Journal of Teaching, Learning & Curriculum (JTLC)
Volume 2 Issue 2 Year 2026 Pages 672 – 717
E–ISSN : 3110-3707 | DOI: 10.61227
e-mail : jtlc.journal@gmail.com
https://journal.pusmedia.com/index.php/JTLC/index

Key Barriers to the Implementation of Competency-Based Education Towards Life Skills and Character Formation in Catholic-Sponsored Public Primary Schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the key barriers to the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) towards life skills and character formation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya. This study's targeted 15 Catholic sponsored public schools, 15 head teachers, 240 teachers, 232 parents, 8, 200 learners, 1 Diocesan Educational Secretary, 1 Chaplain and 2 Sub County education officers. Out of a population of 8691 individuals, the study sampled 30% of the targeted schools using stratified and simple random sampling technique, criterion sampling for head teachers, stratified sampling for teachers, and snowball technique for parents which translated to 5 schools, 5 head teachers, 72 teachers and 69 parents. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was used to sample 367 learners. The study used questionnaires to collect data from Diocesan Educational Secretary, the Chaplain, Education Officers, head teachers, deputy head teachers, and teachers. Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data from parents. Document Analysis guide was used to analyse relevant documents on school-level implementation records and available monitoring or inspection reports for the five schools. The study also used a structured observation guide to record interactions among learners, between learners and educators, and parents' non-verbal cues during key informant interviews in each of the five schools. Quantitative data were analysed by the researcher using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics summarised respondents' demographic characteristics and levels of teacher and learner preparedness for CBE implementation. Qualitative data were thematically analysed. The study established that the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) towards life skills and character formation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County was hindered by several barriers. Key challenges included inadequate teacher preparation on CBE approaches, insufficient teaching and learning resources, large class sizes, heavy teacher workloads, limited institutional support, and inadequate parental involvement. The study concluded that the effective implementation of CBE towards life skills and character formation depends on adequate teacher competence, availability of instructional resources, supportive school environments, and active stakeholder participation. The study recommends continuous teacher capacity-building on CBE pedagogies and assessment practices, increased provision of teaching and learning resources, strengthened school support systems, and enhanced stakeholders' involvement in learners' character development.

Keywords: Barriers; Implementation; Competency-Based Education; Life Skills; Character Formation; Catholic-Sponsored Public Primary Schools

Article info: Submitted **:** 2026-08-29 | Accepted : 2026-09-12 | Published : 2026-10-28

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INTRODUCTION

Vavrus et al. (2011) and, more recently, Amunga et al. (2020) argue that learner-centered, competency-based pedagogy places considerably heavier demands on teacher judgment, formative assessment skills, and classroom time than the transmission-style teaching it replaces, demands that pre-service training in many Sub-Saharan African systems does not yet meet. If this argument holds, then the transmission of life skills and character formation, which depends even more heavily on modelling, dialogue, and sustained relationships than the transmission of academic content, is plausibly the first casualty of under-resourced CBE implementation, not an incidental side effect.

Recent Kenyan evidence reinforces this concern rather than resolving it. In Embu County, Mwangi et al. (2026) found that although 95% of teachers had received some pre-implementation training, 65% still held negative perceptions of the new curriculum, indicating that training coverage alone does not translate into readiness to deliver it. In Kajiado County, where the present study is located, Macharia et al. (2026) similarly found that poor incentives, heavy workloads, and a lack of supportive mechanisms depressed teacher motivation and, with it, teachers' commitment to the lesson planning, instructional delivery, and continuous assessment that CBE requires. Read alongside Vavrus et al. (2011) and Amunga et al. (2020), this more recent evidence suggests that the gap between what CBE demands of teachers and how teachers are equipped to deliver has persisted, rather than closed, since the reform's rollout, including in the very county this study examines.

At the continental level, the African Union frames education as an instrument for an integrated, self-reliant Africa grounded in African identity, values, and ethics (AUC, 2015, 2018). This framing is aspirational rather than operational: the AUC's own review work acknowledges that competency-based reforms across the continent have advanced more on paper, in curriculum documents and teacher-training frameworks, than in classroom-level practices that would allow a researcher to verify whether character-related outcomes are actually being produced (AUC, 2018). Kenya's reform fits within this continental pattern rather than outside it: the BECF commits schools to developing love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism, and integrity alongside academic competencies (KICD, 2017, 2019), yet neither the Ministry of Education's monitoring instruments nor the national assessment system currently specifies how the acquisition of these life skills, as distinct from competencies, would be observed or verified (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). As a result, the policy architecture declares character formation a goal of CBE but, in practice, not an object of monitoring, precisely the ambiguity this study is

positioned to interrogate empirically rather than merely restate.

