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Leadership Practices by Heads of Institution of Empowering Teachers on Competence-Based Education Sustainability in Public Junior School: A Case of Kisii County, Kenya

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Abstract
This study aimed at investigating Leadership Practices by Heads of Institution of Empowering Teachers on Competence-Based Education (CBE) Sustainability in Public Junior School. Curriculum reform is vital in ensuring that education system meets societal demands. The study adopted a census technique for the Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (SCQASOs), involving all 11 officers since the population was small, accessible, and suitable for eliminating sampling error while achieving the desired level of precision. The Yamane (1967) simplified formula for finite populations was used to determine the sample sizes for Heads of Institutions (HOIs) and JS Teachers at a 7% precision level. Yamane (1967) simplified formula was used because the population was known. For HOIs, with a total population of 686, the sample size was calculated as n = 157 distributed proportionately to all sub-counties. As for JS teachers, with a total population of 1,925, the sample size was calculated as n = 185 and the sample were proportionally distributed across the sub-counties. Overly, the sample comprised of 11 (SCQASOs), 157 HOIs and 185 Junior School teachers, hence, a total sample of 353. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Results showed high mean scores for teacher empowerment (M = 4.10, Std.Dev. = 0.54). The study therefore, recommends continuous empowerment of teachers and learners to enhance sustained CBE implementation.

Introduction

In Kenya, curriculum reform has been a key strategy in advancing national development goals, particularly those outlined in Kenya Vision 2030. The government, through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Ministry of Education, adopted Competency-Based Education in 2017 to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for holistic development (Basic Education Curriculum Framework, 2017; Helyn, 2017). The CBE framework emphasises seven core competencies: communication and collaboration; creativity and imagination; critical thinking and problem solving; digital literacy; citizenship; learning to learn; and self-efficacy. This reform was introduced in response to the limitations of the 8-4-4 system, which was widely criticised for its rigidity and its inability to cater to learners' diverse talents, interests, and career aspirations (Ngaruiya, 2023).

Education plays a critical role in expanding opportunities for national development (Deshmane & Thombre, 2024). Competency-Based Education (CBE) is grounded in the idea that education should identify and develop the talents and abilities of a nation's citizens (Moon, 2007). The sustainability of CBE initiatives largely depends on how employers perceive the credibility of the qualifications awarded upon completion. In turn, this credibility is closely tied to the quality of the assessment processes used (Zaky, 2026).

Since its introduction in the United States in the early 1970s, competency-based education has attracted considerable scholarly attention (Winterton, 2017). At a broader level, the goals of Competency-Based Education (CBE) emphasise the accurate evaluation of learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, with clearly defined, measurable outcomes at each stage of learning. More immediately, CBE is oriented toward a practical education system that prioritises the development and assessment of essential life skills, enabling individuals to function effectively and meaningfully within their societies (Winterton, 2017).

CBE represents a significant shift from traditional models towards mastery-based progression, enabling learners to advance upon demonstrating competence regardless of time, place, or pace (United States Department of Education, 2021). This approach emphasises flexibility, personalised learning pathways, and clearly defined learning outcomes (Gallagher & Palmer, 2023). Research indicates that CBE can enhance workforce readiness by ensuring graduates possess competencies essential for productivity in complex and rapidly changing economies (Hodge et al., 2022).

Although Competency-Based Education (CBE) offers institutions many opportunities, it also presents notable challenges. Pluff and Weiss (2022) explored the nature of CBE, highlighting how delivering conventional qualifications through flexible structures can enhance student engagement and improve outcomes in a changing education landscape. They further recommend evaluating an institution's readiness to implement CBE by considering key factors such as whether it fosters a culture of innovation, adaptability, and strong institutional commitment. Hence, the current study evaluated leadership practices of HOIs in empowering teachers' influence on the sustainability of CBE in public junior schools—a case of Kisii County, Kenya.

Literature Review

CBE implementation requires deliberate alignment with an institution's mission, vision, and strategic objectives to foster a shared sense of purpose and institutional buy-in. Current literature underscores that such alignment enhances organisational coherence and facilitates the adoption of change, as stakeholders perceive the initiative as part of the broader institutional agenda rather than an isolated reform (Carey & Stefaniak, 2018; Jones, Voorhees, & Paulson, 2021). This description rightly highlights the value of collaboration across departments and working groups; however, recent studies suggest that collaboration should extend beyond internal teams to include industry partners and community stakeholders, ensuring that competencies remain relevant to workforce needs (Ewell, 2020; Rios et al., 2020). The emphasis on continual assessment and re-assessment aligns with best practices, as CBE models thrive on data-driven decision-making to adjust curriculum and delivery methods in real time (Kelchen, 2018; Voorhees & Voorhees, 2022).

