

ECDE Teachers' Social Concerns on Parental Involvement in the Competency Based Education: A Case of Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

Competency Based Education (CBE) is a system of education that has increasingly become popular as the preferred mode of delivering education and training locally and globally. However, in spite of the fact that CBE implementation has been initiated in both developing and developed countries, there are social concerns in its implementation that have been alluded to in research. Therefore, the study objective was to determine ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education in Bungoma County. The study was carried out in ECDE centres in Bungoma County. Descriptive survey research design was used. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The sample size was 201 ECDE teachers who were identified through simple random sampling and County director of education was purposively sampled. Data was collected through questionnaires for ECDE teachers, interview schedule for the County director of education and focus group discussions for preprimary one (PP1) and Preprimary two (PP2) parents. An observation schedule was used to triangulate the findings. Pilot study was conducted to enhance validity and reliability of the findings. Qualitative data was scored manually then organized and analyzed systematically as per thematic areas in a narrative form. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 26). Among the major findings 142 (74.34%) of the sampled teachers revealed that the parents are not supportive in CBE implementation. Further research on enhancing access, equity and inclusion of CBE in pre-primary education is desirable. **Keywords:** ECDE Teachers', Social Concerns, Competency Based Education, Kenya, Pre-primary education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Studies conducted at the global level underscore the important contribution early years education makes towards attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. Evidence suggests that this is a stage where meaningful educational foundation is laid in basic mathematics and literacy skills. As such, it is imperative to ensure that interventions are well implemented at this early stage to ensure that young children have strong foundations in basic skills like arithmetic and literacy (Saeed & Munir, 2021; Davis-Kean *et al.*, 2021). In developed countries, such as Finland and Canada, the Competency-Based Education at the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) level focuses on holistic child development, with an emphasis on social, emotional, cognitive, and physical growth. Educators are well-trained and use play-based learning, hands-on activities and individualized instruction that is tailored to the child's developmental stage and interests (OECD, 2017). This approach encourages creativity, critical thinking,

and problem-solving, while also fostering strong partnerships between parents, teachers and communities (Hodges, 2018). High-quality resources, ongoing professional development for teachers and clear guidelines for parental involvement are also key components of the CBC system in these countries.

At the global level, these studies show that when parents collaborate with educators, children feel more secure, motivated, and supported in their learning journey. This partnership also enables teachers to better understand the child's background, interests, and needs, which can inform more personalized and effective teaching strategies. Moreover, engaged parents are more likely to advocate for quality learning environments and resources, which benefits the broader ECDE system.

In Africa, the whole issue of what education system is to be taught has been even more perilous. At independence, most African countries embraced an

education system that was content based. A study by Taasisi ya Elimu (2013), points out that, by early 1990's countries in Africa started to reform their education system to competency-based education in order to deal with developmental needs of their countries since learners lacked appropriate skills and applicable knowledge. In Rwanda, the implementation of CBE began in 2015 in order to deal with scarcity in its education system with emphasis on science and technology. This was in response to its education philosophy of making sure that every child at all levels of learning receives quality education to develop their full potential and relevant skills, knowledge and desired attitudes that will help them fit in the society and job market (Republic of Rwanda, 2015).

In Kenya, However, it is important to point out that the Kenyan education system has sidelined ECDE since independence. Right from the Ominde Commission of 1964, the Mackay Commission of 1981, the Kamunge Commission of 1986 to the Koech Commission of 1998 gave far-reaching policy recommendations without paying attention to pre-primary education. It took the Sessional Paper of 2005, the 2006 Early Childhood Development policy framework and the Basic Education Act of 2013 to draw attention to pre-primary education in Kenya. In this context, the study noted that since competence-based education acknowledges the two years of pre-school, it is therefore important to pay attention to its implementation. CBE in Kenya was introduced in 2017 to improve early childhood education, however, challenges persist at the ECDE level. Teachers often lack adequate training and resources and the curriculum is not always well integrated into the local context (Republic of Kenya, 2020). Parental involvement is also limited due to a lack of awareness and guidance on how to engage in the learning process.

Further, the Early Childhood Education Act No. 3 of 2021 was enacted to provide a framework for the establishment of systems for the administration of early childhood education within a County and for connected purposes. Early Years Education in the context of CBE is now referred to as pre-primary or pre-school are the foundational years in the academic cycle where the child's mental, social and physical abilities are formed as well as fundamental skills of self-confidence, self-awareness, self-expression and self-esteem. It is the crucial stage where the learners develop a basic understanding of their immediate environment, an appreciation of their culture, aesthetic and artistic world and the curiosity to discover and explore the world around them (UNESCO, 2015).