The national stakes in resolving this ambiguity are not trivial. Kenya's population is disproportionately young; those aged 18–24 make up roughly three-quarters of it (KNBS, 2019). Persistent youth unemployment partly stems from a mismatch between what schools certify and what employers and communities require of graduates, both technically and in workplace conduct (Munyao, 2017). The state positions CBE as the corrective to this mismatch and as a vehicle for Vision 2030 (GOK, 2007). The Constitution of Kenya (2010, Article 10) and the fourth national goal of education give this mandate a values dimension with constitutional standing, not merely a curricular aspiration (Wambua & Waweru, 2019). A reform of this scale, carrying both an economic and a constitutional mandate, is precisely the kind of policy that doctoral research should test against classroom-level evidence rather than accept at the level of stated intent.

Catholic-sponsored public primary schools add a layer to this picture that the literature reviewed above does not address. As public schools, they must deliver the national CBE curriculum in full; as Catholic-sponsored institutions, they are expected to root character formation in Catholic social teaching, stewardship, solidarity, and collective responsibility (Catholic Education Secretariat, 2014; Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Whether and how teachers in these schools reconcile a state curriculum with a faith-based formation mandate, what preparation they have, what obstacles they face, and which classroom practices they use, remains a question the existing literature on Kenyan CBE implementation, which is written almost entirely about public schools in general, has not asked. Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, where both mandates converge and the learner population comes from markedly diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, offers a setting where this question can be examined empirically rather than assumed.

Statement of the Problem

The successful implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) is central to achieving Kenya's educational vision of developing competent, values-driven, and socially responsible citizens. Through its emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy, continuous assessment, life skills, and values education, CBE is intended to facilitate holistic learner development, including character formation. Catholic-sponsored public primary schools are uniquely positioned to advance these aims due to their tradition of integrating moral and spiritual values into educational practice.

However, emerging concerns suggest that the translation of CBE policy into classroom practice may be constrained by several institutional,

pedagogical, and socio-cultural challenges. Factors such as inadequate teacher preparedness, limited teaching and learning resources, challenges in competency assessment, large class sizes, insufficient stakeholder support, and competing curriculum demands may undermine effective implementation of CBE and consequently limit learner acquisition of life skills and character competencies. While studies have examined CBE implementation in various contexts, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on the barriers affecting life skills and character formation within Catholic-sponsored public primary schools.

This knowledge gap is particularly evident in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, where little is known about the nature and extent of barriers hindering the implementation of CBE in relation to life skills and character development. Without such evidence, efforts to strengthen educational practice and policy interventions may not adequately address context-specific challenges. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the key barriers to the implementation of Competency-Based Education towards life skills and character formation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya. The findings are expected to inform strategies for enhancing effective CBE implementation and promoting holistic learner development.

Literature Review

In this section, theoretical and empirical reviews guiding and related to this study are presented.

1. Theoretical Review

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) offers a framework for understanding educational change by examining individuals' concerns, patterns of innovation use, and implementation practices (Anderson, 1997). CBAM explains barriers not as a free-standing list of obstacles but as conditions, such as limited training, large classes, heavy workloads, and inadequate resources, that keep an otherwise willing teacher at an early stage of concern or a low level of use (Hollingshead, 2009). This forms the basis on which the study treats teacher preparedness as its independent variable and models barriers as a condition affecting the relationship between preparedness and practice.

2. Empirical Review

Outside Africa, evidence specific to Catholic-sponsored public primary schools is scarce, so the closest evidence comes from studies of Catholic religious education, primary character education, social-emotional learning, and religion-based schools in Europe and Asia. The strongest recurring barrier is insufficient teacher preparation for competency- and character-oriented teaching, including

uncertainty about how to move beyond content delivery to attitudes, skills, and habits (Jhon, 2021; Badeni & Saparahayuningsih, 2023; Jurišić & Kemfelja, 2025). Related barriers stem from this: difficulty assessing character, social-emotional growth, and applied competencies rather than factual recall (Jhon, 2021; Hamid et al., 2025; Jurišić & Kemfelja, 2025), and treating character formation as a fragmented individual effort rather than a whole-school plan with explicit goals and leadership support (Hamid et al., 2025; Siagian et al., 2024). In Catholic religious education in Croatia, administrative obstacles and teacher and parent attitudes kept instruction at an informational level, with weak development of attitudes, conflict resolution, and experiential learning (Jurišić & Kemfelja, 2025).