Despite the importance of staffing and stakeholder engagement, the current research warns against underestimating the need for targeted professional development for instructors transitioning to a Competency-Based approach (Weise, 2020; Young & Chen, 2022). Additionally, the caution regarding unrealistic expectations is valid; nonetheless, it would be beneficial to have a clearer link to the evidence showing that CBE often requires multi-year cycles before demonstrating measurable student outcome gains or financial returns (Fain, 2019).

Providing targeted training, support, and adequate resources is essential to the effective adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE) (Pluff & Weiss, 2022). Curry and Docherty (2017) argue that successful implementation of CBE depends on proactive engagement, open collaboration, data sharing, negotiation, and continuous adjustment among faculty, administrators, and learners. Such collaboration requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders, supported by an institutional culture that encourages innovation and responsiveness to the unique demands of CBE.

A study by Waweru (2018) on teacher preparedness for the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) revealed significant gaps in educators' readiness. The findings indicated that 98.8% of teachers felt unprepared to implement CBC, particularly due to the introduction of new subjects, while 95% reported that preparing lesson plans for every lesson was impractical. Additionally, more than half of the teachers expressed difficulties in fostering creativity and imagination, as well as in developing assessment rubrics aligned with learners' abilities to demonstrate and apply competencies in practical contexts. Similarly, Paulo (2014), in a study on pre-service teacher preparedness in Tanzania, found that despite the introduction of a competency-based curriculum in secondary schools in 2005, teacher education programmes at the University of Dar es Salaam had not been sufficiently revised to meet the new instructional demands associated with the reform.

The Competency-Based Education (CBE) model focuses on recognising and developing learners' diverse abilities, including intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities. Rahman (2014) conceptualises competence as the consistent and effective application of knowledge and skills in line with established performance standards. Unlike traditional education models, CBE emphasises tailoring learning experiences to maximise each learner's potential. It

provides multiple pathways for learners to gain diverse experiences, combining subject-based instruction that builds foundational knowledge with activities that nurture individual talents. Additionally, the allocation of instructional time is structured to balance experiential learning, presentations, and subject-specific engagement, with greater emphasis placed on activities that enhance practical experience. Assessment within this model also goes beyond conventional methods by incorporating diverse criteria such as learners' talents, aptitudes, and abilities.

Research by Ondimu (2018) indicates that a shortage of teaching and learning materials is a major barrier to the successful implementation of competency-based curricula. The study found that when instructional demands do not align with available resources, it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to design and deliver learner-centred lessons. Similarly, Muneja (2015) observed that inadequate resources negatively affect curriculum implementation, as competency-based education aims to develop learners into innovators and problem solvers, an outcome that largely depends on sufficient access to appropriate learning materials.

Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) argue that, although still relevant, their work may not fully capture the post-pandemic shifts in curriculum delivery, digital pedagogy, and leadership strategies. Newer studies indicate that pedagogical leadership must now encompass technology integration, adaptive teaching models, and learner-centred approaches to meet evolving educational demands (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2022; Robinson et al., 2023).

In Summary, when teachers take on leadership roles, their capacity for classroom innovation improves, leading to better student learning outcomes. The study further revealed that such leadership positions boost teachers' motivation and self-confidence, while also equipping them with the skills to inspire, guide, and support their colleagues. As a result, teachers develop stronger professional knowledge, confidence, and more positive attitudes toward their work. In this context, the present study sought to examine how heads of institutions empower both teachers and learners to sustain the implementation of Competency-Based Education.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Bell, Bryman, & Harley (2022, mixed-methods design is increasingly popular as it allows for the collection of numerical data through quantitative tools and in-depth, contextual insights through qualitative tools.

Target Population

The target population consisted of public Junior School teachers, heads of public Junior Schools, and Sub- County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (SCQASOs) in Kisii County, Kenya. As per the information obtained from the Kisii County Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), the County has a total of 1,925 public junior school teachers, 686 public junior schools with a total population of 686 heads of public junior schools, and 11 Sub- County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers corresponding to the 11 Educational Administrative Sub-Counties (Kisii County TSC Director's Office, July, 2024).

