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The Influence of Integration of Community Service Learning on Implementation of Competency Based Curriculum in Public Primary Schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Community Service-Learning (CSL) has emerged as a transformative pedagogical approach within the global discourse on curriculum innovation. This study investigates how CSL integration influences the implementation of Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub County, Trans Nzoia County. Specifically, it examines the current status of CSL practices, teacher preparedness, and teachers' engagement, attitudes, and perceptions toward CSL integration. Guided by experimental and reflective learning theories, the study employed a descriptive survey design. The study collected data using structured questionnaires, and instrument reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.742. Findings reveal that while CSL holds significant potential to enrich CBC implementation, gaps remain in teacher preparedness and institutional support. The study underscores the importance of embedding practical CSL experiences in teacher training programs and fostering school community partnerships to align educational outcomes with local aspirations. It recommends that the Ministry of Education strengthen policy frameworks and resource allocation to support CSL integration, thereby advancing a more community-driven and competency-oriented approach to primary education in Kenya.

1. Introduction

Community Service-Learning (CSL) has increasingly gained prominence in global education discourses, reflecting its relevance not only in academic contexts but also in broader societal development. The forces of globalization and the demand for twenty-first-century skills have compelled many countries to adopt Competency-Based Curricula (CBC), which emphasize learner-centered approaches, problem-solving, and active citizenship. Within this framework, primary education is tasked with preparing pupils not only for future employment but also to become engaged agents of social change, capable of addressing complex societal challenges. Consequently, schools worldwide are being challenged to collaborate innovatively with communities to design curricula and learning experiences that nurture holistic student development (Cloete et al., 2011).

As a philosophy, educational model, and pedagogy, CSL provides learners with experiential opportunities that extend beyond traditional classroom settings. By engaging in authentic tasks alongside community members, students integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application, thereby transforming attitudes, values, and reflective practice skills (Bringle & Hatcher, 2013; Whitley, 2014; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2016). CSL experiences further promote complexity in learners' cognitive, affective, and social domains, enabling them to connect prior learning with broader socio-cultural and historical contexts (Lee & Chen, 2014). Importantly, CSL fosters relationship-building skills, as students often collaborate closely with field supervisors and partner institutions, receiving continuous feedback that enhances their professional growth (Kathuri-Ogola et al., 2015).

Beyond individual student outcomes, CSL has demonstrated significant benefits for communities, educators, and partner organizations. In North American and European contexts, universities have institutionalized CSL as part of broader educational reforms, resulting in abundant literature and theoretical frameworks that highlight its transformative potential. Empirical studies confirm that CSL strengthens institutional–societal partnerships and sustains learners' enthusiasm for community engagement even after program completion (Van Dijk et al., 2019). Approximately two-thirds of community-based learners report that CSL experiences deepened their long-term commitment to civic participation. Moreover, CSL has been shown to enhance learners' social skills, civic responsibility, and academic achievement, while simultaneously fostering positive attitudes toward self and society (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Conway et al., 2009).

Taken together, these findings underscore CSL as a powerful pedagogical approach that aligns with the goals of CBC. By embedding CSL into primary education, schools can cultivate learners who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible, reflective, and community-oriented. This dual emphasis on competence and civic engagement positions CSL as a critical lever for educational innovation in the twenty-first century.

Extant research on CSL in Africa highlights that student learning and development are shaped by systemic pressures within primary education as well as historical and contextual challenges. Studies in South Africa emphasize the need for more community-based learning opportunities to enhance student confidence and competence (Ferguson & Smith, 2011). Multidisciplinary investigations

confirm that CSL fosters deeper connections between theoretical knowledge and practical applications in community settings (Bheekie & Van Huyssteen, 2015). These findings underscore CSL's potential to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world problem-solving in African education systems.

Teacher preparedness emerges as a critical determinant of effective CSL integration. Scholars argue that preparedness enhances teacher motivation and equips them to navigate the complexities of real-world teaching (Manasia et al., 2020; Robinson, 2016). Engagement with communities through CSL has been shown to elevate instructional excellence (Peterson-Ahmad et al., 2018), while practical experiences help teachers overcome initial anxieties and refine their strategies (Ramírez, 2021). Teacher preparation programs that emphasize collaboration and feedback from experienced educators further strengthen planning, classroom management, and adaptation to diverse learning styles (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021; Hamilton & Margot, 2019). Ultimately, practical classroom strategies not only enhance technical skills but also contribute to the formation of professional teaching identities (Retnawati et al., 2018; Rowan et al., 2021).