Other barriers concern the setting in which teachers work. Parental and community engagement is often inconsistent, weakening the supervision and reinforcement on which character education depends (Jhon, 2021; Hamid et al., 2025; Siagian et al., 2024); infrastructure, space, materials, and device access are limited (Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Aryani et al., 2024; Jhon, 2021); and life skills and character education are not integrated across school programmes (Defitrika & Mahmudah, 2021; Yuliani et al., 2024). In rural China, academic pressure, administrative burden, low funding, and weak community buy-in pushed social-emotional learning below test-oriented priorities (Fu et al., 2025), while in Indonesian religion-based schools, missing coordination, planning documents, training, and evaluation tools left moral goals unclear and implementation inconsistent (Hamid et al., 2025). Taken together, this literature suggests that the main barriers- weak teacher preparation, limited experiential pedagogy, poor assessment systems, weak stakeholder coordination, and inadequate material support (Fu et al., 2025; Mansur & Sholeh, 2024; Levchyk et al., 2021; Aryani et al., 2024), are not independent of one another: weak preparation tends to generate the assessment and coordination problems that follow it (Jhon, 2021; Hamid et al., 2025).

No study set in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools elsewhere in Africa was found, but studies from Tanzania, Rwanda, and South Africa report barriers relevant to this study. Teacher capacity is the most frequently reported barrier: as Ngeno et al. (2021) reviewed, teachers in Tanzania and South Africa lack adequate training and revert to teacher-centered methods when implementing competency-based curricula, and in South Africa motivation and ongoing support mattered more than teacher attitude alone. A comparative review of Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania identified shared bottlenecks: teacher professional development, resource and infrastructure constraints, and assessment-system inertia. It showed

that governance choices shaped these outcomes: Rwanda's centralized implementation was orderly but faced financing problems, while Tanzania's gradual, locally adjusted rollout left equity divides in place (Mwangi & Barasa, 2025). Tanzania's experience also points to the need for teachers to take part in curriculum formulation and revision (Ngeno et al., 2021). Because Kenya's county-level implementation is closer to Tanzania's than to Rwanda's, its barriers likely resemble Tanzania's equity and resourcing problems. Much of this regional evidence, however, comes from secondary schools or from national policy analysis rather than primary classrooms (Ngeno et al., 2021; Mwangi & Barasa, 2025).

Kenyan studies, none of which isolate Catholic-sponsored public primary schools, identify a consistent set of barriers. Inadequate teacher training is the most frequently reported barrier (Cheruiyot, 2024; Muchira et al., 2023; Mackatiani & Ejore, 2024): in Kinangop, 66.5% of teachers were untrained in CBC, resulting in low awareness of its tenets and a reversion to old methods (Karua et al., 2025); in rural Embu, low implementation was significantly associated with low teacher competence (Wanjau et al., 2023); and teachers in Bomet, Northern Kenya, and Moiben lacked capacity to infuse core competencies, design assessment rubrics, use pupil-centred methods, and integrate educational technology (Naomi et al., 2023; Hussein, 2023; Mutai et al., 2024). Resource and infrastructure deficits form the second barrier: inadequate textbooks and instructional materials (Pale, 2020; Atikiya, 2021; Naomi et al., 2023), absent computer laboratories, devices, and internet (Wanyama, 2025; Atikiya, 2021; Kawinzi, 2025), missing libraries (Pale, 2020; Kawinzi, 2025), and insufficient government funding (Waruingi et al., 2022; Mackatiani & Ejore, 2024). In Kajiado County, where the present study is located, poor incentives, heavy workloads, and a lack of support mechanisms have also been found to depress teacher motivation for CBE (Macharia et al., 2026).

The remaining barriers involve stakeholders and class conditions. Parents and other stakeholders were inadequately involved in the reform (Pale, 2020; Hussein, 2023): in Bungoma, parents did not understand CBC expectations or grading (Pale, 2020), and in Isiolo, they had not been sensitized to their role (Atikiya, 2021). Overcrowded classrooms with 70–100 pupils per stream and high teacher-to-pupil ratios impeded delivery (Pale, 2020; Mutua & Waweru, 2023; Waruingi et al., 2022; Mutai et al., 2024), and resistance to change persisted among educators and parents unfamiliar with CBC methods (Cheruiyot, 2024; Mungai, 2026). Taken together, these barriers appear less as separate problems than as a shortfall in resourcing and preparation expressed at the classroom, school, and community levels. The reported

resistance to change looks less like an attitude problem than a rational response to being asked to implement a demanding curriculum without adequate training, staffing, or community preparation.

