NAK-KANAK: Journal of Child Research
E-ISSN: 3047-1168 P-ISSN: 3047-504X
JCR, Vol. 3 (2), May 2026 (71-88)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21107/njcr.v3i2.258

Evaluation of Teacher Practices on Competency-Based Assessment Methods in Lower Primary Grades in Siaya County, Kenya

Ombese Sollome Nyaboke[1]✉, Benson Charles Odongo[1], Cleophas Owino Owiko[1]

[1]Department of Special Needs Education and Early Childhood Development Education, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: April 30, 2026
Revised: May 11, 2026
Accepted: May 16, 2026

Keywords:
Teacher practices;
Competency Based assessment;
Early childhood development;
Lower grade.

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC license.

Copyright © 2026 by Author, Published Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura

ABSTRACT

Background of the study: The Competency-Based Assessment Framework for Early Years Education (CBA-F-EYE) recommends that teachers employ a variety of methods and tools to gather evidence of learner performance, document this evidence, and provide feedback to inform instructional decisions and policy interventions.

Aims and scope of paper: Guided by this perspective, the current study examined teacher practices in the use of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods in lower primary grades within public schools in Siaya County. The study was philosophically grounded in constructivism and employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. The theoretical framework was informed by Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism theory (1896–1934).

Methods: The target population included 1,968 lower primary teachers, 656 head teachers, and one County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (CQASO). A purposive sample of 24 teachers, 12 head teachers, and one CQASO was selected. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, observation protocols, and document analysis guides. Instrument reliability was ensured through a pilot study, while authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness were reinforced through triangulation of data sources. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data.

Results: The findings revealed three major themes: inadequate understanding of CBA concepts among teachers, non-compliance with prescribed CBA assessment methods, and an unsupportive implementation environment characterized by inadequate training, large class sizes, heavy workloads, and insufficient instructional resources. Most teachers predominantly relied on oral questioning and written exercises, while authentic assessment approaches such as rubrics, portfolios, projects, and observation schedules were minimally utilized. The study further found that many teachers conceptualized assessment as a process of testing knowledge acquisition rather than evaluating learners' competencies, skills, values, and practical application of learning.

Contribution: The study has developed a framework that school administrators can use as comprehensive mechanisms for classroom-based assessment that balance formative and summative approaches, thereby capturing learners' knowledge, skills, and values more effectively.

✉ **Corresponding Author**
Address : Bondo, Kenya
Email : benard@aims.ac.za

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of quality education and serves as a cornerstone of curriculum development. Within the framework of Competency-Based Education (CBE), Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) is essential for evaluating learners' ability to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-world contexts. According to Oluoch (1990), assessment is integral to achieving educational objectives, while the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2008) defines it as the process of evaluating the quantity and quality of learning within a specified timeframe.

One of the strengths of CBE lies in its emphasis on formative assessment, which aligns with the principle of excellence—one of the six guiding pillars of the reform. Rather than focusing on competition for examination grades, CBE encourages learners to excel in areas of personal interest and ability (Benen, 2021). The reform prioritizes the development of competencies that enable learners to demonstrate what they can do, rather than simply what they know (MoE, 2021).

CBA methods such as project-based learning, observational assessments, rubrics, and portfolios foster critical competencies including collaboration, creativity, and self-efficacy. These tools allow learners to track progress, reflect on achievements, and engage in meaningful learning experiences. For teachers, diverse and reliable assessment tools facilitate accurate evaluation and tailored interventions, ensuring holistic learner development.

Since the inception of CBE in Kenya in 2017, significant progress has been made. However, the implementation of CBA methods and tools remains a challenge. Globally and regionally, countries adopting CBE have faced setbacks related to teacher capacity, environmental constraints, and policy alignment. In Kenya, studies have highlighted similar issues. For instance, Waweru (2018) found that teachers struggled to employ appropriate assessment methods aligned with CBE. Momanyi and Rop (2019) reported that teachers had only partial understanding of CBE features and found new CBA methods difficult to implement. Atak (2021) noted that overcrowded classrooms hindered the effective use of formative assessment rubrics in rural schools.

International studies echo these concerns. Patteera (2021) revealed that while Thai teachers held positive attitudes toward self and peer assessment, these methods were rarely practiced. Mana (2018) found that preschool teachers in Qatar predominantly relied on pen-and-paper assessments. Osman (2021) observed that Ghanaian teachers favored traditional assessment methods, with limited use of alternative tools.

In Kenya, the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC, 2021) has called for a paradigm shift from summative to formative assessment practices. The National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP, 2018–2022) emphasizes reforming primary-level assessment to balance both approaches. The Competency-Based Assessment Framework for Early Years Education (CBA-F-EYE, 2021) provides guidance on suitable assessment tools, principles of assessment, and teacher responsibilities in evaluating competencies.

Despite these policy efforts, literature reveals that teachers are generally underprepared for CBA implementation. Most studies focus narrowly on specific tools, such as rubrics, resulting in fragmented insights that are insufficient for informing comprehensive improvements. Moreover, there is a notable lack of empirical research examining teacher practices in using CBA methods in lower primary grades within Siaya County.

This gap underscores the need for a detailed investigation into how teachers apply CBA tools and methods in real classroom settings. Understanding these practices is crucial for determining whether meaningful educational change is occurring or if traditional approaches persist despite policy reforms. By addressing this gap, the current study aims to provide evidence-based insights that can inform teacher training, instructional practices, and policy interventions ultimately enhancing the quality and competitiveness of education in Kenya. Patteera (2021) explored teachers' practices and perceptions of self and peer assessment in Thailand, revealing positive attitudes towards these methods, though they were not widely practiced. Mana (2018) examined preschool teachers' knowledge and practices of learning and assessment methods in

Qatar, showing that pen-and-paper assessments dominated both knowledge and practice. Osman (2021) studied basic school teachers' assessment practices in Ghana and found that traditional assessment methods were predominantly employed, with limited use of alternative tools. Atak (2021) explored the use of formative assessment rubrics in rural Kenyan primary schools and noted that overcrowded classrooms made exclusive use of rubrics cumbersome and time-consuming.

