



Research Article

Teacher Preparedness in Community Service Learning and Acquisition of Core Values Among Learners in Early Years Education in Murang'a County, Kenya

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Abstract

The teacher forms the link between the intended curriculum and the intended learners experience. This is nowhere more evident than in Community Service Learning (CSL), where value formation depends on deliberate planning, modelling and assessment rather than content transmission. Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum places core values such as unity, responsibility, integrity and patriotism at the heart of early years education, yet the extent to which teachers are prepared to cultivate these values through CSL has received little empirical attention. This study sought to determine the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning and its relationship with the acquisition of core values among learners in early years education in Murang'a County, Kenya. The study was guided by Bandura's social learning theory and Kolb's experiential learning theory; the study employed a mixed research design. From a target population of 10,882 and an accessible population of 7,395. A purposive random sampling was used to obtain a sample of 46 respondents from four sub-counties. This consisted of 28 Grade Three teachers and 18 heads of institutions. Data were collected using a five-point Likert questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha =.842) and structured interview for head of institution. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and Pearson Product Moment Correlation at the 5% significance level using SPSS Version 30, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically. The findings showed uniformly high self-reported preparedness, with role modelling drawing the strongest endorsement (96.6% strong agreement). Correlation analysis returned a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between teacher preparedness and acquisition of core values ($r = .452$, $p = .014$). The study concluded that teacher preparedness in CSL significantly influences value acquisition among early years learners and recommends sustained, value-specific continuous professional development so that what teachers know is matched by what they practice daily in the classroom.

Keywords

Teacher Preparedness, Community Service Learning, Core Values, Early Years Education, Competency-based Curriculum

1. Introduction

Community service learning does not produce values on its own. A cleanup exercise, a visit to the elderly or a school garden project can pass without leaving any moral residue in a

seven-year-old unless someone frames the activity, models the conduct it is meant to teach and helps the child reflect on what

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they learn. The teachers are responsible for exactly these social skills developments. The quality of the planning, facilitation, modelling and assessment that the teacher brings to a service activity determines whether values such as unity, responsibility, integrity or patriotism take root in learners [22]. Teacher preparedness is therefore best understood not as a background condition of community service learning but as the active process through which its potential is either realized or left dormant.

Kenya's education reforms have raised the stakes of this argument. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework designed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development places core values at the center of the Competency-Based Curriculum [11], and CSL was piloted as a formal pathway for cultivating them [12]. The competency-based approach shifts attention away from content acquisition toward the outputs of learning, which in a values context means observable dispositions rather than recited definitions [1]. A content-driven curriculum asks the teacher mainly to transmit information. A competency-based one asks the teacher to design experiences through which learners practice and demonstrate what they are expected to become. Preparedness is a multifaceted construct spanning training, confidence, methodological range, capacity for value modelling and competence in evaluation [10].

Evidence from teacher education elsewhere confirms that preparation of this kind can be built, and that it matters. A survey of 235 pre-service elementary teachers in the United States found through hierarchical regression that those with stronger civic awareness, interpersonal skill and commitment reported greater confidence to teach civic ideals [28]. A complementary conclusion was reached for practicing teachers, where professional development improved K-12 teachers' capacity in service-learning project design, learner reflection, community engagement and the evaluation of civic outcomes beyond what classroom experience alone could supply [27]. In Spain, teachers tracked through service-learning workshops recorded gains in didactical behaviour, self-confidence, classroom management and the ability to connect community engagement to the curriculum [8]. Much the same was found among teacher candidates in a literacy course, whose empathy, professional confidence and readiness to work with diverse learners grew through mandatory service placements [26]. What these studies share, however, is their focus on the teacher as the outcome. None of them followed the chain through to the values acquired by young learners, and the one study that did examine learner perceptions of service-learning in Australia worked with university students rather than children and did not treat teacher preparedness as a variable at all [4].

African evidence points to the cost of leaving preparation for chance. Ghanaian basic schoolteachers held generally positive attitudes toward the revised national curriculum framework, yet poor readiness, missing materials and weak support structures degraded both teaching quality and learner engagement [24]. In Tanzania's Arumeru District, inadequate teacher

preparation made competency-based implementation inefficient [17], while the same weakness has been traced to incomplete understanding of curriculum standards and thin financing for training [19]. Where preparation was invested in, the pattern reversed: Rwandan teachers who underwent professional development implemented the competence-based curriculum more effectively than colleagues who relied on initial training alone [23], and in Uganda, professional development reinforced by mentoring and leadership support consistently improved teachers' adoption of learner-centered pedagogy [25]. The values link comes from South Africa, where teachers' preparedness, professional dedication and planned learning experiences shaped learners' development of accountability, respect, honesty and citizenship, though that study concerned classroom values education generally rather than community service learning [7].