The barriers literature is the most consistent body of evidence in this review, but its consistency partly reflects a narrow methodological range: most studies are descriptive or cross-sectional surveys in which teachers or administrators report obstacles retrospectively (Cheruiyot, 2024; Muchira et al., 2023; Pale, 2020; Atikiya, 2021). Several findings rest on single, geographically narrow studies, such as the Kinangop and Nairobi training figures (Karua et al., 2025; Isaboke et al., 2021), and the regional evidence is drawn largely from secondary schools (Ngeno et al., 2021; Mwangi & Barasa, 2025), limiting its applicability to primary-level, Catholic-sponsored settings. Barriers are also reported mainly from the school's side, so stakeholder disengagement appears as a coordination problem perceived by teachers and administrators (Hamid et al., 2025; Jhon, 2021; Siagian et al., 2024) rather than as experienced by parents and learners themselves.

Three gaps exist. First, across all levels reviewed, researchers treat barriers as a list of obstacles to document rather than as a variable tested against the strength of the relationship between teacher preparedness and classroom practice. Second, no reviewed study isolates Catholic-sponsored public primary schools. Third, few studies consider teachers', learners', and parents' perspectives on the same barriers. The present study addresses these gaps by modelling barriers as a moderating variable, informed by CBAM's account of factors that may constrain implementation, and by testing the proposed moderation statistically. It also collects barrier data from teachers, administrators, learners, and parents within the five Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the key barriers to the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) towards life skills and character formation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and integrated during interpretation. The study analysed quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data was analysed thematically.

2. Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, Kenya, approximately 30 kilometres southwest of Nairobi, near the Ngong Hills. All the five Catholic-Sponsored Public Primary Schools operating in the sub-county at the time of the study were included in the sampling frame, which removed the need to justify a sub-selection from a larger pool of CSPPS and instead made the study a near-census of CSPPS in the sub-county, maximizing the empirical coverage. Within these five schools, the convergence of a national CBE curriculum mandate and a distinct Catholic character-formation mandate made Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County a setting for empirically examining the practical work of reconciling the two, consistent with the empirical gap.

3. Target Population

This study's targeted 15 Catholic sponsored public schools, 15 head teachers, 240 teachers, 232 parents, 8, 200 learners, 1 Diocesan Educational Secretary, 1 Chaplain and 2 Sub County education officers. Out of a population of 8691 individuals, the study sampled 30% of the targeted schools using stratified and simple random sampling technique, criterion sampling for head teachers, stratified sampling for teachers, and snowball technique for parents which translated to 5 schools, 5 head teachers, 72 teachers and 69 parents. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was used to sample 367 learners.

The study included adult respondents because their professional, administrative, pastoral, or parental roles provided relevant perspectives on CBE implementation. Their participation enabled the study to examine classroom practices, school leadership, educational administration, pastoral support, and parental involvement.

Table 1. Sample Matrix

Category	Population	Sample size	%
Schools	15	5	30
Head teachers	15	5	30
Teachers	240	72	30
Parents	232	69	30
Learners	8200	367	Table
Total	**8,687**	**513**	

4. Research Instruments

This study used four instruments: questionnaires, a key informant interview guide, a document analysis guide, and an observation guide.

Questionnaires: The study used two types of questionnaires to collect data from different respondent categories. The first questionnaire was administered to the Diocesan Educational Secretary, the Chaplain, Education Officers, head teachers, deputy head teachers, and teachers. *Key Informant Interviews (Parents):* The researcher used a semi-structured key informant interview guide with the 10 sampled parents. *Document Analysis:*