From the above description, therefore, the ECDE teachers have also concern on the role that parents play in their children's education. At the ECDE level, parental involvement is important in ensuring that the learners are willing and happy to learn. Parents can help

to enhance practical skills acquisition and to help mould an all-rounded pre-school learner by guiding them on performing basic tasks. However, the concern is that most parents lack clarity on their role in the implementation of CBE. The parental voice was well captured in this study weighing on their recommendations on how to improve ECDE. Given that the parents are the primary socialization agents, they might undo the expected outcomes at school if they are not properly inducted. The study analyzed ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education in Bungoma County.

1.1 Objective of Study

The main objective of the study was to determine ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education in Bungoma County.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Competency Based Education has parental empowerment and engagement as one of the guiding principles of the system. Parents are, therefore, the first teachers and greatly influence the performance of a child in school. They are not only the primary caregivers but also the primary educators of their own children. Studies have actually identified a positive correlation between parental involvement and the successful adjustment and achievement of early childhood education (Jackman, 2009; Akaneme *et al.*, 2014). Parental involvement in the successful delivery of Competency Based Education cannot be gainsaid.

Studies conducted in Europe revealed that ECDE parents were well informed and involved in their children's education and acted more or less like co-educators. In Norway, for example, parental involvement is institutionalized through formulation of policy documents that spell out the threshold of parental involvement. Further, In South Africa, parental engagement is legitimized through an Act of Parliament. The South African Schools Act sets out the threshold of parental involvement in order to enhance the children's performance and boost their educational pursuit (Ule *et al.*, 2015; Bæck, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2004).

However, In Kenya, a study on the perceived challenges and opportunities in parental involvement in the implementation of competency-based curriculum (Mwarari *et al.*, 2020) identified various challenges regarding parental involvement. The study identified issues of awareness among the parents, communication, learning at home and collaboration with the community. On awareness among the parents, the study revealed that parents were not properly inducted on their specific role and lacked knowledge on how to get involved in the implementation of CBE. The parents also indicated that there was poor communication between schools and parents on matters regarding the implementation of CBE, the parents are also given very short notices on what was

expected of them even where they were significant financial implications and increased parental workload in the evening even for parents who work night shifts. Regarding learning at home, the parents decried assumption by the system that all parents were literate enough to understand the instructions and use of some of the materials needed to support homework. The parents were also concerned that the system was demanding too much from their young children. Moreover, the parents noted that the guidelines were not clear enough since the parents did not have the background information on what was being learned and the objective to be achieved. Parents do not necessarily understand the use of some of the materials asked for, too many activities scheduled for home and the requirements for frequent school visits. Finally on collaboration with the community, the parents expressed concerns about the safety of children in community service, the financial implications of the home study and availability of the required learning materials with the limited time schedules (Mwarari *et al.*, 2020).

The study gap that emerged in the area of ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education was the training and induction given to the ECDE parents, on their role in CBC. Most of the parents indicated as lacking time and commitment to be involved in early childhood education. The question that arose then was what the ECDE teachers could do to motivate parental involvement (McDowell, *et al.*, 2018; Koch, 2018; KICD, 2019). Presently, the ECDE teachers are concerned that this key stakeholder seems to be groping in darkness as major milestones are being scaled in the implementation. The study, therefore, looked at what the government and the ECDE teachers could do to come up with innovative strategies for parental involvement. This marks one of the major gaps that the study looked into.

Another significant methodological research gap in looking at ECDE teachers' social concern on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education is lack of parents' voice in the studies. Parents, especially, have an important role to play in children's education and development and hence, their opinions should be factored in studies. A study by UNICEF (2018) in Narok County, Kenya attempts to listen to local parents' opinions about their ECDE children's participation in preschools and mother tongue education in the rural area of Narok County. The study felt that such perspectives determine the support that parents give and the extent to which they engage in their children's education. However, limited research has been conducted in the rural areas listening to parents' actual views on pre-primary education (Cumming 2017). This study, therefore, bridged the gap by conducting a focus group discussion with the parents in order to listen to their voices on implementation of CBC in the ECDE context.

This study identified the gap on the level of knowledge and awareness of the competency-based education by the parents. The study identified knowledge gaps among the parents in that the implementation of the CBE did not pay enough attention to reorienting the ECDE parents on the new system. The study also focused on the negative views among the parents towards their perceived increased workload with the onset of CBE.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to gather evidence on ECDE teachers' social concern on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education in Bungoma County, Kenya. This method guarantees an accurate depiction of the state of affairs and a comprehensive appreciation of the situation achieved through a detailed analysis of the situation.

