

Original Research Article

Influence of School Leadership Styles on the Implementation of Competency-Based Education in Public Primary Schools: Evidence from Endebess Sub-County, Trans Nzoia, Kenya

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of school leadership styles on the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in public primary schools in Endebess Sub-County, Trans Nzoia, Kenya. Guided by the Full-Range Leadership Theory, the study focused on instructional, democratic, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership approaches. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting 673 respondents, of which 299 were sampled through stratified random and census techniques. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed through descriptive statistics, regression, and thematic analysis. Findings showed that instructional, democratic, and transformational leadership styles positively influenced CBE implementation, while laissez-faire leadership had a negative effect. The study concluded that effective leadership, coupled with teacher preparedness and adequate resources, is critical to successful CBE delivery. The paper recommends strengthening instructional and democratic leadership practices, enhancing leadership and teacher training, and improving resource provision.

Keywords: Competency Based Education, Instructional, Democratic Transformational.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports a section of findings from a broader study that examined the role of leadership styles in the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in public primary schools. Competency-Based Education (CBE) represents a paradigm shift from rote learning to skills, values, and competency development essential for the 21st century. Globally, countries such as the United States, Australia, and several European nations have adopted competency-based models to foster flexible and outcomes-driven learning. In Africa, Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria have taken similar approaches to align education with employability needs.

Kenya introduced the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017 to replace the 8-4-4 system, with emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy and holistic development Sifuna, (2019). Despite supportive policy reforms, implementation success has varied, especially in rural settings where resources and teacher preparedness are limited. Research shows that school leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping curriculum outcomes, as leadership styles directly affect teacher motivation, collaboration, and instructional practices

Mwang'ombe, (2021). Oketch *et al.*, (2021). This study explores how leadership approaches influence CBE implementation in Endebess Sub-County, a rural context characterized by both potential and constraints.

Statement of the Problem

Although Kenya has made considerable strides in rolling out CBE, implementation in rural primary schools faces persistent challenges, including inadequate resources, limited teacher training, and infrastructural constraints. While much research has focused on teacher preparedness and resource adequacy, less attention has been given to the role of school leadership in guiding and sustaining the reforms. Leadership approaches such as instructional, democratic, and transformational leadership are known to enhance innovation and collaboration, while laissez-faire leadership undermines accountability. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these leadership styles specifically influence CBE in rural counties such as Trans Nzoia. This study addresses this gap by examining how head teachers' leadership styles shape the delivery of CBE in Endebess Sub-County.

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Research Objectives

Although several objectives informed the study, this paper narrows its attention to the objective that examined;

- The influence of school leadership styles (instructional, democratic, transformational, and laissez-faire) on the implementation of CBE in public primary schools in Endebess Sub-County, Trans Nzoia, Kenya.
- The challenges and opportunities associated with school leadership in enhancing the successful delivery of CBE.

Research Questions

It endeavored to respond to questions connected to;

- Different school leadership styles influence the implementation of CBE in public primary schools in Endebess Sub-County?
- Challenges and opportunities exist for school leadership in enhancing the delivery of CBE?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for policy, practice, and scholarship. For policymakers, findings will guide the Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) in designing leadership training and development programs tailored to CBE. For school leaders, the results highlight how different leadership styles affect teacher motivation and curriculum outcomes, offering direction for improving leadership practices. Teachers and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) will also benefit from identifying leadership behaviors that support their work, while School Management Committees (SMCs) and communities will gain insights into the importance of participatory governance in curriculum reforms. Finally, the study contributes to the literature by filling a contextual gap on leadership styles and CBE implementation in rural primary schools in Kenya.

Justification of the Study

The justification of this study rests on the critical role that effective school leadership plays in the successful implementation of curriculum reforms such as Competency-Based Education (CBE). Despite being a national priority in Kenya, the implementation of CBE has faced persistent challenges, particularly in rural settings like Endebess Sub-County, where inadequate resources, limited teacher preparedness, and infrastructural gaps hinder progress. Leadership styles directly influence how teachers adopt new pedagogical approaches, manage available resources, and sustain motivation during transitions (Chumba *et al.*, 2017). However, limited empirical evidence exists on how specific leadership styles affect CBE implementation in public primary schools within rural contexts. This study is therefore justified as it not only fills this knowledge gap but also provides practical insights to policymakers, education managers, and practitioners on the most effective leadership approaches to strengthen curriculum

reforms. The findings will guide interventions aimed at improving teacher supervision, collaboration, and innovation, ultimately enhancing learner outcomes and equity in education.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Full-Range Leadership Theory Bass & Avolio, (1994). Which integrates transformational, transactional (instructional), and laissez-faire leadership approaches. This framework was suitable because it provides a comprehensive understanding of how varying leadership behaviors influence teacher performance, motivation, and curriculum delivery. The theory helped in examining both active (instructional, democratic, and transformational) and passive (laissez-faire) leadership styles and their impact on CBE implementation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine the influence of school leadership styles on the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in public primary schools. The quantitative strand measured relationships between leadership styles and CBE implementation using descriptive and inferential statistics, while the qualitative strand provided deeper insights through interviews. The study was conducted in Endebess Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya, an area characterized by rural settings, limited resources, and diverse leadership practices, making it suitable for investigating the research problem.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study engaged a total sample size of 299 respondents drawn from various education stakeholders in Endebess Sub-County. This sample comprised 35 head teachers, 224 teachers determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, 5 Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), 1 Sub-County Education Officer (SCEO), and 34 School Management Committee (SMC) members. To obtain this sample, a combination of census, stratified proportionate random sampling, and simple random sampling techniques was applied. Census sampling was used for head teachers, CSOs, and the SCEO due to their relatively small population, allowing all of them to be included in the study. Teachers were selected through stratified proportionate random sampling to ensure balanced representation across schools, while SMC members were chosen using simple random sampling to give each an equal chance of selection. This multi-technique approach enhanced representativeness, minimized bias, and strengthened the generalizability of the findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Leadership Styles of Head Teachers