Based on the reviewed literature, several research gaps have been identified. First, most studies focused solely on lesson plans, with no comprehensive evaluation of professional document planning and usage specific to Siaya County. Second, while some studies in Kenya addressed learner-centred teaching methodologies, none specifically examined their application in lower primary grades under the CBE framework in Siaya County. Third, the reviewed studies predominantly focused on ICT integration in upper primary and junior secondary levels, leaving a gap in understanding its application in lower primary grades, particularly in Early Years Education (EYE), which is foundational for future learning. Lastly, existing research on Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) concentrated on single assessment methods without exploring alternative approaches comprehensively. Overall, studies on CBE implementation provided fragmented insights, with no study exhaustively evaluating teacher practices across all aspects of CBE implementation such as professional document planning, instructional methodologies, ICT integration, and assessment in lower primary grades within Siaya County. This highlights the need for the current study to address these gaps.

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that there existing research on Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) concentrated on single assessment methods without exploring alternative approaches comprehensively. Overall, studies on CBE implementation provided fragmented insights, with no study exhaustively evaluating teacher practices across all aspects of CBE implementation—such as professional document planning, instructional methodologies, ICT integration, and assessment—in lower primary grades within Siaya County. This highlights the need for the current study to address these gaps.

Assessment is central to the provision of quality education, serving as a key mechanism for determining whether learners are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes outlined in the curriculum. It also provides critical feedback on the overall effectiveness of educational delivery. In the context of Competency-Based Education (CBE), assessment practices must align with its guiding principles to ensure meaningful learning outcomes. Teachers play an indispensable role in Competency-Based Assessment (CBA). They are responsible for designing and administering assessment tools, collecting and analyzing data, documenting learner progress, and providing constructive feedback. Despite Kenya's commendable strides in educational reform, particularly through the implementation of CBE, existing literature reveals persistent challenges in the execution of CBA methods. In Siaya County, there is a notable absence of comprehensive studies examining teacher practices in the use of CBA methods at the lower primary level in public schools. Available research is limited and often focuses narrowly on specific tools—such as rubrics—without offering a holistic view of assessment practices. This fragmented literature fails to provide sufficient insights for guiding instructional improvements or informing policy interventions. To enable stakeholders to understand the current status of CBA implementation in Siaya County and make informed decisions, there is a pressing need for an empirical study that evaluates teacher practices in using CBA tools and methods. Such a study would offer detailed, evidence-based findings that could strengthen instructional strategies, enhance teacher training, and support policy development aimed at improving the quality of education. This study therefore seeks to fill the existing knowledge gap by examining the teacher practices on the use of CBA methods in classroom assessment in lower primary grades in public schools in Siaya County.

METHOD

Research design

This study was guided by constructivism as its philosophical foundation, utilizing a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological research design to explore and gain in-depth insights into lower primary teachers' experiences with integrating ICT in teaching and learning.

Target population

For this study, the target population included 1,968 lower primary grade teachers, 656 primary school head teachers, and one County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (CQASO). Specifically, it encompassed all lower primary school teachers, who serve as the primary curriculum implementers in schools, as well as all primary school head teachers, who are both educators and immediate supervisors responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) in their respective institutions. Additionally, the CQASO, as a technocrat in curriculum implementation, was a key part of the target population due to their role in ensuring quality standards in learning institutions through supporting and guiding teachers, who are the core implementers of the CBE.

Location of the study

The study was located in Siaya County, Kenya.

Sample and sampling techniques

A total sample size of 37 participants-comprising 24 lower primary teachers, 12 headteachers, and 1 CQASO-provided valuable insights into this study.The study adopted stratified random sampling to select two public primary schools per sub-county, resulting in 12 schools overall. Saturated sampling was used to include 12 head teachers, and, with their guidance, 24 lower primary grade teachers were purposively chosen based on their CBE compliance and teaching experience.

Research instruments

In-depth interview, observation protocols and document analysis guide we used to collect data. In-depth interview for teachers of lower primary grades, primary school head teachers and in-depth interview for The County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. Observation protocol was used to collect data from teachers of lower primary grades while document analysis guide was used to collect data from teachers of lower primary grades.

Data analysis techniques

Collected data was categorized into themes and sub-themes and was analyzed thematically as per the set criteria as per the sub-themes.

RESULTS

The objective of this study was to examine how teachers use Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods in assessing learning in lower primary grades. To achieve this, data was collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. The interviews focused on three key areas: teachers' understanding of CBA methods, their approaches to assessing learning, and their experiences with using CBA in practice. Probing questions were used to gather detailed insights into their assessment practices. Document analysis sought to identify the assessment methods incorporated into schemes of work and lesson plans, as well as any documented evidence of assessments and the tools used. Classroom observations aimed to capture how teachers practically applied CBA methods in real teaching situations, including photographic evidence of relevant documentation, portfolios, previous assessments, and learning tools used by students.

Inadequate Understanding of CBA

In this context, inadequate understanding of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods refers to teachers' limited grasp of what CBA entails, both conceptually and in practice. The findings revealed that many teachers lacked a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of CBA, with their knowledge falling short of the standard definition outlined by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC). This gap in understanding indicated a need for further training and capacity-building to ensure that teachers effectively implement CBA in their classrooms.

To assess teachers' knowledge, the study employed in-depth interviews, with one of the key questions being: *What do you understand by CBA?* As informants attempted to answer, a variety of responses emerged, reflecting different levels of familiarity with the concept. Some teachers demonstrated partial awareness, offering vague explanations, while others admitted uncertainty about its principles and application. One informant, in particular, hesitantly provided a response that,

> *CBA is when, a teacher teaches the learners after that, the teacher will observe them and ask them questions to see how much they have learnt using competency-based assessment methods….(IILPGT1)*

Another teacher reluctantly said that,

> *After a lesson or sub-strand or strand, a teacher will want to find out what learners have learnt. Therefore, the teacher can use different methods like written exercise or a project to see whether the learning outcome have been achieved or not. So assessment is when a teachers wants to know what has been learnt….(IILPGT2).*

Another teacher briefly noted that,

> *It is a about finding out how learners are progressing using assessment tools like rubrics and observation even projects and focus on the acquired competencies as indicated in the new education reform …. I think so…. (IILPGT5).*

Another teacher of lower primary grade responded by saying that,

> *The competency-based assessment is the assessment of competencies. It when the teacher want to find out about the competencies the learner has acquired after a given sub-strand or strand using various assessment methods like project so that the teacher can observe what the learners can do or not do alone and in groups …..(IILPGT7).*

