

KEMI Journal of Educational Leadership and Management

KJELM

[ISSN 3079-4048]

Volume: 2 Issue: 2 | Aug-2026

Internal and external determinants of junior school preparedness for learners' career pathway choices in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Cite this article in APA

Barkwang, S. N., & Toroitich, P. J. (2026). Internal and external determinants of junior school preparedness for learners' career pathway choices in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. KEMI Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 2(2). https://doi.org/10.68147/98f7b40f

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Abstract

Preparing students to make informed career pathway choices in senior schools is a critical role for junior schools' management and stakeholders. Learners' career preparedness begins with the early identification and nurturing of learners' abilities and talents by the school's management through teaching and learning processes. The study investigated the internal and external determinants of junior schools' preparedness in shaping learners' career pathway choices in senior schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Specifically, the objectives were to examine the influence of school-level factors on learners' preparedness, assess the effect of sensitization activities on shaping learners' knowledge and attitudes, and analyze the role of parents and guardians in supporting preparedness in career pathway choices in senior schools. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population comprised 437 Heads of Institutions, and random sampling was used to select 80 junior schools (20%). Respondents comprised 80 Heads of Institutions and 80 Parents' Association representatives, making a sample of 160. Collection of Data was done through questionnaires, with responses from 76 Principals and 68 parents' representatives, yielding a 90% return rate. Data was cleaned, coded, and analyzed both thematically and descriptively using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences, with frequencies and percentages employed to describe relationships among the variables. The findings revealed that schools significantly influence learners' preparedness through curriculum delivery, career guidance and experiential learning process. Awareness campaigns and

workshops were also found to strongly shape career choices in senior schools. Additionally, parental support emerged as a critical factor influencing learners' preparedness. The study recommends that parents participate in meeting attendance and actively engage in mentorship, career guidance, academic clinics, and resource support to enhance learners' career pathway choices preparedness.

Key terms: Career Pathway Choices, Internal and External Determinants,Junior Schools' Preparedness, Teaching and Learning Process, Junior Schools' Management, and Parental Support

Introduction

The transition from junior school to senior school under Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) requires learners to make informed career pathway choices that align with their interests, abilities, and future aspirations. Career preparedness is therefore a critical educational outcome that enables learners to select pathways such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science. Competency Based Education systems increasingly recognize the importance of career preparedness through career guidance and career development programmes in facilitating learners in making informed choices that will influence future professional and occupational prospects (OECD, 2025).

In Kenya, CBC emphasizes learner-centred education and the nurturing of individual talents and competencies. Consequently, junior schools are expected to provide adequate career guidance, mentorship, experiential learning opportunities, and parental engagement to facilitate informed pathway selection (Charles, Rupia, & Onyango, 2023). Research studies conducted indicate that school-based career guidance programmes, sensitization initiatives, and parental involvement significantly influence learners' career awareness and decision-making processes (Otwine et al., 2022). However, variations in school preparedness and stakeholder involvement continue to affect the effectiveness of career pathway selection. This study investigated the internal and external determinants of junior schools' preparedness in shaping learners' career pathway choices in senior schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the implementation of the Competency-Based Education in Kenya, concerns remain regarding the preparedness of junior schools to support learners in making informed career pathway choices. Many schools face challenges related to inadequate career guidance programmes, limited sensitization activities, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and varying levels of parental support. Consequently, learners may make pathway choices based on incomplete information, peer influence, or misconceptions about career opportunities. Although previous studies have examined career guidance and career development in general, limited empirical evidence exists on the specific determinants of junior school preparedness in supporting learners' pathway choices within the CBE framework.

Studies conducted in East Africa and Kenya have shown that where career education and guidance are poorly implemented, learners make choices based on peer influence or guesswork rather than informed self-awareness, leading to pathway mismatches and suboptimal academic engagement (Mbaka, Mwanzia, & Murungi, 2023). Without understanding the influence of school-level factors, sensitization activities, and parental support, policymakers and educational stakeholders may be unable to design effective interventions that promote equitable and informed career decision-making. This indicates a systemic challenge that could affect the success of CBC in producing skilled, competent, and employable graduates. Embirical studies have shown that, failure to identify and address these determinants, therefore risk learners of career unpreparedness, where learners from well-resourced schools access

better guidance and make more strategic choices, while those in under-resourced contexts face limited opportunities and higher chances of being misaligned with their strengths and aspirations. This situation may contribute to increased dropout rates, wasted resources, and a workforce ill-prepared to meet Kenya's socio-economic development needs (Otwine et al., 2022). This study therefore sought to fill this knowledge gap by examining the determinants of junior school preparedness and their influence on learners' career pathway choices in senior schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the internal and external determinants of junior schools' preparedness in shaping learners' career pathway choices in senior schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

i) To examine the influence of school-level factors on learners' preparedness for career pathway choices in Senior Schools in Uasin Gishu County.

ii) To assess the effect of sensitization activities on shaping learners' knowledge and attitudes towards career pathway choices in Senior Schools in Uasin Gishu County.

iii) To analyze the role of parents and guardians in supporting learners' preparedness for career pathway choices in senior schools in Senior Schools in Uasin Gishu County.