Population and Sample

The target population is crucial in research as it provides a basis for sampling, ensures the relevance and generalizability of findings and contributes to the precision of the study. Defining the target population clearly allows researchers to focus on a specific group that can answer the research questions effectively (Creswell, 2014; Kothari, 2004; Robson, 2011).

The target population for this study included, the County Director of Education and ECDE teachers in Bungoma County.

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.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The study utilized a variety of research instruments to collect comprehensive data from a diverse and geographically dispersed sample. These included questionnaires for ECDE teachers, Interviews with County Directors of Education (CDEs), FGDs with parents of ECDE learners and observation checklists. A pilot study was conducted in a representative ECDE center to test the instruments for clarity, validity, and reliability. Feedback from experts and respondents led to revisions that improved the tools. Validity was established through expert review and alignment with objectives, while reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.86. Data collection followed ethical procedures and proper approvals, ensuring quality, consistency, and integrity of the findings.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data was transcribed, coded, and themed based on research questions, focusing on respondents' experiences and understanding of CBE implementation at ECDE level. Their insights revealed key aspects of implementation, adding depth and context to quantitative findings. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS Version 26, enabling effective descriptive statistical analysis. The mixed-methods approach, grounded in post-positivism, highlighted discrepancies between policy expectations and actual practices. Ethically, the study obtained required approvals and ensured informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participation barriers were minimized, and data credibility was maintained through anti-plagiarism checks. Ethical practices, including photo blurring and avoiding personal identifiers, were observed, supporting the study's integrity and participant protection.

4 RESULTS

4.1 The ECDE Teachers' Social Concerns on Parental Involvement in the Competency Based Education

The Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017) envisages that since the parents are key stakeholders that influence the child, the ECDE teachers will work collaboratively with them for the benefit of the child. For example, the teachers will write to the parents on areas where they expect the parents to support and

supervise homework. Hitherto, the role of the parent was relegated to meeting the financial obligations while largely leaving the teaching and learning process almost entirely to the teacher.

Further, a report on Needs Assessment for Curriculum Reform in Kenya (KICD, 2016), underscored the need for learners to be provided with suitable situations in order for them to experience and attain the proposed competencies. Towards attaining suitable and sustainable environments both at home and in school, the parent is key and expected to be the springboard for varied and appropriate experiences that are the hallmark of the CBE. The parents are also expected to enhance a conducive environment for learning both at home and in school since they are the focal providers of the requisite resources.

Therefore, the study sought to find out from the teachers what they felt about parental involvement in delivery of CBE. The study began by seeking a general picture of the teachers' views on parents' support for CBE implementation in terms of whether they are involved or not. To begin with, majority of the teachers at 79.58% (152) felt that pre-school parents were involved in the education of their children. However, this optimistic picture is watered down when the issue is probed further. The teachers were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that PP1 and PP2 parents were supportive of the implementation of competency-based education implementation. Their responses were in figure 3.1 below:

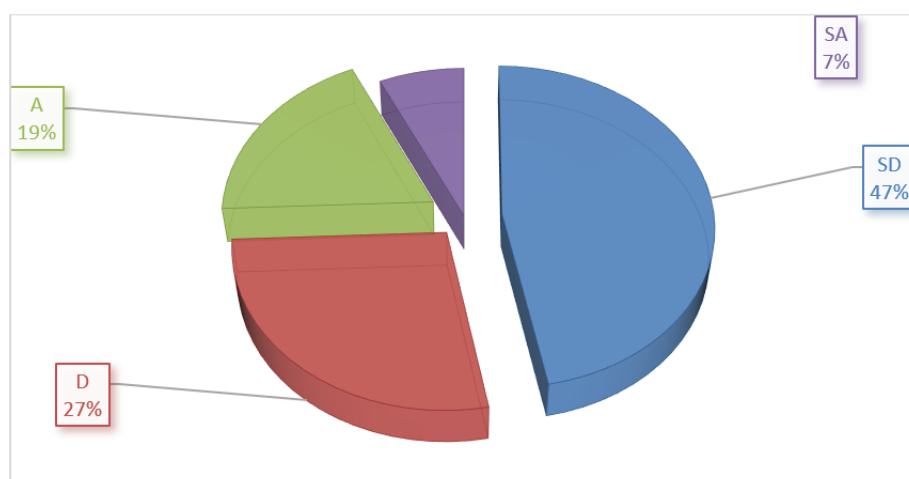


Figure 3.1: ECDE Teachers' views on Parents Support for CBE Implementation

The implications of these findings were that majority of the teachers at 74.34% (142) opine that the parents are not supportive. It therefore means that even though the parents are involved, they are not supportive. A further probe on the same revealed that the teachers feel that the parents are not in a position to afford the requirements needed for their PP1 and PP2 children. The findings from the key informants of this study were in

support. The above findings seem to corroborate with the voices of participants who noted that: -

*In a family suffering from poverty, CBC requirements are not a priority
Some children don't even bring maize for porridge to school, others have torn school uniform which is a sign of poverty
I feel parents are struggling with other basic needs. You cannot go to these parents and begin*

to demand for this or that when you can see for yourself their level of need.