One informant added that,

> *Competency-based assessment is to find out what learners have learnt at the end the lesson, sub-strand or sub-strand by using oral questions, written exercise and observations with project work focusing more on the competencies that the learners have developed……IIPGT8)*
>
> *It is a type of assessment recommended by the CBE whereby teachers are expected to use various assessment methods to asses' various competencies of learners at the end of the lesson, during mid-term or at the end of the term……(IILPGT9).*

An informant explained that,

> *CBA is to assess ability of the learners in a particular area or sub-strand to find out whether the learner got something. It is normally done while teaching or after the lesson and it is continuous….(IILPGR12)*

One of the interviewed head teachers shared that,

> *I think it is when you assess an area where a learner is competent and you…only assess the competency (IIPSHT1).*

Another head teacher explained that,

> *It is an assessment that is geared towards what the child knows and can do. It is an assessment that goes beyond mental work… (IIPSHT 6).*

One of the head teachers noted that,

> *This is about assessing competencies in a continuous way to find out how learners are progressing in development of competencies……(IIPSHT8)*

The findings indicate that a significant number of informants lack a clear understanding of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA). While some teachers have no knowledge of what CBA entails, others possess only vague ideas, and some resort to guesswork when discussing its application. This gap in understanding presents a critical challenge to the effective implementation of CBA methods and tools in lower primary education. Without a solid grasp of the principles underpinning CBA, teachers may struggle to design and execute assessments that accurately measure learners' competencies.

Evidence of this inadequate understanding was also observed during document analysis, specifically in schemes of work and lesson plans. The assessment methods incorporated into these documents primarily focused on evaluating what learners had already acquired in terms of knowledge, rather than assessing their ability to apply that knowledge or develop essential skills. Ideally, competency-based assessment should capture both what learners know and what they can do, ensuring that they acquire relevant skills aligned with the curriculum's objectives. However, the absence of such assessments suggests that teachers may not fully comprehend the intended purpose of CBA, which could be affecting the way they structure learning experiences.

Further examination of lesson plans revealed a limited use of assessment tools, with most plans containing only one or two methods, primarily targeting knowledge-based evaluation. This narrow approach overlooks the broader competency-based framework, which requires systematic and continuous assessment of skills, attitudes, and values alongside cognitive understanding.

Classroom observations reinforced this theme, as the predominant assessment strategies consisted of simple question-and-answer sessions and written exercises. While these methods can be useful for gauging knowledge retention, they do not fully encompass the depth of CBA, which emphasizes assessing practical abilities, problem-solving skills, and values. Notably, essential aspects such as structured and continuous assessment approaches that evaluate learners' competencies were largely absent in observed lessons, further highlighting the need for improved teacher training and awareness of CBA methodologies.

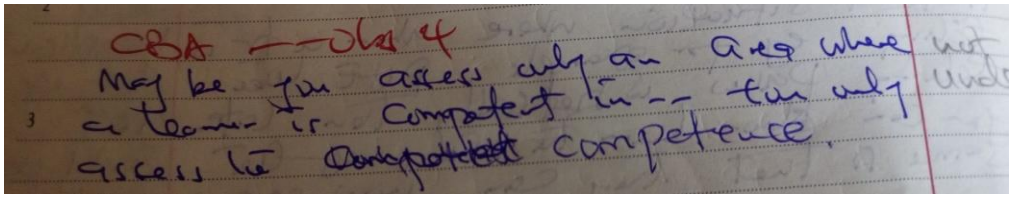


Figure 1. A section of field notes during an interview with head teachers

Analysis of field notes from interviews with head teachers (Figure 1) reveals a significant gap in understanding regarding Competency-Based Assessment (CBA). One administrator, uncertain of its meaning, vaguely defined CBA as the "assessment of competencies." This definition appears to be guesswork, highlighting not only a lack of comprehension of assessment within the new curriculum reform but also posing a serious challenge to the successful implementation of the Competency-Based Education (CBE). Given that administrators are responsible for guiding teachers on assessment methods, their misunderstanding of CBA presents a considerable obstacle.

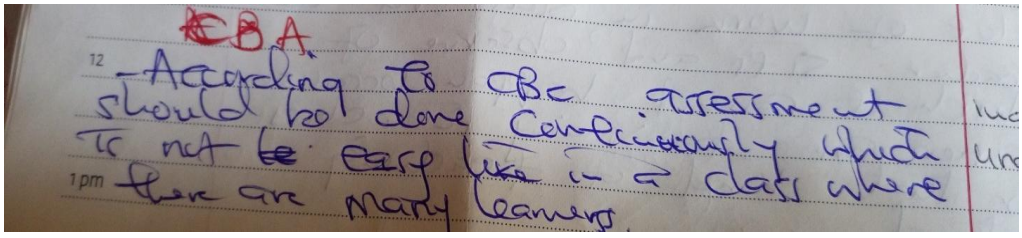


Figure 2. A section of field notes during an interview with head teachers

Further data from Figure 2 reinforces this concern, indicating that administrators recognize that CBA should be continuous. However, their understanding remains superficial, as one respondent stated that such assessment would not be feasible in large classes. While this suggests some awareness of CBA, their definition lacks depth and fails to encompass the comprehensive nature of competency-based assessment.

The findings underscore a widespread inadequacy in teachers' understanding of CBA. Only 6 out of 22 interviewees (27%) demonstrated some knowledge of the concept, while the remaining 73% had a limited perspective, equating CBA merely with assessing what a learner has learned—neglecting its broader purpose of evaluating what they know, what they need to learn, and what they can do.

According to KNEC (2021), CBA is a structured, continuous process of gathering information from multiple sources to make informed decisions regarding learners' knowledge, skills, learning needs, and competencies. The findings suggest that key CBE terminologies, such as CBA, remain unclear among educators and administrators, signaling a deeper issue of inadequate conceptual grasp of the education reform. This lack of clarity poses a major hindrance to effective implementation. These results align with the study by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) in Zambia, where despite the adoption of CBE, challenges persisted in conceptualizing and applying assessment criteria and competencies effectively.

Non-Compliance to CBA Methods

Non-compliance in this context refers to the failure of lower primary grade teachers to adhere to the assessment directives set by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) for Early Years Education (EYE). The theme of non-compliance with Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods emerged during data coding from the three research instruments—interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. During interviews, teachers were asked a fundamental question: *How do you conduct assessments?* To gain deeper insight, follow-up probes sought to determine *when* and *where* assessments were administered. The responses revealed significant variations in teachers' practices, highlighting inconsistencies in the implementation of CBA methods. Some teachers demonstrated a partial understanding of the intended procedures, while others showed a clear deviation from prescribed guidelines.