Data collection instrument

According to Sukmawati et al. (2023), research instruments are tools used to collect various types of data. They further assert that the validity of the data obtained largely depends on the quality of the instruments used. This study, therefore, used a questionnaire for JS teachers and heads of institutions, and an interview guide for Quality Assurance and Standards Officers.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were used to gather data from Junior School Teachers (JSTs) and Heads of Institutions. As a data collection instrument, the questionnaire is widely regarded as a flexible and effective tool across various research fields. Its structured design enables uniform data collection, organisation, and analysis, making it particularly suitable for quantitative studies (Kuphanga, 2024). The instrument was semi-structured, comprising mainly closed-ended items alongside a few open-ended questions to capture additional insights. It consisted of Part A: Demographic Information (For both Heads of institutions and Teachers), PART B: HOIs Communication of a Clear Vision to Support the Sustainability of the (CBE) In Public Junior Schools, Part C: HOIs' Fostering of Creativity in The Implementation of the CBE, Part D: HOIs' empowerment of stakeholders to sustain the implementation of the CBE, Part E: HOIs' Strategic Planning in Guiding the Implementation of the CBE and Part F: HOIs' Role in Building a Resilient School Culture to Support the Continued Implementation of the CBE.

Interview Guide

The study employed an interview guide to collect data from Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers who participated in the research. An interview guide is advantageous as it allows the researcher to obtain detailed, in-depth information while also enabling the observation of non-verbal cues, which may not be easily captured through other data collection methods (Parveen & Showkat, 2017).

Validity of Research Instruments

Validity and reliability are essential components of sound research, as they determine the accuracy and consistency of data collection instruments (Mohajan, 2017). These constructs are critical in ensuring that the data obtained adequately reflect the phenomena under investigation. In this study, both content validity and face validity were employed to assess the appropriateness of the research instruments. Content validation was guided by expert review, consistent with recommendations by Zimmerly and Moulton (2013), who suggest that involving between two and six experts is sufficient for establishing instrument validity. Accordingly, the research instruments were developed and refined under the supervision of two experienced academic supervisors who possess expertise in research methodologies and familiarity with the Competency-Based Curriculum. Face validity was quantitatively assessed by the clarity and comprehensibility of all items within each domain, as rated by respondents. Respondents rated the clarity and comprehensibility of all items in each domain according to a four-interval scale (1 = Not clear and understandable; 2 = Somewhat clear and understandable; 3 = clear and understandable; and 4 = Very clear and understandable). Ratings 1 and 2 represent invalid or irrelevant content, while ratings 3 and 4 represent valid or relevant content based on its clarity and comprehension (Yusoff, 2019).

Reliability of Research Instruments

The study assessed the reliability of the research instruments using measures of internal consistency. Internal consistency evaluates the extent to which different items that are intended to measure the same construct are related to one another. It is particularly applicable when multiple items are used to capture various dimensions of a single concept, as this enhances the richness and dependability of the data collected. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for the questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha, as proposed by Cronbach (1951), measures the degree of internal consistency by examining the interrelatedness of items within a scale. The study achieved a reliability threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$. This threshold is recommended for educational and social science research to ensure internal consistency of Likert-scale items. High reliability coefficients implied that the instruments consistently measured Heads of Institutions' visionary leadership practices and the sustainability of Competency-Based Education, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study findings.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted a census technique for the Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (SCQASOs), involving all 11 officers since the population was small, accessible, and suitable for eliminating sampling error while achieving the desired level of precision. The Yamane (1967) simplified formula for finite populations was used to determine the sample sizes for Heads of Institutions (HOIs) and JS Teachers at a 7% precision level. Yamane's (1967) simplified formula was used because the population was known. For HOIs, with a total population of 686, the sample size was calculated as n = 157 and allocated proportionately across all sub-counties. For JS teachers, with a total population of 1,925, the sample size was calculated as n = 185, and the sample was proportionally allocated across the sub-counties. Overall, the sample comprised 11 (SCQASOs), 157 HOIs, and 185 Junior School teachers, hence, a total sample of 353.