Most of the rural population parents are poor. Poverty makes it difficult for these parents and their children to acquire the most basic facilities for school.

When you make a list of what you want the parents to buy, they openly tell you that they cannot afford. What do you do if they cannot afford.

There are serious economic challenges and the parents definitely give priority to other basic needs of the family. It is us who are affected most as ECDE since parents feel that the county government should provide for their children.

(ECDE Teachers' responses on parental role, October 2023)

These qualitative issues of poverty and financial strain among parents of early childhood education (ECDE) children can significantly impact their views and engagement with competency-based education. When parents are struggling financially, their focus often shifts toward immediate survival needs, such as providing food, shelter and healthcare, rather than educational concerns. As a result, they may view CBE as an added burden that requires additional time, resources or effort they cannot afford.

The quantitative figures in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2 below reflect that ECDE parents seem uninterested in the CBE. The financial strain can limit the parents' ability to support their children's learning. They might

be unable to provide necessary learning materials, attend school meetings or engage in activities that are part of the CBE framework, which emphasizes active participation, hands-on learning and continuous assessment. This can create a disconnect between the parents and the education system, where the parents might not fully understand or value the benefits of CBC because they are preoccupied with the daily struggles of life.

Additionally, financial difficulties can affect parents' overall engagement with the ECDE schools. If parents have to be working round the clock or dealing with financial insecurity, they may lack the time or energy to actively participate in school activities or engage in conversations with teachers about their child's progress. This perceived lack of interest might not reflect true disinterest in CBE, but rather a coping mechanism driven by external stressors that hinder their active involvement.

The study went further to qualify the ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education. The ECDE teachers were asked their opinion regarding the support the parents provided for their children. Based on the responses provided in the pilot study, the following responses were calibrated as the areas of parental engagement. The responses are presented in table 3.1 below.

These quantitative findings were further presented in the figure below to bring out a more explicit depiction of the results as shown in figure 3.2 below.

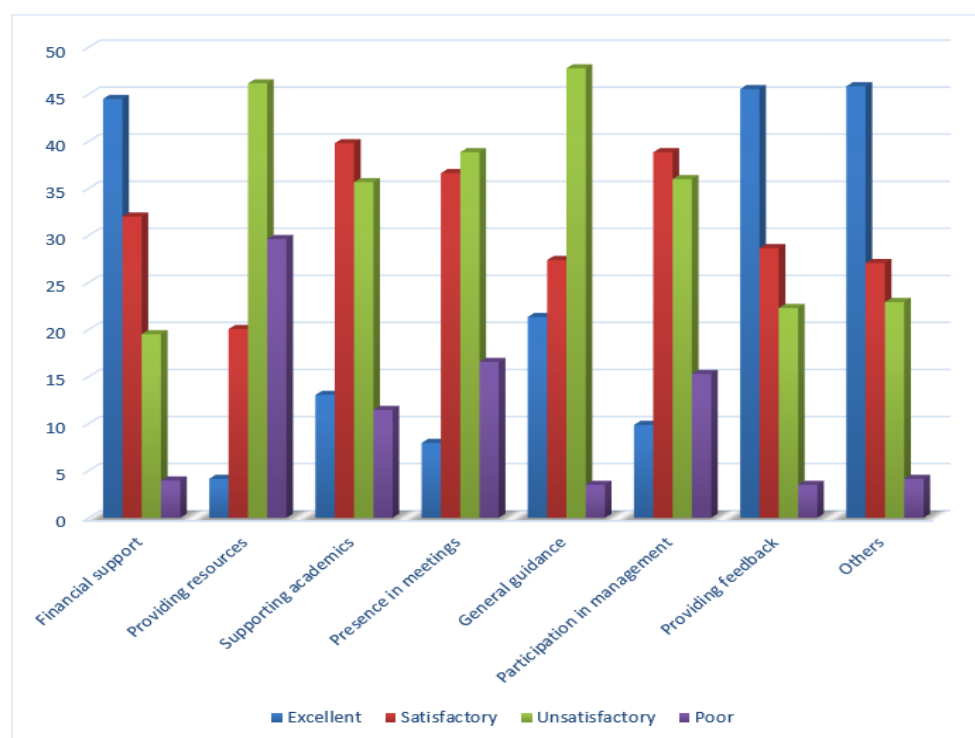


Figure 3.2: ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental engagement in CBE

