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Teachers' Content Preparation and Learners' Participation in Classroom Learning Activities in Junior Schools in Embu County, Kenya

Ezekiel Mugendi Ireri[1*]; Dr. Francis Murira[2]; Dr. Stephen Monanda[3]

[2;3](PhD)
[1]MeD Candidate-Philosophy of Education-Department of Educational Foundations, Kenyatta University, Kenya.
[2]Lecturer- Philosophy of Education-Department of Educational Foundations, Kenyatta University, P.O. Box 43844-00100, Nairobi, Kenya.
[3]Lecturer-Philosophy of Education-Department of Educational Foundations, Kenyatta University, P.O. Box 43844-00100, Nairobi, Kenya.

Corresponding Author: Ezekiel Mugendi Ireri[1*]

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Abstract: Teachers content preparation is a pedagogical practice which enables the instructor to gauge learners' understanding, achievement, and participation in classroom activities. Teachers in public junior secondary schools in Kenya lack adequate pedagogical skills to effectively implement the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Besides, the influence of their pedagogical skills on learners' classroom participation has not been sufficiently examined. This study investigated the relationship between teachers' content preparation and leaners participation in classroom activities in junior secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya. The study also intended to identify ways of preparing junior secondary learning level educators to facilitate effective implementation of CBE while enhancing learners' classroom participation in Embu County, Kenya. The study was anchored in John Dewey's theory of learning, whose tenets of experiential learning, interaction, and reflective engagement guided both inquiry and interpretation. A phenomenological study was conducted using a multi-stage mixed methods design. The target participants comprised 127 head teachers and 333 teachers (460) from public junior secondary schools in Embu County; however, only data from 370 were valid. Phenomenological analysis was employed to interpret participants lived experiences of teaching and learning within the CBE context. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations, while qualitative data were analysed using a six-step thematic analysis process. The findings revealed that purposeful content preparation, was consistently associated with higher levels of learners' classroom participation, both in teachers, lived experiences and in the quantitative patterns observed which align with Dewey's view that learning. The study concluded that effective CBE implementation depends largely on teachers' content preparation skills. It recommended strengthened pre-service training, continuous professional development, and reflective content preparation that foreground learner participation.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Skills, Content Preparation, Learner Participation, Classroom Learning Activities.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

➢ *Background to the Study*

Education plays a key role in society as it models an individual to develop values such as honesty, tolerance, dedication, and personal integrity, which are essential for patriotism. A good education system creates an optimistic outlook toward the nation's cohesiveness and integrity while also cultivating societal productivity in people living there. Ndichu (2013) emphasised this in his study, which demonstrated the importance of acknowledging the philosophical underpinnings of education, including social cohesion, national development, integrity, freedom, good citizenship, and happiness. Attaining the goals of a good education system is reliant on the quality of learning accessible in the institutions. Educators facilitate the realization of quality education systems because of their role in translating curriculum-related goals into meaningful

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education experiences, attained competencies, and influence on learner development (Mwaniki, 2025; Shi et al., 2025).

According to UNESCO's 2020 World Teacher Report, there are 94 million teachers globally. However, there are over 69 million teacher shortages globally, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa (over 70%) (UNESCO & International Task Force for Education 2030, 2024). To achieve global universal education by 2030, there is a need to address education challenges, such as teacher training and recruitment. As such, there is a need to recruit quality teachers with relevant and up-to-date pedagogical skills that match the needs of Junior Secondary School learners.

Teacher preparedness through pre-service and in-service training is now prioritised in many countries, with disparities noted in the Global South and North based nations due to differences in education systems and processes. In Norway, the CBE is termed the LK20 (Kunnskapløftet 2020) reform, whose implementation has been identified as not enhancing 10th graders' scores significantly, prompting the need to implement the curriculum systematically and foster professional educator development (Edvoll et al., 2026). As a result, teachers in the U.S.A., France, Finland, and the U.K. have prioritised subject pedagogical abilities to make certain that they possess the necessary skills for teaching.

The significant efforts in improving teacher education globally have, however, encountered context-specific challenges. Research shows that teachers in Asian countries prefer pedagogical approaches that align with the communities' traditional aspects or cultures. Play-oriented pedagogies have enhanced learners' performance but are rarely implemented in Asian countries as learning norms are oriented toward socio-cultural approaches (Bautista et al., 2023). A study of learners from Asia and the Pacific also revealed that teachers are more educator-centred, except for techniques used in New Zealand and Australia, which are learner-oriented. Similarly, Lee (2024) demonstrated that traditional, culture-based pedagogies in Taiwan were preferred over content and language-integrated learning (CLIL). These demonstrate that educator preparedness may not solely guarantee effective learning as their application of relevant pedagogical abilities is dependent on the existence of supportive stakeholders, resource adequacies, and the will to adopt dynamic teaching strategies.

Singapore offers its educators model teacher preparedness programmes, for example, the Teacher Education Model for the 21st century (TE21), which focuses on the V3SK model that ensures that a teacher has adequate values for offering learner-centred and professional teaching, pedagogical assessment skills, and subject knowledge and understanding of students' learning approaches. The Singapore Teaching Practice (STP) is also a framework under TE21 that emphasises that teachers should effectively develop positive classroom cultures, pedagogical practices, and assessments (National Institute of Education, 2009). Malaysia implements the Institute Pendidikan Guru (IPG) and the Program Pembangunan Professional Berterusan (CPD), which support digital literacies, inclusive education, and educator pedagogies (Taufik et al., 2025).