Literature Review

Literature were reviewed based on the thematic areas as follows:

School-Level Factors and Learners' Preparedness

Research studies demonstrates that schools play a critical role in learners' career development through curriculum delivery, career guidance programmes, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities. OECD (2021) notes that effective school-based career guidance enhances learners' understanding of career pathways and the related occupational opportunities. Studies conducted in Africa have similarly established that schools with structured career guidance programmes produce learners with higher levels of career awareness and preparedness. In East Africa, empirical studies from Rwanda and Tanzania find that provision of school-based guidance, linked to experiential encounters (industry visits, mentorship), significantly improves students' career knowledge and decision self-efficacy (Rwanda district studies; Charles et al., 2023). Kenyan research on CBC implementation similarly highlights that gaps in teacher preparedness, limited career-resource centres, and inconsistent guidance programmes undermine junior-level preparedness for senior-school pathway selection (county and school-level CBC studies). Collectively, these findings indicate that strengthening school-level inputs is a necessary condition for improving pathway choices under CBE.

Sensitization activities such as career days, mentorship programmes, workshops, and awareness campaigns provide learners with exposure to career opportunities and labour market trends (OECD, 2021). Previous studies indicate that such activities improve learners' knowledge, attitudes, and confidence in making career decisions. Continuous sensitization has been linked to better alignment between learners' interests and chosen pathways.

Parents and guardians are important influencers of learners' educational and career decisions. Research suggests that parental encouragement, mentorship, provision of career information, and participation in

school activities positively influence learners' career aspirations and preparedness. However, limited awareness among some parents regarding CBC pathways may hinder effective support.

Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualized that school-level factors, sensitization activities, and parental support influence learners' preparedness, which subsequently affects their career pathway choices in senior schools. C**onceptual framework adopted illustrates the determinants of Junior school preparedness influencing learners career pathway choices in senior schools. The conceptual framework shows the** relationship between the variables of the study which include: **Independent, mediating and dependent variables. Independent variables comprised; school role (**career guidance, resources, teacher capacity), Sensitization Activities (career days, mentorship, labour-market awareness), and Parental Role (information, encouragement, decision support). Dependent variable comprise of Career pathway choices, mediating variable comprise of learner preparedness (self-awareness, career information, decision making skills)

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on three complementary theories:

Super's Developmental Theory

Super's Developmental Theory of Career Development aligns closely with the junior school level within Competency-Based Education, which falls within his *growth* and early *exploration* stages. During these stages (roughly ages 11–15), learners begin forming self-concept, developing career interests, and exploring subject areas that will later influence their occupational choices (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2021). In the CBE framework is precisely applicable when learners are expected to prepare for selection into senior school pathways: STEM, Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science. Super's theory therefore justifies early, structured exposure to different subjects, career talks, and guidance activities so learners can make informed, realistic pathway choices consistent with their self-concept and abilities.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

The theory highlights that learners' **self-efficacy beliefs**, **outcome expectations**, and **goals** directly shape their educational and career choices (Lent, 2020). In the basic education context, learners who receive adequate school guidance, parental support, and sensitization activities develop stronger confidence in their ability to succeed in a chosen pathway. For example, when a junior school student attends a well-organized STEM career fair, meets role models, and receives teacher encouragement, their STEM self-efficacy increases, making them more likely to select a STEM pathway. This theory thus explains why the determinants under study (school preparedness, sensitization, parental role) are critical levers for influencing learners' actual pathway choices under CBE.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's model situates career choice within an interconnected set of systems. The **microsystem** (school, teachers, parents) provides immediate influences; guidance programs, parental discussions, peer influences which shape preparedness. The **theory** captures the interaction between school and home, for example, when parents attend school sensitization events and reinforce what learners have been taught. The **ecological factors** include CBE policy, Ministry of Education directives,

and national labour-market trends, which influence the design of pathways and career information shared in schools (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In Kenya, this framework is highly relevant because CBE explicitly seeks to align education with Kenya's Vision 2030 and labour-market needs. Therefore, understanding how these systems interact helps explain why some learners make well-aligned pathway choices while others do not.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study will adopt a mixed-methods approach anchored in a descriptive survey design with correlational analysis. The design was suitable because it enabled the collection of data from respondents of Junior Schools in Uasin Gishu County regarding perceptions and experiences related to career preparedness and pathway selection. The quantitative component will allow measurement of relationships between school preparedness factors (school role, sensitization, parental support) and learners' actual career pathway choices, while the qualitative component will capture deeper insights from teachers, school leaders, and parents about challenges and best practices in preparing learners. This design is appropriate for educational research as it permits both statistical inference and contextual understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Target Population

