



# Teacher Capacity Strengthening in ASAL and APBET Schools in Kenya

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Ministry of Education



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## What is the issue?

The primary focus of this research was to address the following question: What knowledge, attitudes, and practices do key stakeholders need to support successful curriculum implementation in pre-primary and primary schools in Kenya? The objective of this companion piece is to position the project's research work and findings within the broader policy context, including policy strategies and decision-making processes that it will inform. Specifically, this piece aims to enhance teacher capacity, with a particular emphasis on ASAL areas (Arid and Semi-Arid Lands) and informal settlement settings. This policy brief is a component of the formative research project titled "Transforming Schooling into Learning (TSIL)." Before the project rollout, a formative study was conducted involving 395 participants. The research aimed to identify key competence gaps among stakeholders involved in the implementation of the competency-based curriculum (CBC), focusing on parents, teachers, school leaders, and government education officers

### *Scale of problem*

- *Teacher capacity gaps remain the main challenge in implementing CBC.*
- *The critical gaps identified include: low digital literacy among teachers, the need to adopt learner-centered approaches, and embrace the shift from summative examinations to formative assessments.*
- *There is need to collect more evidence on the equitable implementation of the CBC, particularly in marginalized communities such as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and informal settlements.*

## Background

Kenya introduced a new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017, which prioritizes the development of skills and competencies in learners, moving away from a sole focus on academic content. This curriculum necessitates that teachers undergo retooling and training to transition from teacher-centered methodologies to learner-centered approaches. The findings mentioned stem from a formative study conducted by Dignitas in collaboration with the Kenya Education Management Institute and with the support of a multi-agency Technical Working Group.

## Understanding the Problem of Teacher Capacity Strengthening

Teachers are recognized as a significant determinant and contributor to the educational achievement of learners. Teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices play a significant role in predicting learning outcomes. Proficiency in subject matter content is essential to ensure teaching effectiveness. Therefore, it is not solely the qualifications attained by a teacher that contribute to their quality, but also their actual achievement in terms of subject matter competencies. Researchers attribute the low achievement of pupils in schools to teachers' inadequacies in understanding the subject matter. This issue has been highlighted in the most recent policy articulation, as evidenced by the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms (PWPER) Report (Government of Kenya, 2023),

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which dedicated a chapter to synthesizing public and expert recommendations on implementing teacher education and management.

Teacher education and management encompass a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) or early education to university-level education.

The following are some of the aspects that this policy paper addresses:

Teacher capacity gaps remain the biggest challenge in implementing CBC. While it is acknowledged that the Ministry of Education (MoE), in collaboration with the Teachers Service Commission, has initiated an intensive in-service training program following the adoption of the CBC, evaluations conducted internally within the MoE and externally have revealed persistent gaps in teacher capacity. Critical gaps identified include low digital literacy among teachers, adopting more learner-centered approaches, and embracing the transition from summative examinations to formative assessments.

Several studies have highlighted the gaps in implementing the competency-based curriculum; the outcomes from these

studies can be extrapolated to competency-based assessment. The studies conducted by *Akala (2021)*, *Odundo (2019)*, and *Ogutu (2019)* have identified a confluence of behavioural factors associated with knowledge levels, skill sets, and attitudes as explaining factors influencing the implementation of competency-based curriculum processes, including teacher education and management. Additionally, research by *Muthanje et al. (2020)* and *Muchira et al. (2023)* specifically addresses critical issues affecting teachers in CBC implementation in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and primary schools. The specific needs of marginalized areas and communities regarding teacher capacities remain a challenge, risking the marginalization of these groups in the CBC implementation process.

## About Transforming School into Learning and Formative Research

The "Transforming Schooling into Learning" project is a two-year initiative aimed at enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to adopt practices that improve the implementation of competency-based curriculum processes in urban informal settings and arid contexts, specifically in Kisumu and Isiolo counties. The project will be executed in schools throughout these two counties, collaborating with classroom teachers, heads of institutions, boards of management, parents, and education officials, including curriculum support

officers and sub-county officials. Before the project's official launch, a formative study (see design below) was conducted to provide foundational insights. This study, conducted in 2023, employed a mixed-methods approach and targeted three counties: Isiolo, Makueni, and Kisumu. The objective was to compare findings from schools located in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), rural communities, and urban informal settlements. A total of 395 participants from 87 school communities were engaged, comprising 253 teachers,

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25 heads of institutions, 78 parents, and 13 education officials.

The study operationalized value-based education elements referred to as socio-emotional learning and resilience. Various data collection tools were utilized, including survey questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and observation checklists. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25 for quantitative data and NVivo version 10 for qualitative data analysis.

