

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY KICD AND KNEC TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION AND MANAGE STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya represents a significant educational reform requiring effective communication strategies to facilitate information dissemination, stakeholder engagement and successful policy adoption. This study examined the communication strategies employed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) in disseminating information and managing stakeholder relations during CBE implementation. The study was guided by the recognition that strategic communication is essential in reducing uncertainty, promoting stakeholder understanding and fostering acceptance of educational reforms. The study adopted a qualitative exploratory approach using a multiple case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with KICD and KNEC officials, curriculum developers, assessment specialists, heads of institutions and parents' representatives. Institutional documents, including policy circulars, communication guidelines, stakeholder engagement reports and official publications, were also reviewed to complement interview data. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis through thematic coding and pattern matching across the two institutional cases. Findings revealed that KICD and KNEC employed diverse and integrated communication strategies, including mass media, digital platforms, formal documentation, participatory forums, hierarchical communication structures, briefing sessions and non-formal engagement platforms. Digital channels such as websites, WhatsApp, social media platforms, emails and bulk SMS enhanced timely access to information, while radio, television and vernacular media improved outreach and inclusivity among diverse stakeholder groups. Formal communication mechanisms, particularly circulars and official publications, provided standardized and authoritative guidance on curriculum and assessment matters. The study further established that stakeholder engagement forums, curriculum panels, county dialogues and professional conferences created opportunities for feedback, consultation and collaborative decision-making. KNEC additionally utilized confidential communication channels and periodic briefing sessions to address sensitive assessment-related information.

The study concludes that communication strategies employed by KICD and KNEC were largely multi-channel, audience-centered and participatory, reflecting efforts to improve stakeholder awareness and acceptance of CBE. However, challenges related to communication coherence, accessibility and unequal digital infrastructure continue to affect stakeholder engagement, particularly in marginalized areas. The study recommends strengthening coordinated communication frameworks, expanding feedback mechanisms and adopting inclusive communication approaches to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of CBE implementation in Kenya.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This section examines the communication strategies employed by public institutions during the implementation of educational policies, with particular focus on the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). Communication is considered a strategic management function that supports effective policy implementation through information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, coordination of activities and promotion of public understanding of reforms. The shift from the 8-4-4 education system to Competency-Based Education (CBE) highlighted the importance of structured communication approaches capable of explaining curriculum changes, assessment reforms and implementation processes to diverse education stakeholders. In this context, effective communication became essential for building awareness, managing expectations and facilitating stakeholder participation throughout the reform process.

The study explored the communication channels utilized by government agencies, including stakeholder forums, workshops, policy circulars, digital platforms, policy briefs and mass media, to share information and strengthen relationships with education stakeholders. Drawing on global, regional and Kenyan experiences, the discussion demonstrates that communication strategy is a critical factor influencing the success of curriculum implementation. It provides the basis for examining the specific communication approaches adopted by KICD and KNEC in facilitating the implementation of CBE.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Communication strategies are deliberate, structured and goal-oriented plans through which organizations convey information to specific audiences using appropriate communication channels to achieve predetermined objectives. They encompass message design, audience segmentation, channel selection, stakeholder engagement mechanisms, feedback systems and evaluation processes that ensure communication activities align with organizational goals. Effective communication strategies facilitate information dissemination, shape stakeholder perceptions and enhance organizational legitimacy through consistent and coherent messaging (Cornelissen, 2014; Falkheimer & Heide, 2022). Within public sector institutions, communication strategies are essential for explaining policy intentions, managing stakeholder expectations, promoting transparency and fostering public trust. Their effectiveness significantly influences stakeholder acceptance of policy reforms, particularly where reforms require institutional and behavioural change (Heide & Falkheimer, 2018; Grunig, 2009). Beyond information dissemination, communication strategies play a central role in stakeholder relationship management by creating opportunities for dialogue, feedback, collaboration and mutual understanding. Organizations that engage stakeholders through strategic

communication are more likely to achieve institutional objectives and sustain stakeholder support (Steyn & Niemann, 2010; Freeman, 2010; Grunig, 2009).