Table 3.1: ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental engagement in delivery CBE

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor
Providing financial support	44.52	32.01	19.51	3.96
Providing teaching -learning resources	4.14	20.06	46.18	29.62
Supporting academics like assignments	13.06	39.81	35.67	11.46
Presence in meetings	7.96	36.63	38.85	16.56
General guidance to children	21.34	27.39	47.77	3.5
Participation in management of the institution	9.87	38.85	35.99	15.29
Providing feedback to teachers	45.56	28.66	22.29	3.5
Others like supporting teaching, donations etc	45.86	27.07	22.93	4.14

There are three principal findings from the quantitative data above. First, the teachers felt that parents are apt in providing financial support, providing feedback to teachers and other forms of support with an affirmative index of 76.53%, 74.22% and 72.93% respectively. This means that the teachers believe that parents are willing to pay the fees, provide the teachers with necessary feedback and other support as indicated in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017) and the Needs Assessment for Curriculum Reform in Kenya (KICD, 2016).

Secondly, there seems to be a problem when it comes to provision of teaching -learning resources. Majority of the teachers at a high score 75.8% felt that the parents do not provide materials that are needed for teaching the competency-based education. The implication then is that while as the parents are ready to keep their children in school and providing the basics, they are not willing to engage further in the delivery of CBE. The study notes that this as a big challenge in the implementation of CBE in early childhood education. Competency-Based Education is resource intensive and expects parents to continuously provide teaching and learning resources for the children. In a nutshell, the ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education is that the learners are not well provided with the teaching-learning resources that are imperative for effective delivery. The findings spell impediment to the effective implementation of CBE. It is not enough to pay fees and keep the child at school, the parent needs to ensure that the child has enough learning resources.

A direct observation in one of the schools on parent's meetings confirmed the low attendance and further observed a heavily skewed attendance towards the female gender. According to the teacher, the meeting expected 86 parents but only recorded 47 parents out of which only 11 were male. The male attendance is paltry 23% in this cited example. The voices of the ECDE teachers weighed on this observation in the qualitative findings:

Parents are willing to escort their children to school in the morning but they do not want to come for meetings

Parents rarely attend our meetings, sometimes we are forced to ask parents to come with their children on the day of the meeting

These meetings are almost left to mothers and we are often asking 'where are the fathers of these children?'

More than 90 percent are mothers yet the percentage of single mothers as per our records is far less

They come just to meet the requirement of being there

(ECDE Teachers' responses on parental role, October 2023)

Document analysis of available records indicates that most of these pupils do have both parents and a few come from single parent homes or are raised by guardians. The concern then was that male parents were avoiding ECDE meetings. The study indicated that parental involvement was not gender balanced, a situation that serves to propagate the negative view that ECDE space is for female gender. While as this is not true; it lowers the esteem and importance of ECDE education.

Qualitative findings from the County Director collaborated the findings:

One of the challenges we have with ECDE is the wrong notion that ECDE is a preserve of women. When you go to most of antenatal clinics, you find the nursing mothers taking care of the children as part of the reproductive roles. Maybe due to the patriarchal male domination in the society, the same is carried forward in pre-primary. Most of the African men have their own definitions of the roles for men and women, and child rearing is predominately in the hands of the mothers. However, we do not experience this in primary and secondary schools. Such a belief denies pre-primary education the due attention. Education stakeholders must find a way to eradicate this gender stereotype.

(County Director of Education, April, 2024)

Thirdly, the findings indicate an ambivalent opinion towards parents supporting academics like assignments, their general guidance to their children and their participation in management of the institutions. In

these three areas there is almost a tie in the score for assenting and dissenting at 44.59% against 55.41%; 48.73% against 51.27% and 48.72% against 51.28% respectively. The implication then is that the ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education is one of parents who are merely fulfilling their obligation and not willing to go an extra mile. In the context of CBE, an indifferent attitude on the parents would impede delivery since there is an expanded role on the part of the parent and more is required of them for effective delivery.

The quantitative findings above on ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental engagement in CBE is corroborated by parental voices from the focus group discussions. ECDE parents affirmed their challenges and dilemma in supporting delivery of CBE:

Parents are not trained like the way the teachers are

The teachers went to college but there is no college for parents on CBC

Teachers understand their work in school.