One teacher explained,

> *I mainly use question and answer and written exercise as methods of assessment. However, use observation schedule at times but I realize it needs a lot of time to observe 57 learners. I occasionally give the project work at the end of a strand more so when handling environmental and creative activities but I only do this depending with the availability of time and resources. I give assessments at the end of the sub-strand or strand. At school level, we do have mid-term assessments and end of the term assessments. . ……..IILPGT1).*

Another teacher explained that,

> *I normally do assessment in class with oral questions and written exercise being the mostly used assessment methods. I assess learning at the end of every single lesson either in class or outside depending on what learning area am teaching. Sometimes I use projects depending on the availability of resources since project work is expensive in terms of materials. …… (IILOGT2)*

Another informant noted that,

> *A part from oral questions and written exercise, I do observation during practical subjects like creative arts at the end of a strand or sub-strand and I mostly do it in class. ….. (IILPGT5).*

Another teacher added that,

> *I mostly use oral questions to assess learning at the end of the lesson. At the end of a strand or sub-strand I do give a written exercise to be done individually or in a group depending on the earning area and time available. Assessment is usually done in class but during creative activities, we can do it outside class…..(IILPGT8)*

Another teacher briefly shared that,

I mainly use oral questions to asses learning. I occasionally give a written exercise because the learners are many and I handle different classes, making it difficult to get time for marking the exercise. I give assessment at the end of the lesson and in most cases assessment is done in class……(IIPGT10)

Another teacher clarified that,

It depends on what I am assessing, if it is knowledge, I use oral questions and written exercise but if it is a skill in practical learning areas then I will use observation because this way I give learners more time to do and it allows me to find out how much the child can perform a given task. I normally do assessment at the end of the lesson or strand…….(IILPGT11).

The same question was asked to the primary school head teachers and they made the following observation. One head teacher explained that,

During classroom assessments, teachers use oral questions and written exercises in most cases. Assessment is done either inside class or outside class but it is mostly done inside class. Assessments should be continuous and therefore it is done at the end of every lesson…..(IIPSHT2).

Another head teacher shared that,

On their daily lessons teachers use oral questions and written exercise in most cases. Sometimes you can find some teachers doing observations or learners doing a project and this is mostly done at the end of a strand. Assessment is normally done inside class and sometimes outside class depending on the learning areas being assessed or the assessment method used.….(IIPSHT3)

Another head teacher echoed the above observations by saying that,

Teachers use oral questions and written exercises to assess learning in most cases. They use other methods like portfolio and sometimes project more so when doing school-based assessment where assessment tools are developed by KNEC but administering and scoring is done the teachers according to the given guidelines……. (IIPSHT7)

The same question asked to the CQASO, and had the following to share,

CBA has clearly spelled out the required standards: Methods and tools that teacher should use. Teachers have been trained on the same but unfortunately, the shift expected has not been effected. Teachers still use exam-oriented methods like written exercises in most cases. Sometimes teachers use observation, portfolios and projects even authentic assessment but I think this is mostly done during school-based assessment only. Teachers are still stuck in exam mentality when it comes to assessment but hopefully, more training will bring change (IICQASO).

From the conversations above, one can clearly see that most teachers primarily rely on oral questions and written exercises as assessment tools, which they administer at the end of lessons, sub-strands, and strands or during mid-term and end of term assessments. Some teachers incorporate observation schedules, especially for practical and creative learning areas, though they find it time consuming due to environmental and creative activities, but its usage is limited by time and resources.

Head teachers observed that oral questions and written exercises dominate daily classroom assessments, projects and observation methods are employed less frequently, typically at the end of strands and depending on the learning area and availability of resources. Lastly, the CQASO commented that, there is a disconnect between the continuous assessment standards set by CBACF and teachers' actual practices. Despite the training, teachers often reverted to exam-oriented methods.

The question on how the assessment tools are developed and administered elicited the following responses.

During an in-depth interview, a teacher had this to share,

I develop assessment tools I use at the end of the lesson, sub-strand or strand. I come up with questions derived from the content we have covered in class at the end of the lesson or strand. We don't do mid- term but when it comes to end term the schools purchase

assessment papers. When doing assessments, we normally do it in class unless it is a practical learning area, which requires some practical. Learners do exams individually in most cases…. (IILPGT3).

Another teacher added that,

We set our own assessment for midterm but the school buys assessment papers which we normally do during end term assessment. These assessments are administered in class unless there are practical to be done and learners do the exercise individually...(IILPGT6).

The same questions asked the head teachers in an interview had the following to share,

Teachers set their own assessment for class which are normally done at the end of a lesson or strand. We do not do mid-term exams. During end term, we normally buy assessment papers which is cheaper than setting now that the school does not have a printer. Assessments are done in their respective classes……(IIPSHT8).

Another head teacher added that,

Teachers set their own assessment but before we break for midterm, subject teachers sit as a team and develop assessment tools to be used as mid-term exams. As for the end of term assessment, we purchase from the suppliers. Assessments are done in classes unless it is a a practical learning area…(IIPSHT…9).

It is evident from the discussions above that teachers play a central role in the development of assessment tools for school-based evaluations. However, there appears to be a lack of structured mechanisms within schools to guide this process, leaving educators to rely on their own discretion when designing and administering assessments. As a result, the nature and effectiveness of these tools may vary depending on individual teachers' approaches and expertise. Additionally, classroom-based assessments predominantly utilize traditional pen-and-paper methods, suggesting that alternative or more diversified assessment techniques have not been widely adopted in these settings.

