

Students' Voice as a Propulsion in Teaching and Learning in Competency-Based Curriculum. A Case of St. George's Public Primary School, Kiambu County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The shift from teacher to learner in implementing Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has given impetus to students' voices. Descriptive design was used. The target population was all 16 teachers teaching grade 8 at St George's public primary school in Kiambu County, Kenya. All 16 teachers purposefully participated. A questionnaire was used to collect data, and it was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that half often and the other half of the teachers rarely considered students' experiences, needs, and interests before the overall planning for teaching and learning. The study recommends intensive retooling of teachers for effective CBC implementation.

Keywords: students' voice, competency-based curriculum, and teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, efforts to enhance the quality of education through teaching and learning have been reflected in reforms targeting students' voices. Students' voice entails efforts by teachers to tap into the experiences and interests of learners for optimal realization of learning outcomes. Apart from improving classroom practices, the overall educational governance also benefits, thus producing a holistic learner as the final product may occur.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, the students' voice continues to be widely embraced as a modern strategy to promote effective teaching and learning in education. Students' voices entail efforts by teachers to tap into their experiences, ideas, and feedback to foster desired changes, especially in classroom practices. Key among the students' voices that influence education during the teaching and learning process are their experiences, thoughts, and knowledge. As a result, it impacts diverse aspects of the curriculum, such as pedagogy, governance, and contributes to institutional interventions. According to Strydom & Loots (2020), studies on student voice currently position students as active dialogue partners in higher education with much to contribute rather than passive consumers or evaluators, thus influencing teaching and learning preparation, implementation, and actual product.

The shift from focusing on the teachers to students voice is consistent with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; United Nations, 1989), which states that children should have "the right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child" and that "the views of the child should be given due weight." Since the early 19th century, efforts to recognize students' voices by scholars such as Dewey's point that "Voice" is a priority for institutional practice in schools, enhance decisions that reflect

students' goals and priorities, thus necessitating the utilization of resources to achieve desired outcomes (Kahne, Bowyer, Marshall, & Hodgins, 2022). Further, student voice should be viewed as a significant dimension of a healthy school and classroom culture, and attending to student voice can support academic outcomes and broader school improvement. Additionally, he argues that it would be a mistake to imagine that high-quality learning environments can be pursued without attention to student voice. According to Craig, Brown, and O'Hara (2023), student voice enhances learning conditions through students' increased engagement and teachers' new perspectives. They further suggest that a student voice approach can provide further information through a learner lens for teachers to reflect on and take pedagogic action, thus enhancing classroom practices. Additionally teacher related interventions to improve learning revealed organizing learning trips, excursions and contests and being innovative with ICT usage thus enhance on tapping learners voice (Mose, Katam and Orodho,2024). Thus creates the need to explore learners voice in the teaching learning practice.

However, despite the positive impacts of the students' voice in education, research points out that in South Africa, the impact of student voices on higher education is hard to find (Strydom & Loots, 2020). In Ireland, among students in Irish post-primary schools, the traditional teaching pedagogy, which consists of more teacher-centred approaches with little input from students, continues to prevail largely (Craig et al, 2023). This revelation in post-primary education levels calls for scrutiny of the foundation of basic education implementation, especially when implementing CBC. Similarly, the learners voice can be constrained by inadequate instructional materials, unmet teachers needs and low use of technology as pointed by (Katam,2019,2020 & Nzoka, Kaugi and Katam,2022). Further, raising learners voice may necessitate government interventions to empower all stakeholders on hidden curriculum to promote learning as pointed by (Katam & Buya,2023 &2025).

Scholars using the Dewey model point out that the focus on student voice in implementing student-centered learning demands a change in the teachers' current practice, which this paper seeks to unearth teachers' efforts put in considering students' voice in CBC implementation (Santi, 2017). Therefore, multiple roles played by the teacher should be anchored on students' voices to achieve the optimum desired outcome. In Kenya, the CBC framework developed by the KICD has guided the continued implementation of CBC since 2018. The emphasis is on the practical aspect, guided by the Social Constructivism advocated by Dewey (ROK, 2017). Therefore, the curricula should be tailored to the child's preconceptions and resonate with how the child views his or her world to promote hands-on and experiential learning through continuous, participatory, and experiential learning. This has been demonstrated through a study that revealed that majority of the teachers utilize learner centre methods that provoke thoughts using discussion and demonstrations (Abuko & Katam,2022).