The Kenyan literature reflects a system investing heavily in retooling while still struggling with depth. Continuous teacher training is reported as a policy priority [16], and by 2024 the Teachers Service Commission had retooled over 281,000 teachers. Yet teachers in Uasin Gishu County remained short of training in the methods the curriculum recommends, with workload compounding weak preparation and narrowing the repertoire of teaching styles available to them [20]. A similar picture was recorded in Embu County, where teachers who had received pre-implementation training nonetheless felt insecure about competency-based pedagogies [21]. A comparison of Kenya's experience with South Korea and the United States added a structural insight, that preparedness is shaped not only by training volume but by teachers' involvement in developing the curriculum they deliver, because ownership breeds the confidence that handed-down programmes do not [18]. Teacher competency has likewise been identified as the cornerstone of competency-based implementation [14]. The study closest to the present concern, conducted in Nairobi County, established that CSL implementation practices significantly affect service outcomes among Grade Seven pupils, but its outcome was service delivery rather than value acquisition, and its cohort was well past the early years [2].

A gap therefore remains at the intersection of three bodies of work that rarely meet: studies of teacher preparation that stop at the teacher, studies of competency-based implementation that stop at curriculum delivery, and studies of service-learning outcomes that bypass the early years. Whether the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning relates to the acquisition of core values among young learners has not been established empirically in the Kenyan early year's context. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning and its relationship with the acquisition of core values among learners in early years education in Murang'a County, Kenya. The corresponding null hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning and the

acquisition of core values among learners in early years education in Murang'a County, Kenya.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study relied Bandura's social learning theory [3] and on experiential learning theory as developed by Kolb [13]. Social learning theory holds that behaviour is acquired through observation and imitation of credible models rather than through direct instruction alone. Its relevance to teacher preparedness is immediate. If young learners absorb values by watching what significant adults do, then the teacher's capacity to model unity, responsibility, integrity and patriotism deliberately, and to sustain that modelling across ordinary classroom moments as well as staged service activities, becomes the operative mechanism of value transfer. A teacher trained to recognize the value content of a service activity can make that content visible; one who has not may run the same activity as a logistical exercise and leave the values implicit, where a seven-year-old is unlikely to find them.

Experiential learning theory supplies the second half of the mechanism. Kolb's cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation describes how a service activity becomes learning rather

than mere participation. The cycle does not turn by itself for young children. The teacher structures the concrete experience, prompts the reflection, names the concept the child has just enacted and creates the next occasion to try it again. Preparedness in community service learning is, in these terms, the teacher's capacity to keep the cycle turning. The two theories together predict exactly the relationship this study tested: where teachers are well prepared, the modelling is deliberate and the experiential cycle is completed, so learners should show stronger value acquisition; where preparation is weak, both mechanisms stall.

3. Methodology

The study employed a mixed research design combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The target population comprised 10,882 individuals across Murang'a County. Out of this population, an accessible population of 7,395 was drawn in four sub-counties: Murang'a South, Kandara, Gatanga and Kiharu. A purposive random sampling methods was used to select the participants distributed proportionately across the sub-counties. The accessible population is presented in Table 1 and the resulting 371 samples as distributed in Table 2.

Table 1. Accessible Population by Sub-County.

Sub-County	Learners	HOIs	Teachers	Parents	Total
Murang'a South	891	89	120	748	1848
Kandara	846	85	140	710	1781
Gatanga	911	91	159	765	1926
Kiharu	875	88	142	735	1840
Totals	3523	353	561	2958	7395

Source: Murang'a County Education Office, 2014

Table 2. Sample Size Distribution by Sub-County.

Sub-County	HOIs	Teachers	parents	learners	Total
Murang'a South	4	8	38	44	94
Kandara	4	5	36	43	88
Gatanga	5	8	38	46	97
Kiharu	5	7	36	44	92
Totals	18	28	148	177	371

Schools were selected through proportionate sampling while heads of institutions, teachers, parents were purposively

selected. The learners were selected through random sampling. Data on teacher preparedness were collected through a five-point Likert questionnaire administered to teachers & parents; a structured interview guide administered to heads of institutions and observation checklists for learners. Content and face validity were established through expert review by university supervisors, senior lecturers in the Department of Education

at Tharaka University and education specialists from the Murang'a County Education Office. A pilot in Kangema Sub-County was carried out prior to the main study due to its similarity in characteristics being investigated in sub-counties under study. This helped to identify any potential logistical or methodological issues that can come up during the actual study as noted by Creswell [6]. Reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients.

Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Teacher Preparedness	5	.842	Good
Core Value Acquisition	4	.880	Good
Overall Instrument	24	.941	Excellent

Good = alpha above .80; Excellent = alpha above .90.

The Teacher Preparedness subscale attained an alpha of .842 and was therefore judged reliable, while the overall instrument returned .941. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS Version 30, with the null hypothesis tested through Pearson Product Moment Correlation at the 5% significance level. Prior to inferential analysis the data were screened through tests of normality, multicollinearity,

autocorrelation and homoscedasticity; the moderate departures from normality observed on the Shapiro-Wilk test were judged tolerable for parametric analysis given the sample characteristics of all the variance inflation factors fell below the conservative threshold of 5.0 proposed by Hair [9]. Table 4 summarizes the diagnostic tests carried out prior to the inferential analysis. Qualitative responses from the heads of institutions were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Table 4. Diagnostic tests.

Diagnostic test	Statistic	Value	Remark
Normality (Teacher's preparedness)	Shapiro-Wilk W	0.587, $p < .001$	Moderate departure, tolerable
Normality (Core Values)	Shapiro-Wilk W	0.792, $p < .001$	Moderate departure, tolerable
Multicollinearity	Tolerance / VIF	0.612 / 1.634	Within thresholds
Autocorrelation	Durbin-Watson	1.847	Within 1.5-2.5
Homoscedasticity	Koenker LM	2.184, $p = .139$	Constant variance

3.1. Research Question

The study sought to answer the following question: What is the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning, and how does it relate to the acquisition of core values among learners in early years education in Murang'a County?

3.2. Study Variables

Teacher preparedness, the independent variable, was measured through five Likert-scaled statements covering CSL-related training, the ability to help learners exemplify expected values, role modelling, confidence in conducting CSL activities and value assessment. Acquisition of core values, the dependent variable, was measured through four Likert-scaled statements addressing unity, responsibility, integrity and patriotism.

4. Results and Findings

The demographic profile of the teachers was evaluated through their years of teaching experience under the Competency-Based Curriculum, since perceptions of preparedness

draw meaning from the length of exposure to the curriculum whose values that breed the CSL. The distribution is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of Teachers by Years of Teaching Experience Under CBC.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Below 2 years	5	17.2
2-3 years	13	44.8
4-5 years	8	27.6
Above 5 years	3	10.4
Total	28	100.0

Table 5 shows that 44.8% of the teachers had taught under the Competency-Based Curriculum for two to three years, 27.6% for four to five years and 10.4% for more than five years, so that 82.8% had at least two years of experience within the curricular paradigm. The presence of teachers with over five years of CBC experience suggests involvement in the piloting that began in 2017 before the 2019 rollout. This experiential base matters for the credibility of the self-reports that follow, because a teacher who has planned, facilitated and

assessed CSL activities across several cohorts is judging preparedness against practice rather than against training certificates alone.

4.1. Degree of Teacher Preparedness in CSL

Teachers rated their own preparedness across the five dimensions of the construct. Their responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Teachers' Responses on Teacher Preparedness.

Statement	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
I have received adequate training to facilitate CSL activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.6	72.4	100.0
I can help learners exemplify expected values during CSL activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.8	86.2	100.0
I act as a role model in nurturing values among learners	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	96.6	100.0
I am confident in conducting CSL activities that promote values	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.9	93.1	100.0
I am able to carry out assessment of values during CSL activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.9	93.1	100.0

Values are percentages of total respondents. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; U = Undecided; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

Most teachers agreed or strongly agreed with every statement. Adequate training drew 72.4% strong agreement, the ability to help learners exemplify expected values 86.2%, and confidence in conducting CSL activities and the ability to assess values 93.1% each. The strongest endorsement fell on role modelling, where 96.6% strongly agreed. The pattern is implying in its shape as much as its level: the dispositional dimensions of preparedness, role modelling and confidence, outran the technical dimension of training, which is consistent with the account of the teacher as the primary credible model

in the young learner's environment [3]. The heads of institutions corroborated the self-reports. One remarked:

Respondent C: "The teachers are well equipped, and they do value assessment using rubrics. We see them modelling values intentionally, which is something we did not see five years ago. Their confidence in handling CSL has grown and they no longer treat it as an add-on; it is now part of how they teach."