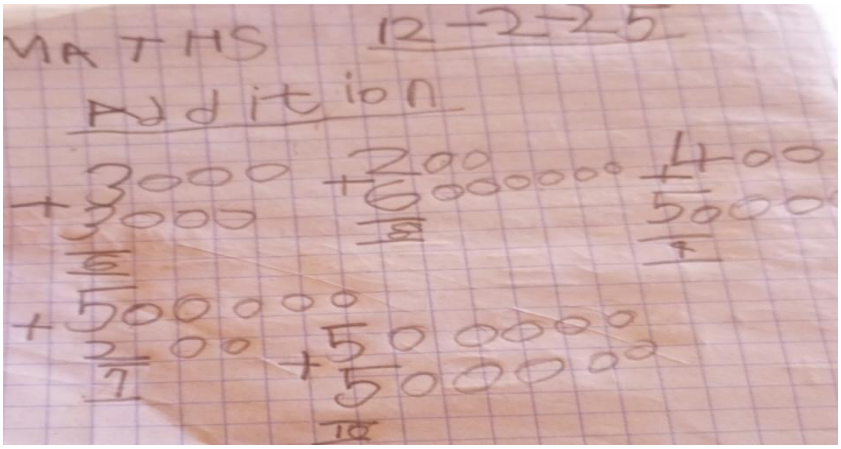


Figure 3. A photo of a learners book at the end of the lesson

The findings presented above highlight a clear non-compliance among teachers in lower primary grades in Siaya County regarding the application of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods. This is evident from various observations documented in the study. Figure 3 illustrates a learner's book during lesson observation at the end of instruction, revealing that teachers predominantly employed written exercises as a mode of assessment. While written exercises serve a valid purpose in evaluating acquired knowledge, they are inherently limited in assessing broader competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to apply learned concepts in real-life situations.

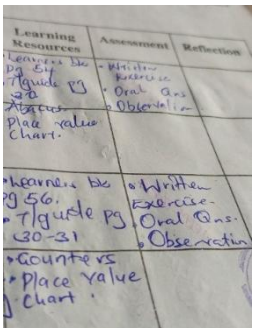


Figure 4. A snapshot of handwritten schems of work showing assessment methods

Similarly, Figure 4 presents a section of schemes of work, which incorporate written exercises, oral questioning, and observation as assessment methods. However, these methods lack fundamental assessment principles, particularly fairness and flexibility, making them less inclusive of learners with diverse needs and abilities.



Figure 5. A photo of learnes doing assessment during a lesson observation

Figure 5 further reinforces this observation, showing learners engaged in an individual written exercise during a lesson. The teacher relied solely on this form of assessment, further limiting the scope of evaluation.



Figure 6. A photo of learners doing mid term assessment

Figure 6 depicts learners undertaking a mid-term assessment, which is entirely written and falls under summative assessment. The dominance of written assessments raises concerns

regarding inclusivity, fairness, and accessibility, as it does not cater to the varied learning styles and strengths present in a diverse classroom setting.

Beyond observational data, document analysis revealed that, aside from portfolios stored in classroom corners, the primary form of documented assessment evidence consisted of learners' exercise books. These exercise books predominantly contained written exercises, particularly in subjects such as Mathematics, Literacy, and Kiswahili. During lesson observations, most assessments were conducted at the end of instruction, largely emphasizing theoretical knowledge acquisition. Out of the ten teachers observed, only two (20%) utilized observation schedules to assess Mathematics and Environmental Activities, while just one teacher (10%) employed rubrics for literacy assessment. The remaining seven teachers (70%) relied on oral questioning, written exercises, or a combination of both, further confirming the predominant use of conventional assessment techniques.

A key issue identified in the study is the lack of differentiated curriculum approaches in assessment. Teachers applied uniform assessment tools to all learners in a class, using identical items and instructions without considering learners' diverse needs and abilities. This went against the principles of CBA which is fairness and flexibility among other. Consequently, assessment methods lacked variety, as illustrated in Figure 4.4.31, where a class of over 150 learners, each with different academic abilities and interests, were subjected to a standardized written assessment.

From these findings, it is evident that teachers in Siaya County do not fully adhere to the guiding principles of assessment that underpin the development and implementation of CBA tools. Principles such as fairness, flexibility, accessibility, authenticity in relation to real-life experiences, and collaborative assessment strategies remain largely unaddressed in current classroom practices. This lack of compliance with the Competency-Based Assessment Framework for Early Years Education (CBAF-EYE) may have far-reaching implications, not only affecting learners' academic development but also impacting society by failing to cultivate essential competencies needed in real-world contexts.

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that teachers are still conducting assessments as traditional exams rather than embracing competency-based assessment approaches. Assessment is primarily conducted at the end of instruction, relying heavily on written exercises and oral questioning, with only minimal instances of observation, portfolios, rubrics, or project-based evaluations. As a result, assessments are largely limited to measuring what a learner has memorized, rather than exploring what they truly understand, what they still need to learn, and their ability to apply knowledge in practical settings.

This approach contradicts the intent of the CBAF-EYE, which advocates for a shift from one-time summative assessments to formative assessments that foster continuous learning opportunities and skill development (MoE, 2021). Furthermore, the findings indicate an imbalance between formative and summative assessments, with teachers prioritizing summative assessment, often driven by an "exam mentality" rather than a competency-based assessment approach.

These findings align with the study conducted by Momanyi and Rop (2019) in Kenya, which concluded that the majority of teachers rely on commercially available exams set by vendors. These exams tend to be content-driven rather than competency-based, further reinforcing the reliance on traditional assessment techniques rather than fostering holistic learner development.

Unsupportive environment on the use of CBA methods

In this context, an unsupportive environment for the use of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) methods refers to the lack of essential support systems, including teacher training and a conducive classroom and school setting designed to equip, empower, and motivate educators to effectively use Competency-Based Assessment (CBE) methods.

Findings indicate that only a small fraction of teachers have attempted to achieve a balance between formative and summative assessments, as required by the Kenya National Examinations

Council (KNEC). The theme of an unsupportive environment emerged through coded data analysis based on interviews, lesson observations, and document reviews, complemented by field notes and photographs taken during lesson observations and document analysis.