In policy implementation processes, communication strategies reduce uncertainty, clarify policy objectives, address stakeholder concerns and encourage participation. Effective communication enables stakeholders to understand policy expectations and participate meaningfully in implementation processes. Conversely, inadequate communication may result in confusion, misinformation, skepticism and resistance, thereby undermining policy outcomes (Heide & Falkheimer, 2018; Sahlberg, 2015; Batra, 2020). This is particularly important in educational reforms, where policy changes affect diverse stakeholder groups, including policymakers, administrators, teachers, learners and parents. Sustained and inclusive communication enhances stakeholder awareness, understanding, participation and ownership, whereas communication failures often contribute to misconceptions and resistance (Fullan, 2020; Levin, 2010; Sahlberg, 2021). The implementation of curriculum reforms therefore requires communication strategies that provide timely, accurate and accessible information while creating opportunities for stakeholder feedback and engagement. Research indicates that ineffective communication contributes to uncertainty and resistance during curriculum reform processes (Fullan, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021; Rogers, 2003). The adoption of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya represents such a major educational reform requiring coordinated and continuous communication efforts among key institutions and stakeholders.

As the institutions responsible for curriculum development and assessment, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) are expected to implement communication strategies that enhance stakeholder awareness, understanding, acceptance and participation throughout the reform process (Waweru, 2018; Mweru, 2020; Waithaka, 2021). Within the CBE implementation framework, KICD is responsible for curriculum development and dissemination, while KNEC oversees competency-based assessment and evaluation. Both institutions have used various communication approaches, including workshops, print materials, circulars and digital platforms, to disseminate information about the reform (KICD, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2024). However, evidence indicates that communication strategies employed during CBE implementation have experienced several challenges. Persistent communication gaps have contributed to stakeholder confusion, misinformation and limited engagement among head teachers, parents and school administrators. Inadequate dissemination of information and inconsistent messaging have affected stakeholder understanding and slowed the adoption of the reform (Muchira et al., 2023; Ogembo, 2024; Njogu & Ochieng, 2023). Although KICD and KNEC operate within a coordinated policy framework, communication between and within the institutions has sometimes lacked coherence, resulting in inconsistent interpretations of CBE requirements among stakeholders (KICD, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2024; Ogembo, 2024).

These communication challenges have affected stakeholder acceptance of CBE. Head teachers have reported inadequate training, insufficient instructional guidance and unclear assessment information, while parents have expressed limited involvement and inadequate understanding of the reform. Such shortcomings have contributed to uncertainty, resistance and reduced confidence in the implementation process (Njogu & Ochieng, 2023; Muchira et al., 2023; Richards, 2022). Furthermore, regional disparities have constrained communication

effectiveness. Rural and marginalized schools often experience limited internet connectivity, inadequate digital infrastructure and restricted access to updated curriculum information, resulting in unequal access to reform-related communication and affecting implementation capacity (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Njogu & Ochieng, 2023). Concerns regarding the effectiveness of CBE implementation have also been associated with communication weaknesses, including poor coordination, unclear messaging and inadequate institutional preparedness. These challenges have reinforced the need for stronger communication systems and stakeholder engagement mechanisms capable of supporting effective reform implementation (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, 2024; Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2024;). Although government initiatives have emphasized improved stakeholder engagement, communication processes and institutional coordination, there remains a need for more structured, participatory and feedback-oriented communication systems that bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation at the school level (Ministry of Education, 2024; Fullan, 2020; OECD, 2020).

The Kenyan experience demonstrates that successful implementation of Competency-Based Education depends not only on policy design but also on the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by KICD and KNEC. Strengthening information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, communication coherence and feedback mechanisms is therefore critical for improving stakeholder understanding, reducing resistance and ensuring the sustainability of CBE reforms (UNESCO, 2021; Sahlberg, 2021; Fullan, 2020).

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) requires government institutions to adopt effective communication strategies that facilitate timely dissemination of curriculum information, enhance stakeholder engagement and support coordinated implementation processes. In this regard, institutions such as the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) have employed various communication mechanisms, including workshops, circulars, digital platforms and stakeholder forums, to support CBE implementation. However, limited empirical evidence exists on the specific communication strategies adopted by these institutions and how they have been structured to facilitate curriculum implementation.

While existing studies have highlighted general challenges associated with CBE implementation, they have not adequately examined the institutional communication approaches used by KICD and KNEC, including the models, dissemination channels and stakeholder management practices employed. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how communication strategies have been designed and operationalized to support effective curriculum implementation. This study therefore seeks to investigate the communication strategies employed by KICD and KNEC in disseminating information and managing stakeholder relationships during the implementation of Competency-Based Education.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This objective adopted a qualitative exploratory approach within a multiple case study design to examine institutional communication processes and practices during the implementation of