East Asian countries, including China and Japan, also have adequate teacher preparedness models, which could be used as a foundation for understanding their essence, especially when implementing a new curriculum, such as the CBE. Japan's teacher preparedness model focuses on in-service training and specialised practice of educators while pursuing their degree (Badawi & Badawi, 2024). It also includes lesson study (Jugyo Kenkyu), a collaborative approach where peer educators focus on designing, observing, and iteratively analysing lesson outcomes to enhance their pedagogical skills (Miyamoto, 2024). China offers its educators continuous professional development through teaching research groups (TRGs) and mentorship sessions. The mentorship is whereby new educators are matched with recognised master teachers who guide them through reflective discussions, observations, or co-teaching, while TRGs entail teachers meeting regularly to analyse learners' works and reflect on their pedagogical approaches (Dineinge et al., 2026).

African nations have noted that it is essential to integrate adequate pedagogical abilities in teachers to achieve high educational standards, improve the quality of learning outcomes, and produce learners who can compete globally (Mohd Yusof et al., 2018). The legislature and political leaders in Ghana have passed legislation and policies that promote educators' pedagogical-based training for fostering productive learning, thereby improving learners' academic performance (Boateng et al., 2023). Research targeting educational institutions at the secondary learning level in Morocco showed that the country's education department has intensified teacher training to produce highly qualified and competent teachers capable of improving learner participation in classroom activities, positive student performance, exchange of educational ideas, and assessment practices, ultimately leading to higher-quality education (Laanani & Fathi, 2024).

Studies conducted in East Africa also reveal the essence and enhancement of pedagogical skills in the education sector. In Tanzania, it was found that educators lack the pedagogical skills for teaching algebra (Beichumila et al., 2022). Wambi et al. (2019) echo these findings in Tanzania, who identified the significance of teachers' pedagogical skills, specifically context knowledge, as significantly predicting learners' performance in Uganda. These suggest that East Africa is associated with educators with limited pedagogical competencies, which enhances the need to explore if their existence in educators could foster active learner participation in schools using the CBE curriculum.

In Kenya, the education docket has created mechanisms and provided support for equipping teachers with relevant pedagogical skills before they are hired to practice (Okutu, 2020); however, they have not been trained on those pertinent to the CBE curriculum, which is currently being taught in schools. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) is mandated under Article 237 (2) has accredited the Kenya

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Education Management Institute (KEMI), among other affiliate organs, with the responsibility to introduce and administer the Teacher Professional Development (TPD) educational programmes to educators at various learning levels (Kariuki et al., 2024; Office of the Auditor General, 2021).

Despite efforts to ensure the preparation of qualified teachers, staffing issues resulting from the freezing of teacher employment by international educational financiers have led to an increased educator-to-learner ratio, coupled with inadequate funds for offering adequate in-service training, which has negatively influenced teachers' pedagogical practices, thus affecting students' participation in the classroom (Tabira & Otieno, 2020). Reports from the Embu County Director Teacher Management (CDTM) office indicate that the teacher-to-student ratio is approximately 1:60 against the international standard by UNESCO of 1:34 for primary and 1:29 for secondary schools. Such a high teacher-to-student ratio affects teachers' content preparation, content delivery methods, and frequency of learning assessment, and hampers the maintenance of interactive lessons by educators (Kisia, 2023).

Pedagogy is a key determinant of the learning–teaching environment, as the manner in which a teacher organises content, manages the classroom, and engages with subject matter significantly shapes learners' reception, interpretation, and participation in classroom activities. Pedagogical challenges hamper the success of the CBE learning system at the Junior secondary learning level in the country (Cheruiyot, 2024). However, whether these inadequacies influence classroom content preparation, and how they impact classroom participation activities, remains unknown.

Although Kenya's government has introduced various educator preparation and professional development projects to support the implementation of CBE, a number of challenges still exist. These include financial barriers to effective professional development, a high teacher-learner ratio, and inadequate pedagogical tools, indicating that the challenge has not been addressed effectively (Kisia, 2023; Wanjiku et al., 2024). If the challenges are not effectively addressed in Embu County and Kenya at large, there is a risk that the successful leveraging of CBE benefits might be limited. This may lead to lower classroom participation among learners and low-quality education systems. Addressing the challenges might enhance educators' pedagogical practices, enhance classroom participation, and foster the attainment of CBE goals.

Whereas there are studies revealing challenges related to teacher preparedness and the implementation of the CBE, the extent to which educators' content preparation influence classroom participation in junior secondary schools in Embu County remains unknown. There is, therefore, a need to investigate the influence of teachers' content preparation on learner participation in classroom learning activities in public junior secondary schools in Embu County.

➢ *Statement of the Problem*

Teachers' pedagogical skills and activities are key in the learning-teaching environment, especially with the adoption of the CBE learning system in Kenya. Analysis of the discourse presented above shows apparent challenges, including CBE-related content preparation skill inadequacies among educators. Despite CBE introduction and implementation in Kenya, most educators still experience major challenges using learner-based pedagogical strategies, the design of relevant learning processes, and in assessing academic outcomes. These inadequacies might hamper the effective leveraging of CBE benefits and lower learner engagement levels in the classroom, which are major requirements under the curriculum.

Teachers' content preparation ability is essential for fostering participation in the classroom; however, there are no empirical insights into how its use while implementing the CBE influences learners' participation in classroom activities in junior secondary learning levels in Kenya. This identified problem needs to be addressed, considering the positive impact of teachers' content preparation skills on learners' participation within educational contexts. The targeted problem is that there are limited CBE-related content preparation pedagogical skills among teachers, including those teaching junior secondary learners, and a limitation in insights into how they affect participation in class activities. This study sought to investigate the impact of teachers' content preparation on students' participation in classroom activities in public Embu-based junior secondary learning levels.

➢ *Objective of the Study*

This study sought to establish the relationship that exists between teachers' content preparation and junior secondary learners' classroom participation in Embu County, Kenya.