## Findings from the formative research

### *Key findings from TSIL*

- *Inadequate digital literacy skills among most stakeholders.*
- *Teachers self-report higher levels of pedagogical content knowledge than they actually possess.*
- *Teachers require both technical and emotional support to build resilience and effectively deliver on the CBC curriculum*



Based on the study findings, several key knowledge and capacity gaps among teachers in CBC implementation have been identified:

- **Inadequate Digital Literacy:** Approximately 40% of teachers reported that they were incorporating digital literacy into their classes. However, a significant portion (83%) indicated that they had taken steps to update their digital skills to better engage with their pupils.
- **CBC Pedagogical Content Knowledge:** While a majority of teachers reported using inquiry-based learning (70%), role-playing (81%), cooperative learning (78%), and group discussions (77%), other important CBC instructional strategies were less commonly utilized. For example, only 31% reported using journaling, 36% reported community service learning, and 39.5% reported using graphic organizers. Overall, only 40% of teachers met expectations for pedagogical content knowledge.
- **Interpretation of Curriculum Designs:** Classroom observations revealed low utilization of CBC instructional strategies despite high self-reported usage. Only a small percentage of teachers (15%) were observed to assess and link knowledge and skills taught with learners' real-life situations, and a minority (20%) used appropriate key inquiry questions. Additionally, only 35% of teachers' preparation met expectations.

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- **Planning for Teaching and Learning:** Many teachers struggled with utilizing newer and innovative teaching strategies. For instance, a smaller percentage of teachers reported using independent study (35%), journaling (31%), community service learning (36%), and graphic organizers (39%) compared to more traditional methods like cooperative learning or group discussions (77%). Only 8% of teachers indicated planning for curriculum implementation, and only 6% reported reflective practice.
  - **Teachers' Attitudes to CBC Implementation:** Teachers expressed the need for both technical and emotional support in CBC implementation. Challenges included feelings of stress due to workload (39.2%), particularly pronounced in Isiolo (44.7%), feelings of inability to cope with challenges (47%), predominantly in Kisumu (53%), fatigue in filling assessment records (43%), mainly in Isiolo (55.6%), and perceived high time requirements for CBC (67.2%). Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive support, including technical assistance, professional development, and emotional support, ideally provided by instructional leaders such as head teachers or deputy head teachers.

## **Policy Implications and Recommendations from the formative study:**

- Without adequate digital skills, teachers may struggle to effectively utilize digital tools and resources to support learning, potentially resulting in decreased levels of learner engagement and achievement.
- The lack of sufficient pedagogical content knowledge among teachers could have a detrimental impact on the successful implementation of the CBC curriculum. Additionally, without a clear understanding of the curriculum goals and intended outcomes, teachers may struggle to design and implement effective instructional strategies aligned with the curriculum objectives.
- Without adequate emotional and technical support, teachers may experience feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed while implementing the CBC curriculum. This could lead to burnout and a decline in morale, potentially resulting in the loss of highly qualified teachers and a decrease in the quality of instruction, assessments, and, ultimately, learner achievement.

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## Based on the policy implications, this paper proposes six key recommendations to the Teacher Service Commission (TSC):

- Strengthen a capacity development program for teachers in the early years to assess the acquisition of competencies and facilitate recognition for promotion and reward.
- Enhance teacher capacities to manage large classrooms in the early years, primary, and Junior Secondary School (JSS) levels to address high pupil–teacher ratios.
- Strengthen psychosocial support services for teachers to help them meet the demands of implementing the curriculum.
- Implement classroom-based mentorship programs to provide ongoing support and guidance to teachers.
- Enhance teacher capacities to effectively engage with parents, fostering collaboration and partnership in the education process.
- Improve teacher capacities to effectively undertake competency-based assessments, ensuring accurate evaluation of student learning outcomes.

## Conclusions

Capacity building and strengthening teachers are crucial in successfully implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Despite the induction and training of over 200,000 teachers in primary and junior schools on CBC implementation, teachers still encounter challenges applying the requisite skills. These challenges are particularly pronounced for teachers in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) and Alternative Provision of Basic Education and Training (APBET) schools due to the additional constraints within their contexts.

Efforts by the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission need to be concerted and focused to address these challenges comprehensively. By providing targeted support and resources, these efforts can help teachers overcome obstacles and achieve better results in CBC implementation.

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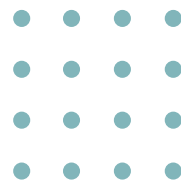
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