Data Analysis and Presentation

After data collection, the researcher undertook data cleaning and preparation to ensure readiness for analysis. This process is critical for correcting errors and addressing anomalies before analysis, as data errors are common in human-collected datasets (Chai, 2020). Proper cleaning and preparation enhance data accuracy, improve data quality, and contribute to more reliable research results. This study employed mixed research methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, summarised the data, and Results were presented in tables to enhance clarity and interpretation. A mixed design was appropriate since the components could cross-validate or support each other. For instance, qualitative thematic findings were used to explain the quantitative regression patterns (triangulation).

Results

Junior School Teachers' Responses on Empowerment of Stakeholders

The analysis was based on JST's ratings on a five-point Likert-scale, with mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) used to determine how empowerment of stakeholders sustains the

implementation of the CBE in junior schools, where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 =Disagree = 3= Not sure 4= Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The results were tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Junior School Teachers Response on Empowerment of Stakeholders

Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	M	Std. Dev.
Supports teachers in improving their instructional practices	14 (7.7)	17 (9.3)	18 (9.8)	86 (47.0)	48 (26.2)	3.75	1.17
Builds positive relationships with staff, parents, community, and stakeholders	10 (5.5)	25 (13.7)	19 (10.4)	83 (45.4)	46 (25.1)	3.71	1.18
Engages stakeholders in developing the school's mission and vision	12 (6.6)	23 (12.6)	16 (8.7)	80 (43.7)	52 (28.4)	3.74	1.21
Discusses CBE issues with teachers, learners, and parents	10 (5.5)	19 (10.4)	24 (13.1)	82 (44.8)	48 (26.2)	3.76	1.15
Creates an inclusive, positive, and collaborative learning environment	14 (7.7)	29 (15.8)	24 (13.1)	74 (40.4)	42 (23.0)	3.55	1.23
Motivates stakeholders toward excellence by setting high expectations	12 (6.6)	32 (17.5)	25 (13.7)	72 (39.3)	42 (23.0)	3.54	1.24
Provides a clear roadmap for success and celebrates achievements	16 (8.7)	42 (23.0)	17 (9.3)	56 (30.6)	52 (28.4)	3.47	1.33
Fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning environment	10 (5.5)	31 (16.9)	24 (13.1)	74 (40.4)	44 (24.0)	3.61	1.21
Motivates stakeholders toward excellence (shared responsibility focus)	10 (5.5)	30 (16.4)	33 (18.0)	66 (36.1)	44 (24.0)	3.57	1.22
Recognises the importance of involving all stakeholders in CBE implementation	10 (5.5)	33 (18.0)	10 (5.5)	70 (38.3)	60 (32.8)	3.75	1.26
Empowers individuals and teams to take ownership of CBE roles	20 (10.9)	36 (19.7)	13 (7.1)	64 (35.0)	50 (27.3)	3.48	1.35
Empowerment of teachers fosters unity and shared responsibility in CBE	12 (6.6)	41 (22.4)	10 (5.5)	68 (37.2)	52 (28.4)	3.58	1.30

The results in Table 1 indicate that junior secondary school (JS) teachers in Kisii County generally perceive head teachers' supportive and inclusive leadership practices positively in the implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) curriculum.

The highest mean score was observed for **"**Discusses CBE issues with teachers, learners, and parents" (M = 3.76, Std. Dev. = 1.15), suggesting that teachers strongly recognise head teachers' efforts to communicate and address curriculum issues collaboratively. The highest-rated item, discussing CBE issues with teachers, learners, and parents (M = 3.76), reflects individualised consideration and participatory leadership, in which leaders actively engage stakeholders and value their input. According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders foster collective decision-making and shared responsibility, which enhances commitment to institutional goals.

Moderately high mean scores were recorded for items such as "Builds positive relationships with staff, parents, community, and stakeholders" (M = 3.71, Std. Dev. = 1.18) and "Fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning environment" (M = 3.61, Std. Dev. = 1.21). These findings suggest that head teachers promote inclusive and collaborative practices, although slightly higher Std. Dev. Values indicate some variability in experiences across different schools**,** potentially due to differences in resources or contextual challenges. The findings on building positive relationships with staff, parents, and the community (M = 3.71) and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (M = 3.61) further reflect idealised influence, where leaders model inclusive values and create a supportive organisational culture. These practices align with Downton's view of leadership as a relational process that transforms social interactions within institutions. The emphasis on inclusive leadership and relationship-building is also supported by recent studies. Komba, Anangisye, & Katabaro 2022) found that leaders who foster collaboration and inclusivity create positive school climates that facilitate curriculum implementation. The current findings (M = 3.71 and M = 3.61) confirm that such practices are present in Kisii County, although variability suggests contextual differences across schools.

