in Kenyan junior schools. The successful implementation of the new curriculum hinges on access to adequate teaching materials, technological tools, and conducive learning environments. However, many schools across the country face significant shortages of textbooks, digital devices, and well-equipped classrooms. This resource deficit not only impedes the practical application of CBC activities but also limits students' engagement and access to quality education. Sifuna and Sawamura (2009) emphasize that disparities in resource allocation exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly affecting schools in rural and marginalized areas where infrastructure development lags behind urban centers.

### Attitudes and perceptions of educators and stakeholders towards CBC.

Resistance to change among educators, parents, and students poses another critical challenge to the adoption of CBC. The shift from traditional teaching methods to a competency-based approach represents a fundamental departure in educational philosophy and practice. Some stakeholders express skepticism about the efficacy of CBC, citing concerns over its implementation feasibility and impact on learning outcomes. This resistance often stems from a lack of understanding and familiarity with the new curriculum's objectives and methodologies. Effective communication and engagement strategies are essential to address these apprehensions and build support for CBC among all stakeholders (Republic of Kenya, 2017).



Infrastructural deficits further complicate the CBC implementation landscape in Kenyan junior schools. Inadequate classroom space, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient sanitation facilities are among the critical infrastructural challenges faced by many schools, particularly in rural and underserved areas. These deficiencies not only hinder the delivery of quality education but also undermine the holistic development goals of CBC. Komba and Mwandangi (2015) argue that addressing infrastructural deficits is crucial for creating an enabling environment where CBC principles can be effectively implemented and sustained over time.

In conclusion, while the Competency-Based Curriculum holds promise for fostering holistic development and preparing students for the demands of the 21st century, its successful implementation in Kenyan junior schools is contingent upon overcoming significant challenges. Addressing issues such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources and infrastructure, resistance to change, and infrastructural deficits requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners. By acknowledging these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, Kenya can advance towards a more inclusive and effective education system aligned with global educational standards.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in junior schools in Kenya marks a significant opportunity to reform the education system towards a more student-centered approach that aligns with the demands of the 21st century. CBC aims to shift the focus from rote memorization to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity, and collaboration among students. This transformation not only enhances academic learning but also prepares students for the complexities of modern society and the global economy. By emphasizing competencies over content mastery, CBC seeks to cultivate a

generation of learners capable of adapting to rapidly changing environments and contributing meaningfully to their communities. However, the successful adoption of CBC hinges on overcoming several critical challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the inadequate training of teachers to effectively deliver the new curriculum. Many educators have expressed concerns about their preparedness and competency in implementing CBC methodologies and assessment practices. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive professional development programs that equip teachers with the pedagogical skills and knowledge needed to facilitate active learning and competency-based assessment strategies. By investing in continuous teacher training and support, Kenya can enhance the quality of classroom instruction and ensure that CBC principles are effectively implemented across junior schools.

Another significant challenge lies in the allocation of resources and infrastructure necessary to support CBC implementation. Many junior schools in Kenya face shortages of textbooks, teaching aids, digital resources, and adequate physical infrastructure such as classrooms and sanitation facilities. These resource constraints undermine the effective delivery of CBC activities and limit students' access to quality education experiences. Addressing resource gaps requires strategic investment in educational materials, technology integration, and infrastructure development to create conducive learning environments that facilitate active learning and competency development. Stakeholder engagement and addressing resistance to change are also critical factors influencing the successful implementation of CBC. Resistance among educators, parents, and students can stem from concerns about the unfamiliarity of CBC, its impact on academic performance, and the practicality of its implementation. Effective communication strategies, stakeholder consultations, and awareness campaigns are essential to foster understanding, build trust, and garner support for CBC initiatives. Engaging stakeholders in the curriculum development

process and providing platforms for feedback and collaboration can help address misconceptions and promote buy-in from all parties involved in the education ecosystem.

Furthermore, infrastructural deficits pose a significant challenge to CBC implementation, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Inadequate classroom space, unreliable electricity supply, and limited access to digital technologies hinder the delivery of CBC-aligned education. Addressing infrastructural challenges requires investment in physical infrastructure, provision of reliable electricity and internet connectivity, and improvement of sanitation facilities to create conducive learning environments. By enhancing infrastructural support, Kenya can ensure equitable access to quality education and facilitate the effective implementation of CBC across diverse geographical regions. In conclusion, while the implementation of CBC in junior schools in Kenya presents transformative opportunities for improving educational outcomes and preparing students for future challenges, overcoming the identified obstacles is crucial for its success. By addressing issues related to teacher training, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure development, Kenya can lay the foundation for a more effective and inclusive education system that empowers learners and nurtures their full potential in a rapidly changing world.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the challenges identified in the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in junior schools in Kenya, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness and success of the CBC rollout. Firstly, addressing the inadequate training of teachers is paramount to the successful implementation of CBC. Comprehensive and continuous professional development programs should be instituted to equip educators with the necessary pedagogical skills and knowledge to effectively deliver CBC. Workshops, seminars, online courses, and peer mentoring opportunities should be provided to support teachers in adapting

to the new curriculum methodologies and assessment practices. These training initiatives should be ongoing to ensure that teachers remain abreast of evolving educational practices and can implement CBC principles in their classrooms effectively.

Secondly, improving resource allocation is essential to support CBC implementation across all junior schools in Kenya. The government, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should prioritize the allocation of resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, digital devices, and infrastructure improvements. Public-private partnerships and engagements with NGOs can play a crucial role in supplementing government efforts to provide essential resources. Ensuring equitable access to quality educational materials and facilities is critical to enhancing the learning experiences of students and supporting teachers in delivering CBC-aligned education.

Effective stakeholder engagement and sensitization are also pivotal in overcoming resistance to CBC and garnering support for the new curriculum. Communication campaigns should be conducted to educate parents, students, community leaders, and other stakeholders about the rationale, benefits, and implementation strategies of CBC. Engaging stakeholders in the curriculum development process and soliciting their feedback can help address misconceptions and build confidence in the new educational approach. Creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration can foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility towards the successful implementation of CBC across the education sector.

Furthermore, infrastructure development is crucial, particularly in rural and underserved areas where infrastructural deficits pose significant challenges. Investment in school infrastructure should prioritize building additional classrooms, improving internet connectivity, and ensuring access to adequate sanitation facilities. Reliable electricity supply and digital technology integration are essential to support CBC activities

such as online learning, digital literacy, and collaborative projects among students.

Implementing these recommendations requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, communities, and stakeholders across Kenya. By enhancing teacher training programs, improving resource allocation, conducting effective stakeholder engagement, and investing in infrastructure development, Kenya can overcome the challenges hindering CBC implementation and pave the way for a more effective and inclusive education system. These initiatives are crucial to ensuring that CBC achieves its objectives of preparing students with the competencies and skills necessary for success in the 21st-century global economy.

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