One of the informants had the following to share,

> *There is a problem with assessment in CBE. It starts right with trainers and then teachers. You see I have attended CBE training before but, am not able to develop the tools and administer them. Reason, the trainers don't seem to know what they are doing either. They just read a training manual to us…. The training should be practical since, the assessment in most cases is practical…….(IILPGT1).*

A teacher explained that,

> *CBA methods are not easy to understand and use unless trained. Developing the tools and even using the available ones seem technical more so if you have not been trained like me. I use question and answer with written exercise in most cases because this is what am comfortable with apart from KNEC exams which comes with strict guidelines……(IILPGT…5)*

Another teacher explained that,

> *These competency–based assessment methods…. To be honest… we only use them during school-based assessments simply because assessment tools are developed by KNEC and the guidelines are given to teachers. Even during school-based assessment, we do not use them because teachers find them too involving and hectic due to heavy workload. But we have to do because it is a KNEC assessment. On the other hand during classroom based assessment I mostly use assessment methods that am comfortable with. It think is not fair to expect a teacher to go through all that toil on a daily or weekly basis of doing individual assessment more so in languages with this kind of teaching and learning environment……..(IILPGT7)*

Another teacher added that,

> *CBA methods time consuming. It needs time to develop the tools and to administer them to individual learners which is not possible given the high enrolment of 65 leaners I have so much work to do so I use the methods that are working for me which is question and answer…..(IILPGT9).*

A teacher added that,

> *CBA methods are very suitable in assessing competencies and values developed among learners. The challenge is that, these tools and methods are very costly. Developing the assessment tools can take quite a long period of time interfering with actual teaching and learning. again, developing these tools even from locally available materials or purchasing is quite involving and expensive too making the use CBA methods……..(IILPGT10).*

Another teacher concluded that,

> *CBA methods are too expensive for most public primary schools to adopt and use as expected. The enrolment of learners in public school, the cost of the materials with lack of training makes it almost impossible. For example, if you look at the cost of teachers developing their own assessment tools and the total cost of production, you will realize that it is a heavy budget. But the big question is, who will fund the exercise? Public primary schools don't have the capacity to fund such……(IILPGT12).*

One of the head teachers on responding to the same question on their experience on how teachers use CBE methods confirmed that,

> *The experience has not been good. Most of the teachers are stuck in pen and paper. Some are reluctant while some lack the knowledge and skill on making the tools and using them according to CBE. There is need for in-service on assessment which should be facilitated by KNEC to sensitize and inform teachers on the appropriate assessment methods and how to develop and use various tools because this is a technical part that the normal CBE training might not be giving to the teachers……(IIPSHT6).*

Another head teacher had the following to share,

Honestly, little is going on in class when it comes to assessment as guided by competency-based assessment framework. Mostly, pen and paper assessments still dominate. I see very little usage of methods like observation, projects and peer assessment. This is happening due to many reasons like lack of knowledge and skill on how to develop and administer various assessment tools, too much workload coupled up with high enrolment of learners.....(IIPSHT8).

The County quality and standards assurance officer concluded that,

My experience is that as much as some individual schools and teachers are trying, just like ICT integration, there is a problem with the use of CBA methods too. A negligible number of schools and teachers seem to be making an attempt on this in Siaya County. Majority of the schools in the county have little or nothing going on when it comes to CBA due to various reasons ranging from lack of knowledge and skills in designing and using appropriate assessment tools among the teachers and lack of resources. Teachers are stuck in paper and pen type of assessment which in the real sense it is an examination mind set……(IICQASO).

From the conversations above one can say that. One of the major issues is the lack of proper training, where teachers struggle to develop and use assessment tools effectively because their training has been mostly theoretical rather than practical. Informants share that, many trainers themselves lack confidence in the methods making the entire training process ineffective. Additionally, high workload and large class size make individual assessment unrealistic. Teacher overwhelmed by large enrolments, resort to traditional question and answer methods due to convenience. Consequently, teachers rely on pen and paper assessments, which are easier to manage within the current education environment. More data show that, institutional barriers and systemic issues such as inadequate support from administration and KNEC has left teachers without guidance and materials.

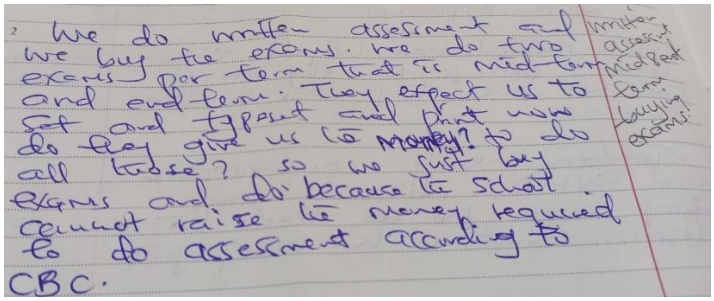


Figure 7. A section of field notes during indepth interview with a headteacher (IIPSHT5)

The findings from figure 4.4.32 reveal significant insights from an in-depth interview with a head teacher (IIPSHT5) regarding assessment practices in schools. The head teacher explained that assessment is conducted through written examinations twice per term—mid-term and end-term. Additionally, due to financial constraints, the school purchases assessment tools rather than producing them, citing the high cost of developing their own.

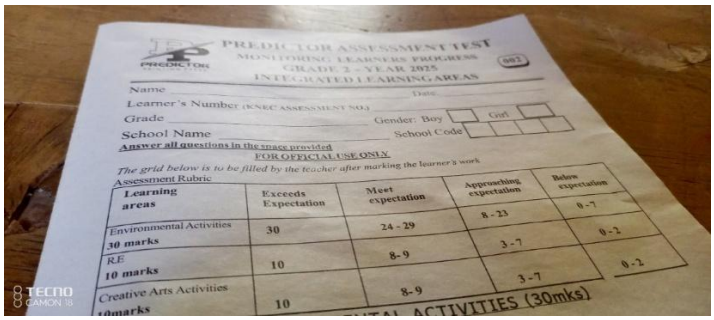


Figure 8. A photo of a purchased assessment paper meant for classroom assessment

Figure 8 illustrates a bought examination used for classroom assessment, reinforcing the notion that teachers do not develop their own assessment tools, as prescribed by the Competency-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF). CBAF guides both formative and summative assessments, aiming to align evaluations with competency-based learning.