Objective

This paper examined teachers' efforts to consider student voices in implementing CBC among grade eight students at St. George's public primary school, Kiambu County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive design to examine teachers' considerations of student voice in implementing CBC. The target population was all sixteen teachers teaching grade eight at St George's public primary school in Kiambu County, Kenya. All sixteen teachers purposefully participated in the study. A questionnaire was used to collect the data, and it was analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and findings presented in figures and graphs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined teachers' efforts to enhance student voice in implementing CBC among grade eight students in Kenya. The researcher first established the teacher's experience in teaching. The respondents' demographic data findings identified their teaching experience in terms of years in the teaching profession. The results are shown in Figure 1.

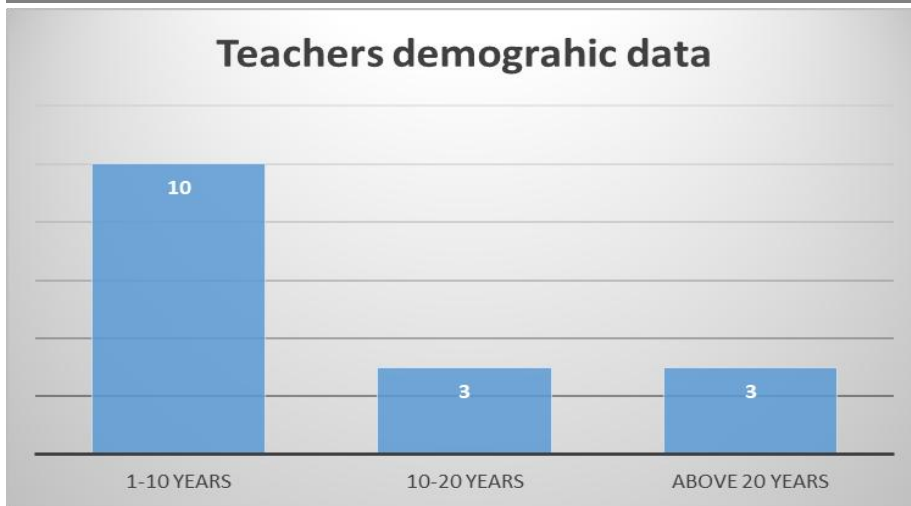


Figure 1. Teachers’ demographic data.

From figure 1, majority of the teachers implementing CBC that is ongoing at Junior Secondary School (JSS) grade eight are still young in their teaching experience, an aspect that the relevant education stakeholders need to tap by retooling them all with requisite competencies to effectively implement the JSS programme to realize its ultimate goal as well as continuing to mentor the teachers.

In order to determine the extent that students voice propel the teaching of CBC implementation that is ongoing at Junior Secondary School (JSS) grade eight, this study focused on how student’s needs, interest, experiences and ideas are incorporated in prior planning of teaching and learning, selection of content, selection of teaching learning aids, selection of learning activities, selection of teaching methods and extend of using and finally on preparation of students assessments. The first aspect was the teachers' responses to whether the students’ voices were a guide during the CBC implementation. The finding was that all the teachers acknowledged that students' voices guided the CBC implementation. This is a positive step by the teachers in preparing teaching and learning that concurs with Dewey’s approach on focusing on the learner as the center of the education process.

Regarding the aspect of how often teachers considered the students' past experiences, needs, and interests before the overall planning for teaching and learning, the finding is as shown in Figure 2.

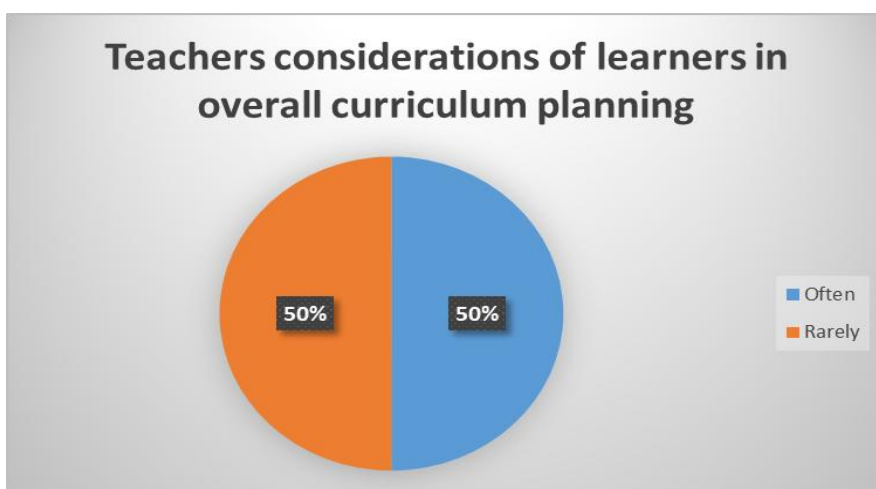


Figure 2: The teachers’ consideration of overall curriculum planning.