➢ *Research Question*

This study sought to answer the following question;

- What relationship exists between teachers' content preparation and learners' classroom participation in Embu County, Kenya?

➢ *Theoretical Framework*

This research entailed a critical examination of teachers' pedagogical skills' impact on student participation in classroom learning activities in public Kenyan-based junior secondary learning institutions. This research was guided by John Dewey's theory of learning whose tenets (pedagogy-related concepts) were used to guide the study (Dewey, J. 1938).

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

➢ *Influence of Teacher' Content Preparation on Students' Participation in Classroom Activities*

Content preparation in education involves introducing content to learners to spark their interest, ensuring they have the right information to prepare their minds for new learning (Kumar et al., 2021). However, such a definition treats

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content preparation as a technical activity, overlooking its pedagogical and relational dimensions that shape how learners cognitively and emotionally engage with classroom activities. In this section, the gap in relation to how content preparation by teachers influences the students' participation is outlined. Content preparation depends on how the information is displayed and delivered.

Kithungu et al. (2020) used a quantitative research methodology to explore the influence of ICT integration on content preparation using 180 principals, 360 teachers, and 398 students in Machakos County, Kenya. The study reveals that once the teacher introduces a new topic, the teacher should utilise tools such as graphs, charts, and maps, among others, so that students can develop an interest in the topic and start to participate. Teachers can also use experiences, stories, and experiments in content preparation to spark students' interest. Whereas Kithungu et al. (2020)'s study overwhelmingly supports that content preparation using academic tools can motivate learners' interest, the scholars did not explore the role of teachers' skills gained in teacher training in influencing how learning materials are prepared to influence learners' participation in the classroom, revealing the need for this proposed study. However, while Kithungu et al. (2020) emphasise instructional tools, Huseyin (2019) and Fanguy et al. (2021) shift the focus towards learner-driven strategies such as note-taking, suggesting that content preparation may be influenced not only by teacher inputs but also by learner agency.

Note-taking is one of the tools that learners utilise in content preparation. Huseyin (2019) quantitatively investigated the impact of note-taking when he involved 72 students at the Mustafa Kemal University in Turkey. The study reveals good note-taking results from active listening to the teacher, interest in the topic, and content comprehension. Moreover, a quantitative study conducted by Fanguy et al. (2021) involving 186 Korean university students in different scientific courses revealed that note-taking is a pedagogical strategy across all areas of education as it increases student engagement with the content by inspiring deeper and more meaningful learning. While note-taking is a significant indicator of classroom participation, the studies do not reveal the specific pedagogical practices of educators that influence the action among learners. In addition, Fanguy et al. (2021) and Huseyin (2019) only used quantitative-based methodological approaches, revealing the absence of qualitative-oriented or mixed-methodological strategies in exploring the correlation between content preparation and classroom participation. This indicates a conceptual gap in the literature, as most studies emphasise learner behaviours without sufficiently interrogating the pedagogical competencies that enable or constrain such behaviours.

Ghalley and Rai (2019) also used a qualitative methodology involving observations and interviews to examine the factors influencing learners' participation using 20 higher-secondary students in Bhutan. The research disclosed that content preparation sparks the students' interest if they prepare themselves by sharing experiences and stories regarding the topic or content, echoing the results posited by (Kithungu et al., 2020). Nevertheless, such context in the study by Ghalley and Rai (2019) has focused more on the student perspective, leaving out the teachers' and school head teachers' perspectives, unlike Kithungu et al. (2020), who sampled all three categories of participants. These scholars' findings did not, however, demonstrate how content preparation impacts classroom participation activities in other countries, such as Bhutan and Kenya. Additionally, the findings were made using qualitative data collection and analysis processes, revealing a relevant research gap and the need to address the question as to whether the same impact can be identified in Kenya, specifically in the context of junior secondary learning institutions in Embu County.

The above analysis reveals a research gap, as none of the reviewed studies revealed how note-taking during content preparation impacts classroom participation in developing countries. Whereas the reviewed studies have been identified to provide evidence that content preparation positively influences classroom participations, the same impact cannot be assumed in the context of Kenya, considering it currently focuses on the CBE curriculum, which differs from that used in Bhutan (Ghalley & Rai, 2019) and in the country by the time Kithungu et al. (2020) conducted their research. As such, this study tested this identified theory in the context of public Kenyan-based junior secondary learning facilities, considering their existence following the introduction of CBE. The data obtained was used to address research objective one, "to establish the relationship between content preparation and junior secondary students' participation in the classroom in Kenya." Besides, the reviewed studies did not adopt phenomenological methods, which reveals a relevant gap justifying the need to conduct this proposed research to fill the identified gap.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

- *Research Design*

This study was phenomenological in nature. A phenomenological methodology was adopted in this study using a multiple-staged mixed methods design. Phenomenology is a philosophical research approach concerned with understanding and interpreting individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 2023; Stolz et al., 2023). In this study, phenomenology was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand teachers' experiences and perceptions collected using interviews and questionnaires regarding the influence of pedagogical practices on learners' classroom participation within junior secondary schools implementing the Competency-Based Education (CBE).

It employed a multiple-stage mixed-methods design that enables a researcher to conduct their research in two phases and obtain data that provides additional insights to obtain findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study adopted a mixed-methods design situated within a broader phenomenological orientation, meaning that both the qualitative and quantitative elements were guided by a concern with understanding and interpreting lived

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experience. Social science techniques were employed to collect the data, first through in-depth interviews and subsequently through questionnaires, but the overarching logic of inquiry remained philosophical. Interviews were conducted first to elicit rich experiential accounts that reflect how participants perceived and made sense of the phenomenon.