In an interview with the SQASOs, structural support for innovation was mostly highlighted. R3 described HOIs who provide a favourable environment, teamwork, and encouragement for ICT integration, a finding consistent with research emphasising the role of digital tools and collaborative culture in promoting creative teaching (Kafyulilo, Fisser, & Voogt, 2015). R7 similarly noted HOIs' support through training, provision of learning materials, and capacity-building initiatives, which reflect best-practice leadership behaviours associated with sustaining pedagogical innovation (Harris & Jones, 2018).

However, the majority of respondents emphasised that support for innovation remains limited or inconsistent across schools. R5 reported that innovation "*depends on the particular school*" and is generally present only at a minimal level. R4 pointed to significant resource constraints, such as the lack of ICT equipment, echoing African education research that identifies resource shortages as major barriers to instructional creativity (Ogunniyi et al., 2020). R8 added that although the CBE system encourages innovation, implementation is partial and "*there are gaps in some schools*." R10 also noted that support occurs only "*to a small extent*," often hindered by funding limitations.

Head of Institution's practices in Empowerment of Stakeholders

Additionally, analysis of HOI ratings on a five-point Likert-scale, with mean (M) and standard deviation (Std. Dev.) used to determine how empowerment of stakeholders sustains the implementation of the CBE in junior schools, where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 =Disagree = 3= Not sure 4= Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The results were tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Head of Institution's Practices in empowering stakeholders

Statement	SD f (%)	D f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)	M	Std.Dev
The head teacher delegates responsibilities to teachers to lead CBE-related initiatives	2 (1.3)	5 (3.3)	17 (11.3)	70 (46.7)	56 (37.3)	4.17	0.90
Teachers feel empowered to make decisions that impact CBE implementation	2 (1.3)	6 (4.0)	29 (19.3)	63 (42.0)	50 (33.3)	3.99	0.97
Learners are involved in decisions and activities that reflect their interests and competencies	0 (0.0)	3 (2.0)	36 (24.0)	63 (42.0)	48 (32.0)	3.98	0.92
The head teacher promotes professional development to enhance teacher capacity for CBE	3 (2.0)	7 (4.7)	30 (20.0)	65 (43.3)	45 (30.0)	3.94	0.97
The head teacher's empowerment of teachers strengthens school culture promoting collaboration	2 (1.3)	5 (3.3)	34 (22.7)	60 (40.0)	49 (32.7)	3.97	0.95
Discusses academic goals with teachers and learners	2 (1.3)	5 (3.3)	18 (12.0)	72 (48.0)	53 (35.3)	4.12	0.91
Motivates teachers and learners on academic issues	0 (0.0)	3 (2.0)	26 (17.3)	65 (43.3)	56 (37.3)	4.14	0.89
Solves teachers' and learners' conflicts wisely	0 (0.0)	7 (4.7)	20 (13.3)	68 (45.3)	55 (36.7)	4.13	0.92

The results in Table 2 indicate that heads of institutions (HOIs) in Kisii County are generally perceived by teachers as empowering and participatory leaders in implementing the Competency-Based Education (CBE) curriculum. Recent studies emphasise that delegation and distributed leadership significantly enhance curriculum implementation. For instance, Wanjala and Odhiambo (2023) found that school leaders who delegate responsibilities and involve teachers in decision-making improve teacher commitment and instructional effectiveness. This directly supports the highest mean score (M = 4.17), indicating strong delegation practices in this study.

The highest mean score was observed for the item "The head teacher delegates responsibilities to teachers to lead CBE-related initiatives" (M = 4.17, Std. Dev. = 0.90). This suggests that teachers perceive a strong culture of delegation, in which they are entrusted with responsibilities to lead initiatives, thereby fostering ownership and leadership in CBE implementation. The relatively low standard deviation indicates consistency in teachers' perceptions across schools. The highest-rated practice, delegating responsibilities to teachers to lead CBE-related initiatives (M = 4.17), strongly reflects individualised consideration and empowerment, where leaders trust followers with meaningful responsibilities and support their professional growth. According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership involves elevating followers to become leaders themselves. In this study, delegation fosters ownership

and leadership capacity among teachers, which is essential for the sustainable implementation of CBE. Recent studies emphasise that delegation and distributed leadership significantly enhance curriculum implementation. For instance, Wanjala and Odhiambo (2023) found that school leaders who delegate responsibilities and involve teachers in decision-making improve teacher commitment and instructional effectiveness. This directly supports the highest mean score (M = 4.17), indicating strong delegation practices in this study.