Parents understand their work at home.

We should not be asked to do work that belongs to the teachers

CBC is asking for too much from the parents.

I was assisting my child and she said to me, that is not how the teachers showed us. I said okay and kept quiet. Kazi ina mwenyewe (the work belongs to someone else)

Parents are willing to help the teachers. The issue is that they are demanding more than we can provide.

Parents everywhere are complaining about CBC because we are being asked to do too much.

Too much is being expected from us and we have other children and other responsibilities.

Parents are calling for more realistic expectations on what they are requested to do.

(Parents' voices during Focus Group Discussion, October 2023)

The parental voices in the study blending with quantitative findings are in line with the post positivism paradigm of the study. Post positivism approach promotes combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that explores the diversity of facts researchable through various kinds of investigations but respecting and valuing all findings as the essential components for the research. The study therefore blended the two to bring out a comprehensive view of ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education.

The qualitative findings above raised an issue that the study sought to clarify: that the system is placing too much pressure on the parents. The study then summarized the three key areas teased out of the responses from the ECDE teachers as follows: Parents are not willing to participate in CBE activities; Parents are willing but lack information on CBE; Parents are willing but lack resources to support CBE. The study sought the opinions of the ECDE teachers. These responses are important for the internal consistency of the study since they highlight the responses from parents and constitute a paraphrase to the teachers. The ECDE teachers responded as shown in table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2: Responses on ECDE Teachers views on parental support

S/No	Item	Sd	D	A	Sa
1.	Parents are not willing to participate in CBE activities	17	30	56	88
2.	Parents are willing but lack information on CBE	9	23	64	95
3.	Parents are willing but lack resources to support CBE	17	35	53	86

The above quantitative findings are presented in figure 4.10 below for a more graphic presentation and clarity. The figures indicating that parents are not interested in competency-based education (CBE) activities may point to deeper underlying social issues that go beyond mere disinterest. As observed in the quantitative finding above, parents are not actively disengaged but are constrained by factors such as financial stress, time limitations or lack of understanding on their role in CBE. Poverty and financial strain divert parents' attention away from educational concerns, making it difficult for them to prioritize or engage with CBE-related activities, even if they value education.

Furthermore, parents indicated lack of full understanding of the benefits of CBE and feeling overwhelmed by the demands of the education system given that they are not familiar with its structure or the active participation it requires. Limited exposure to CBE, coupled with a lack of clear communication from schools leads to misconceptions about its importance or effectiveness.

Therefore, it is not necessarily true that parents lack interest. In many cases, external factors like economic hardship or limited educational resources hinder their ability to engage fully. The issue lies not in a lack of interest but in the systemic barriers preventing their active participation in their child's learning journey.