Competency-Based Education (CBE). The study focused primarily on officials from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), as these institutions are directly involved in designing, coordinating and implementing communication strategies related to CBE. Although the overall study population comprised 234 participants and the sample included 32 participants, this objective specifically emphasized curriculum developers and assessment specialists from KICD and KNEC. Data obtained from parents and head teachers was used as supplementary evidence to validate and contextualize institutional communication accounts.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which enabled participants to provide detailed insights into communication planning processes, dissemination channels, stakeholder engagement strategies and institutional coordination mechanisms. The interview questions examined how communication strategies were developed, the media and platforms used for information dissemination, the frequency and nature of communication, approaches for targeting different stakeholder groups and mechanisms employed to address concerns arising during CBE implementation. In addition to interview data, relevant institutional documents, including communication guidelines, policy circulars, stakeholder engagement reports, media publications and official website content, were reviewed to corroborate and enrich the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis supported by thematic coding. The initial coding framework was informed by the study objective and relevant communication management literature, with key categories including communication channels, message design, stakeholder engagement, institutional coordination and communication planning. Emerging themes identified from participants' narratives were incorporated through inductive coding to capture additional insights. Pattern matching across the two institutional cases, KICD and KNEC, facilitated the identification of similarities and differences in communication approaches, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of institutional communication strategies employed during CBE implementation.

5.0 FINDINGS

The first objective sought to examine the communication strategies employed by KICD and KNEC in disseminating information and managing stakeholder relations during the implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Data were collected from KICD officers, KNEC officers, National Parents Association representatives and heads of institutions to obtain diverse perspectives on institutional communication practices and stakeholder engagement processes.

Analysis of the interview data generated seven major themes relating to information dissemination strategies adopted during CBE implementation. These themes included multi-channel communication, participatory communication, targeted communication design and internal communication systems, among others. The findings are presented thematically to demonstrate how the two institutions developed and implemented communication approaches to support stakeholder awareness, engagement and participation during the CBE implementation process.

5.1 Mass Media and Digital Platforms

The findings indicate that KICD and KNEC employ mass media and public communication platforms to enhance stakeholder reach during the implementation of curriculum reforms. Respondents from KICD highlighted the use of digital and traditional media platforms, including television, radio and press briefings, as key channels for disseminating curriculum-related information. They further noted the use of stakeholder engagement platforms such as Edu TV, KBC radio programmes and vernacular radio stations to reach diverse audiences across different contexts.

Digital communication platforms were also widely identified by both KICD and KNEC officials as important tools for information dissemination. These included WhatsApp, bulk SMS, emails, Facebook, TikTok and X, which facilitated timely communication and interaction with stakeholders. The integration of system-generated SMS alerts directing users to online content further demonstrated efforts by the institutions to enhance accessibility and bridge communication gaps among stakeholders.

Consistent with the views expressed by KICD and KNEC officials, heads of institutions reported frequent reliance on online portals, institutional websites, social media platforms and virtual communication channels to obtain updates from education agencies. These findings suggest that the adoption of multiple communication channels enabled KICD and KNEC to expand information access, improve stakeholder engagement and support effective communication during curriculum reform implementation.

5.2 Print and Formal Documentation Channels

Formal communication channels, particularly circulars and brochures, were also identified as important tools for disseminating curriculum-related information. Circulars played a significant role in communicating official curriculum guidance to schools through the Ministry of Education, ensuring that information reached institutions through recognized administrative structures. In addition to circulars, respondents noted that KICD disseminates information through print media and publications on its official website to enhance accessibility and transparency.

Within KNEC, formal documentation was viewed as a critical component of effective communication, with one respondent emphasizing that “without a circular, it is not communication.” This perspective highlights the importance attached to official written communication in validating, authorizing and institutionalizing information shared with stakeholders during curriculum reform implementation.

5.3 Participatory and Feedback-oriented Communication

The study established that KICD utilizes existing professional conferences organized by education stakeholders as important platforms for disseminating information on the implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE). In particular, conferences organized by the Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) and the Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA) were identified as key avenues for reaching school leaders and educators effectively. Through these forums, KICD shares curriculum ideas and designs, which are subjected to discussion, review and refinement through formal panels and stakeholder engagement processes before wider dissemination.

The curriculum development process involves presenting emerging curriculum concepts to course panels and engaging key stakeholders, particularly teachers and education practitioners, at various stages of curriculum design and implementation. These engagements serve dual purposes: validating curriculum proposals and providing opportunities for communicating new curriculum directions while gathering feedback from those directly involved in implementation.