Although the two forms of data differed in format, their interpretation was unified under a phenomenological analytic approach, aimed at uncovering the underlying structures and meanings of experience. This sequencing reflects a phenomenologically driven, sequential exploratory mixed-methods design where data collection is empirical, but analysis is philosophical.

➢ *Research Methods*

The researcher mostly focused on the qualitative data that were collected in the research to explore experiences and relied on the questionnaire responses (quantitative) to measure the correlations between teachers' pedagogical-related practices and learner participation in junior secondary schools (public-based) in Embu County. Specifically, qualitative and quantitative methods were used by the researcher. This subsection entails a discussion of selecting them and how they align with this study's search approach and methodological.

➢ *Target Population*

A targeted population in any type of investigation represents the larger population from which a researcher selects their sample (Kothari, 2019). This study's targeted population arose from six Sub-Counties of Embu County, including Mwea, Mbeere North and South, and Embu East, West, and North. There are 385 public junior secondary learning institutions within them. The researcher purposefully targeted head teachers and educators as they were perceived to have adequate experience with teachers' pedagogical skills and their impact on learner participation with the introduction of the CBE curriculum. This formed a universal target population comprising 385 head teachers and 1982 educators.

➢ *Sampling Techniques and Sample Size*

This study targeted head teachers and educators whose input facilitated the attainment of this study's purpose. A number of sampling techniques were adopted, both probability and non-probability-based because of the study's phenomenological nature and multiple-stage mixed-methods design. The targeted sample size is also indicated, including how it was calculated. Two subsections below thus describe this information in detail and with supporting justification for choices made.

- *Sampling Techniques*

This depicts an approach that an investigation's primary researchers apply when identifying their sample within a targeted population (Kothari, 2019). Slovin's 2009 formula facilitated sample size calculation with a confidence level of 95%, which aligns with the propositions of Kothari (2019). Ratio proportionate random-based and non-probability sampling approaches were employed. The ratio proportionate sampling technique was employed in the sampling of targeted head teachers and educators. The sampling approach involved using Slovin's formula as follows; sample size was thus perceived as being a proportion of the targeted population of head teachers and educators against (×) the sample size of the number of sampled head teachers and teachers. Specifications on the actual numbers during the calculation of the sample size using the different sampling approaches are indicated in the subsection below. A purposive non-probability-based sampling approach facilitated headteacher selection to facilitate the selection of individuals heading a public Embu-based junior secondary learning institution to be interviewed in the study.

- *Sample Size*

It is mandatory that a researcher's sample represent the population from which it is extracted to foster study generalizability. The study stratified Embu County into six Sub-Counties, each with its corresponding public-based junior secondary learning facility's head teachers and teachers. The 385 head teachers and 1,982 teachers, which led to a target population of 2367 participants, were stratified into six sub-counties in Embu County. Slovin's 2009 formula facilitated sample size calculation as detailed below:

$$\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where,
n = sample size
N= Population size
e = the level of precision (sample error) where the confidence level is 95% and p= 5%.

Head Teachers	Teachers
$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$	$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$
Where n = Sample size N = 2367 e = 0.05 N = 345 head teachers	Where n = Sample size N = 2367 e = 0.05 N = 1982 teachers
$n = \frac{2367}{1+345\ (0.05)^2}$	$n = \frac{2367}{1+1982\ (0.05)^2}$
n = 127 head teachers	n = 333 teachers

Ratio proportionate sampling techniques were employed in the sample size-related selections of targeted head teachers and educators. This research's sample size was calculated as a proportion of the targeted population of head teachers (N = 345) and educators (N = 1982) against (×) the sample size of the number of sampled head teachers (n = 127) and teachers (n = 333); the derivative from Slovin's formula-based calculations (see Table 1).

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Table 1 Sampled Head Teachers and Educators

Sub-County	School/ Head teachers (N)	The sample size for head teachers (N/345) ×127=n	Teachers (N)	The sample size for teachers (N/1982) ×333= n
Embu East	68	25	362	61
Embu West	32	12	341	57
Embu North	35	13	347	58
Mbeere South	81	30	353	60
Mbeere North	85	31	329	55
Mwea	44	16	250	42
Total	**345**	**127**	**1982**	**333**

A purposive sampling technique was employed to get the sample size of the head teachers; only those heading public-based junior secondary learning facilities participated in the study. The collective target sample for the head teachers and teachers was 460 (derived from Slovin's formula-based calculations) from public Embu-based junior learning facilities; only 370 participated in the study.

➢ *Research Instruments*

The data for this study were collected using questionnaires and interview instruments because the adopted mixed-methods phenomenological design requires the collection of participants' experiences (qualitative) and descriptive data (quantitative) concerning educators' content preparation skills and learners' classroom participation.

- *Interviews*

Interviews are instruments used to obtain qualitative data from participants in a study, both virtually and physically, to obtain in-depth responses subject to a study's phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were given to school head teachers and willing educators of learners in public Embu-based junior secondary learning institutions. These individuals had experience with implementing the CBE curriculum in learning institutions. Hence, they are perceived as being best placed to indicate how teachers' pedagogical skills impact students' participation in classroom activities. Data collected from the interviews included the school head teachers' and teachers' personal experiences and observed classroom participation-related behaviours of learners following the influence of educators' pedagogical skills and abilities. The interview schedule was organised in themes based on the study objectives: content-oriented preparations, deliveries, assessments, and educator-learner interactions. It also covered the effects of teachers' pedagogical abilities on learner outcomes. Collectively, the data collected in the interviews provided a detailed account of how the teachers' pedagogical skills have influenced junior secondary learners' classroom participation, thus explaining the reason behind their behavioural activities, including any changes to them.