Classroom observation supplied behavioural confirmation. Learners showed honesty during tasks, took up assigned roles

responsibly, cared for tools and the environment and displayed fairness during activities, all behaviours mediated by instruction rather than rule enforcement, which indicates that reported preparedness was translating into observable value expression. The heads of institutions nonetheless declined to treat the picture as finished. Two of them flagged the continuing need for refresher training:

Respondent H: "They are competent and well trained in preparing CSL projects. Most have gone for refreshers on value assessment and CSL project planning, but we still need more frequent retooling because the curriculum keeps evolving and the children's needs are changing too."

Respondent N: "Training is good, but the real challenge is consistency. We need ongoing professional development that goes beyond the initial training so that what teachers know is matched by what they do every day in the classroom. When that happens, the children pick the values quickly."

These findings agree with evidence of a strong positive association between teachers' instructional readiness and learners' citizenship competencies [15], and with the finding that teachers' professional abilities improve through service-learning [5]. They also concur with studies identifying teacher pre-

paredness as a key determinant of competency-based curriculum implementation in Kenyan primary schools [14, 20]. Where the present findings depart from much of the regional literature is in direction: whereas studies in Ghana and Tanzania documented weak readiness undermining implementation, the Murang'a teachers presented as a well-retooled cohort whose remaining need, in the words of their own heads of institutions, is consistency rather than capacity [17, 24].

4.2. Relationship Between Teacher Preparedness and Acquisition of Core Values

The null hypothesis was tested through Pearson Product Moment Correlation between the composite Teacher Preparedness score and the composite Core Value Acquisition score. The hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between the degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning and the acquisition of core values among learners in early years education in Murang'a County, Kenya. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Pearson Correlation Between Teacher Preparedness and Acquisition of Core Values.

Variable	Statistic	Acquisition of Core Values
Teacher Preparedness	Pearson Correlation	.452*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014
	N	28

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 shows a positive, moderate and statistically significant relationship between teacher preparedness and the acquisition of core values, $r = .452$, $p = .014$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The degree of teacher preparedness in community service learning is significantly related to the acquisition of core values among Grade Three learners in Murang'a County, and the direction of the relationship indicates that better-prepared teachers are associated with stronger value acquisition. The finding agrees with evidence linking ongoing teacher retooling to sustained quality in CSL facilitation [22], and it lends empirical weight to the theoretical prediction with which the study began: the teacher whose training, confidence, modelling and assessment capacity are in place completes the experiential cycle and supplies the credible model through which the social learning mechanism operates [3]. It also extends the Nairobi County study that established that implementation practices shape CSL outcomes among older pupils, by tracing the same class of relationship down to the early years and defining the outcome as value acquisition itself [2].

5. Conclusion

The teachers of Murang'a County presented as a highly prepared cohort across every dimension of CSL facilitation measured, with role modelling and confidence drawing the strongest endorsement, and this self-assessment was corroborated by heads of institutions and confirmed behaviorally through learner observation. The correlation analysis established that this preparedness is not incidental to value formation: it relates positively, moderately and significantly to the acquisition of core values among Grade Three learners ($r = .452$, $p = .014$). It can therefore be concluded that teacher preparedness in community service learning is a significant correlate of core value acquisition in early years education.

6. Recommendations

Two recommendations were done based on the findings.

First, the qualitative evidence located the frontier of preparedness in consistency rather than initial capacity, so the Teachers Service Commission and county education offices should institutionalize ongoing, value-specific continuous professional development in CSL, with refresher content on value assessment and project planning, rather than treating retooling as a one-off event. Second, since the dispositional dimensions of preparedness proved the strongest and the theoretically most consequential, teacher professional development for early years education should deliberately cultivate value modelling as a taught competence, giving teachers structured opportunities to plan the value content of service activities and to reflect on their own conduct as the primary model young learners imitate. Future research should extend the analysis to larger teacher samples and to designs capable of testing the direction of the relationship established here.

Abbreviations

CBC	Competency Based Curriculum
CSL	Community Service Learning
KICD	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
SPSS	Statistical Packages for Social Sciences

Author Contributions

Julia Njeri Kimani: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing - original draft

Doris Gatuura: Supervision, Validation, Writing - review & editing

Denis Obote: Supervision, Validation, Writing - review & editing

Data Availability Statement

The data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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