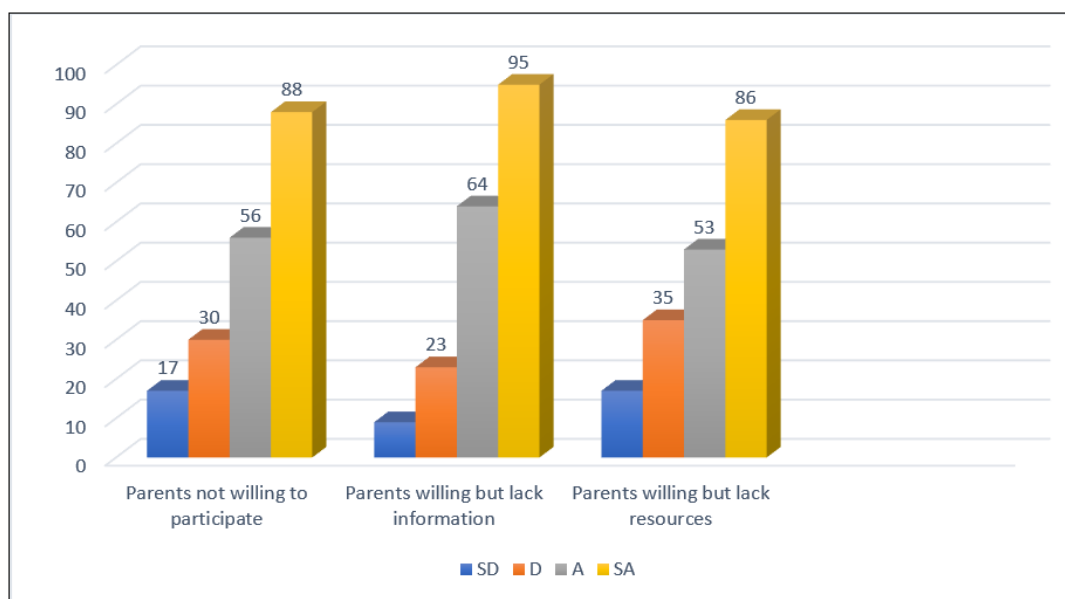


Figure 3.3: Responses on ECDE Teachers views on parental support

These quantitative findings corroborate the qualitative findings from both the ECDE teachers and the parents. To begin with, they confirm parents' unwillingness to participate in the CBE activities. The majority of ECDE teachers at 75.39% feel that the parents are not willing to participate in CBE activities. Secondly, they confirm ECDE teachers' views that the parents are willing but lack information on CBE. The majority of ECDE teachers at 83.25% believe that the parents are willing but do not have the necessarily information for them to offer their support. Thirdly, they confirm that parents are willing but lack resources to support CBE. The majority of ECDE teachers at 72.77% believe that the parents are willing to offer their support but are constrained by resources.

The main implication of these finding is that the issue of lack of awareness on CBE is the greater problem as compared to lack of resources. The findings belabour the view that the major issue with the parents' attitude towards CBE implementation is the fact that they have not been empowered with information regarding the new education system.

From the findings of this study, details emerge that there was low level of understanding of CBE among the parents and this could impede implementation. Parents are part and parcel of the day-to-day implementation of CBE which they can only do effectively when they have a proper grasp of what it entails and the specific expectations on their part. The attitudes reflected in the study are a reflection of information gaps that exist among the parents. When the parents do not understand, they develop a negative attitude and are unwilling to commit themselves towards the effective delivery of CBE.

The study embarked on content analysis by sampling PP1 Language Activities learning guide to evaluate what it is that is specifically entailed:

Pre-Primary 1

Language Activities

Strand: Listening

Sub-Strand: Common greetings and farewell

The specific Learning Objectives include:

Respond appropriately to general greetings at home and at school; Respond appropriately to time related greetings at home and at school; Respond appropriately to farewell at home and at school; Respond appropriately to farewell with reference to time at home and at school; Enjoy responding appropriately to greetings and farewell at home and at school.

The study detailed the above sample where the teacher expects the parents to participate in training their children to acquire common greetings and farewell protocols that can easily be achieved from home-based education. The specific learning objectives aim at what the children should be doing every day including responding appropriately to greetings and farewell at home and at school. It is actually one of the most basic issues that parents should help their children to acquire. The study concluded that most of the tasks are not beyond the parents and are actually within their purview, if they are well inducted into the system. The challenge is not the tasks but mainly awareness on what parents are expected to do and the rationale behind it.

The synthesis of all these findings suggested that parents need to understand both the theory and practice of competency-based curriculum. For effective implementation of the CBE, the awareness, involvement and experience of parents are of critical importance since they are at the core of the teaching and learning process.

Parents are expected to provide collaborative synergy with other stakeholders. Moreover, character development is at the core of CBE and the role of the parents towards the same cannot be refuted. So, when they do not attend meetings, the opportunity is lost for them to internalize their roles and seek clarity where they are not certain.

The study findings on the ECDE teachers' social concerns on parental involvement in the Competency Based Education were synthesized and interpreted revealing that teachers were calling for a fluid ECDE system that embraces more stakeholders. Secondly, the threshold of parental involvement should be defined beyond provision of resources. The teachers' qualitative findings further indicated that since CBE is a premier programme, it would be plausible to look into having implementation committees that incorporate the parents' thus cascading implementation to the institutional level while at the same time plugging the gaps in the flow of information on the programme. The parents' general awareness and involvement in the implementation of CBE are very important because it is they who are charged with the demanding task of managing the child at home with regard to curriculum. Presently, this key stakeholder seems to be groping in darkness as major milestones are being scaled in the CBE implementation. It is incumbent upon the government to ensure that the parents are firmly on board for success in CBE implementation.

The County Director of Education confirmed this:

The spirit behind parental involvement in ECDE goes beyond merely dropping and picking the child for school. It is well stipulated as parental empowerment and engagement. Parents ought to be involved even in the delivery of the curriculum itself. In this new dispensation, the parent has a role in the attainment of the learning objectives. An example is environmental education, the teacher can liaise with the parent in the neighbourhood. A well-planned visit to the neighbourhood can achieve the specific learning objectives and provide the child with dynamic and authentic experiences.

(County Director of Education, April, 2024)

The qualitative findings from the director call for enhanced parental empowerment and engagement. The practice has been a passive role by parents but in the CBE setup, there are specific expectations on the parents. Other than not mentioning the pre-primary education level, the 8-4-4 system of education did not explicitly specify the role of the parent beyond provision of learning resourcing for the learner. This gap in parental role is still being felt in the implementation of CBE.