- *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were used to supplement or test the data obtained from the interviews of the head teachers and educators in public Embu-based junior secondary learning institutions. The questionnaires had closed-ended and open-ended items. Using the instrument enabled the researcher to enhance their time efficiency (Keith, 2009). The questionnaires for the educators had six sections. The first was source demographic or personal information, and Section Two helped the researcher gather information on teachers' content preparation effects on students' participatory activities. The third section sought information on educators' content delivery's impact on students' classroom participation. Section four was used to gather information on the influence of educators' content assessment on learners' participation in the classroom, and section five was used to gather information on the influence of educator-learner interaction on learners' participation in classroom activities. Finally, section six gathered information on the impact of teachers' pedagogical skills on students' learning outcomes.

➢ *Pilot Study*

A pilot or pre-study was used for pretesting developed instruments to ascertain that they were valid, reliable, clear, and feasible thus ensuring that they were suitable to the study's objective and target population and enhancing the quality of data collection processes in the study. The pilot study for this research was done in Kirinyaga County because it shares similar characteristics with Embu County, namely, the high number of schools per unit area that integrated JSS into existing primary school networks and a parallel phase of JSS expansion. This is aligned with Creswell and Creswell (2018), who propose that at least 10% of a study's sample is acceptable in pilot studies in research sampling larger populations. This research's pilot study facilitated the determination of the existence or absence of ambiguity in explored items, whether developed instruments could facilitate the collection of anticipated data, the clarity of the prompts, and whether the queries were correctly explained using relevant terms. During the pilot study that involved 13 head teachers and 33 educators from junior learning institutions, a number of weaknesses were identified and modification was done.

➢ *Validity and Reliability of the Instruments*

- *Validity*

Validity describes how a research instrument measures what is expected of it (Keith, 2009). The questionnaire and interview programme were corrected, adjusted, and expanded based on the findings of the pilot project. The researcher conducted comprehensive consultations and with supervisors at the department and school level in the university and made relevant edits to the instruments to enhance content-based validity. The opinions obtained from the pilot tests were analysed and relevant data integrated into the final questions

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in the instruments. Participants in the pilot study of the interview instrument revealed that the questions provided needed to be modified to include a prompt requesting for provision of an explanation for provided responses. The interview questions were thus modified, hence enhancing its validity.

- *Reliability*

Reliability describes how an instrument used in research would possibly facilitate the recording of consistent findings when used repeatedly (Gay & Airasian, 2003). As such, the primary investigator conducted a re-test on the study's questionnaire to accelerate the reliability of the instruments. Five head teachers and educators were selected from the public Embu-based junior secondary learning institutions to facilitate the reliability-based tests. Each was given a copy of the questions and on completion, their responses were analysed and scored accordingly. After two weeks, the researcher presented the same prompts to the pilot research participants as suggested by Kothari (2019), and their responses re-scored. Subsequently, the relevant counts obtained from these pilot studies were analysed and compared to identify the coefficient of stability, which were done as per the "Pearson's Product Moment". According to Creswell (2018), a relevant coefficient of stability as per the recommendation of Creswell (2018) that can facilitate the recording of reliable findings ranges from 0.5 - 0.99.

A Pearson's Product Moment formula was be adopted as below:

$$r = \frac{N\Sigma XY - (\Sigma X)(\Sigma Y)}{\sqrt{[N\Sigma x^2 - (\Sigma X)^2][NY^2 - (\Sigma Y)^2]}}$$

Where;

N =Number of scores

X = First set of scores

Y = Second set of scores

$\sum xy$ = Sum of the first product of the first and second scores

$\sum x$ = Sum of the first set of scores

$\sum y$ =Sum of the second set of scores

$\sum x2$ = Sum of square of the first set of score

The instructions in the questionnaire were clearly rephrased accordingly to avoid the identified logistical error, hence enhancing the reliability of the study's findings. A common 5-point Likert scale option was selected and integrated into the questionnaire, thus enhancing the reliability of the instrument through standardizing the data collection process. Subsequently, for the interviews, the primary investigator conducted follow-up interviews among the pilot research participants. This enabled the primary investigator to clarify unclear aspects in the pilot interviews' results and add prompts to refine them to ensure they were error free and complete thus enhancing its validity.

➢ *Data Analysis*

Phenomenological analysis facilitated the exploration of educators and head teachers' experiences and how their skills in creating learning content, delivering it, and assessing learning outcomes impact learning participation in classroom activities. According to Smith and Nizza (2022), phenomenological analysis involves investigating a population's lived experiences to gain insights into their activities and life lived. Hence, a researcher only analyses the participants' experiences to understand what they are and what they mean.

In this study, phenomenological analysis was used to illuminate how junior secondary school teachers and learners in Embu County experience content preparation and classroom participation within the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Rather than treating participation as an observable variable alone, the analysis sought to uncover how participation is constituted through teachers' and learners lived pedagogical encounters and meanings. By engaging with participants' descriptions and reflecting on the structure of these experiences, the study revealed essential themes that illustrate how teacher content preparation enable or constrain meaningful learner participation. Such an approach aligns with phenomenology's goal of capturing the essence of human experience as lived in context, thereby providing a rich interpretive foundation for understanding educational practice and informing pedagogical reform.

This study explored the experiences of the teachers and educators (descriptive) and attempted to reveal what they mean in relation to the correlation between educators' content preparation skills and the classroom-related participation within public-based junior secondary learning institutions (interpretive). The descriptive and interpretive phenomenological analysis of the educators' experiences was conducted using qualitative and quantitative data analytical approaches. Specific experiences of educators that were investigated were those related to the pedagogical practices they participate in when creating learning content in junior secondary student outcomes following the introduction of the CBE in Kenya.