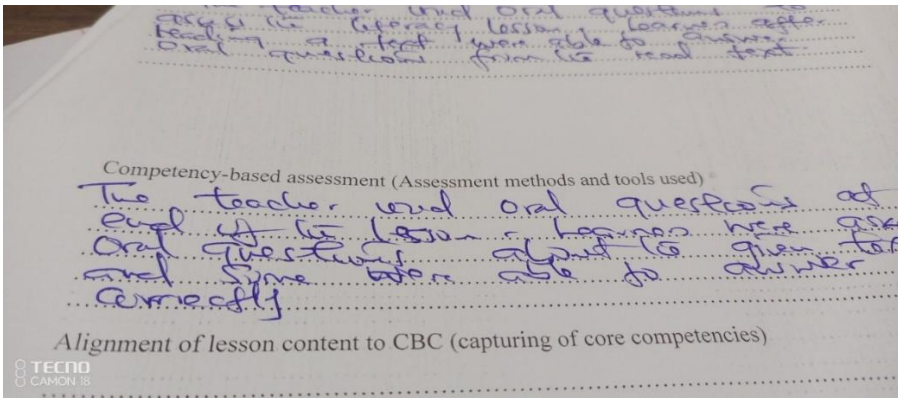


Figure 9. An extract from lesson observation on assessment methods used

Figure 9 presents an extract from a lesson observation (LOP4) that highlights the predominant use of question-and-answer methods during assessments. Sole reliance on this method significantly limits the scope of evaluation, failing to measure essential learning outcomes such as skills and values, and disproportionately disadvantaging learners. This narrowed focus on cognitive aspects fails to adequately prepare students for age-based learning pathways.

DISCUSSION

From the collected and coded data, three main themes emerged. Firstly, there was an inadequate understanding of CBA among teachers in lower primary grades, indicating gaps in knowledge and implementation. Secondly, non-compliance with CBA standards in assessment practices was evident in assess/P34AWUCFent practices, suggesting that teachers were not consistently following recommended guidelines. Lastly, minimal adoption of CBA methods in classroom instruction was observed, with teachers relying on traditional assessment approaches rather than fully integrating competency-based strategies into their classrooms.

From the insights gathered, teachers acknowledge that assessment in CBE presents considerable challenges. Among these, the most pressing issue is incompetent CBE trainers, whose training sessions tend to focus excessively on theoretical aspects rather than practical application. This gap in quality training means that teachers are not adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to develop and implement Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) tools in accordance with Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) guidelines, as outlined in the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (2019).

Furthermore, teacher attitudes play a significant role in assessment challenges. While some teachers have never undergone CBE training, others view the system negatively, deeming it too demanding. These factors, combined with the existing heavy workload, make it extremely difficult for educators to effectively implement CBA as expected, ultimately compromising the effectiveness of CBE assessment practices.

The study further highlights variability in teachers' levels of knowledge and expertise regarding CBA. Many revert to familiar assessment methods, prioritizing ease and convenience over competency-based evaluation. Alarmingly, only 6 out of 22 teachers (27%) had a clear understanding of CBA. The findings from lesson observations confirm this trend—70% of teachers relied on oral questions and written exercises, 20% employed observation schedules, while only 10% incorporated rubrics, a tool essential for grading competency-based assessments

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021), the Competency-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF-EYE) emphasizes that assessment should not only determine whether learners are acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes but also provide insights into the overall quality of education. The intended focus of assessment in CBE reform is to evaluate learners' ability to apply their skills rather than simply regurgitate knowledge. However, as the findings indicate, this objective is not being fully realized due to structural challenges.

These findings align with previous studies on CBE implementation challenges across different countries. Bunoti (2019) highlighted similar concerns in Uganda, where insufficient teacher training and inadequate teaching materials have hindered CBE implementation. Osman (2021) in Ghana reported that teachers prefer traditional assessment methods over alternative assessment tools, while Manal (2018) in Qatar found that teachers' understanding and use of assessment methods vary significantly. Across all these studies, pen-and-paper examinations ranked highest, whereas methods such as anecdotal records ranked lowest in both knowledge and practice

While competency-based assessments are ideal for assessing learners holistically, the findings underscore systemic challenges in CBE assessment, mainly arising from insufficient teacher training, resource constraints, and teacher resistance to competency-based assessment methods. While the CBAF aims to enhance the quality of education by focusing on competencies, the current practices fall short of achieving this goal, as many teachers opt for traditional assessment methods that emphasize knowledge acquisition over skill application. Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive, practical training for teachers, adequate resource allocation, and a shift in educator mindsets towards embracing competency-based assessments to better prepare learners for future academic and career pathways.

Implications

The findings of this study carry important implications for policy, teacher professional development, and classroom assessment practices within competency-based education reforms. The persistent reliance on oral questioning and written exercises demonstrates that the transition from examination-oriented assessment to competency-based assessment remains largely superficial in lower primary education. This suggests that curriculum reforms alone are insufficient without strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding and practical competence in implementing authentic assessment strategies.

The study further implies that inadequate teacher preparation, limited instructional resources, and overcrowded classrooms significantly hinder the effective implementation of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA). Consequently, educational stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Education and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), should redesign teacher training programs to prioritize practical, school-based, and continuous professional development on assessment literacy. Such training should focus on the design and use of rubrics, portfolios, observation schedules, projects, and differentiated assessment strategies aligned with competency-based learning outcomes.

In addition, the findings highlight the need for institutional support systems that enable teachers to balance formative and summative assessment practices. Without adequate administrative support, reduced teacher workload, and sufficient teaching and learning materials, teachers are likely to continue relying on traditional pen-and-paper examinations. Therefore, the study emphasizes that successful implementation of CBA requires systemic reforms that integrate policy support, teacher empowerment, and adequate resource allocation..

Research Contribution

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on competency-based education and assessment by providing empirical evidence on the realities of classroom-based assessment implementation in lower primary education within the Kenyan context. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on policy analysis or general curriculum implementation challenges, this

study specifically examines teachers' practical use of Competency-Based Assessment methods through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

The study advances theoretical and practical understanding of competency-based assessment by demonstrating the disconnect between policy expectations outlined in the Competency-Based Assessment Framework for Early Years Education (CBAF-EYE) and actual classroom practices. It reveals how inadequate conceptual understanding, examination-oriented culture, and structural constraints collectively shape teachers' assessment behaviors.

Furthermore, the study contributes methodologically by triangulating multiple qualitative data sources to provide a comprehensive interpretation of teachers' assessment practices. Practically, the findings offer a contextual framework that policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators can use to strengthen authentic classroom assessment practices that integrate knowledge, skills, values, and learner competencies.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted only in public primary schools within Siaya County, which may limit the transferability of the findings to private schools or other counties with different educational conditions and resource availability. Second, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological design, relying mainly on interviews, observations, and document analysis. Although these methods provided rich and in-depth insights, the findings may be influenced by subjective interpretations from both participants and researchers.

Another limitation is that the study focused primarily on teachers, head teachers, and the County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (CQASO), without incorporating learners' or parents' perspectives regarding competency-based assessment practices. In addition, the study did not quantitatively measure the direct impact of assessment practices on learner competency development and academic outcomes. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited the ability to examine changes in teachers' assessment practices over time following training or policy interventions.

