



Implementation of competency-based assessment in ASAL and APBET schools in Kenya

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What is the issue?

The primary focus of this process was to determine the knowledge, attitudes, and practices required by key stakeholders to support successful curriculum implementation in pre-primary and primary schools in Kenya. The implementation of the Competence-Based Assessment Framework remains challenging, particularly in marginalized areas and communities such as ASALs and informal settlements.

This policy brief has been developed as part of the formative research project titled “Transforming Schooling into Learning (TSIL).” Before the project rollout, a formative study targeting 395 participants was conducted with the research objective of understanding the key competence gaps among stakeholders of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), with a specific focus on parents, teachers, school leaders, and government education officers involved in CBC implementation.

Scale of the problem

- *There are gaps in the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), and these issues are extending to affect Competency-Based Assessment (CBA).*
- *The Competence-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF) has encountered challenges, particularly in the utilization of formative assessments for learning and feedback.*
- *There is limited evidence regarding the equity perspective in the implementation of competency-based assessments in marginalized communities and areas, such as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) and informal settlements.*

Background

Kenya introduced a new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in 2017, with a primary emphasis on fostering skills and competencies in learners, rather than solely concentrating on academic content. An essential element of the CBC is competency-based assessment (CBA), which aims to assess student mastery of competencies. This policy brief outlines the findings from a 2023 study on the implementation of CBC and CBA



in Kenya, accompanied by recommendations. The findings stem from a formative study conducted by Dignitas in collaboration with the Kenya Education Management Institute, supported by a multi-agency Technical Working Group.

Understanding the problem

While the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) has been progressively implemented across grade levels, there remains a significant gap in understanding Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) approaches among key stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, education officials, and parents. Limited evidence exists on the required knowledge levels, skill sets, and attitudes necessary to explain and account for the practice of competency-based assessment in schools.

Several studies by Akala (2021), Demssie et al. (2019), Omariba (2022), Cheptoo & Ramdas (2020), Mwarari et al. (2020), and Mwitwa et al. (2022) highlight the behavioral factors associated with knowledge levels, skill sets, and attitudes as explaining factors for the implementation of competency-based curriculum processes, including assessment. These studies emphasize the multiplicity of stakeholders at different levels, their interactions, and associated relationships as factors contributing to the success or lack thereof of the competency-based curriculum. Additionally, the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWER) report (GoK, 2023, p.27) concludes that the implementation of the Competence-Based Assessment Framework (CBAF) has encountered challenges, particularly in utilizing formative assessments for learning and feedback. The report also notes issues with the assessment of values mainstreamed in the curriculum and raises concerns about the administration of School-Based Assessment (SBA) introducing additional costs and integrity issues regarding the authenticity of scores uploaded onto

the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) portal.

Analysis of the aforementioned studies suggests that CBA and the associated CBC are effective in shifting pedagogical practices, contingent upon the reorganization of existing resources by teachers, parents, school administrators, and support systems. It is evident that without a shift in the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and parents, CBA implementation remains at risk. However, despite these studies, there is limited evidence regarding the equity lens associated with competency-based assessments. While guidelines provide for modifications of tools to meet the needs of special needs students, there is scant mention of disadvantaged contexts such as arid areas, informal settlements, and rural communities.

The Kenya National Examination Council (2021) offers comprehensive guidelines defining and detailing competence-based assessments. CBA is defined as a purposeful, systematic, continuous process of gathering information from multiple sources to make decisions on learners' knowledge, learning needs, acquired knowledge, and skills. It involves creating opportunities for learners to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to solve real-world problems. The guidelines outline nine elements of CBA, emphasizing the evaluation of competency application. CBA utilizes multiple tools and continuous feedback, unlike one-time exams, including classroom assessments, school-based assessments developed by KNEC, and summative assessments to inform interventions at specific grade levels.

The timing of CBA is categorized into three phases: diagnostic before learning, formative during learning, and summative at the end of the learning process. Various assessment tools such as tests, observations, checklists, quizzes, rubrics, and portfolios are employed to assess a variety of competencies. Special needs accommodations are provided through modified accessible assessment formats.



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 informal and arid contexts, specifically in Kisumu and Isiolo counties. The project will be executed in schools across 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 rollout, a formative study was conducted in 2023 utilizing a

mixed methods approach. The study targeted three counties—Isiolo, Makueni and Kisumu—to compare findings from schools in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), rural communities, and informal settlements. A total of 395 participants from 87 school communities, including 253 teachers, 25 heads of institutions, 78 parents, and 13 education officials, were engaged in the study.

Data collection tools employed included survey questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and observation checklists. Analysis of the data 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

- *3 out of 10 teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of competence-based assessments, indicating a significant gap in comprehension.*
- *Schools located in marginalized communities and areas, such as ASALs and informal settlements, encounter difficulties in conducting school-based assessments.*
- *Stakeholders, including Boards of Management and parents, face challenges in comprehending competence-based assessments. Parents, in particular, are often unaware of their roles in the assessment process.*

The study findings reveal specific insights regarding competency-based assessment:

- Only 35% of teachers were found to have adequate preparation in using CBA tools, highlighting significant gaps in training and proficiency.
- The majority of teachers lack an understanding of the distinctions between traditional paper tests and CBA methodologies.
- Parents similarly struggle to grasp the differences between traditional academic rankings and competency-based grading systems.
- Inadequate training programs on CBA for teachers and education leaders were identified as a significant issue

These findings align with those outlined in the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (PWER) report (GoK, 2023) concerning the implementation challenges of the Competence-Based Assessment Framework.

Policy Implications and Recommendations from the formative study:

- Without a common understanding of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA), its effectiveness will be undermined, compromising the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). A shared understanding provides stakeholders—parents, teachers, headteachers, board of management, and education officials—with the necessary information.
- Teachers require extensive retraining in interpreting curriculum guidelines, aligning lesson planning with competencies, and utilizing appropriate CBA tools. Since CBA is primarily the responsibility of teachers, other stakeholders play a supportive role. Therefore, it is essential to provide continuous support to teachers, helping them build confidence and develop alternative approaches to understanding the requirements of CBA and implementation methods.
- Parents and school officials also need orientation to the principles and practices of CBA. Toolkits and practices, such as rubrics, are necessary to enable these support units to effectively contribute to CBA.

Conclusions

By implementing these strategies, the knowledge, attitudes, and practices necessary to support the implementation of the new competency-based assessment can be strengthened. It is crucial to invest in comprehensive and continuous training, establish support structures, and engage all stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya.

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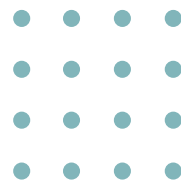
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