Subsequently, the primary investigator adopted reflexive-based thematic analysis steps in analysing the collected qualitative interview responses. The thematic phrases that were used were content-based, that is, each was developed using the terms identified in the participants' responses. The audio-recorded interview responses were thus listened to and transcribed into texts. After that, the transcriptions were analysed following six reflexive-based thematic analysis steps (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The reflexive thematic analysis involves the generation of themes in qualitative data analysis, accompanied by acknowledging the role of a researcher's experience and engaging in iterative processes (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

In addition, the collected quantitative responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were computed to identify their major characteristics of educators' pedagogical skills in

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content-based preparation. Similarly, the bivariate correlation was conducted to ascertain the influence of content preparations on educator-student interactions and student participation. Bivariate correlation was ideal for the study since it measures one variable's influence or effect and strength over another. Findings from the quantitative analysis were used to test results from the thematic report of analysed interviews. They were used to prove whether the obtained qualitative analysis findings hold or are false.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- *Content Preparation and its Influence on Learner Participation in Junior Secondary Classrooms*

- *Theme 1: Clarity and Organization of Lesson Content as a Driver of Engagement*

Clarity and organization of lesson content involve structuring and sequencing instructional material in a logical and coherent manner. This enables teachers to deliver lessons more confidently and efficiently, strengthening their professional effectiveness. The theme reflects Dewey's emphasis on democratic and experiential learning (Dewey, 1916) and Bruner's spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1966), where knowledge builds logically on prior understanding. Teachers who structure lessons thoughtfully can deliver content confidently and manage classroom time efficiently. This preparation supports learners' comprehension, reduces confusion, and creates a clear pathway for engagement. As a result, students are more likely to participate actively and interact meaningfully during lessons.

This theme was strongly represented, with about 38 out of 50 participants (76%) highlighting the importance of structured preparation. The majority were teachers (30 out of 40), who emphasised that tools such as schemes of work, lesson plans, and lesson notes made their lessons more coherent and boosted student participation. Several principals (8 out of 10) also echoed this view, noting that teachers who demonstrated mastery of subject content and simplified their preparation were more effective in sustaining engagement.

Teachers and head teachers from public junior secondary schools in Embu County, Kenya, reported that the use of structured content preparation tools, such as schemes of work, lesson plans, and lesson notes, was crucial for enhancing clarity. These tools were used more efficiently using teachers' content preparation skills, and they helped ensure lessons flowed logically and supported student engagement. Additionally, simplifying approaches and ensuring mastery of subject content were seen as important in encouraging students to participate.

One teacher explained:

When I prepare a lesson plan with clear steps and have my lesson notes ready, I can guide students smoothly. They respond more because the flow is logical, and they don't get lost.

A head teacher highlighted the same point by stating:

I have observed that teachers who come to class with a scheme of work and lesson notes are more confident. Their explanations are clearer, and students are encouraged to join discussions rather than sit quietly.

Additionally, another teacher added:

If I don't simplify my approach while preparing, I lose many students. But when I break the content down and prepare examples, the learners become more active in class activities.

- *Theme 2: Relevance and Adaptation of Content to Learners' Context*

Relevance and adaptation of content involve aligning lesson material with learners' experiences, backgrounds, and real-life contexts, which align with Dewey's principle of connecting learning to real-life experiences (Dewey, 1899) and Freire's critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), as it emphasises meaningful, contextually responsive education. This entails tailoring lessons, examples, and resources to learners' backgrounds, needs, and daily realities. Teachers who tailor lessons to learners' backgrounds and environments improve engagement and instructional effectiveness. Lessons become more accessible, motivating, and inclusive for learners. Students respond with increased participation and a deeper understanding of concepts.

Approximately 32 participants (64%) raised this theme, with more teachers than principals referring to it. Teachers (25 out of 40) stressed that incorporating experiments, diagrams, maps, and multimedia, as well as linking lessons to real-life experiences, motivated students to participate more actively. Principals (7 out of 10) agreed but often added that such methods were most effective when backed by solid preparation and classroom management.

The participants in the interview sessions stressed that preparation that incorporated real-life connections, teaching aids, and interactive resources increased participation. Teachers noted that using charts, diagrams, maps, images, videos, and even experiments made students more eager to contribute. Sharing experiences and stories was another strategy highlighted as fostering participation.

For instance, a teacher, posited that:

When I prepare with diagrams and charts, or even bring in an experiment, students get excited. They want to ask questions and share their own ideas.

Another teacher emphasised the importance of stories and explained their positive impact on classroom participation among junior secondary learners in stating:

If I plan to share a short story or an experience related to the topic, I notice the students connect immediately. They start giving their own examples, which makes the class lively.

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A head teacher affirmed this observation by explaining their observation of the behaviour of educators under their school following the introduction of the CBE curriculum to the Kenyan learning sector by asserting that:

The teachers who prepare using maps, images, or even video clips manage to engage more students. Preparation that relates to the learners' environment translates into higher participation.

Finally, a teacher stressed the classroom environment aspect and posited that:

Part of my preparation is ensuring the classroom feels supportive and friendly. If I plan that well, even the quieter students feel safe to participate.