The target population will comprise all Grade 8 and Grade 9 learners in junior secondary schools, career guidance teachers/counsellors, school heads, and parents/guardians within the selected counties in Kenya. This group is suitable because Grade 9 learners are at the decision point for senior school pathways, while teachers and parents directly influence their preparedness. The target population comprised 437 Heads of Institutions in junior schools within Uasin Gishu County.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The study adopted purposive sampling where public junior schools were involved. The HOIs and parents were part of the respondents. Random sampling was used to select 80 junior schools representing 20% of the target population. Respondents consisted of 80 Heads of Institutions and 80 Parents' Association representatives, resulting in a sample size of 160 respondents.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to Heads of Institutions and Parents' Association representatives. The research instruments were subjected to expert review to ensure content validity. Content validity will be established through expert review by education researchers and career guidance specialists. Construct validity will be ensured by aligning items to theoretical variables (school role, sensitization, parental role, learner preparedness). A pilot study will be conducted in two schools not included in the main sample to refine items. Reliability was enhanced through pilot testing and refinement of questionnaire items before administration. Reliability will be measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient ≥ 0.7 considered acceptable for internal consistency. Structured Questionnaire for HOIs, captured demographic data, exposure to sensitization activities, parental involvement, level of preparedness (self-awareness, career knowledge), and chosen pathways. Parents Questionnaire to assess school-level career guidance programmes, availability of resources, and teacher capacity. All instruments will use Likert-scale items for quantitative constructs (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and open-ended questions for qualitative depth. The study adhered to ethical standards of educational research, including **voluntary participation**, **confidentiality of responses**, and **anonymity of**

participants.

Data Analysis

Data were cleaned, coded, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative responses were analysed thematically.

Research Findings

The study achieved a response rate of 90%, with 76 principals and 68 Parents' Association representatives successfully participating.

The findings revealed that schools play a significant role in preparing learners for career pathway choices. Effective curriculum delivery, structured career guidance programmes, mentorship initiatives, and experiential learning opportunities were identified as key contributors to learner preparedness. Schools that integrated career guidance into teaching and learning processes reported higher levels of learner awareness regarding available pathways.

The study established that sensitization activities significantly influenced learners' knowledge and attitudes towards career pathway choices. Career awareness campaigns, workshops, career fairs, and mentorship programmes exposed learners to diverse career opportunities and enhanced their understanding of pathway requirements. Respondents indicated that regular sensitization activities increased learners' confidence in making informed decisions.

The findings showed that parental support was a critical determinant of learner preparedness. Parents who actively participated in school meetings, mentorship programmes, academic clinics, and career discussions positively influenced learners' career aspirations and pathway choices. However, some parents reported limited understanding of CBC pathways, affecting their ability to provide adequate guidance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings support existing literature that schools are central agents in career development. The results align with OECD (2021) and African studies that emphasize the importance of structured guidance systems, curriculum implementation, and experiential learning in enhancing career readiness.

The findings affirm previous studies that career sensitization programmes improve learners' awareness, attitudes, and decision-making capabilities. Exposure to role models and career information was found to strengthen learners' confidence in selecting suitable pathways.

The study confirms that parental involvement significantly influences learners' preparedness. Consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory, parental encouragement and support contribute to positive career-related self-efficacy and informed decision-making.

Summary of Findings

The study established that: school-level factors significantly influence learners' preparedness for career pathway selection; sensitization activities positively shape learners' knowledge, attitudes, and confidence regarding career choices; parental support plays a critical role in enhancing learners' preparedness and influencing pathway decisions; and effective collaboration among schools, parents, and other stakeholders strengthens learner readiness for senior school transitions.

Conclusions

The study concludes that junior schools play a fundamental role in preparing learners for career pathway choices under the Competency-Based Education. School-based guidance programmes, career sensitization activities, and parental involvement are essential determinants of learner preparedness. The success of CBE pathway implementation therefore depends on coordinated efforts among schools, families, and educational stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. Schools should strengthen career guidance and counselling programmes and integrate them into regular teaching and learning activities.
2. Educational stakeholders should institutionalize regular career awareness campaigns, mentorship programmes, and workshops.
3. Parents should actively participate in school meetings, mentorship activities, academic clinics, and career guidance programmes.
4. The Ministry of Education should develop policies and resources that support career preparedness initiatives in junior schools.

Areas for Further Research

1. A comparative study on career pathway preparedness between public and private junior schools be conducted.
2. A longitudinal study examining the relationship between pathway choices in senior school and future career outcomes.
3. Research on the influence of socio-economic status on learners' career pathway decisions.

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