Beyond professional conferences, the study further established that KICD and KNEC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, utilize decentralized stakeholder engagement forums such as county dialogues and seminars as additional communication strategies for disseminating CBE-related information. These forums are organized at the county level to enhance direct interaction with parents and other education stakeholders within their local contexts. A representative from the Parents Association noted that stakeholders were provided with communication links and contact information to facilitate continuous engagement, access to information and timely support throughout the CBE implementation process.

5.4 Non-formal and Co-curricular platforms for communication

The study further established that KICD and other education stakeholders utilize co-curricular events as alternative platforms for engaging stakeholders and disseminating information on CBE implementation. Events such as the Kenya Music Festival, Drama and Film Festivals, Sports Events and Science Fairs provide opportunities to communicate curriculum-related ideas beyond formal institutional settings. These platforms enhance accessibility and relatability by engaging learners, teachers, parents and the wider community through practical and interactive experiences.

5.5 Formalized Confidential Channel of Communication

The findings revealed that KNEC employed confidential and formalized communication channels when disseminating sensitive assessment-related information. Given the nature of assessment materials and procedures, some communications required controlled access and transmission through secure, officially designated channels to safeguard confidentiality and maintain the integrity of the assessment process. One respondent explained that information relating to assessment tools and instructional guidelines was shared selectively to ensure that only authorized stakeholders received access to sensitive content.

5.6 Institutional and Hierarchical Communication Structures

Findings from KNEC officials indicated that curriculum-related information is disseminated through established administrative structures, including county and sub-county education offices, to ensure that communication reaches schools through coordinated and recognized channels. This was corroborated by heads of institutions, who reported that they primarily receive official updates and guidance from sub-county directors of education.

The study further established that parents access information on curriculum implementation through both informal and formal communication channels. Members of the Parents Association indicated that they often learn about curriculum-related activities through their children after they return from school. They also noted that teachers play a key role in

communicating curriculum updates during school meetings, seminars and parent engagement forums, where parents receive guidance and clarification on various aspects of curriculum implementation.

5.7 Use of Briefing Sessions

Findings revealed that KNEC adopted briefing sessions as an additional communication strategy to strengthen information dissemination among education stakeholders. Respondents explained that the organization introduced periodic nationwide briefings after recognizing that previous communication approaches did not fully address stakeholders' information needs. The sessions brought together head teachers at the sub-county level to provide guidance on critical issues, including learner registration and examination administration. Conducted twice annually, these engagements promoted timely clarification, consistency and standardized communication across schools.

Generally, the study established that KICD and KNEC employed a diverse and integrated range of communication strategies to disseminate information on the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE). A major strategy involved the use of mass media and digital communication platforms, including television, radio, particularly vernacular stations, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X and TikTok, as well as official websites. KNEC also utilized emails, bulk SMS and system-generated alerts to enhance timely access to information. These platforms were used to share curriculum guidelines, circulars, examination timetables and implementation updates, enabling stakeholders, including heads of institutions, to access official information efficiently through digital portals.

Formal communication channels, including circulars, brochures and official correspondence, remained central to institutional communication. These channels provided authoritative and structured mechanisms for disseminating official guidance and ensuring that information reached schools through recognized administrative pathways. The findings further demonstrated that KICD and KNEC adopted participatory and feedback-oriented communication approaches through stakeholder engagement platforms such as Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) and Kenya Primary School Heads Association (KEPSHA) conferences, county dialogues, seminars and curriculum development panels. These platforms provided opportunities for sharing information, validating curriculum decisions, gathering stakeholder feedback and addressing implementation concerns. In addition, KICD utilized non-formal and co-curricular platforms, including music festivals, drama festivals, sports events and science fairs, as alternative avenues for communicating curriculum-related ideas to learners, teachers and the wider community.

The study also revealed that communication strategies were largely audience-centered, with KICD and KNEC considering factors such as language, accessibility, urgency and stakeholder reach when selecting communication channels. For example, the use of vernacular radio stations enhanced understanding and inclusivity by allowing curriculum information to reach communities in familiar languages. Furthermore, communication processes were structured through hierarchical administrative systems involving the Ministry of Education, county directors of education, sub-county education officers and schools. This structure ensured coordinated, consistent and standardized information flow across different levels of implementation. For sensitive assessment-related information, KNEC employed confidential

and controlled communication channels to safeguard the integrity of assessment processes. Parents, on the other hand, primarily accessed curriculum information through schools and their children, with teachers serving as key intermediaries in communicating updates and providing clarification during meetings, seminars and parent engagement forums.