Results from the qualitative part of this phenomenological study informed the development of the survey questions that were used to test the non-statistical findings. Therefore, participants in the survey were asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with how the following teacher's content preparation skills identified in the semi-structured interviews influence student participation in classroom activities in junior secondary school. Some of the teachers' content preparation skills include; preparation of schemes of work, preparation of lesson plans, preparation of lesson notes, use of experiments, preparation of records of work, use of graphs, charts, diagrams, images, and maps, sharing experiences and stories in relation to the topic, mastery of subject content, ensuring simplicity of approach in preparation, use of graphic, video, and audio clips for lessons, and preparation of a friendly/supportive class environment. The results are indicated in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1 Frequency of Respondents' Responses in Relation to the Influence of Teachers' Content Preparation on Student Participation

	Teachers' Content Preparation Skills	**Responses**				
		Strongly Disagree N%	**Disagree N%**	**Neutral N%**	**Agree N%**	**Strongly Agree N%**
(i)	Preparation of schemes of work (n=370)	0 0	19 5.1	28 7.6	132 35.7	191 51.6
(ii)	Preparation of lesson plans (n=370)	0 0	16 .4.3	24 6.5	174 47.0	156 42.2
(iii)	Preparation of lesson notes (n=370)	0 0	0 0	33 8.9	58 42.7	179 48.4
(iv)	Use of experiments (n=370)	0 0	0 0	20 5.4	210 56.8	140 37.8
(v)	Preparation of records of work (n=370)	0 0	14 3.8	36 9.7	148 40.0	172 46.5
(vi)	Use of graphs, charts, diagrams, images, and maps	0 0	0 0	0 0	198 53.5	172 46.5
(vii)	Sharing experiences and stories in relation to the topic (n=370)	0 0	0 0	0 0	157 42.4	213 57.6
(viii)	Mastery of the subject content (n=370)	0 0	0 0	0 0	143 38.6	227 61.4
(ix)	Ensuring simplicity of approach in preparation (n=370)	0 0	0 0	0 0	166 44.9	204 55.1
(x)	Use of graphics, video, and audio clips for lessons (n=370)	0 0	0 0	25 6.8	131 35.4	214 57.8
(xi)	Preparation of a friendly/supportive class environment (n=370)	0 0	0 0	0 0	160 43.2	210 56.8

Note. Source: Research Questionnaires

Based on the results of the questionnaire indicated in the above table, most participants agreed and strongly agreed that teachers' content preparation skills influence student participation in classroom activities in junior secondary school. For instance, most respondents strongly agreed that teachers' content preparation skill such as preparation of schemes of work (51.6%), preparation of lesson notes (48.4%), preparation of records of work (46.5%), sharing experiences and stories in relation to the topic (57.6%), mastery of subject content (61.4%), ensuring simplicity of approach in preparation (55.1%), use of graphics, video, and audio clips for lessons (57.8%), and preparation of a friendly/supportive class environment (56.8%) influences student participation. Similarly, most participants agreed that preparation of lesson plans (47.0%), use of experiments (56.8%), and use of graphs, charts, diagrams, images, and maps (53.5%) influence student participation rate in classroom activities.

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- *Bivariate Correlation*

In order to ascertain the influence of teachers' content preparation skills on student participation, a bivariate correlation is undertaken. The bivariate correlation would prove that the teachers' content preparation skills influence teachers' pedagogical skills with reference to an increase in student participation and learning. The results of bivariate correlation are given in Table 2 below;

Table 2 Bivariate Correlation on the Influence of Teachers' Content Preparation on Student Participation and Learning

	Teachers pedagogical skills (increase in student participation and learning)
Teachers' Content Preparation Skills	**Bivariate correlation**
Preparation of schemes of work (n=370)	0.800
Preparation of lesson plans (n=370)	0.596
Preparation of lesson notes (n=370)	0.685
Use of experiments (n=370)	0.528
Preparation of records of work (n=370)	0.555
Use of graphs, charts, diagrams, images, and maps (n=370)	0.625
Sharing experiences and stories in relation to the topic (n=370)	0.644
Mastery of the subject content (n=370)	0.855
Ensuring simplicity of approach in preparation (n=370)	0.856
Use of graphics, video, and audio clips for lessons (n=370	0.640
Preparation of a friendly/supportive class environment (n=370	0.869

Note. Source: Research Questionnaires

The results in Table 2 above indicate that most of the teachers' content preparation skills have a moderate and strong influence on student participation and learning in junior secondary school. Teachers' content preparation skills, such as preparation of schemes of work (0.800), mastery of subject content (0.855), ensuring simplicity of approach in preparation (0.856), and preparation of a friendly/supportive class environment (0.869), have a strong influence on student participation and learning. On the other hand, preparation of lesson plans (0.596), preparation of lesson notes (0.685), Use of experiments (0.528), preparation of records of work (0.555), Use of graphs, charts, diagrams, images, and maps (0.625), Sharing experiences and stories in relation to the topic (0.644), and Use of graphics, video, and audio clips for lessons (0.640) have moderate influence on the student participation and learning.

- *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated a strong and consistent relationship between teachers' content preparation skills and student participation within junior secondary school classrooms following the adoption of CBE. Quantitative results revealed that several preparation skills, specifically the mastery of subject content, simplicity in lesson design, and preparation of a supportive classroom environment, exerted a strong influence on learners' participation. Other skills, such as lesson planning, lesson notes, use of visual aids, and sharing real-life experiences, also showed moderate influence, suggesting that while foundational preparation enhances participation, its effectiveness depends on how dynamically it is applied during instruction.

Qualitative findings strongly supported these statistical trends. Approximately 76% of participants (38 out of 50), mostly teachers, emphasised that thorough and structured preparation, through schemes of work, lesson plans, and records of work, made their lessons more coherent and engaging. Teachers reported that having clear lesson goals, simplified explanations, and an organised progression of content allowed learners to connect new knowledge to prior understanding, thus encouraging active participation. Principals reinforced this observation, noting that teachers who demonstrated mastery of subject matter and designed learner-centred materials consistently produced more motivated and confident students.

The qualitative data also illuminated aspects that quantitative findings could not fully explain. For example, the use of experiments, storytelling, and multimedia content was found to not only sustain interest but also accommodate diverse learning preferences, a core principle of CBE pedagogy. However, several teachers highlighted constraints such as limited preparation time and insufficient access to teaching resources, which affected the consistency of lesson planning and preparation. Despite these limitations, the integrated findings reveal that under the CBE framework, effective content preparation transcends mechanical documentation, it represents intentional pedagogical design that fosters inclusivity, learner curiosity, and classroom engagement. The convergence of results thus affirms that structured yet flexible preparation remains a key determinant of student participation and success in the CBE classroom.