Suggestions

Future studies should adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine the long-term effectiveness of competency-based assessment practices and their influence on learners' competency development. Comparative studies across different counties, school types, and educational contexts would also provide broader insights into the implementation challenges and successes of CBA.

Further research should explore learners' and parents' perceptions of competency-based assessment to provide a more holistic understanding of assessment practices within competency-based education systems. Additionally, future studies could investigate the effectiveness of targeted teacher professional development programs in improving assessment literacy and authentic assessment implementation.

From a practical perspective, policymakers should strengthen continuous in-service teacher training programs focused specifically on assessment literacy and competency-based pedagogies. Schools should also establish collaborative assessment structures where teachers jointly develop assessment tools, share best practices, and engage in peer mentoring. Moreover, reducing teacher-pupil ratios and increasing funding for instructional materials would create a more supportive environment for authentic competency-based assessment implementation. Ultimately, sustained collaboration among policymakers, curriculum developers, school administrators, and teachers is essential to ensure that competency-based assessment reforms move beyond policy rhetoric into meaningful classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the majority of teachers had an inadequate understanding of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA), which was largely limited to the assessment of knowledge acquisition. This approach overlooked critical aspects of competency-based assessment, including the evaluation of learners' skills, values, and their ability to apply knowledge effectively in practical contexts. The findings further indicated widespread non-compliance with the CBA standards established by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC). A strong "examination mentality" persisted among teachers, with most informants referring to mid-term and end-of-term examinations, thereby demonstrating a greater preference for summative assessment rather than formative assessment approaches.

Most schools relied on commercially purchased assessment papers for end-of-term examinations, while the development and administration of continuous classroom-based assessments were left to the discretion of individual teachers. This resulted in inconsistencies in assessment practices, as teachers conducted assessments according to their own methods and timelines. Assessment practices also reflected significant gaps in teachers' understanding of CBA methods. Teachers primarily used assessment to evaluate learners' acquisition of knowledge rather than assessing competencies, skills, and values as required within Competency-Based Education (CBE). Consequently, oral questioning and written exercises dominated classroom assessment practices, whereas rubrics, portfolios, projects, and observation methods were minimally utilized. This indicates that many teachers had not fully transitioned from traditional examination-oriented assessment to competency-based assessment practices.

Furthermore, teachers mainly applied CBA methods during school-based assessments using tools developed by KNEC, while classroom-based assessments varied considerably across teachers due to the absence of standardized school-level assessment guidelines. Oral questioning and written exercises remained the most commonly used assessment methods. Therefore, there is a need for continuous capacity building and professional development for lower primary teachers in Siaya County on the effective use of CBA tools and assessment methods in order to strengthen classroom assessment practices.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ombese Sollome Nyaboke: Conceptualization and Methodology. Data curation and Writing-Original Draft. **Benson Charles Odongo:** Formal analysis and Supervision. **Clephas Owino Owiko:** Investigation, Supervision, Writing -Review & Editing.

REFERENCES

Abera, G., & Tolessa, G. (2019). Continuous assessment perception of Madda Walabu University instructors, South East Ethiopia. *Journal of Education and Practice, 10*(4).

Abdul Muth'im. (2014). Understanding and responding to the change of curriculum in the context of Indonesian education. *American Journal of Educational Research, 2*(11), 1094–1099. https://doi.org/10.12691/education-2-11-15

Abiye, C. M., & Ayibatonye, E. J. (2014). Science teachers and continuous assessment: Implementation in secondary schools, competence and effects. *Journal of Research and Method in Education, 4*(4), 36–41.

Akala, B. M. (2021). Revisiting education reform in Kenya: A case of competency-based curriculum (CBC). *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 3*(1), Article 100107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100107

Amukowa, D., & Pale, J. W. (2020). Competence-based curriculum in primary schools in Kenya: Opportunities and challenges of implementation. *Journal of Education and Practice, 11*(32).

Amutabi, M. N. (2019). Competency-based curriculum and the end of an era in Kenya's education sector and implications for development: Some empirical reflections. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa, 3*(10), 45–66.

Atak, B. J. (2021). *Exploring how formative assessment rubrics are used in schools to support teaching and learning: A case study of one primary school in Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, Aga Khan University).

Benen, J. D. (2021). *Understanding teachers' preparedness to teach the CBC in Kenya* (International and Comparative Education Specialization No. 78). Stockholm University.

Carrette, V. (2009). Assessing competencies in classrooms: In search of a framework of instruction. In *Evaluation under tension between regulation of learning and systems control*. De Boeck.

IBE-UNESCO. (2017). *The why, what and how of competence-based curriculum reforms: The Kenya experience* (In-Progress Reflection No. 11 on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment). UNESCO International Bureau of Education.

Kabita, D., & Ji, L. (2017). *The why, what and how of CBC reforms: The Kenyan experience* (In-Progress Reflection No. 11 on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment). UNESCO.

Kafyulilo, A. C., Rugambuka, I. B., & Moses, I. (2012). The implementation of competency-based training approaches in Tanzania: The case of pre-service teachers at Morogoro Teacher Training College. *Universal Journal of Education and General Studies, 1*(11), 339–347.

Kaviti, L. (2018). *The new curriculum of education in Kenya: A linguistic and educational paradigm shift*. University of Nairobi.

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. (2008). *Ministry of education brief*. Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. (2011). *Draft report on alignment of education system with the new constitution*. Government Printer.

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. (2017). *Facilitator's training manual for early years education curriculum*. Government Printer.

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development. (2018). *Report on competence-based curriculum activities presented to the National Steering Committee*. Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.

Makunja, G. (2016). Challenges facing teachers in implementing competence-based curriculum in Tanzania: A case study of community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. *International Journal of Education*.

Oluoch, J. P. (1990). *Essentials of curriculum development*. Elimu Bookshop Ltd.

Osman, S. (2021). Basic school teachers' assessment practices in the Sissala East Municipality, Ghana. *European Journal of Education Studies, 8*(7).

Patteera, T. (2021). Teachers' practices and perceptions of self-assessment and peer assessment of presentation skills. *English Language Teaching, 14*(12). Canadian Center of Science and Education.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In M. Cole & V. John-Steiner (Eds.), *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 79–91). Harvard University Press.