Kenyan studies reveal both opportunities and challenges in CSL implementation. At the United States International University in Nairobi, students expressed positive attitudes toward CSL but demonstrated gaps in writing and research skills (Opiyo-Newa, 2012). Collaborative projects have identified challenges faced by field supervisors, including preparing students for demanding environments, fostering reflective practice, and clarifying CSL learning goals (Kathuri-Ogola et al., 2015; VanLeeuwen et al., 2016). These findings highlight the need for stronger alignment between CSL objectives and teacher preparation programs.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2016) reported that CSL was a timely innovation, moving education beyond theoretical learning toward practical skill acquisition. Stakeholders noted that CSL reinforced learner motivation, nurtured talents, and provided opportunities for students with weaker academic performance to thrive through hands-on engagement. CSL was also seen as fostering responsibility, self-drive, and problem-solving skills, thereby positioning learners as active contributors to community development.

Evidence from the Educate Experience Program (EXP) demonstrates CSL's broader socioeconomic impact. Participants reported higher income levels, greater business ownership, and improved employment prospects compared to peers who did not participate. Notably, female participants experienced significant gains in income and entrepreneurial activity, underscoring CSL's potential to promote gender equity in education and economic empowerment.

Despite these promising outcomes, integrating CSL into primary education in Kwanza Sub-County faces systemic and cultural challenges. The 2-6-3-3-3 education structure perpetuates assumptions about valid knowledge, complicating CSL adoption (Owuor, 2023). Additionally, the influence of Eurocentric values among elites has created dilemmas and a lack of consensus among CBC stakeholders (Mwenda, 2023). These contradictions raise concerns about the quality and efficiency of CSL implementation in public primary schools in the region. It remains unclear to what extent teachers are integrating CSL into the curriculum, thereby creating a critical knowledge gap that this study seeks to address.

1.1 Rationale of the study

- Understanding the current state of CSL will help to identify areas for improvement, enhancing the overall education of students and communities.
- Investigating how perceived benefits will provide insights into the social impact of CSL on students and communities.
- Findings can inform curriculum developers on how to integrate CSL effectively within the primary school curriculum.
- Evaluating teacher preparedness and involvement will guide the development of training programmes to support education in implementing CSL initiatives.
- Assessing community engagement and partnerships ensures that integration of CSL aligns with the needs and aspirations of local communities, fostering a more community-driven educational approach.

1.2 General Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the influence of the integration of community service learning on the implementation of competency-based curriculum in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County, in Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To examine the existing status of integration of community service learning on the implementation of competency-based curriculum in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County.
- To assess the influence of teacher preparedness in the integration of community service learning on the implementation of competency-based curriculum in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County.
- To establish the extent of community involvement and partnerships in facilitating integration of community service learning in competency-based curriculum in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County.
- To explore teachers' involvement, attitudes, and perceptions towards the integration of community service learning in competency-based curriculum in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County in Trans Nzoia County.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which was deemed appropriate for examining the influence of Community Service-Learning (CSL) integration on the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in public primary schools. This design enabled the collection of quantitative data from a broad population, allowing for the generalization of findings.

2.2 Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 1,240 individuals drawn from 124 public primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County, Trans Nzoia County. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table, a sample size of 360 respondents was established as adequate to represent the population. A combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques was employed: Head teachers (n = 53) were purposively selected, given their administrative roles and direct involvement in curriculum implementation. Teachers (n = 187) were selected using simple random sampling from the 53 sampled schools, and Subject panel heads (n = 120) were also selected randomly from the same schools. This stratified approach ensured representation across key stakeholder groups in curriculum delivery.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to head teachers, subject panel heads, and teachers. The instruments were developed based on the study objectives and validated through expert review by professionals from the Ministry of Education. Items were standardized to ensure comparability across respondent categories.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.742, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Validity was enhanced through expert consultation and alignment of items with the study objectives.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were employed to summarize responses. Effect sizes were computed to assess the magnitude of relationships. Pre- and post-survey comparisons were conducted to measure statistical differences in perceptions and practices.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards by ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and non-discrimination. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their information would be used solely for academic purposes.