Teachers were asked to rate the extent to which their head teachers exhibited different leadership styles. The results showed that instructional leadership had the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.74$), followed closely by democratic leadership ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.82$). These two styles were therefore the most dominant in the study schools. Transformational leadership was moderately applied ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.91$), while laissez-faire leadership recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.84$), indicating limited use. These findings suggest that most head teachers relied on instructional and participatory approaches to guide teachers and learners, while few embraced a laissez-faire approach. This aligns with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2019), which emphasized instructional and participatory leadership as essential for effective curriculum reforms. Conversely, the low application of laissez-faire leadership resonates with Oketch *et al.*, (2021). Who noted that the lack of direction undermines successful curriculum implementation.

Implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Respondents also assessed how CBE was being implemented across schools. The results revealed that learner-centered pedagogy ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.79$) and competency-based assessment ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.81$) were fairly well embraced, both falling within the moderate to high range. However, teacher preparedness ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.92$) and the availability of teaching resources ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.88$) were only moderate, indicating that many schools struggled to provide adequate support for CBE delivery. These findings support Owuor (2020), who found that teacher training gaps hinder CBE implementation in Kenya, and are consistent with Muganda and Omollo (2022), who highlighted inadequate infrastructure and resources as major obstacles to curriculum reform.

Relationship between Leadership Styles and CBE Implementation

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of different leadership styles on the implementation of CBE. The results showed that instructional leadership had the strongest positive influence ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$), followed by democratic leadership ($\beta = 0.318$, $p = 0.002$) and transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.017$). In contrast, laissez-faire leadership had a significant but negative effect on implementation ($\beta = -0.155$, $p = 0.041$). These findings imply that head teachers who actively guided instructional practices, engaged teachers in decision-making, and inspired innovation enhanced CBE outcomes, whereas those who abdicated responsibility hindered implementation. This supports Robinson *et al.*, (2019), who argued that effective instructional leaders improve curriculum outcomes, and Juma and Mwangi (2020), who noted that participatory leadership drives

teacher engagement. The results also echo Mutua (2022), who found that transformational leadership fosters innovation but depends on adequate resource support, while confirming Oketch *et al.*, (2021), who linked laissez-faire leadership with weakened accountability.

Qualitative Findings

Insights from interviews with Curriculum Support Officers, the Sub-County Education Officer, and head teachers further reinforced the quantitative results. Respondents observed that schools led by instructional leaders recorded stronger curriculum supervision and adherence to CBE guidelines. Democratic leaders encouraged teacher collaboration, which improved lesson planning and classroom practices. Transformational leaders motivated teachers to attend workshops and embrace innovation, even in the face of resource gaps. By contrast, schools under laissez-faire leaders experienced uncertainty and inconsistency in teaching practices, as teachers lacked direction and support. These findings emphasize the importance of active leadership in addressing CBE challenges, especially in rural contexts where resources are often limited.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that instructional and democratic leadership styles were the most dominant among head teachers in Endebess Sub-County. The implementation of CBE was moderately successful, but constrained by limited teacher preparedness and shortages of teaching resources. Among the leadership styles, instructional leadership had the greatest positive effect on CBE outcomes, followed by democratic and transformational leadership, while laissez-faire leadership exerted a negative influence. Teacher motivation, effective supervision, and collaboration emerged as key enablers of CBE success.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that school leadership styles play a decisive role in the successful implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in public primary schools. Instructional leadership emerged as the most influential, as it ensures goal-setting, close teacher supervision, and accountability in curriculum delivery. Democratic leadership was also found to be critical, as it fosters collaboration, participatory decision-making, and teacher engagement, while transformational leadership contributed positively by motivating teachers to embrace change, professional development, and innovative pedagogy. Conversely, laissez-faire leadership weakened accountability, reduced teacher motivation, and created inconsistencies in curriculum implementation, thereby negatively affecting CBE delivery. Overall, the findings underscore that leadership effectiveness in rural contexts like Endebess is closely tied not only to leadership styles but also to adequate resources, teacher preparedness, and infrastructural support.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen CBE implementation, the study recommends that head teachers adopt instructional, democratic, and transformational leadership practices while avoiding laissez-faire tendencies. School leaders should provide clear direction, inspire innovation, and encourage teacher collaboration to improve classroom outcomes. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should invest in leadership development programs tailored to CBE, enhance continuous teacher training, and ensure timely provision of instructional resources. County education offices and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) are urged to intensify supervision, mentorship, and peer-learning initiatives among school leaders, while School Management Committees (SMCs) and communities should strengthen participatory governance and mobilize local resources to complement government efforts. Collectively, these interventions would address systemic gaps and enhance the overall effectiveness of CBE in public primary schools.

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