EXAMINING ECDE TEACHERS' VIEWS ON LEARNER CLASSROOM SOCIALIZATION IN COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION: A CASE OF BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The study explored Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) teachers' views on learner classroom socialization within the Competency Based Education (CBE) framework in Bungoma County. While CBE is gaining global traction as a preferred educational approach, social concerns surrounding its implementation persist, particularly in early education settings. This research aimed to examine these concerns from the teachers' viewpoint and propose strategies to address them. Anchored in Symbolic Interactionism and Social Exchange Theory, the study employed a descriptive survey design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from 201 ECDE teachers using questionnaires, while interviews and focus group discussions involved the County director of education and parents of Preprimary One and Two learners, respectively. An observation schedule and pilot study were also utilized to ensure the reliability and validity of data. Analysis involved thematic narrative methods for qualitative data and SPSS (Version 26) for quantitative data. Key findings indicated significant challenges in implementing CBE: 83% of teachers cited inadequate teaching and learning facilities; the teacher-pupil ratio stood at 1:43, far exceeding the recommended 1:25; 86% had inadequate CBE training; and 74% noted lack of parental support. The study recommended improving infrastructure and facilities, integrating digital tools, enhancing teacher training, and addressing teacher-pupil ratios. It also called for further research to promote access, equity, and inclusion in CBE at the pre-primary level, emphasizing the need for systemic support to successfully implement the CBE model in early education settings

Key Words:

Competency Based Education: Is a system of education that is learner centered aimed to develop seven key competencies in pupils, that is, Communication and Collaboration, Self-efficacy, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creativity and Imagination, Citizenship, Digital Literacy and Learning to Learn.

ECDE Teacher: A facilitator in teaching and learning in pre-primary education that has undergone formal training in teacher training colleges or universities and has also received retraining in CBE

Socialization: Inculcation of knowledge, values, skills and attitudes in learners. Socialization involves the academic work that teachers do and also goes to imparting the values. In this study, effective socialization requires aligned beliefs, attitudes and collaboration between pupils, parents, teachers and the school environment.

Learner socialization: Refers to the delivery of Competency-Based Education itself in terms of learner outcomes and content that is relevant to the age of the learner. In this study, learner socialization is contextualized refer to the process through which learners acquire skills, values, behaviors and competencies necessary for meaningful participation in both classroom and societal settings.

INTRODUCTION

Learner socialization involves how content is delivered to suit learners' developmental stages, ensuring age-appropriate and relevant material. This process shapes not only academic outcomes like literacy and numeracy but also social competencies such as teamwork, communication and critical thinking. Effective socialization fosters holistic growth, helping learners adapt to structured environments while internalizing expected norms, responsibilities and problem-solving skills aligned with real-life experiences and societal expectations. The study begins by underscoring the centrality of the teacher in the learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education. The study noted recognized that the ECDE teacher is at the heart of the delivery and therefore it is them who are expected to first understand the system and then deliver on the same. In this respect, a study that seeks their point of view and feedback cuts a niche given that most studies bring out the voice of policy makers.

However, studies on CBE implementation conducted globally and, in the region, have revealed low level of awareness on the CBE content which poses challenges in its implementation and delivery process. Research in countries where CBE has been implemented has shown that teachers lack a thorough understanding of the requirements of the CBE. The repercussions are that the desired outcomes are reduced to mere checklists and the competencies cannot be mastered as intended (Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2019).

According to Franklin & Lytle (2015), there is low level of awareness about CBE content and this makes it difficult for wider acceptance of CBE programmes. Moreover, there is no unanimous agreement among scholars and practitioners on theoretical meanings of competency and related concepts leading to variations in CBE curricular, models, principles and characteristics, learning processes, assessment practices and operationalization of the concepts (Wesselink et al, 2010, Boahin & Hofman, 2012).

Studies have also revealed that ECDE teachers are looked upon and viewed of less importance in comparison to other cadres in the same profession. These views lower their motivation and commitment thereby affecting the delivery (Armstrong, 2009; Britton & Propper, 2015; Nduku 2016). One of ECDE teachers is quoted in a study saying: CBE has come with very many changes in the way we teach and assess that require teachers to re-equip themselves with new knowledge and skills. But then, many teachers in Kenya do not have the time or resources to leave their places of work to attend training (Iminza, et al., 2022). This study, thus, identified the role of the ECDE teacher in CBE implementation as a critical conceptual gap in the study.

Therefore, while the CBE offers numerous benefits, its implementation has faced challenges. Many schools in Kenya lack the necessary resources, such as digital devices and adequate learning materials, to fully implement the CBE. There is also the challenge of teacher preparedness where educators need continuous training to effectively deliver the CBE content and utilize appropriate teaching methodologies. Ensuring that teachers are well-prepared is crucial for the success of the curriculum. Alongside this are the assessment methods where transitioning from traditional examination-based assessments to more holistic evaluation methods pose challenges (Sande, 2023).

Studies on ECDE teachers' views in the competency-based education delivery have mainly brought out the voice of policy makers on the challenges and their estimations on what needs to be done. The studies have indicated what teachers ought to do with regard to teaching methodology that is in line with the content, level of the learner and the environment within which learning is taking place. Studies have also emphasized what the government of Kenya is doing to make sure ECDE teachers acquire the skills of producing a learner who meets the demands of the 21st Century. However, the current direction is to allow the pupils some latitude to facilitate the learners as they experience and express themselves in the new form of education and can bring about several benefits including: In the CBE setting, the learners are expected to acquire exposure to different views when interacting with other learners. First, the study identified gaps in studies that call for more autonomy of the ECDE teachers so that they too are incorporated in the decision-making process. Teachers play a significant role as CBE implementers in the schools and it is therefore imperative that they are involved

in decisions regarding education change. This study, thus, identified ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in CBE.

Objective of study

The main study objective was to examine ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education in Bungoma County

Limitations of the Study

The study on ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education in Bungoma County, Kenya, emphasized the validity and reliability of its findings. Recognizing that respondents might feel exposed when discussing shortcomings, the researcher adopted strategies to ensure accuracy and honesty. A 10% sample size was used to enhance precision, and triangulation of data collection tools—questionnaires, interviews, and observations—was employed to cross-verify responses. Questionnaires were central to collecting data, but to mitigate bias—such as respondents overstating strengths and downplaying weaknesses—the researcher also consulted the County Director of Education for validation and used direct observation to confirm findings. Scheduling interviews presented challenges due to participants' busy routines. This was resolved through prior visits, building rapport, and maintaining flexibility with appointment times. The study also utilized Google Forms to collect data online but encountered technological limitations among some teachers. To address this, hard copies were provided, and mobile phone accessibility was ensured. The researcher's physical presence during school visits further enhanced participation and led to a high return rate of research tools. Overall, these methodological considerations strengthened the credibility and completeness of the data collected for the study.

Assumptions

In undertaking the study, the researcher made the assumptions that ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education have a bearing on successful delivery of CBE

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education in Bungoma County, Kenya. The research sought to understand the sociological challenges teachers encounter during CBE implementation in early childhood settings. As Bungoma County transitions to the CBE model, unique challenges emerge due to its diverse socio-economic landscape, particularly in rural areas where resources and infrastructure are limited.

CBE emphasizes skill mastery over rote learning and is designed to provide learners with real-world competencies. However, its application in early childhood education raises social concerns that directly affect teaching practices and outcomes. To capture these concerns, the study used a descriptive survey design—ideal for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from a broad group. Structured questionnaires with open- and closed-ended questions were distributed to ECDE teachers, enabling a comprehensive exploration of their views.

The research aligned data collection methods with four core objectives: learner socialization and improvement strategies for CBE. Multiple data sources, including questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews with the County Director of Education, document reviews, and direct observation—were used for triangulation to enhance data validity.

The mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, allowed for a nuanced understanding of the issues. The survey design's non-experimental and cross-sectional nature helped in capturing the current realities of CBE implementation without influencing participants' behaviors or contexts.

Ultimately, the descriptive survey design proved effective in collecting reliable, representative data, offering critical insights into the social factors influencing CBE in Bungoma's early childhood education sector.

Data Collection Procedure

The target population in a research study refers to the specific group of individuals or units that a researcher aims to study and make generalizations about. This definition is crucial for ensuring the relevance and applicability of findings. In this particular study, the target population comprised stakeholders involved in Competency-Based Education (CBE) at the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) level in Bungoma County, Kenya. Bungoma County consists of 802 ECDE centres across eleven sub-counties, and this entire group formed the base from which the target population was drawn.

Key stakeholders included the County Director of Education, ECDE teachers and ECDE parents. Each group was purposefully chosen based on their unique roles in implementing and interacting with CBE. Teachers, as frontline implementers, parents as primary caregivers, and the Director as a policy overseer, offered critical insights. The teacher population was deemed homogeneous due to standardized training nationally, supporting consistent data collection.

Sampling methods included cluster sampling (grouping ECDE centres by sub-county), simple random sampling (for ECDE teachers), purposive sampling (for the County Director), and incidental sampling (for parents). These techniques ensured broad and accurate representation, minimized bias, and allowed for meaningful data collection. A 10% sample size was adopted in line with Mugenda and Mugenda's recommendation for descriptive research.

Data collection instruments included questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation checklists. The questionnaire administered to teachers had both closed and open-ended questions, capturing both quantitative and qualitative data. It focused on the teachers' understanding and implementation of CBE, covering areas like training, methodology, use of teaching aids, assessment strategies, digital integration, and use of indigenous languages. Interviews with the County Director were used to gather in-depth information on policy implementation, challenges, and systemic feedback. The interview method allowed for flexibility, probing, and observation of non-verbal cues, thereby enriching the quality of data collected.

Focus Group Discussions were used with parents to explore their perspectives and experiences with CBE. FGDs enabled dynamic interactions where parents could express concerns, reflect on teachers' efforts, and suggest improvements. These discussions proved essential for gaining nuanced understanding of how parents perceive and support CBE at the home and community levels.

An observation checklist was employed to gather direct evidence of CBE implementation. It ensured systematic recording of visual indicators in the learning environment and cross-verified data collected through other instruments.

Before the main study, a pilot test was conducted to validate and refine the tools. The pilot helped identify unclear questions and tested reliability through the test-retest method. The tools were administered twice to the same group, and Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was used to assess consistency. A coefficient of 0.86 confirmed high reliability, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.8.

Validity was ensured through expert review and alignment of tools with study objectives. Face validity was established during piloting, while content validity was assured by expert consultation and internal crosschecking. Overall, the methodological rigor in defining the target population, sampling, instrument development, and validation ensured that the study would yield reliable and applicable findings on the implementation of CBE in Bungoma County's ECDE centres.

Data Analysis

The research process began with obtaining written authority from Moi University, School of Education, which facilitated the legal clearance from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Following this, the researcher reported to the County Commissioner's office and the County Director of Education (CDE) as a formal procedure and courtesy. Visits were made to each selected school for self-introduction and to establish rapport with participants, during which the study's purpose and authorization were clarified. Participants were assured of strict confidentiality.

To ensure internal validity and data reliability, the researcher adhered to established data collection protocols, aligning with Creswell's (2014) guidance on procedural integrity. This approach ensured that the collected data accurately reflected the research questions, maintaining both ethical standards and the study's credibility.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically based on research questions. Respondents shared their experiences and recommendations on Competency-Based Education (CBE) implementation at the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) level. Contextual interpretation of responses allowed for holistic understanding and meaningful insights. This analysis helped confirm and enrich the findings from the quantitative data.

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 26, a user-friendly statistical tool that facilitated the summarization of data through descriptive statistics. This dual approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of ECDE teachers' perspectives on social issues affecting CBE implementation. The post-positivism paradigm underpinning the study highlighted gaps between policy expectations and actual practices, offering evidence for these discrepancies.

Sampling procedures emphasized randomness and minimized bias. Surveys and interviews were designed to be concise and accessible, with follow-ups on non-responders to enhance data completeness. Ethical standards were rigorously upheld—participants gave informed consent, understood the study's academic purpose, and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Personal identifiers were excluded, and in cases involving children's photos, faces were blurred to protect identities in line with ethical practices (Scott, 2005).

Finally, the study ensured originality and credibility by avoiding plagiarism. As part of university guidelines, the final thesis was screened through Turnitin to meet required academic standards. Altogether, the study was conducted ethically and methodically, ensuring reliable and impactful findings on the implementation of CBE in ECDE settings.

RESULTS

Examine ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education in Bungoma County

Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) lays the foundation for holistic child development. With the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya, a shift from traditional knowledge-based teaching to learner-centered, skill-based learning has emerged. While as the CBE framework emphasizes the development of core competencies like creativity, communication, critical thinking and collaboration, the ECDE teachers raised concerns regarding its practical implementation. This study presents field data collected through classroom observation and interviews with ECDE teachers on their social concerns about the CBE approach and its impact on learner classroom socialization.

The study began with the teachers' own assessment on their knowledge on competency-based education. It was important to begin with their views as a mark of their confidence in their delivery. This study aligned itself with the post positivism paradigm that focuses on researching issues in the context of involving

experiences of the majority. Accordingly, the study sought to hear from the ECDE teachers their personal experiences. The findings are reflected in table 1 below:

Table 1: ECDE Teachers' Assessment on their Own Knowledge of Competency-Based Education

No	Information on Competency Based Education	Am certain	Almost certain	Not Certain
1	I understand why the reforms in education were done to introduce Competency Based Education	120	60	11
2	I understand the three levels of Basic Education	153	45	3
3	I can explain the values that CBE seeks to instill in the pupils'	135	55	6
4	I can list the seven core competencies for Basic Education	141	47	3
5	I understand what the new policy expects of a teacher	132	54	5

The above findings of the study revealed that the teachers had a clear grasp of the information on Competency Based Education with an average of over 70% that they are certain about their understanding of why the reforms in education were done to introduce CBE, understanding of the three levels of Basic Education, understating of the values that CBE seeks to instill in the pupils, understanding of the seven core competencies for Basic Education and understanding of what the new policy expects of a teacher. These finding paint an optimistic picture with regard to implementation since it begins with conceptualization by the key stakeholders, who are the ECDE teachers.

The study noted that the challenge begins with implementation in terms of making specific provisions in their teaching methodology to adapt to CBE. While most of the teachers at above 70% indicated that they were applying appropriate methodology, selecting learning activities which promote infusion of the core competencies and had appropriately adapted professional documents to the new requirements, only a mere 34 % indicated that were well equipped to evaluate learners using the CBE assessment rubrics.

Qualitative findings of the study collaborated the view on inadequate preparations on the part of the teacher. This is well captured in the following words of an ECDE teacher respondent:

'The government ought to have started by training the teachers before anything else. After all preparations are done elsewhere, it is the teacher who is left to implement in the classroom. That for me is the major challenge with this education system that put the cart before the horse'

All the plans are put in place so that the teacher can deliver the curriculum. So thorough retraining of the teacher should have been done. Of course, the ECDE teacher should have come first because that is where the implementation was to begin.

The best place would have been to start with the training in college. While in college, the teachers have a good opportunity to comprehend curriculum issues and when they go to the ECDE centers, they are well prepared.