The results in Figure 2 indicate that half of the teachers rarely consider the students’ voice in the overall planning of the curriculum, and they are worrying. The challenge pointed out was rarely attributed to large class sizes, which was noted by the majority of the teachers. Few pointed out inadequate resources available, especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities. This scenario depicts impediments faced by the teachers that education stakeholders need to focus on during capacity building for effective implementation. The timely focus, therefore, may revert to what studies in higher education in South Africa

found that the impact of student voices is hard to find (Strydom & Loots, 2020). Regarding the way forward to this impediment, almost all the teachers suggested the provision of adequate classes to avoid student overcrowding, thus more attention to all the learners, while half thought of embracing ICT in the teaching and learning to ease the attainment of CBC core competencies which supports Nzoka, Kaugi and Katam government interventions to improve on low ICT usage.

Further, the respondents' findings on the consideration of students' needs, interests, and experiences in preparing content are shown in Figure 3.

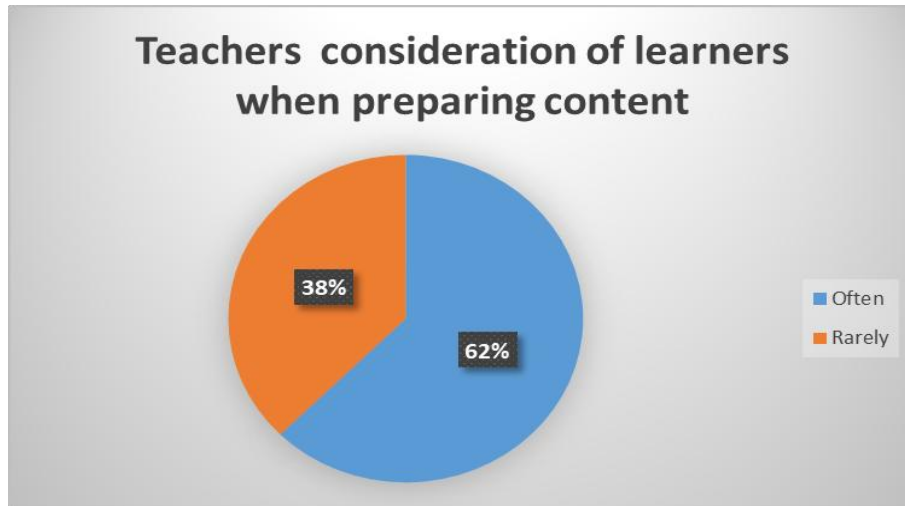


Figure 3: Teachers' consideration in content preparation.

Figure 3 reveals that most teachers consider students' needs, interests, and experiences when preparing content. The teachers' efforts indicate that the content imparted to the learners is learnable and significant outside the classroom context. This is an indication of positive intervention undertaken by the government to ensure the provision of quality education. On the contrary, the few teachers who do not consider students' voices when preparing the content support Strydom & Loots' (2020) and Craig et al.'s (2023) assertion that students' voices are not fully utilized. Therefore, continuous and consistent teacher retooling is paramount for effective implementation to address the few teachers still lagging. The challenges noted by most teachers pointed out the limited time and large class sizes, thus making it impossible to attend to individual students. The large classes may further impede learner voice due to inadequate instructional materials as pointed by (Katam, 2019). As a way forward, the majority of the teachers suggested the implementation of small class sizes.

The aspect of selection of teaching aids to enhance learning by stimulating students' deep understanding and interest, the respondents' results are indicated in Figure 4.

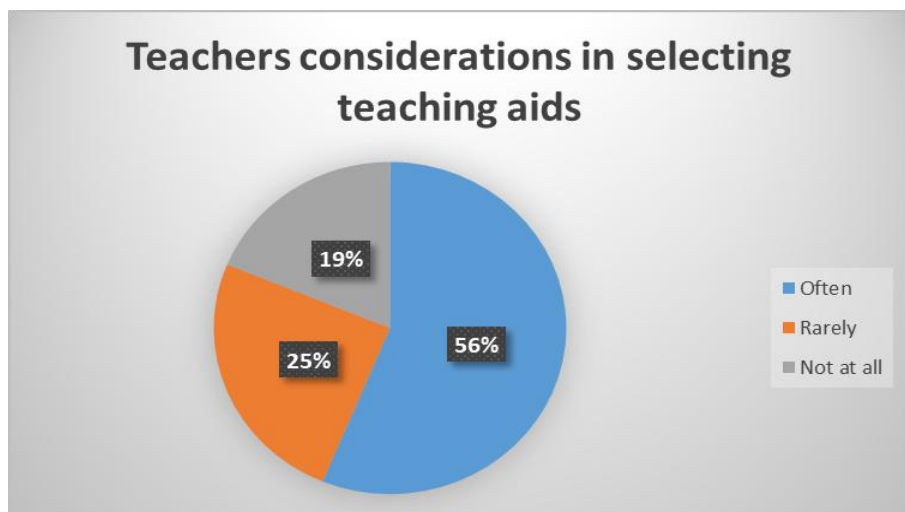


Figure 4: Teachers' consideration in selecting teaching aids.