3. Results of the study

3.1 Objective 1: Status of CSL Integration in Primary Schools

The first objective was to examine the existing status of Community Service-Learning (CSL) integration in the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in public primary schools in Kwanza Sub County. Table 1 summarizes teachers' perceptions of CSL integration.

Table 1: Influence of CSL Integration on CBC Implementation

Statement	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
CSL enhanced classroom studies	50	46	4	–	–
CSL helps learners to work in groups	91	9	–	–	–
CSL experiences added value to professionalism	93	7	–	–	–
CSL experiences improved civic awareness	89	11	–	–	–

The findings in Table 1 reveal strong consensus among teachers regarding the positive impact of CSL. A combined 96% agreed or strongly agreed that CSL enhanced classroom studies. Similarly, 91% reported that CSL improved group work and collaboration skills. Teachers overwhelmingly (93%) affirmed that CSL experiences added value to their professionalism by reinforcing knowledge and linking theory to authentic practice. Moreover, 89% indicated that CSL improved civic awareness, fostering cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity to community needs.

3.2 Objective 2: Teacher Preparedness for CSL Integration

The second objective assessed the level of teacher preparedness for integrating CSL into the CBC.

Table 2: Pre- and Post-Survey Analysis of Teacher Preparedness

Criterion	Pre-Survey Mean	Post-Survey Mean
Familiar with CSL lesson planning	2.01	3.59
Familiar with methods to integrate CSL	1.25	3.05
Choosing appropriate CSL methods	1.07	2.89
Feels ready to integrate CSL	2.25	4.54
Feels secure to impart CSL lessons	1.97	4.41
Feels secure explaining CSL strands	1.46	4.13
Ability to research/create CSL materials	2.08	4.46
Ready to adapt lessons when disrupted	1.07	4.71
Time management in CSL classrooms	1.13	3.43
Student management in CSL contexts	1.02	3.87
Stress management in CSL preparation	1.05	3.98
Motivation to teach in CSL schools	2.00	4.86
Motivation to continue CSL preparation	2.56	4.91

The results in Table 2 demonstrate significant improvement in teacher preparedness following CSL exposure. Teachers reported increased confidence in lesson planning, classroom management, and stress management. Notably, motivation to teach in CSL-integrated institutions rose from 2.00 to 4.86, while motivation to continue preparing CSL lessons increased from 2.56 to 4.91. These findings highlight the transformative impact of practical CSL experiences on teacher readiness and professional growth.

3.3 Objective 3: Community Involvement and Partnerships

The third objective examined the extent of community involvement and partnerships in facilitating CSL integration.

Table 3: Community Involvement in CSL

Criterion	Yes (%)	No (%)
Satisfaction with CSL	85	15
Community needs met through CSL	78	22

Community involvement was reported as strong, with 85% of teachers satisfied with CSL programs and 78% affirming that community needs were met. Qualitative feedback emphasized the value of CSL in literacy support, inclusion of learners with disabilities, and professional collaboration. Panel heads noted that CSL fostered acceptance, inclusion, and long-term partnerships, while partner organizations highlighted benefits for families, children, and teacher candidates.

3.4 Objective 4: Teachers' Engagement, Attitudes, and Perceptions

The fourth objective explored teachers' engagement, attitudes, and perceptions toward CSL integration.

Teachers' reflections revealed increased awareness of stakeholder inclusion and the importance of teamwork. While some acknowledged challenges in implementing CSL, they expressed willingness to embrace them. CSL experiences challenged preconceived notions, broadened perspectives, and deepened appreciation for community engagement. Teachers reported greater understanding of the struggles associated with CSL and recognized its importance for both learners and communities.

4. Discussion

The findings revealed that CSL integration in primary schools in Kwanza Sub-County was generally positive, with teachers reporting enhanced classroom studies, improved collaboration, and strengthened civic awareness. These results align with Bringle and Hatcher (2013) and Whitley (2014), who conceptualize CSL as a pedagogy that provides experiential learning opportunities beyond traditional classroom settings. Similarly, Behar-Horenstein et al. (2016) and Lee & Chen (2014) emphasize that CSL fosters reflective practice, complexity in thinking, and connections between theory and authentic community contexts. The present study confirms that CSL is not only feasible in Kenyan primary schools but also beneficial in reinforcing professionalism and civic responsibility among teachers and learners.