Similarly, high mean scores were reported for "Motivates teachers and learners on academic issues" (M = 4.14, Std. Dev. = 0.89) and "Solves teachers' and learners' conflicts wisely" (M = 4.13, Std. Dev. = 0.92). These findings indicate that head teachers are effective in providing motivation, guidance, and conflict resolution, with low variability in responses suggesting these practices are consistently applied across institutions. Similarly, the high ratings for motivating teachers and learners on academic issues (M = 4.14) and resolving conflicts wisely (M = 4.13) demonstrate inspirational motivation and idealised influence. Bass and Avolio emphasise that transformational leaders inspire commitment and act as role models who maintain harmony and trust within organisations. These findings suggest that HOIs not only motivate stakeholders but also help maintain a positive and supportive school climate. Similarly, research by Nguyen, Harris, & Ng (2022) agrees that motivational leadership and positive school climate are key outcomes of transformational leadership, leading to improved teacher performance and student outcomes. The high ratings for motivation (M = 4.14) and conflict resolution (M = 4.13) align with these findings, confirming the role of leadership in fostering a conducive learning environment.

Other items, such as "Discusses academic goals with teachers and learners" (M = 4.12, Std. Dev. = 0.91) and "Learners are involved in decisions and activities that reflect their interests and competencies" (M = 3.98, Std. Dev. = 0.92), also received high mean scores. This demonstrates that teachers perceive a participatory approach in academic planning and learner engagement. The low standard deviations indicate general agreement among teachers, highlighting consistent leadership practices in these areas. The findings on collaboratively discussing academic goals (M = 4.12) and involving learners in decisions that reflect their interests (M = 3.98) further illustrate participatory leadership and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders encourage shared decision-making and stimulate followers to contribute ideas, thereby enhancing innovation and commitment. This participatory approach aligns with Downton's view of leadership as a relational and transformative process. The importance of participatory decision-making and learner involvement is also widely documented. Komba et al. (2022) reveal that involving teachers and learners in decision-making enhances ownership and successful implementation of competency-based curricula. The current findings (M = 4.12 and M = 3.98) support this view, demonstrating that participatory practices are well established in Kisii County schools.

Some respondents reported visible efforts by HOIs to encourage innovation. For example, R1 observed that "*to some extent, they support learners to do projects*," while R2 explained that learners are allowed to bring locally available materials for use in class activities. This kind of resource improvisation aligns with studies showing that innovative, learner-centred pedagogies often emerge when teachers and leaders creatively utilize local materials in resource-constrained environments (Vavrus, Thomas, & Bartlett, 2013).

The majority of respondents emphasised that support for innovation remains limited or inconsistent across schools. R5 reported that innovation "*depends on the particular school*" and is generally present only at a minimal level. R4 pointed to significant resource constraints, such as the lack of ICT equipment, echoing African education research that identifies resource shortages as major barriers to instructional creativity (Ogunniyi et al., 2020). R8 added that although the CBE system encourages innovation, implementation is partial and "*there are gaps in some schools*." R10 also noted that support occurs only "*to a small extent*," often hindered by funding limitations.

While some HOIs engage in meaningful empowerment through retooling, teamwork, resource support, and policy communication, empowerment remains uneven and insufficient, constrained by leadership gaps, generational differences, and strained staff relationships.

Conclusion

CBE will not be sustainable without moving from a centralised administrative type of governance to participatory and accountable institutional governance. TSC should enhance accountability in school governance and leadership, and KEMI should train and empower School leaders with skills and tools for CBE management in a participatory manner. Administrative responsibility should be taken for institutionalising teachers' participation and for delegating responsibilities for CBE work, and a clear roadmap for implementation at the school level should be developed, along with regular mechanisms for monitoring and feedback. The creation of educational contexts and conditions that would enable CBE to be effectively and sustainably implemented would depend on such specific administrative rearrangements which would allow empowerment to move from the realm of hope to the practiced reality of a governance approach.

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