As shown in Figure 4, slightly more than half of the teachers often consider students' needs, interests, and experiences in selecting appropriate teaching aids to enhance learning. This is because teaching aids selected aid students' deep understanding and arouse their interest in the concept being taught, thereby enhancing the development of competencies required. A concern about a sizable number of teachers still rarely or not using teaching aids should be addressed to ensure that teaching and learning are meaningful to all students. Almost half of the teachers of contrary ideas support what Strydom & Loots (2020) observed on underutilizing the students' voices. As pointed out earlier, most teachers pointed to inadequate ICT facilities and suggested adequate and functional facilities to remedy the impediment.

The aspect of teachers considering students' voices in preparing learning activities, all the teachers agreed in considering students' voices, pointing out that learning activities selected for teaching and learning stimulate students' critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. Similarly, all the teachers agreed that their teaching method selection is guided by the students' needs, interests, and experiences. Regarding the extent to which the teachers use the various teaching methods, the results are as shown in Figure 5.

Teaching Method	Rating		
	Often (2)	Rarely (1)	Not at All (0)
Cooperative learning/discussion	12	4	
Problem solving	13	3	
Role play/ Dramatization	5	11	
Simulation/imitation	14	2	

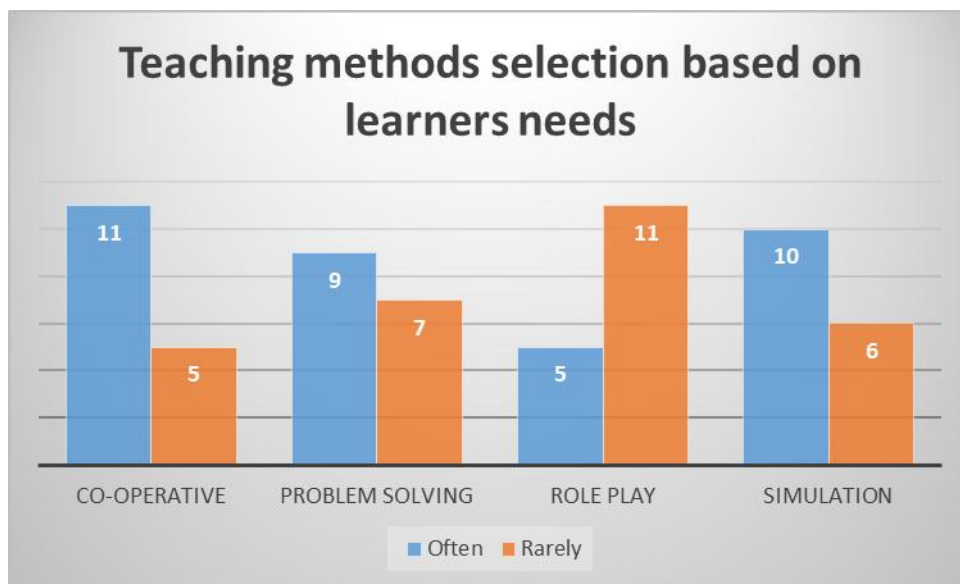


Figure 5: Teachers' considerations of selection of teaching methods.

The teachers' trend in considering students' voices when selecting teaching methods, as shown in Figure 5, is impressive. For instance, the majority of the teachers adopt cooperative, simulation, and problem-solving methods often. The choice of problem-solving strengthens the attainment of the core competencies and makes learning real. The teachers' efforts also support the CBC pillar anchored on the theoretical approaches attainment that guides the teaching and learning practices effectively, according to KICD (2017). This can also be attributed to capacity building on pedagogy and other curriculum aspects, organized to acquaint the teachers properly. Further, the teacher's efforts are a positive stride because, according to Craig et al 2023 student voice enhances learning conditions through students' increased engagement and teachers' new perspectives. This finding further concurs with the observation that teachers use appropriate learner centred pedagogies thus promoting learners voice during the teaching learning process (Abuko & Katam, 2022). The weak aspects of using role play, as indicated by many teachers, are worth noting and need strategies to be employed to encourage teachers to adopt it. This supports studies in Irish post-primary schools, the traditional pedagogy of teaching, which consists of more teacher-centred approaches with little input from students, continues to prevail to a large degree (Craig et al, 2023). Further less focus on role play utilization may be attributed to

issues related to hidden curriculum that calls on all stakeholders empowerment as pointed by (Katam& Buya, 2025). The challenge again pointed out was inadequate ICT facilities.