6.0 DISCUSSION

The findings established that KICD and KNEC extensively utilize mass media and digital communication platforms to disseminate information on the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE). The use of radio, television, official websites, social media platforms, emails and bulk SMS demonstrates institutional efforts to maximize outreach and ensure timely access to information among diverse stakeholder groups. The adoption of vernacular radio stations and national media platforms such as Edu TV and KBC TV reflects KICD's recognition of Kenya's geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity. Through vernacular communication channels, curriculum information is localized, enabling parents, teachers and communities who may face challenges accessing formal English-language communication platforms to better understand and engage with curriculum reforms. This approach reflects an inclusive communication strategy aimed at enhancing stakeholder awareness, acceptance and participation in CBE implementation.

The findings indicate that digital communication has become a central component of curriculum implementation processes. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X, websites, emails and bulk SMS were widely used to disseminate curriculum updates, guidelines, timetables, circulars and other relevant information. The reliance on digital platforms demonstrates a transition towards technology-supported communication systems that improve efficiency, immediacy and accessibility. These findings are consistent with Dean Barnlund's Transactional Theory, which conceptualizes communication as a dynamic and continuous process involving interaction between communicators rather than a one-way transmission of information (Barnlund, 2017). The use of interactive digital platforms by KICD and KNEC reflects efforts to facilitate continuous engagement, feedback exchange and timely clarification among stakeholders.

The deployment of television programmes, vernacular radio stations and social media platforms also illustrates the application of framing principles in communication. These platforms do not merely extend the reach of curriculum information but also shape how stakeholders interpret and relate to CBE. For example, vernacular radio stations enable curriculum messages to be presented within familiar linguistic and cultural contexts, making the reform more meaningful to local communities. Consistent with Wolfers' (2024) assertion that communication effectiveness is influenced by message relevance, audience-specific framing enhances understanding, acceptance and support for curriculum reforms.

Despite the increasing use of digital platforms, formal communication channels remained critical during CBE implementation. Circulars, brochures, print media, website publications and official emails provided structured and authoritative mechanisms for communicating policy directions and implementation guidelines. Circulars, in particular, served as official reference documents that promoted consistency, reduced ambiguity and legitimized institutional communication. This aligns with the Transactional Theory perspective, which

emphasizes that effective communication requires clarity, appropriate contextualization and shared understanding between institutions and stakeholders (Barnlund, 2017).

It was revealed that communication strategies employed by KICD and KNEC were largely participatory, consultative and interactive. This demonstrates a deliberate move towards inclusive communication approaches in curriculum implementation. The involvement of teachers, parents, school administrators and other stakeholders in curriculum discussions supports the principles of Transactional Theory, which views communication as a two-way process involving feedback and the co-construction of meaning (Barnlund, 2017). By engaging stakeholders through conferences, curriculum panels, seminars and dialogue forums, CBE was positioned as a collaborative reform process rather than a purely top-down policy initiative. These findings are consistent with Batra's (2020) study in India, which found that top-down communication approaches contributed to misinterpretation among head teachers and recommended stronger grassroots engagement strategies. Similarly, Waweru and Orodho (2019) observed that participatory and iterative communication processes strengthen policy acceptance and improve implementation outcomes.

The study also established that communication on curriculum matters extended beyond formal institutional platforms through the use of co-curricular activities such as drama and music festivals. These non-formal communication spaces provided innovative avenues for reaching learners, parents and communities while making curriculum messages more interactive and relatable. This finding supports Akyeampong's (2020) observation that localized and community-based communication approaches enhance stakeholder engagement in educational reforms.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that communication within CBE implementation followed a structured hierarchical flow involving the Ministry of Education, county education offices, sub-county education offices and schools. This administrative structure facilitated coordination, accountability and consistency in the dissemination of curriculum information. Unlike findings from studies by Jansen (2018) and Amukugo (2020), which identified weak stakeholder engagement and ineffective communication structures as barriers to curriculum reform implementation in South Africa and Namibia respectively, the present study indicates that established communication systems within KICD and KNEC contributed to more coordinated information flow and stakeholder engagement during CBE implementation.

7.0 CONCLUSION

KICD and KNEC employed largely similar communication approaches that integrated mass media, digital platforms, print media, participatory forums and hierarchical administrative structures to disseminate information on CBE implementation. These shared strategies enabled the institutions to reach diverse stakeholder groups, facilitate information access and support coordinated communication across different levels of the education system.

However, KNEC demonstrated distinct communication practices through its emphasis on system-generated bulk SMS messaging, formalized confidential communication channels and briefing sessions. These additional mechanisms strengthened direct, timely and controlled communication with stakeholders, particularly when sharing assessment-related information and addressing operational requirements.

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