The documents analysed comprised national CBE/CBC policy texts (the Basic Education Curriculum Framework and relevant Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development curriculum designs), school-level implementation records (schemes of work and records of co-curricular or character-formation activities), and available monitoring or inspection reports for the five schools. *Observation Guide:* The researcher and trained research assistants used a structured observation guide to record interactions among learners, between learners and educators, and parents' non-verbal cues during key informant interviews in each of the five schools. Observation focused on a defined set of indicators associated with life skills and character formation, including cooperation, responsibility, discipline, and empathy, as manifested in classroom and playground interaction. ***Data Analysis Procedures:*** Quantitative data were analysed by the researcher using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics summarised respondents' demographic characteristics and levels of teacher and learner preparedness for CBE implementation. Qualitative data were thematically analysed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The response rates represented by the seven categories of respondents are presented below. The study targeted 513 respondents, including administrative personnel, school leaders, teachers, parents (as key informants), and learners in Grades 7–8. Of the 513 targeted respondents, 392 participated, yielding an overall response rate of 76.4%. The learner category recorded 338 responses from the 367 targeted learners, representing a response rate of 92.7%. The adult respondent categories achieved full participation, with all 54 targeted respondents providing the required data, resulting in a 100.0% response rate. These respondents comprised the Diocesan Educational Secretary, the Chaplain, two Sub-County Education Officers, ten head teachers and deputy head teachers, thirty teachers, and ten parents who served as key informants. The high response rate enhanced the completeness of the data available for analysis and minimized the potential for substantial non-response bias. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that a response rate exceeding 70% is generally considered adequate for educational survey research. The overall response rate of 76.4% therefore provides a strong empirical basis for the subsequent analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the study findings.

Highest Level of Academic Qualification

Figure 1 presents the distribution of respondents by highest academic qualification. The findings indicate that 24 (44.4%) held bachelor's degrees, representing the largest

proportion. Respondents with diploma qualifications and those with a Kenya Primary Education Certificate accounted for 10 (18.5%) each. Seven (13.0%) held master's degrees, while 3 (5.6%) had certificate qualifications. None of the 54 respondents held a PhD (0.0%). The predominance of bachelor's degree holders indicates that university graduates constituted the largest respondent group. The variation in educational attainment provides a basis for examining the study phenomenon from different educational and professional perspectives. However, academic qualifications alone do not determine respondents' competence or the reliability of their contributions. The absence of doctoral-level respondents should therefore be interpreted in relation to the study objectives and target population rather than as an automatic limitation. These findings provide relevant demographic context for interpreting the subsequent research findings.

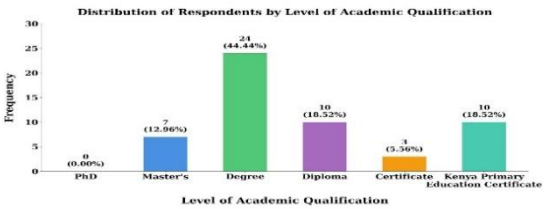


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Level of Academic Qualifications

Source: *Field Data (2026) N =54*

Experience in Competency-Based Education (CBE) Implementation.

As presented in Figure 1, the findings indicate that, out of the 54 valid responses, 36 (66.7%) of the respondents had three years and above of experience in Competency-Based Education (CBE) implementation, 16 (29.6%) had between one and two years of experience, while 2 (3.7%) had between zero and one year of experience. These findings suggest that most respondents had substantial practical exposure to CBE implementation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in the Ngong area. The findings relate to the literature reviewed on teacher preparedness and curriculum implementation, which emphasises the importance of continuous professional development in strengthening teachers' capacity to implement competency-based curricula. Effective implementation also depends on teachers' pedagogical knowledge, professional support, and access to adequate instructional resources. Although most respondents had considerable experience implementing CBE, experience alone does not necessarily indicate adequate preparedness or effective implementation of life skills and character formation in learners.

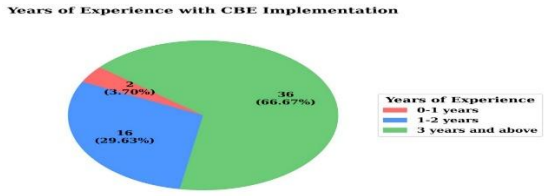


Figure 2. ***Years of Experience with CBE Implementation***

Source: *Field Data (2026)*

Barriers to CBE Implementation towards Life Skills and Character Formation

This section presents the findings on the key barriers in the implementation of CBE towards life skills and character formation, from the perspectives of learners, teachers, parents, and the Diocesan Educational Chaplain.