Most teachers agreed that students' assessment was guided by their needs and experiences, as shown in Figure 6.

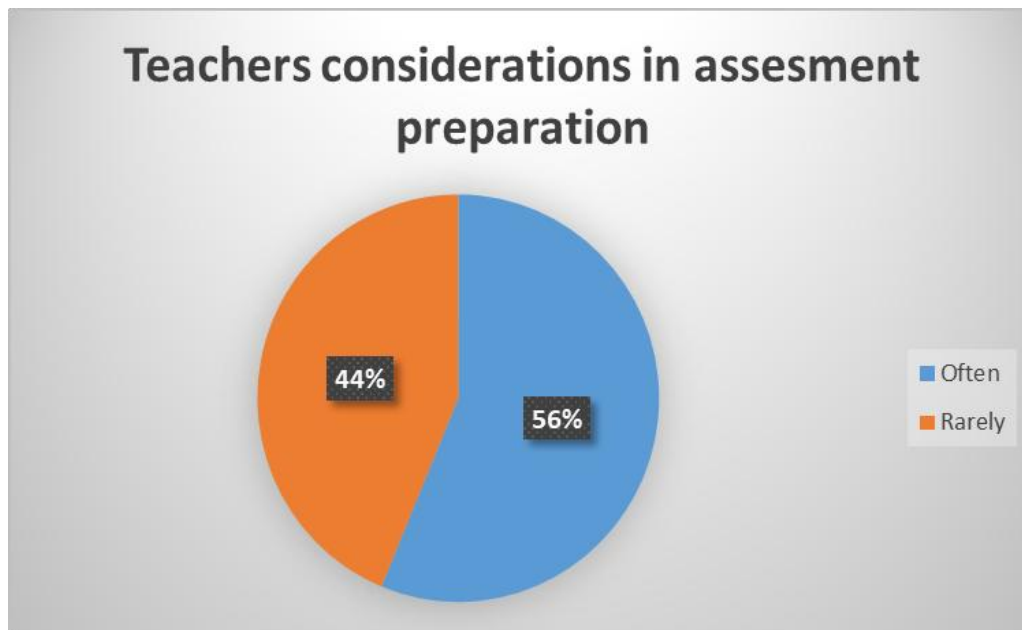


Figure 6: Teachers' considerations in assessment preparation

Figure 6 reveals that more than half of the teachers put efforts into ensuring assessments consider students' voices. The strides may be attributed to the teachers' comprehension of the learning outcomes required of the students in the CBC. Therefore, the students may find all that is learned in the curriculum relevant in their lives. This also aligns with the CBC provision of assessment methods required (KICD, 2017). However, concerns remain for almost half of the teachers who rarely consider students' voices during assessment preparation. This calls for interventions to update all teachers on the importance of various CBC assessments that need to be focused on. The challenges were inadequate time scheduled for training, high workload, high pupil-teacher ratios, and negative attitude. The way forward suggested was the need for continuous organization of seminars.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that teachers' consideration of students' voices in implementing CBC is still lacking. In all the aspects of curriculum, key challenges pointed out by the teachers as impediments to considering the students' voice in all aspects of curriculum during the CBC implementation include large class sizes, high workload due to inadequate teachers, inadequate information and technology devices, and inadequate time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address the challenges encountered in considering students' voices in CBC implementation, some of the ways forward indicated are reducing all class sizes, thus ensuring proper facilitation of the pupil-teacher ratio. This calls for the relevant stakeholders to ensure that the policy on the learners and teachers' ratio is adhered to, enhance effective curriculum implementation, thus realizing optimal learning and learning outcomes.

There is also a call for the continuous and consistent retooling of teachers regularly. The efforts from the government through the Ministry of Education should be supported by ensuring that all key curriculum implementers are retooled intensively and extensively. This will enable all of them to comprehend all changes in the CBC.

It was also recommended that adequate curriculum resources, including ICT, be provided. Since CBC encourages integration of ICT in all the programmes from basic to higher levels of education, there is need for the government and all relevant education stakeholders including the private sectors in collaborating to ensure that educational institutions are provided with adequate ICT facilities that both the teachers and the learners can utilize to achieve the education goal and desired outcome. This is in line with the 21st-century skills embraced in the curriculum.

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