4.1 Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness emerged as a critical factor in successful CSL integration. The study found that teachers demonstrated significant improvement in confidence, motivation, and classroom management after CSL exposure. This supports Manasia et al. (2020) and Robinson (2016), who argue that preparedness is essential for navigating the complexities of teaching in real-world contexts. Peterson-Ahmad et al. (2018) further corroborate that CSL enhances instructional excellence. The findings also resonate with Kihwele & Mtandi (2020) and Ramírez (2021), who highlight the transformative power of practical experience in bridging gaps between theory and practice. Importantly, the study underscores that teacher preparation programs must embed CSL components to cultivate adaptive, reflective, and resilient educators capable of addressing diverse classroom challenges.

4.2 Community Involvement and Partnerships

Community involvement was found to be robust, with schools and communities collaborating effectively to meet local needs. Teachers reported that CSL reinforced their understanding of course content and provided authentic contexts for applying knowledge. These findings echo Van Dijk et al. (2019), who observed that service learning strengthens institutional–societal partnerships, and Conway et al. (2009), who linked CSL participation to improved civic engagement and academic achievement. The Kenyan case demonstrates that CSL can serve as a bridge between schools and communities, fostering mutual benefits such as literacy support, inclusion of learners with disabilities, and professional collaboration.

4.3 Teachers' Engagement, Attitudes, and Perceptions

Teachers' reflections revealed that CSL challenged preconceived notions and broadened perspectives on community engagement. While some acknowledged logistical challenges, most expressed willingness to embrace CSL as a valuable pedagogical approach. These findings align with Gerda and Rene (2017), who noted that prior CSL participation increases teachers' willingness to engage in future service-learning initiatives. The study highlights that CSL not only enhances technical teaching skills but also shapes professional identity, critical thinking, and appreciation of community struggles.

4.4 Synthesis and Contribution

Overall, the study demonstrates that CSL integration in Kenyan primary schools contributes positively to classroom learning, teacher preparedness, community partnerships, and teacher attitudes. By situating these findings within global and African literature, the study provides evidence that CSL is a viable and impactful component of the Competency-Based Curriculum. Importantly, it identifies gaps in teacher training and resource allocation, suggesting that sustained institutional support is necessary for scaling CSL across Kenyan schools.

5. Conclusion

From the results and discussion, this study concludes that Community Service-Learning (CSL) is a valuable and effective concept in curriculum implementation in Kenyan primary schools. CSL enhances classroom learning, strengthens professionalism, fosters civic awareness, and promotes collaboration among teachers, learners, and communities. Teacher preparedness and community partnerships emerged as critical factors in successful integration, while teachers' reflections revealed broadened perspectives and increased appreciation of CSL's role in education. Overall, CSL contributes meaningfully to the goals of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) by preparing learners to be competent, reflective, and socially responsible citizens.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Policy Support: The Ministry of Education should promote CSL as a core component of CBC implementation and management in primary schools.
- Teacher Training: Regular training for teachers and stakeholders should be conducted to enhance pedagogical skills and ensure effective CSL integration.
- Institution–Community Collaboration: Teacher training institutions should liaise with communities and relevant organizations to provide teacher trainees with authentic CSL opportunities, cascading into primary schools.
- Curriculum Design: Academic staff should be supported with information and resources to design and implement CSL modules that are meaningful to both students and communities.
- Hands-on Pedagogy: Teacher training institutions should adopt practical, experiential approaches to CSL, enabling trainees to apply knowledge and skills to real-life contexts.
- Higher Education Support: Universities and tertiary institutions should supplement teacher training efforts by preparing human resources to implement CSL across the education sector.
- Innovative Pedagogical Techniques: Pre-service teacher programs should integrate CSL through active learning, flexible scheduling, multicultural curricula, team teaching, learner-centered approaches, and community participation.
- Early Initiatives: CSL engagement should be nurtured from the initial stages of teacher training to instill habits of community involvement that can be modeled in classrooms.
- Reflective Practice: Teacher trainees should be encouraged to maintain journals, portfolios, and visitation logs documenting community engagements, which should form part of the assessment.
- Funding and Research: The government should allocate budgetary support and grants to motivate teacher trainers and higher education faculty to conduct CSL-related research and revise syllabi to global standards.
- National Consortium: A state-wide consortium should be established, comprising the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders, to coordinate and strengthen CSL in teacher education.

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