Learners' Perspective

Table 2. Barriers to CBE Implementation (learners' perception)

Key Barriers	N of Participants	Percentage %
Inadequate resources, i.e. Laboratories, books, and computers.	243	72
Discrimination by teachers and other learners	74	22
Inadequate teachers	61	18
Lack of support from teachers and parents	57	16.8
Lack of clear knowledge of CBE	22	6.5
Incomplete syllabi in different subjects	20	6
Missing school due to health issues	3	1
Poor communication between teachers and learners	3	1
Negative attitude perception towards subjects	1	0.3

Source: *Field data, 2026*

Findings from the above table shows that, of the 338 learner respondents, 484 barrier-mentions were recorded in total (learners could name more than one barrier), led by inadequate resources (243, 72% of respondents), followed by discrimination from teachers and other learners (74, 22%), inadequate teachers (61, 18%), lack of support from teachers and parents (57, 17%), syllabus incompletion (20, 6%), and unclear knowledge of CBE (22, 6.5%); missing school, poor communication, and negative attitude were each named by fewer than 1% of learners. Each leading barrier affects life skills and character formation indirectly: a learner who lacks materials, feels discriminated against, or is taught by an overstretched or under-informed teacher has fewer opportunities to practice and internalize the values CBE is meant to cultivate.

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Teachers' Perspective

Thematic analysis of the open-ended barriers question produced six barrier themes from the teacher respondents (each respondent's first-mentioned barrier was used, for a total of 44 responses), presented in Table 2.

Table 3. Barriers to CBE Implementation (Teachers' Perception)

Key barriers	No. of participants	Percentage (%)
Lack of adequate resources	19	43.2
Heavy workload for the teacher	7	15.9
Inadequate knowledge of CBE	6	13.7
Lack of enough digital facilities and Digital literacy	6	13.7
Inadequately trained teachers	4	9.0
Some CBE content is not age-appropriate	2	4.5

Source: *Field data, 2026*

The leading barrier, named by 19 of 44 teacher respondents (43.2%), was inadequate resources, matching the leading concern among learners. This was followed by a cluster of implementer-related deficiencies: heavy workload on teachers (15.9%), inadequate knowledge of CBE (13.7%), a lack of digital facilities and literacy (13.7%), and inadequate numbers of teachers (9.0%), all of which converge with the learner-reported barriers on the same underlying problem of deficiencies in resourcing and in the implementing workforce. The remaining barrier, that some CBE content was not age-appropriate (4.5%), was raised only by teachers, plausibly because teachers, as adults responsible for delivering the curriculum, are best placed to judge content appropriateness. Interviews with the Diocesan Education Secretary and the Diocesan Educational Chaplain corroborated resource and logistical constraints. They added a lack of adequate personnel, a lack of rescue centres for vulnerable learners, and parental alcoholism and prostitution in learners' home lives, each of which is developed further from the chaplain's perspective. Each of these barriers indirectly affects life skills and character formation: an overworked, under-resourced, or under-informed teacher has fewer opportunities to model, guide, and give feedback on the values CBE is meant to cultivate, which is precisely the mechanism examined in the moderation test reported.

Parents' Perspective

The ten interviewed parents identified barriers and challenges to CBE implementation, grouped into four categories and summarised in Figure 3: learner developmental challenges, the parental role, infrastructure, and implementer deficiency.



Figure 3. Barriers and Challenges to CBE Implementation

Source: *Field data, 2026*

Learner Developmental Challenges

Learner developmental challenges named by parents included the initiation rite, substance abuse, peer

influence, and school dropout or truancy.

Initiation rite: parents linked this rite of passage into adulthood to character challenges when not well addressed, since the individual is expected to discard childish behaviour and take on greater responsibility, but may instead take up greater freedom with minimal responsibility, compromising the values of respect and humility.

Substance abuse: Parent-002 raised concern over learners' use of substances such as marijuana: "...so not everything that you should participate in, for example, we can say like now when our children have indulged in marijuana smoking..." Although not stated explicitly, parents implied that substance use undermined the formation of learners' values and skills, with affected learners also negatively influencing peers towards increased drug use, truancy, and rudeness, hindering teachers' inculcation of appropriate life skills and character formation.

Peer influence: Parent-002 observed that friends could easily lead children into negative behaviour, stressing the need for parents to caution their children about their company and to monitor friends and neighbours so they could intervene when a child began to go astray. Peer influence of this kind was seen to interfere with autonomy and responsibility, significant life skills whose acquisition CBE implementation could be undermined by improper peer groupings. School dropping-out: Parent-002 noted, "...since others have even dropped out of school, and you are still there," citing dropping out as a challenge to the continued acquisition and reinforcement of life skills and character formation, both for the learner who drops out and, through distraction, for classmates who remain.