- *Relating Findings to Existing Literature on Content Preparation and Classroom Participation*

The integrated findings aligned with previous academic works emphasizing the importance of thorough teacher preparation in facilitating learner engagement. Kumar et al. (2021) highlighted that organised content delivery (from simple to complex) stimulates comprehension and motivates students to participate more actively. The current study confirmed this position by showing that teachers who prepared structured lesson notes, visual aids, and simplified activities created interactive environments that encouraged student confidence and dialogue. Similarly, Havik and

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Westergard (2019) and Ghalley and Rai (2019**)** found that when teachers exhibit mastery of content and create supportive classroom climates, learners demonstrate higher participation levels, an outcome strongly emphasised in this study.

However, this study expands the literature by situating the discussion within the CBE and junior secondary learning level context in Embu, Kenya, which demands not only academic preparedness but also creativity and learner empowerment. While Li and Xue (2023) associated the use of learning support resources with increased student engagement, the present study nuances this argument by showing that availability alone is insufficient. Instead, teachers' intentional preparation and ability to adapt materials to learners' levels of competence determine the degree of participation. This contextual difference likely arises from systemic challenges, such as resource constraints and uneven teacher training in CBE pedagogy, that influence the quality of lesson preparation in developing education systems.

The findings also revealed partial deviation from earlier quantitative studies that emphasised technical preparation (schemes of work, lesson plans) as the sole determinant of classroom success. In the CBE environment, the qualitative evidence underscores that affective and relational preparation, creating a friendly atmosphere, and connecting content to lived experiences, is equally critical. This suggests a paradigm shift from procedural to transformative preparation practices that align with CBE's learner-centred philosophy.

Conclusively, the findings affirm existing literature on the link between teacher preparedness and student participation while advancing the discourse by contextualizing it within the evolving CBE system. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative results confirm that well-prepared, flexible, and supportive teachers are central to fostering participatory learning experiences. Any deviations from earlier literature can be attributed to contextual limitations in training and resources rather than to contradictions in theory, thereby reinforcing the argument that teacher preparation quality remains a cornerstone of participatory and effective classroom practice.

- *Discussion of Findings on Content Preparation Effects on Classroom Participation in Comparison with Dewey's Theory of Learning*

The findings of this study align strongly with Dewey's (1938) experiential learning tenet, which emphasises that education should be rooted in meaningful experience. Both qualitative and quantitative results revealed that well-prepared lessons, clear learning outcomes, and structured teaching materials enhanced students' participation and understanding. This supports the position of Dewey (1916), who stated that learning is most effective when teachers organise experiences that connect prior knowledge to new ideas. The results also align with Das and Banerjee's (2023) interpretation that teachers' planning supports learners' capacity to make sense of content through practice. Similarly, Ye and Shih (2021) affirmed that organise preparation enhances learner engagement by creating a continuous cycle of experience and reflection. The study therefore augments Dewey's assertion that the teacher's preparation sets the foundation for active, experiential, and participatory learning in the classroom.

V. CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ *Conclusions*

These conclusions are grounded in the lived experiences of teachers and school principals in junior secondary schools in Embu County and interpreted within John Dewey's theory of learning.

In responding to the research question which sought to find the relationship existing between content preparation and learners' classroom participation in Embu County, Kenya, participants were sampled in junior secondary learning facilities.

In response to this research question, the study concluded that content preparation plays a fundamental role in shaping learners' classroom participation.

The findings revealed that when teachers prepared content thoughtfully, through clear lesson planning, simplification of concepts, and alignment with learners' prior experiences, learners were more willing to ask questions, take notes, and engage in learning activities.

Content preparation was therefore not experienced as a technical exercise but as an experiential and reflective process that set the conditions for participation.

This conclusion aligns with Dewey's assertion that learning begins with experience and purposeful organization of content.

Poor or superficial preparation, on the other hand, constrained learner engagement and reduced participation to passive listening, undermining the democratic and interactive ideals emphasised in CBE implementation.

➢ *Recommendations*

The policy recommendations presented in this section are derived from the study's empirical findings and philosophical grounding in John Dewey's theory of learning.

- There is a need to strengthen and reorient existing teacher education and professional development and training policies to align more explicitly with the philosophical foundations of the CBE. While current policies acknowledge learner-centred pedagogy, the study established that these commitments are often articulated at a rhetorical level, with limited guidance on how teachers should translate them into classroom practice.

Teacher training policies under the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and relevant education agencies, including Teacher training programmes at the Universities

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and other Higher Institutes of learning be enhanced to foreground experiential learning, reflective practice, and democratic classroom engagement, which foster learner-centred pedagogies.

Such enhancement should ensure that pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes deliberately move beyond transmission-oriented instructional models and instead cultivate teachers' capacity to design learning experiences that actively involve learners in discussion, inquiry, collaboration, and assessment.

This recommendation aligns with Dewey's assertion that education should be grounded in meaningful experience and that learners must be active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

- The study recommends the formulation and articulation of a coherent pedagogical philosophy to guide the preparation and practice of junior secondary school teachers within the CBE framework. While Kenya has broad education policy statements, there is no clearly articulated philosophical position that explicitly links curriculum implementation, pedagogy, and learner participation.

In this regard, the study proposes that CBE implementation be guided by a philosophy of education grounded in experiential learning, reflective inquiry, and social interaction. Such a philosophy would serve as a conceptual mirror through which curriculum developers, teacher educators, school leaders, and teachers can reflect on the nature of learning, the role of the teacher, and the place of the learner within the classroom.

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