(ECDE Teachers' responses, October 2023)

Indeed, studies have corroborated this by indicating that it is important to begin with training the teachers. Rwanda is one of the countries in the region cited as having made significant progress in implementing competency-based education. The system began by training the teachers in the colleges to replace teacher centered passive leaning approaches with learner centered approach. The process began by ensuring that all teachers were taken through an intensive in-service training on how to implement the new curriculum (Ndayambaje, 2018; Ndihokubwayo, Habiyaremye and Rukundo, 2019; Mugabo, Ozawa and Nkundabakura, 2021). Teacher preparedness is hence a key ingredient towards successful implementation of a new education programme.

The study, therefore, went further to look at teacher preparedness for delivery of CBE in order to provide more exhaustive data on teachers' views in the delivery. Providing that a single study cannot exhaustively look at all indicators of teacher preparedness, this study picked four areas of teaching methodology adaptation. The study sequenced four key areas of the teaching practice in terms of teacher preparation, teaching methodology, classroom practice and assessment then accordingly looked at areas that would bring out a picture of teacher preparedness in terms of: adaptation of professional documents, appropriate methodology, provisions in the classroom and evaluation of learners. The study sought the views of the teachers ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree to gauge the ECDE teachers' views on preparedness for effective delivery of CBE. The following are the specific quantitative findings synthesized in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: ECDE Teachers' Views on Preparedness for Effective Delivery of CBE
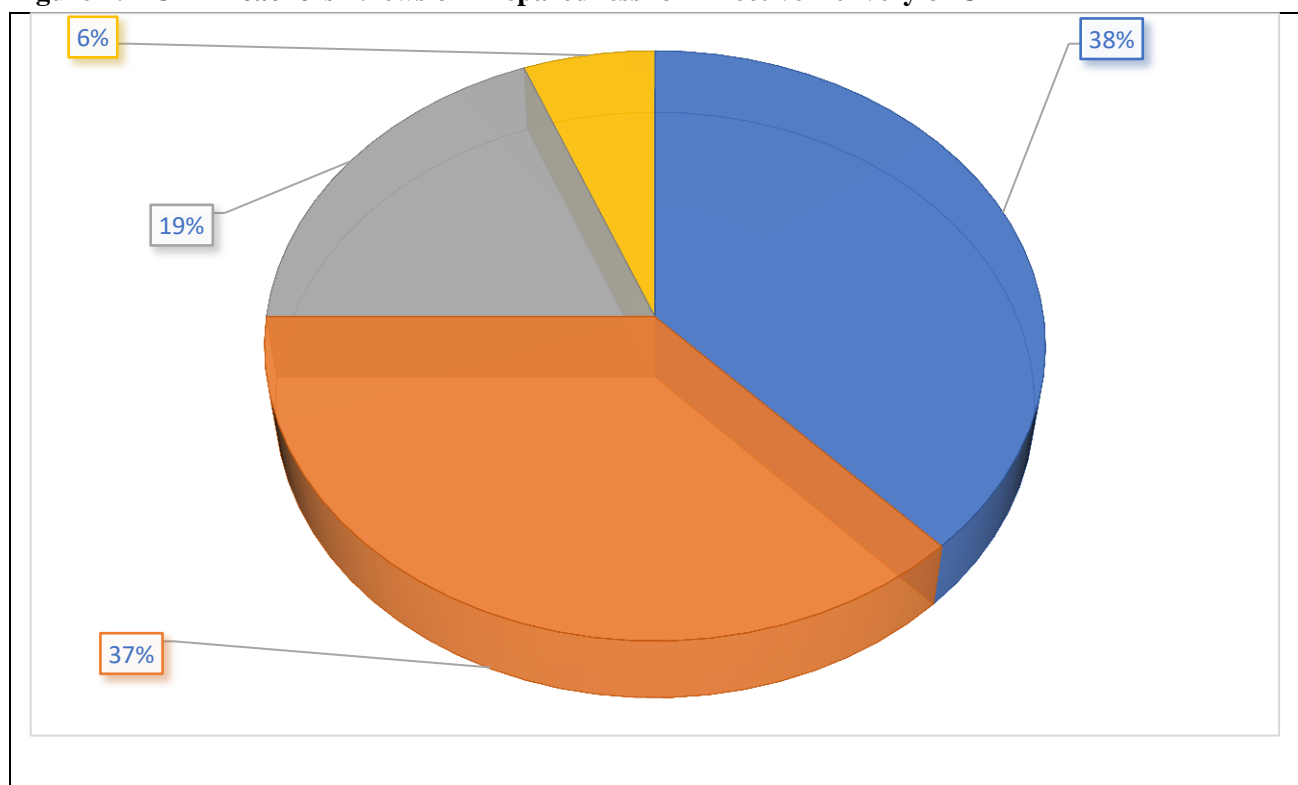
The findings indicate the feeling among ECDE teachers that they are well prepared in both adaptation of professional documents commensurate with ECDE and also application of appropriate teaching methodology. However, the teachers feel inadequate in the provisions they have made in the classroom practice as well as evaluating the learners. Given that this is a self-assessment, the researcher takes this an indicator of the ECDE teachers' sense of confidence in the delivery of CBE. The finding thus reveal that the teacher feels confident in the preparations they make and the methodology they employ but feel that they are not well equipped with regard to managing a CBC classroom and evaluating the learners. The teachers are expected to handle both summative and formative examination at this level.

The quantitative findings are collaborated in the qualitative finding. The recorded explanations of the ECDE teachers on their views in the delivery of CBE were as follows:

That part on assessment and evaluation in competency curriculum is not clear

We are used to marking by making ticks and cancellations and awarding making percentage mark

The world of children is not complicated at all, we should avoid complicating it through CBC

I was teaching even before CBC. Now there is limited time because of the many activities required by CBC.

Each school can use what they have. CBC should not be difficult

The part on infusing core competencies, achievements, PCIs development and values is a bit vague and not clear to many of us.

(ECDE Teachers opinions, October 2023)

The study emphasized that, the aspect on evaluation in the context of competence-based education is gray area that requires more polishing as per the findings of the study. According to the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF, 2017), there was a shift from the traditional approach that was knowledge-based assessment to the new approach that is Competency Based Assessment. The new assessment model incorporated both the formative and summative assessments approaches. This new model pays as much attention to the continuous feedback during learning as it does the end of course assessment. The new emphasis on continuous component is premised on the need to improve instruction learning and facilitate the acquisition of the desired competencies. The traditional knowledge-based assessment primarily focused on summative assessment which was a one-off rigid assessment that determined the knowledge achieved by a learner at the end of a course. The findings of this study indicate that the shift in assessment approaches has not been well imbibed into the ECDE teachers.

The study conducted a content analysis of Mathematics Activities Assessment for Pre-primary One. The study sampled two sub-strands under the first strand of classification to help paint a picture of what the ECDE teachers' qualitative findings. The findings are presented in table 2 below:

Table 2: Mathematics Activities Assessment for Pre-primary One

MATHEMATICS ACTIVITIES ASSESMENT

KEY: EX- EXCEEDING EXPECTATION, MT –MEETS EXPECTATION, AP-APPROACHES EXPECTATION BE-BELOW EXPECTATION.

	Tick appropriately under each category to rate learners' ability	EX	**MT**	AP	BE	COMMENTS
1.0	**CLASSIFICATION**					
1.1	**Sorting and grouping**					
	Identify similarities among objects in the environment for distinguishing one object from the other					
	Identify differences among objects in the environment to appreciate their similarities and differences					
	Enjoy sorting and grouping objects in the Environment					
	Group objects according to a specific attribute to create sets of similar objects					
	Appreciate the materials in the environment for their uniqueness and diversity.					
1.2	**Matching and paring**					
	Identify similarities among objects in the environment					
	Identify differences among objects in the environment					
	Match similar objects in the environment					
	Pair objects according to specific criteria					
	Appreciate the use of different objects in the environment					

Kenya National Examinations Council (2022) provides guidance on attributes of a 21st century assessor as one who knows how the content to be tested is taught and have above average knowledge in educational values that influence teaching and learning. An assessor is one who conscientiously sets out to influence

positive classroom practices by designing assessment tasks that assess acquired knowledge, competencies, and values.

KNEC considers assessment to be part of the learning process with the teacher at the steering wheel. The learning process involves acquisition of meaningful feedback on the learner's level of performance with regard to attainment of targeted learning outcomes which entail acquisition of intended knowledge, skills and attitudes. This is the process of Assessment which takes three different forms: (i) assessment for learning, (ii) assessment of learning and (iii) assessment as learning. Assessors play a critical role in the process of assessment by marking and awarding measurement scores to learners' responses. The validity and credibility of assessment outcomes depend highly on the objectivity in marking and grading learners' work (KNEC, 2022). This study notes that there is need to shed more light on assessment for ECDE teachers so that they are squarely in charge of a process that they fully comprehend.

Studies on ECDE carried out in Bomet and Kericho Counties concur that although teachers are generally learning on the job in matters CBC, it is worse for assessment aspect. Most of the teachers have minimum knowledge on how to conduct the assessment and this was a hindrance to effective implementation of competency-based education in pre-primary levels (Ngeno, 2022; Momanyi & Rop, 2019).

Closely related to this, the study sought the teachers' response on their views of availability of time for delivery of CBE lessons as shown in table 3 below:

Table 3 ECDE Teachers' Views of Availability of Time for Delivery of CBE Lessons

Ability to write lesson plans with all CBE aspects	Time adequate	Time not adequate	Not certain
Availability of time to make lessons plans for all lessons	37	144	10
Making sure lesson planning does not eat into teaching time	24	159	8
Availability of time to assess individual learners in class	15	174	2

The study synthesis the raw data into the figure 2 below to paint a clearer picture of the situation regarding availability of time for lesson delivery in lieu of the available time.

Figure 2: ECDE Teachers' Views of Availability of Time for Delivery of CBE Lessons
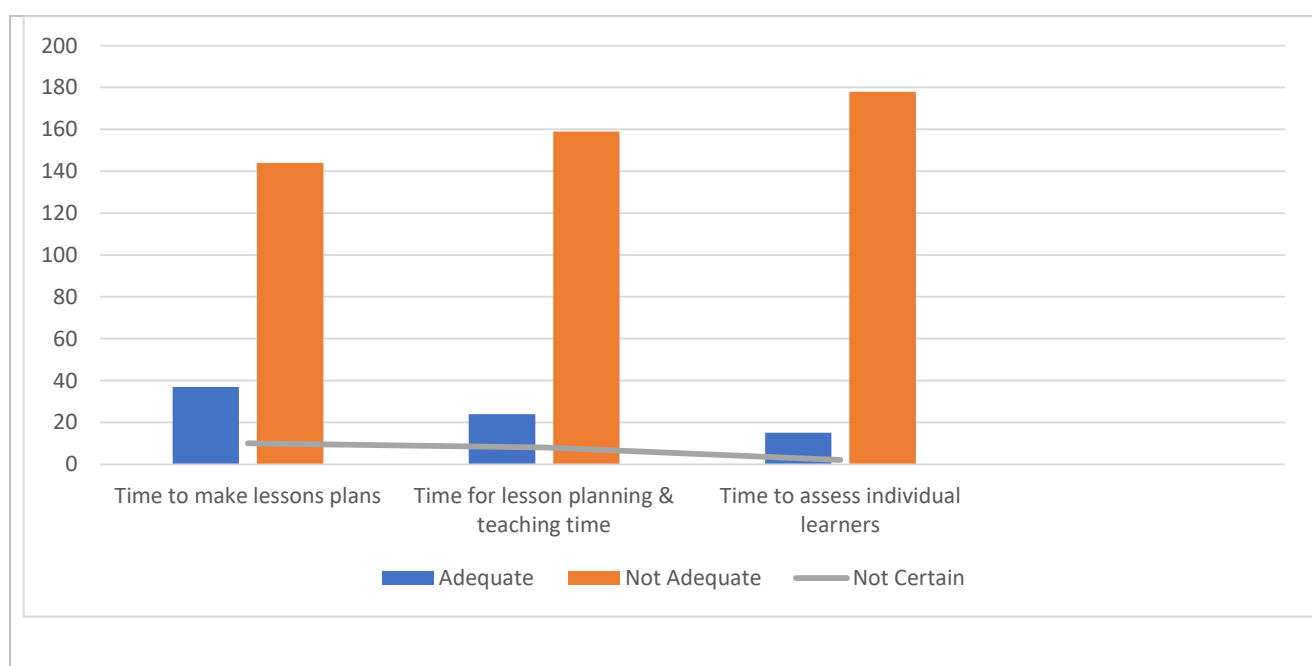
The findings solidly indicate that the ECDE teacher do not have adequate time to make lessons plans for all lessons, to ensure lesson planning does not eat into teaching time and adequate time to assess individual learners in class. Further, the findings on insufficient time to assess individual learners in class are comparatively higher than the rest. The issue of assessment is a consistent challenge across the study giving the implication that the ECDE teachers are yet to sufficiently grasp the entire concept. There is a convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings regarding inadequate time for individual assessment of learners in class as indicated by the opinions of the teachers below:

The mission of CBC is to nurture every individual and their potential. How do you assess 60 learners in a class of 30 minutes and teach.

The subjects have too much to cover and you may not have enough time to assess learners individually

Time availability and the size of the class make assessment in class difficult

The main problem is the number of pupils in class, sometimes they are crowded in a single class making our work difficult.

Preparing for class requires time, for me am all alone in PP2 so I have little time to do all these things at the same time.

(ECDE Teachers opinions, October 2023)

Studies concur that the teachers have a challenge with the theoretical underpinnings of the CBE assessment. The Competency Based Assessment Framework for Teacher Education (CBAF-TE, 2017) developed by a collaboration of KICD and the KNEC indicate that the teachers should be well versed in the Purpose of assessment, Types of assessment, Mode of Assessment and feedback in assessment. This study persistently validates the position that the assessment component of CBE in ECDE is the weaker part of the chain.

These quantitative findings are in tandem with the qualitative findings from the County Director of Education:

The system is yet to fully develop and assimilate quality assessment tools that are in line with Competency-Based Assessment. Since we are still in the implementation stage, I feel that we are yet inculcate into our teachers the skills of making use of Competency-Based Assessment tools for quality evaluation of competencies. There has been a shift from the traditional knowledge-based assessment to Competency-Based Assessment. This shift has embraced both formative and summative assessments approaches and provides continuous feedback that is used to improve instruction learning and facilitate the acquisition of the desired competencies. This area is yet to be well cascaded to the ECDE teachers and is one of the areas we plan to improve on in the coming days. The Ministry of Education is also doing the same in the DECTE programmes.

(County Director of Education, April 2024).

The Kenya National Examinations Council (2022) acknowledges that the use of CBA enables the teacher to understand the different learners' dynamics and facilitate determination of learning needs. This enables the teacher to utilize effective pedagogies that fully nurtures the learner's potentials. An effective education system should aim at equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be productive members of their society and to cope with the social, economic, and environmental challenges of the changing times. At the ECDE level, teachers are encouraged to use authentic assessment approaches in order to assess the learners' competencies effectively. Authentic assessment determines the learners' performance and understanding on significant tasks that have relevance to daily life. It is a form of assessment that utilizes real life tasks to give the learners an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies. The teacher should ensure that all forms of assessment tasks including the written, performance, oral and acoustic must be authentic in nature.

The study then looked at the teachers' personal assessment of their infusion of core competencies in teaching CBE as a measure of their views in the delivery of Competency Based Education. The findings are presented in figure 3 below:

Figure 3: ECDE Teachers' Views about Infusion of Core Competencies During Teaching
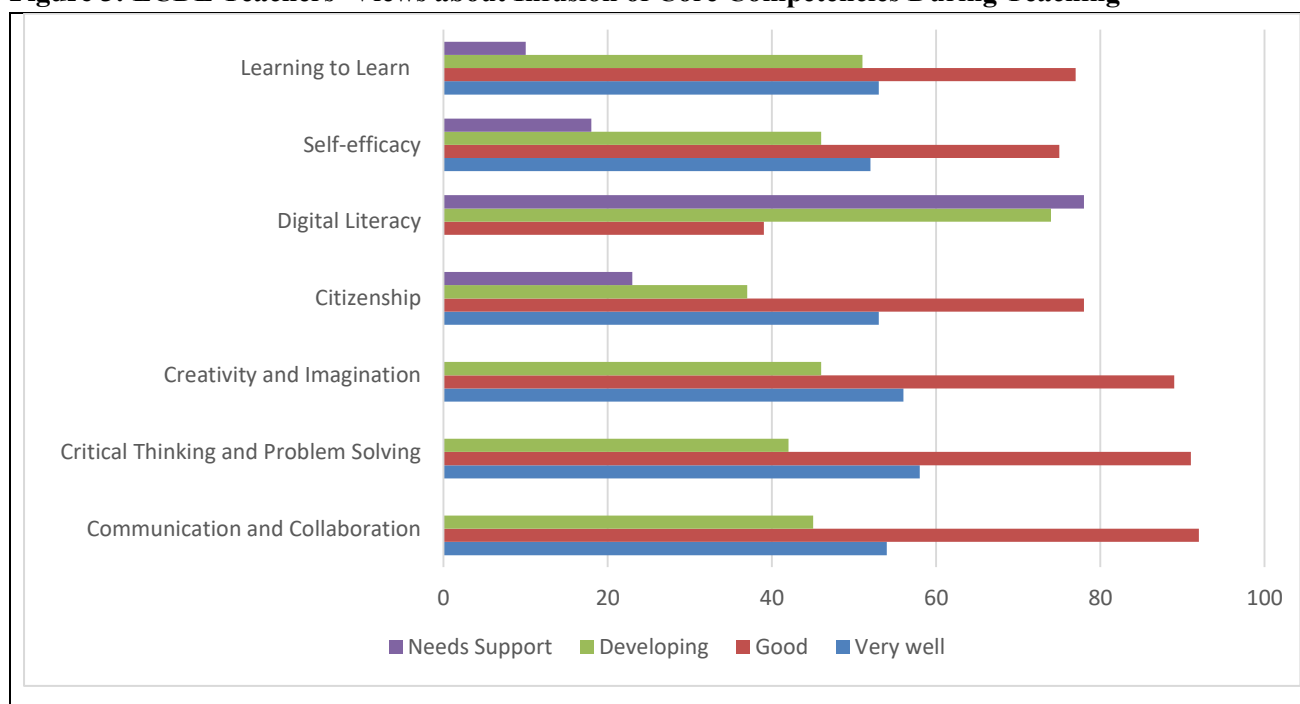
The above findings indicate that the teachers are confident about their infusion of the core competencies except for digital literacy where it is apparent that they are either developing the skill or need to be supported in the same.

The study carried out observational study to collaborate the self-assessment of the teachers. In one of the schools, the researcher noted a play activity that brought out communication and collaboration in an ingenious manner. The teacher asked the children to form pairs. Then in each pair, the children were asked to sit back-to-back with their arms interlocked with those of their pairing partner. Then the teacher asked the children to support each other in that position to stand up. This was both interesting and tedious and indeed some of the pairs managed to stand. The teacher asked those who had managed to do so to demonstrate to the others how they did it and others were guided to successful completion of the task. The teacher was bringing out communication and collaboration.

In another institution, the researcher observed boys and girls working together in groups like holding hands in groups and singing. The immediate cultural context permits mixing of boys and girls in such contexts. Further, the children would be formed into different groups with one of the children acting as the group leader. More significantly, the researcher observed the teacher asking the group to pick another leader until virtually every child had a chance to play the leader role. Further, the researcher observed another school where children held hands and formed different shapes including tunnels and houses. One of the children was asked to navigate out or around while the other children paused obstacles in the quest. The teacher was inculcating critical thinking and problem solving at the level of the child.

The findings confirmed that indeed the ECDE teachers were inventing their unique methods of inculcating core competencies in a simple and child-friendly way. There were virtually no digital devices in all the institutions visited.

Qualitative findings from ECDE teachers confirmed that they were finding their way around limited facilities:

An ECDE teacher is down to earth, we teach in many ways to help our children understand. When you come to our classes you see a lot of creativity in the way we teach. Even this CBC is not a big deal for us. Once we know what needs to be done, we work our way towards that using what we have. That is what teaching PP1 and PP2 means.

(ECDE Teacher's opinion, October 2023)

However, observational study in at least two ECDE centres noted that special considerations needed to be designed to accommodate children who are chronologically older than the ECDE going children to meet their specific needs thus ensuring access and equity. The researcher took note of the how the teacher meaningfully incorporated the special children into the learning environment, including special tasks suitable for their ability. ECDE education has the potential to reach and impact learners that traverse different social-economic contexts including the most vulnerable and marginalized groups like children with special needs. The study highlighted the need to localize CBE to reflect the child's immediate environment in a way that factors the context of the child. This study therefore recommends indigenization of CBE to reflect the contextual environment of the child rather than an attempt to copy paste the system across the country.

Empirical studies have indicated that teachers have challenges incorporating learners with special needs in the regular classes. The teachers noted that maintaining the interest of the children with special needs and guiding them through the learning activities becomes a serious challenge when you have a bigger group to deal with. The reviewed study reported that teachers require special skills and competencies to handle children with special needs. These teachers are required to first understand the special needs of each child in order to give them individualized attention and guidance. It is not easy for teachers who have not gone through the training (Cooc, 2019).

Studies conducted in Tanzania of early childhood education indicate that the challenge of physical infrastructure and teaching learning resources is also a problem in Tanzania. The government and other educational stakeholders have lowly prioritized ECE leading to unqualified teachers and supervisory staff. Furthermore, the majority of ECE teachers adopt didactic teaching styles that give too much emphasis to literacy and numeracy skills and less emphasis to learning through play and discovery (Ndijuye & Rao, 2018).

The study further examined the teaching methodology. According to KICD (2016), CBC requires that teachers are retooled in order to be responsive to the requirements of competency-based education. The orientation moves from focus on content knowledge to emphasis on 21st century skills, pedagogy and professional competencies where attention shifts from teacher-centred approaches to learner-centered pedagogies.

The ECDE teachers were asked to indicate from a list provided, the various learner activity-based strategies that they use in their classes. The indicated areas were teased out of the options cited by respondents in the pilot study and further refined using literature review. From the findings it was noted the songs were the most popular learner activity-based strategy as indicated in figure 4 below:

Figure 4 Learner activity-based strategies used in the classes
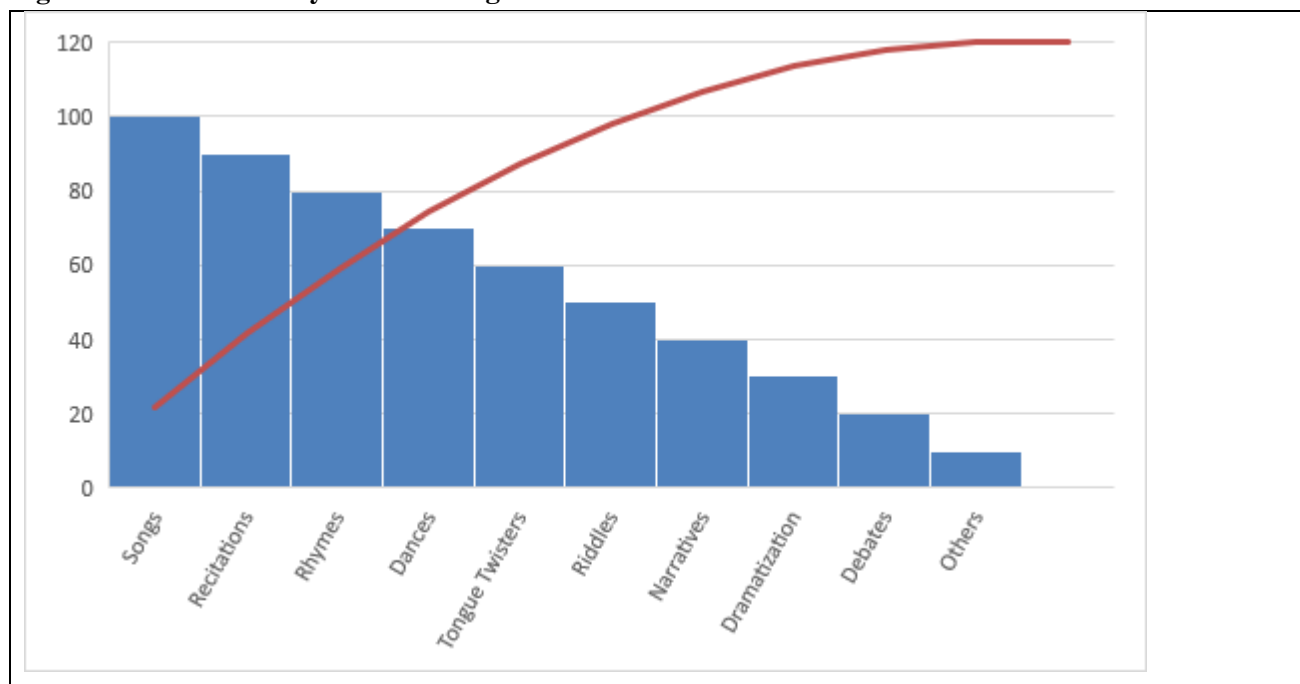
The study emphasized that since ECDE is the earliest form of education, it should help the child to appreciate their cultural identity. It should therefore be deliberate about introducing children to the varied and rich cultural diversity. The songs, recitations, rhymes and dances are the earliest cultural expressions that child encounters in ECDE. The position of this study is that ECDE education should favour the development of interest among the children, in their own cultural heritage. The study noted that use of songs, recitations, rhymes, dances, tongue twisters, riddles, narratives, dramatization, debates and other forms of oral renditions reverberated the cultural derivative background of the study. The ECDE teachers' responses were triangulated during the observational sessions where the study found out that songs were a common feature in most of the schools. The study observed that most of the ECDEs were lively and enjoyable spaces for the children. The findings indicated that in spite of the numerous challenges sited in the delivery of CBE, teachers were still finding creative and interactive approaches for effective delivery.

Previous studies also noted that playful learning experience are crucial for quality early childhood education. Foundational learning skills require the teachers to employ pedagogical skills that are child-centred and ones that arouse interest and curiosity from the learners. Leaners should be provided with an opportunity to discover knowledge within their environments. This formative stage of the child requires humour and play to sustain the interest of the leaners. The ECDE should be a child friendly environment that caters for the needs of all the children (APHRC, 2023).

This study emphasizes the critical role of leveraging immediate environments of the child for effective delivery of competency-based education. In particular, the findings emphasize the importance of the cultural aspects that promote learning and all-round development of the child. The predominant Luhya community situations songs and dance as critical cultural aspects of a child's socialization and development. The study positions this as one of the key outcomes of this study given that the tendency is to always look at the resources that are inadequate and lacking for effective delivery of quality education.

The study sought the ECDE teachers' views on learner classroom socialization through a Domain-by-Domain Analysis. This is a method of evaluating learner outcomes one developmental area or domain at a time. Each domain reflects a specific skill set that the CBE curriculum aims to nurture in learners. The idea is to assess

the teachers' views how well children are doing in each of these areas separately, rather than giving a general overview. In this study, the following domains were analyzed as shown in figure 5 below:

Figure 5: A domain-by-domain analysis of teachers' views on classroom socialization
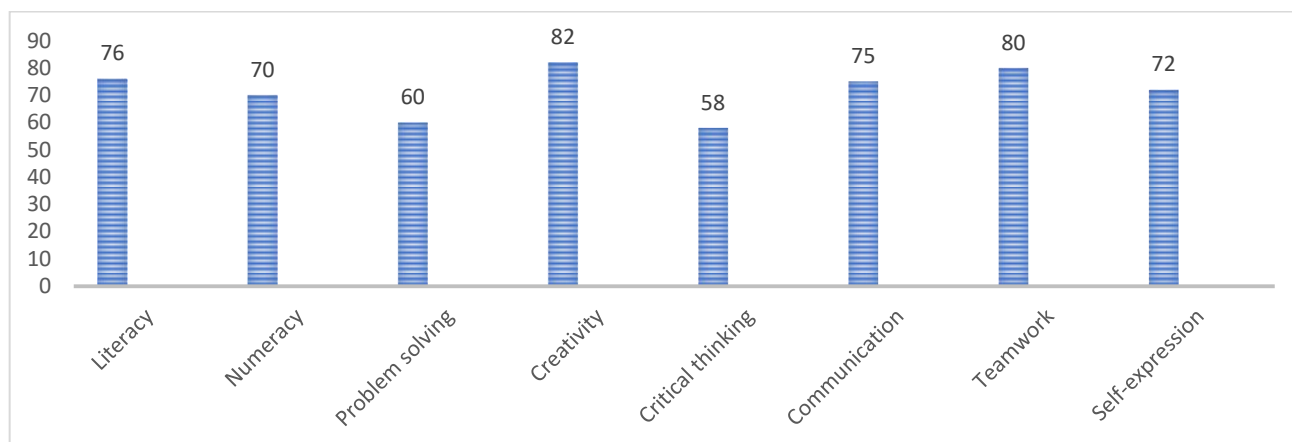
The study collaborated the quantitative finding by making observations and interviewing the teachers for clarity. On literacy skills, teachers noted the challenge of low exposure to print materials at home affected the speed of literacy acquisition for children from underprivileged backgrounds. On numeracy skills, the ECDE teachers noted that though most of them could count up to 20 easily, but struggle with written numerals and abstract sums. Regarding problem solving skills only a moderate number of learners showed clear problem-solving capabilities. Most struggled with tasks that required multiple steps or reflection. The study noted in one observed activity that the children using blocks to create bridges, only 4 out of 10 groups managed the task independently. On a positive note, on creativity skills, the study noted that it emerged as the highest-performing domain. The study observed learners freely engaged in drawing, dramatization and creating shapes using clay or sand. However, critical thinking appeared to be the lowest performing domain. The teachers noted that most learners could answer "what" and "who" questions but struggled with "why" and "how." In one of the observed sessions, the study noted that when the teacher asked them to explain their drawings is often difficult or what would happen after that, it was difficult. Then on communication skills, the children expressed themselves using short phrases and songs. Kiswahili and local dialects dominated. Teachers used storytelling and pair-sharing to enhance communication. On team work, the study observed activities such as group songs, outdoor games, and cleaning tasks that encouraged cooperation. Observations showed that learners helped each other in group tasks like organizing toys or role-play activities. On self-expression the study noted that teachers used drama, role-play and drawing to gauge self-expression. In one of the observed class, learners were asked to "draw what makes you happy." Responses included parents, teachers, and food.

The observational study and teacher feedback affirmed that the CBE framework has the potential to foster holistic learner development in ECDE. Despite challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited learning resources, ECDE teachers are employing creative, culturally relevant and learner-centered approaches to build foundational competencies in literacy, numeracy and social-emotional learning. Classrooms observed were dynamic and supportive environments where children actively engaged with one another, their teachers, and their learning materials. While learners showed strong outcomes in creativity, teamwork and literacy, the areas of critical thinking and problem-solving remain areas needing attention. The ECDE teachers expressed serious concerns about resource constraints, large class sizes and the need for more structured training in Competency-Based Assessment. The findings strongly suggest that with adequate support, continued teacher training and contextual localization, the CBE has the potential to deliver transformative outcomes in early childhood education.

Strategies that can be used to address ECDE teachers' concerns on learner classroom socialization in Competency Based Education in Bungoma County

Capacitate ECDE Ecosystem Through More Resource Allocation, Strengthening ECDE, Financing and Resourcing for Sustainability

A summary of recommendations by the teachers indicates that County Governments should provide sufficient equipment and infrastructure for ECDE programs. ECDE Teachers noted that they were not adept in digital skills required extensive re-skilling in order to leverage on the affordable ICT technologies that could be developed and deployed. The teachers noted that digital skills are fluid and dynamic and ECDEs need to accelerate into the future.

The County Director of Education noted that:

There are significant challenges in the implementation of competency-based education at the ECDE level arising from inadequate of collaboration between the two levels of government. Then, NACECE and DICECE centres at the KICD played a major role in supporting ECDE and should not have been disintegrated. More of administrative. Even the issue of capitation for ECDEs ought to be considered like happens in primary schools. Right now, the funding mechanisms for ECDEs are a bit vague. The problem of low-quality teacher management systems continues to affect the instructional quality of pre-primary education. Even a critical issue like the porridge feeding programme that is key in ECDE lacks clarity and consistency. A lot of policy issues at ECDE are so dependent on the County government in power that it is hard to tell the overall policy direction.

(County Director of Education, April 2024)

Pre-primary institutional management should be enhanced in order to spur the development of creative and robust strategies that focus on and continue to focus on changing institutional vision, mission, values, and their game plan with an emphasis on strategy, targets, initiatives, and strategic outcomes that address the needs of the child.

The study noted that ECDE space is still defragmented in terms of what exists on the ground. Early childhood development education (ECDE) is offered in institutions bearing various names, including ECDE centre, pre-primary, preschool, pre-units, nursery and day care. There is also a lack of effectively established and utilized ECDE boards of management at the institutional level. Since boards of management draw from the human resource capital of the local community, they have the capacity to bring together parents and the immediate community in developing the ECDEs.

Studies concur that ECDEs are poorly resourced. In a study conducted on an urban view of challenges facing implementation of the competency-based curriculum in Kenya (Iasboke, 2021), the ECDE teachers indicated that they experienced difficulties in implementing CBC due to lack of adequate learning facilities such as classrooms, chairs and tables. The teachers reported that most of the public pre-primary schools had high enrollment yet, there were inadequate classrooms to accommodate the high numbers. They further explained that the situation was getting worse each day to an extent that two learners share one chair while others lacked tables to write on. Similarly, the center managers also indicated that lack of adequate infrastructure in public pre-primary schools was a big challenge to implementation of the curriculum. They demonstrated that implementation of CBC in pre- primary school was challenged by lack of learning facilities. They cited instances where the available classrooms were not adequate. In one of the examples cited, here were approximately 68 learners in each of the classrooms, PPI and PP2. The extent of these challenges sometimes forced the Heads of institutions to combine PP1 and PP2 learners.

Enhance Inclusivity in ECDE

The teachers decried low prevalence of persons with special needs in ECDEs indicating that parents of these children did not feel comfortable to bring the children to schools as currently constituted. Their specific concerns were:

Where are the special children?

Most of the parents hide them at home

We do not have enough special schools

Children with special needs are not adequately catered for

(ECDE Teachers' voices, October 2023)

"Special children" refer to those with physical, cognitive, emotional, or developmental disabilities, including conditions such as autism, Down syndrome, hearing or visual impairments or learning disabilities. These children often require specialized support and accommodations to thrive academically and socially. They are typically placed in special schools designed to provide tailored curricula, trained staff and specialized resources that cater to their unique learning needs. However, some children may also be integrated into mainstream education settings with appropriate support.

When implementing competency-based education (CBE) at the early childhood education (ECDE) level for special children, there are several concerns. One of the primary challenges is ensuring that the CBE model is sufficiently adaptable to meet the diverse needs of these children. CBE emphasizes individualized learning but it requires teachers to have specialized training to effectively support children with varying disabilities. The curriculum may need to be modified, and additional resources such as assistive technologies, therapists, or trained aides may be required. As Kauffman & Hallahan (2011) state, "the challenge lies not in the content of the curriculum but in adapting the learning environment to ensure all students can engage and succeed." Furthermore, concerns about accessibility and inclusion arise. Without proper accommodations, special children may struggle to engage with the learning process, leading to potential feelings of exclusion or frustration.

One of ECDE teachers shared a personal experience on children with special needs: *There was a child who was hyper active in my class, uncooperative and did not want to interact with the other children being a bit hostile. Initially, I mistook this for indiscipline. I tried several approaches to deal with the child to no avail. In one of our meetings, I shared this experience with my colleagues. It was then that I learned from a colleague who had encountered a similar case that this could be a manifestation of special needs. It later turned out that the child was autistic. ECDE teachers are the first to encounter all the children that enter school. It is important for us to be supported on how to identify special needs children otherwise they will be mishandled.*

The findings from the teachers are supported by the County Director of Education in noting that as currently constituted, the ECDEs do not inspire the confidence of parents who have special needs children to bring them to school. A case in point is situations where corresponding primary schools have special units yet the ECDE does not have these children since the primary schools are well supported to mount special needs education.

Observations carried out by the researcher noted that all the institutions needed to create a barrier free environment to aid accessibility, findability, and approachability. It was also noted that there need to involve persons with special needs as significant stakeholders in addressing issues of mainstreaming inclusivity in ECDEs as the mantra goes 'nothing for us without us'. Therefore, the study calls for capacitating the entire ECDE ecosystem support, technical and pedagogic skills requisite for mainstreaming inclusivity. Inclusivity is premised upon the principle that every child is unique and difference and should therefore be accorded an

opportunity to bloom at their own pace while keeping in mind the need for quality in nurturing mental and physical development.

According to UNICEF (2022), early childhood inclusion is a practice that involves providing children with special needs the opportunity to participate in regular classroom activities alongside their typically developing peers. This approach, which is rooted in the principles of equality and diversity, has numerous benefits for both children with disabilities and their neurotypical classmates. Early childhood inclusion is crucial in promoting all children's overall development and well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Studies conducted in Canada seem to set the benchmark in inclusive classrooms in early childhood education. The Canadian education system recognizes early childhood education as holding immense significant due to the critical role in shaping the child's development and hence a valuable investment. Inclusive classrooms are becoming more prevalent there, requiring teachers with expertise in teaching all children. The purpose of inclusive education in this context is to foster collaborative relationships to facilitate the learning of children from diverse backgrounds.

(Seward, Dhuey & Pan, 2023).

Exploring Private Public Partnerships Models to Empower ECDE

Through the voice of the ECDE teachers strengthened by document analysis, the study also recommended that corporates could be encouraged through appropriate legislation to set up ECDE centres.

Workers struggle a lot with their children during the working hours.

Mothers with PP1 and PP2 learners want their children close to them when there are working. It would be a good idea to have more and more ECDE centres.

The workers would be more motivated when they see the companies setting up ECDEs for them close to their working places.

PP1 and PP2 children are heavily dependent on their parents. It would be a good idea to have companies sponsoring ECDE centres.

Some of our ECDE are close to some of these companies and if they partnered well with us, the facilities in our institutions would improve and take better care of their workers' children as well as those of the local community

(ECDE Teachers' responses, October 2023)

The qualitative findings of the study indicate that most of the corporates are well resourced and could enhance provision of sufficient equipment and infrastructure for ECDE programs. This proposal creates a win-win situation in that the corporates will house the children of some of their staff while the ECDEs are better resourced. These findings are affirmed by the County Director of Education:

Our ECDEs should strive to bring partners on board in order to secure funds for retooling trainer of trainers and ECDE teachers on CBE. The partners could also offer other support programmes through comprehensive training, availing and equipping ECDE centres with learning materials. For example, through partnership with EIDU, 24 ECDE coordinators and more than 100 ECDE teachers underwent training in February and April 2024 on integrating technology in education. The emphasis is on boarding more partners to help improve pre-primary education.

(County Director of Education, April, 2024)

Coordination, Linkages and Partnerships: Early Childhood Development services are provided by many players without clear multi-sectoral coordination structures. The proposal in the Service Standard Guidelines

National Pre-primary Education Policy 10 National Pre-primary Education Policy 11 National Pre-primary Education Policy of establishing a National Committee for Early Childhood Development housed at the Department of Children's Services to oversee coordination and implementation of the National Policy Framework was ineffective due to lack of ownership and inadequate technical capacity. As a result, there has been duplication of efforts, lack of synergy and inefficient use of resources leading to low quality services.

UNICEF acknowledges that ensuring that children have access to quality ECDE services is critical to building a strong foundation of nutrition, health, cognitive and socio-emotional development. Such a foundation improves the ability of the child to enter school ready to learn, retention in school for a longer time and improving academic achievement. Yet this can only be achieved with considerable investment of resources that many communities may not be in a position to raise. The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) plug in to catalyze resource mobilization (Xie, et al., 2022)

Further studies called for the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children support schools are instrumental in offering support for early year's education. These studies acknowledged that to enhance access, retention and quality of ECDE, it was important for them to be supported to build sustainability, gender equity and build the momentum to meet independently without external support by the NGOs. The studies called for parental involvement to a level that includes decision making as one of the equally important components like governance and advocacy through the school councils, committees, and other structures for parents' participation that provided impetus to reach out to the wide community for support since parents had the necessary networks (Stanikzai, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined ECDE teachers' perspectives on learner classroom socialization within Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework. Results indicate that over 70% of the teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of CBE principles, including its goals, structure, core competencies and professional expectations. Similarly, more than 70% reported applying learner-centered methodologies and adapting professional documents to meet CBE requirements. However, only 34% felt adequately equipped to assess learners using the new Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) rubrics, highlighting evaluation as a major challenge.

Teachers raised concerns about large class sizes, limited assessment training and lack of digital tools. Observations confirmed that ECDE teachers used culturally relevant, child-friendly strategies despite resource constraints. Notably, digital literacy and special needs inclusion remained underdeveloped. Overall, the findings highlighted that while ECDE teachers are creative and resilient, effective CBE implementation requires more training, assessment support and localized strategies to address the diverse needs of learners.

Qualitative insights reinforced these findings, with teachers expressing confusion around CBA, citing lack of pre-implementation training. Limited time for lesson planning and individual learner assessment was also flagged, exacerbated by large class sizes. Teachers voiced the need for training at the college level and during in-service programmes, aligning with successful models in countries like Rwanda (Ndayambaje, 2018).

Observation revealed that teachers innovatively infused core competencies, particularly collaboration, critical thinking, and communication, through interactive, culturally grounded activities such as songs, storytelling and group play. Nonetheless, digital literacy and inclusion of children with special needs remain underdeveloped areas. Teachers also highlighted the lack of resources and infrastructure as additional impediments to effective implementation.

The study concluded that while ECDE teachers are conceptually prepared and creatively engaged with CBE, significant gaps exist in assessment skills, time allocation and inclusion strategies. These findings stress the

importance of targeted teacher training, culturally contextualized pedagogy and improved classroom conditions for successful CBE implementation in early childhood education.

Literature reviewed concurred with the study findings. Learner socialization in Competency-Based Education (CBE) involves equipping learners with age-appropriate skills, values and behaviours for classroom and societal participation. CBE emphasizes holistic development through competencies like communication, creativity and problem-solving. Central to this process is the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) teacher, who facilitates learning tailored to learners' developmental stages across affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains.

In Kenya, the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (2017) led to reforms in teacher training, replacing ECDE courses with the Diploma in Early Childhood Teacher Education (DECTE), guided by a Competency-Based Assessment Framework. Teachers are trained to apply experiential and reflective methodologies, ensure real-life task integration and focus on learners' progress. Despite reforms, many teachers lack full understanding of CBE principles, posing a barrier to effective implementation.

Globally and regionally, studies highlight challenges such as limited awareness, lack of teacher training and poor access to resources. Teachers have struggled transitioning from traditional content-based methods to CBE. ECDE teachers, often undervalued, face motivation and resource constraints. The study identifies a key gap in involving ECDE teachers in CBE decision-making and calls for their empowerment, better training and inclusion to enhance learner outcomes and meet 21st-century educational demands.

The study highlights several strategies to strengthen ECDE in Kenya. First, resource allocation remains inadequate. Over 70% of ECDE teachers reported lack of facilities, with some classrooms accommodating up to 68 children. Teachers also cited the need for digital skills training and consistent funding mechanisms. Secondly, only 12% of ECDE institutions cater for children with special needs. Many parents hide such children due to stigma or lack of facilities. Teachers emphasized training in special needs identification, and the study calls for inclusive infrastructure and policy reforms. Thirdly, public-private partnerships (PPPs) were proposed. Teachers and officials suggested corporates sponsor ECDE centers, enhancing proximity for working parents and improving resources. Notably, partnerships like EIDU's 2024 training of more than one hundred ECDE teachers demonstrate potential. Finally, the study stresses the need for multi-sectoral coordination, clear governance and sustainable investment in ECDE systems.

The salient findings of this study will provide policy makers with foundational evidence for decision making and designing policies to enhance the delivery of competency-based education at the ECDE level not only in Bungoma County but in the entire republic of Kenya.

Accordingly, the study entrenched the following major policy recommendations that form the take outs of the study: Positioning of pre-primary as foundational education and revision of the scheme of service for ECDE teachers to enhance its prestige.

Historically, pre-primary education in Kenya has often been overlooked, leading to inadequate attention and insufficient investment in this critical sector. For a long time, pre-primary education was perceived as informal and was predominantly taught by untrained teachers, which contributed to its marginalization and underperformance. This perception resulted in what can be described as benign neglect, where pre-primary education was neither prioritized nor given the necessary resources to thrive. However, the study highlights the urgent need to reposition pre-primary education as a foundational level of learning that is crucial for the overall educational system. By recognizing the importance of early childhood education and making proportionate investments, CBE can unlock the potential of this sector. The study emphasizes that countries that have successfully integrated pre-primary education as a key component of their education systems have also seen improvements in their overall educational outcomes. As such, adopting policies that prioritize the growth and development of pre-primary education is essential for national development. One of the most

significant recommendations of the study is the revision of the scheme of service for Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) teachers. By enhancing the prestige and professional status of ECDE teachers, the country can attract qualified educators, improve the quality of teaching and provide children with a stronger educational foundation. Positioning pre-primary education as a critical and respected part of the education system will not only improve outcomes for young learners but also contribute to the country's long-term social and economic growth.

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