Parental lack: Parent-002 described children missing school, and in some cases engaging in negative behaviour, when fees were lacking. Taken together, these material lacks leave affected learners less able to focus on and internalize life skills and character formation: a hungry learner learns with difficulty, and one without resources others have may find it harder to accept fairness**.** CBE requires collaboration between implementers and parents, including parents providing materials for activities begun at school. Parent-005 described the burden of gathering these materials and the difficulty of supporting them financially on her own, which at times led to her children missing school; she suggested government support in supplying some materials would help. Parent-009 identified internet access as a related challenge: some families owned smartphones but lacked data, limiting learners' access to CBE's digital learning resources. Parent-005 also described difficulty providing basic meals, only partly offset by school feeding programmes, and Parent-002 described children missing school, and

in some cases engaging in negative behaviour, when fees were lacking. Taken together, these forms of material lack leave affected learners less able to focus on and internalise life skills and character formation: a hungry learner learns with difficulty, and one without resources others have may find it harder to accept fairness. Parent-001, Parent-003, and Parent-004 added that CBE itself was costly: parents were periodically asked to purchase items, such as ingredients for cooking lessons, that some could not afford, and, in some cases, children were punished or sent home. Given that this study's public primary schools serve some economically marginalized families, this recurring cost was experienced as a real burden; Parent-004 suggested that earlier notice, at the start of term, would allow parents to plan and contribute better, which would in turn support rather than undermine the inculcation of life skills and character formation.

Parental disengagement: parents felt they had not been adequately involved in decisions on CBE: "...when CBE started, we were not involved. Teachers had no idea; parents also did not know what it was, and now they are being trained. Some people are doing this according to their own different design..." Lack of involvement was seen to breed a lack of interest, making it harder for disengaged parents to collaborate with CBE implementers towards learners' life skills and character formation.

Lack of parental support: Parent-003 described some parents contradicting the values, such as sharing and responsibility, that teachers sought to instill, for instance, objecting when a child shared personal items or took part in cleaning tasks, because the parent had paid for the items and that the child was in school to learn rather than to sweep. In this parent's account, such resistance limits the effectiveness of CBE's character-formation efforts at home.

Infrastructure and Implementer Deficiencies

Parents also raised infrastructure and implementer deficiencies that teachers and learners had already reported. Parent-001 identified the absence of a laboratory as a key obstacle, since practical science lessons essential to acquiring values, life skills, and practical knowledge could not be conducted effectively without one, leaving learners disadvantaged. Parent-004 and Parent-007 felt teachers were not adequately trained, particularly newer teachers, or as effective as those under the previous 8-4-4 system; Parent-003 and Parent-005 described teachers overwhelmed by administrative workload and by having to teach multiple subjects due to staff shortages; and Parent-003 described classes of up to 80 learners under a single teacher, leaving little time for individual attention. Together, overcrowding, heavy workload, and limited experience

compromised CBE implementers' ability to deliver on life skills and character formation.

The Diocesan Educational Chaplain's Perspective

The Diocesan Educational Chaplain, interviewed as a key informant on the diocese's Preparation for Personal Integrity (PPI) programs, reported major improvements since their introduction: pregnancy cases among students had reduced to almost zero, and learners who went through PPI and chaplaincy programs became, in his description, ambassadors of good behaviour and values wherever they were. He also noted that learners participated more freely when chaplains or catechists led sessions rather than regular classroom teachers, creating a more joyful and engaging learning environment. Table 3 summarises these themes, along with the barriers he identified.

Table 4. Themes emanating from the Diocesan Educational Chaplain interview

Theme's	Sub-Themes
Barriers to the implementation of PPI	Drug abuse, unruly behaviour, and theft are big challenges
	Lack of enough workforce
	Inadequate resources
	Lack of a rescue centre for the vulnerable learners
	Parent alcoholism
	Prostitution in learners' lives
	Unstable economy
	Some teachers view PPI as a waste of time
Positive impacts of PPI: PPI has led to an increase in students joining the University.	
Reduction in pregnancy rates in schools.	
Learners act as ambassadors not only in school but also at home, according to parents.	
PPI is very interactive, and learners are well engaged	
Learners act as ambassadors not only in school but also at home, according to parents.	
PPI is very interactive, and learners are well engaged	