Studies have shown that parental involvement in a child's early childhood education results in quality

learning and care outcomes. It leads to better social, emotional and learning outcomes. Parents play an integral role in a child's early childhood education and care. From setting achievable goals to celebrating successes, from providing guidance to creating moments of connection, the power of a parent's presence is tremendous (Dereli, F., & Türk-Kurtça, T., 2022). The age 3 to 6 years is a stage that lays foundations for personal, social and emotional development of the child as well as language and physical development. Given that these are critical years for providing a firm foundation for learning, a stable and nurturing environment needs to be provided by both parents and teachers. There is need for synergy between what the teacher is doing in school and what the parent does at home. Similarly, it is important to ensure that there is no dissonance between what is reinforced at school and that which is emphasized at home. The child needs consistence in the two environments (Morgan, 2017; Goodall, 2018).

A number of studies have further demonstrated that CBE was rolled out without clear empirical evidence whether the parents who are at the epicenter of implementation, have the prerequisite knowledge and understanding of their role in the entire process (Sari, 2020). This contextual gap is now manifesting itself with reports that parents feel that the CBE is overburdening them. The study opines that the role of the parent is too is critical, being at the centre of the cogwheel, to be relegated to the periphery.

Parents also brought out pertinent issues in regarding their empowerment and engagement in CBE context that was well summarized in this qualitative finding:

I have seen the teacher asking parents to take photographs for some assignments. This is okay. But the teacher has already assumed that the family has what it takes to take these photos. But this is not the problem, the real issue is that some of the photos can be personal. Photos taken in the house expose the family background, like utensils, furniture and so on. Imagine a simple innocent photograph of a child making the bed. This photo gets into the family bedroom. How many people are comfortable showing off their bedrooms even to the ECDE teacher. This is different from assignments like cleaning the compound or planting a tree. Am not sure where the teacher draws the line between what is private and what is public.

(Parent' voice during Focus Group Discussion, October 2023)

These are sociologically valid arguments by the parents. While the photos can promote creativity and reflection, it can inadvertently lead to low self-esteem and discrimination, especially along socioeconomic lines. According to symbolic interactionism, the way

children perceive and interpret their social world is shaped by the symbols, signs and interactions they experience. When children are asked to share photos of their homes, those from lower-income families might feel embarrassed or stigmatized if their living conditions do not align with societal ideals of wealth or success. These children may interpret their home setting as "less than" or "inferior," which can harm their self-worth and social identity.

Similarly, from a social exchange theory perspective, interactions are based on perceived rewards and costs. If children are from disadvantaged backgrounds, they may feel that their home environment is a source of social disadvantage, where they are not able to present the same "valuable" or "socially acceptable" assets as their wealthier peers. This can lead to a sense of unequal exchange, where they feel their home life offers them fewer "rewards" in terms of status or social capital, reinforcing feelings of discrimination and exclusion. Ultimately, these experiences can negatively impact their self-esteem and social relationships, as they internalize societal biases about socioeconomic status.

The above qualitative findings bring out the issue of the scope of portfolio of evidence that the ECDE teacher seek from the parents. The teachers are provided with suggested activities in the curriculum designs and it is left to their discretion to scope the parental empowerment and engagement. The study identifies this as a gap in the scope of parental empowerment and engagement in the implementation of CBE.

The concerns raised by the parents regarding their role in the implementation of CBE are not without merit and it behooves the policymakers to act with speed. It is important to state that any ineptitude on the part of the parents could easily derail the smooth implementation of CBE. Moreover, the role of the parent in the smooth functioning of CBE will not only enhance institutional capacities towards implementing CBE but also teacher motivation. The gap in information could be bridged by preparing a guidebook that details the expectations on the part of the parent so that it is not left to individual institutions to craft their own sensitization programmes.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, which focused on determining ECDE teachers' concerns regarding parental involvement in CBE, involved using questionnaires for teachers and focus group discussions for parents. This approach allowed the researcher to gather in-depth insights from both teachers and parents, providing an in-depth understanding of how parental engagement impacts the delivery of CBE.

The study highlights several recommendations to strengthen ECDE in Kenya. First, parental

involvement is crucial, yet 74.34% of parents cited limited understanding of Competency-Based Education (CBE) due to poor communication. While most parents showed goodwill and willingness to support their children, they requested clearer guidance from teachers. The study recommends ECDE teachers use both digital and written communication, aligning with global practices seen in Japan and the U.S.

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