Source: *Field data, 20226*

On barriers, the Chaplain cited the difficulty of reaching the diocese's many schools with limited personnel for pastoral and PPI duties, a constraint only partly offset by involving seminarians and other clergy. He joined teacher respondents in citing a lack of resources, including PPI books that many schools could not afford and, in some cases, had never seen, compounded by the loss of the subsidies dioceses had once received from Rome and by a lack of funds for the transport needed to visit schools regularly. Because PPI programmes are focused specifically on values and character formation, this unavailability, in his assessment, directly limited the programmes' contribution to life skills and character formation where they were not well implemented. He further identified a lack of rescue-centre provision for vulnerable learners, some of whom faced parental alcoholism, other substance abuse, or, in the context of poverty, parents engaging in prostitution as a survival mechanism, home circumstances that he judged to hinder the inculcation of life skills and character formation actively. Finally, he noted that some teachers viewed PPI as a waste of time, and when this attitude among implementers interfered with or reduced their contribution to the program, it negatively affected the program's realization of life skills and character formation.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings identified inadequate learning resources as the most frequently reported barrier, as cited by 43.2% of teacher-category

respondents (19 of 44) and 72% of learners (243 of 338). Other barriers included teacher shortages, heavy workloads, limited digital facilities, and inadequate understanding of CBE. These findings demonstrate that limited resources and implementation capacity constrain schools' ability to provide the practical, participatory learning experiences required to develop learners' life skills and character values. The findings are consistent with previous studies identifying resource shortages, inadequate teacher preparation, and implementation challenges in competency-based education in Kenya and other African contexts (Pale, 2020; Atikiya, 2021; Waruingi et al., 2022; Mackatiani & Ejore, 2024; Mutai et al., 2024; Mwangi & Barasa, 2025). The agreement between teacher and learner responses strengthens the evidence that resource inadequacy is a significant concern in the study setting. However, the findings also show that barriers extend beyond institutional conditions.

Parent interviews identified financial constraints, limited digital literacy, inadequate consultation, and disagreement with certain school practices as additional challenges. These findings indicate that household circumstances and differences between school and family expectations may affect parental participation in CBE. While previous studies have highlighted stakeholder engagement and school-community coordination (Hamid et al., 2025; Jhon, 2021; Siagian et al., 2024), the present findings emphasise the need to consider the practical and relational circumstances shaping parental involvement. Viewed through Ubuntu philosophy and Catholic Social Teaching, which emphasise human dignity, interdependence, and shared responsibility, these findings highlight the importance of cooperation among schools, families, the Church, and government (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Udah et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the successful implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) towards life skills and character formation in Catholic-sponsored public primary schools in Ngong, Kajiado North Sub-County is hindered by several interrelated barriers. Teacher-related factors, particularly inadequate training in competency-based pedagogical approaches and assessment methods, limit the effective delivery of life skills and character education. The study further concludes that insufficient teaching and learning resources constrain the use of learner-centered strategies that are essential for competency development.

Additionally, institutional challenges such as large class sizes, heavy teacher workloads, limited administrative support, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms negatively affect CBE implementation. The findings also

indicate that parental and community involvement in supporting life skills and character formation remains inadequate, reducing the reinforcement of competencies learned in school. As a result, learners may not fully acquire the intended life skills, values, attitudes, and character competencies envisioned under the CBE framework.

The study therefore concludes that unless these barriers are addressed through collaborative efforts involving teachers, school administrators, parents, sponsors, and education policymakers, the realization of holistic learner development through CBE may remain constrained. Effective implementation of CBE requires adequate teacher preparedness, sufficient instructional resources, supportive school environments, and active stakeholder participation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), and school sponsors should provide continuous professional development programs focused on competency-based pedagogies, life skills education, character formation, and competency assessment techniques. Regular in-service training would enhance teachers' capacity to effectively implement CBE.

Schools should be equipped with sufficient instructional materials, digital learning technologies, and resource centers that support competency-based learning. The government and sponsors should allocate adequate resources to facilitate learner-centered teaching and assessment.

School administrators should enhance institutional support by providing regular supervision, professional mentoring, and monitoring of CBE implementation. Efforts should also be made to address teacher workload challenges and maintain manageable teacher-learner ratios.

Schools should establish stronger partnerships with parents and community stakeholders through sensitization programs, workshops, and regular engagement forums. This would promote shared responsibility in the development of learners' life skills and character competencies.

The Ministry of Education and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should develop clear guidelines and practical assessment tools for evaluating life skills and character competencies to ensure consistency and effectiveness in competency assessment.

Catholic sponsors, Boards of Management, and government agencies should work collaboratively to provide the necessary moral, financial, and infrastructural support required for the effective implementation of CBE and the promotion of character formation.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization : All Authors;
Methodology : All Authors ;
Investigation : All Authors ;
Writing original draft preparation : All Authors ;
Writing review and editing : All Authors ;
Visualization: All Authors.
All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript