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Pedagogical and Content Knowledge Needs of Junior School Kiswahili Teachers under Kenya's Competency-Based Education

Hezron Nyamberi Otwori, Maurine Kang'ahi, Francis C. Indoshi

Department of Educational Communication, Technology and Curriculum Studies, School of Education, Maseno University, Kenya

Corresponding Author Email: nyamberihezron0@gmail.com

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Abstract

Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya asks teachers to plan for competencies, teach through learner-centred methods, assess formatively and connect subject content to learners' cultural worlds. This study examined the pedagogical and content knowledge needs of Grade 7 and 8 Kiswahili teachers in Nyamache Sub-County, Kenya, through the lens of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). A convergent mixed-methods design combined a questionnaire (n = 77), semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers and 4 Curriculum Support Officers, and 36 observed lessons rated on a 22-item checklist (κ = .801). Normalised Need Indices showed moderate content need (M = 0.391) and the lowest need in pedagogy (M = 0.366). Planning and delivery were strong: 100% of lessons had clear objectives and organised lesson plans, and participation was encouraged in 97.2%. Practice weakened as lessons moved from delivery to responsiveness: formative assessment (63.9%), constructive feedback (66.7%), behaviour management (66.7%) and monitoring (58.3%) were the weakest pedagogical items. In content, poetry (*ushairi*) was the most under-resourced and least well-taught strand, with the lowest observed content score (56.3%), and incorporating cultural references was the weakest item on the whole checklist (58.3%), as it was absent from grammar lessons. Teachers wanted mentoring, peer observation, and lesson study (83.3% each). The findings show that a low aggregate need can hide specific, consequential gaps. Professional development for Kiswahili teachers should target assessment for learning, feedback, large-class management, poetry pedagogy and culturally grounded grammar, delivered through school-based coaching rather than generic CBE workshops.

Keywords: Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Formative Assessment, Kiswahili Poetry, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Competency-Based Education, Teacher Professional Development, Kenya

Introduction

Curriculum reform changes what teachers must know before it changes what they do. Reforms that move education from content coverage towards competencies depend on teachers' ability to plan, teach and assess in new ways, and research on teacher professional

development shows that such change in practice is more likely when learning is content-focused, collaborative and connected to teachers' own classrooms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development of this kind can be well targeted only if it starts from an accurate picture of what teachers already do well and where they need support.

Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE) makes this requirement concrete. It asks teachers to move from content coverage to the development of competencies such as communication, critical thinking, creativity and citizenship, and to use continuous, formative assessment to track that development (KICD, 2017).

For Junior School Kiswahili teachers, the demand is layered. They must teach an integrated curriculum — grammar (*sarufi*), composition (*insha*), oral literature (*fasihi simulizi*), written literature (*fasihi andishi*), poetry (*ushairi*), communication (*mawasiliano*) and culture (*utamaduni*) — through learner-centred methods while continuously assessing progress. Doing so requires more than subject mastery and general teaching skill; it requires pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), the ability to turn a particular topic into something learners can understand (Shulman, 1986). Because culture is a named strand of the curriculum, it also requires teaching that draws on learners' cultural knowledge and experience (Gay, 2018).

Whether teachers are equipped for these demands is an open question, and the available evidence points to uneven readiness. Nyamache Sub-County in Kisii County recorded a Kiswahili mean of 36.98% in the 2022 Kenya Primary School Education Assessment (KPSEA), below the three other sub-counties compared: Bomachoge (38.82%), Nyaribari Masaba (41.80%) and Sameta (43.75%) (Kisii County Director of Education, 2023). A result of this kind cannot identify its own causes, but it signals the need to look closely at instruction. Kenyan studies of Kiswahili under CBE report that teachers interpret subject matter well but struggle to plan for integrated competencies (Mugera & Kafwa, 2024), and that professional development improves active learning and assessment practice where teachers can access it (Wamokhela et al., 2025).

Two limitations remain in what is known. Few studies have examined Kiswahili teachers' pedagogical and content needs together, and fewer have checked self-reported needs against what happens in lessons. This matters because aggregate and self-reported measures can mislead. A teacher population may report low overall pedagogical need while specific practices, such as formative assessment, remain weak. Likewise, overall content confidence may hide one strand that is consistently under-taught. Professional development designed from averages will repeat what teachers already do well and miss what they do not. The research problem, therefore, is that the specific pedagogical and content needs of Junior School Kiswahili teachers are not well documented, so professional development risks being generic rather than targeted.

This paper therefore addresses two questions:

1. What are Junior School Kiswahili teachers' pedagogical professional development needs for effective instructional practice?
2. What are their content knowledge needs, and in which Kiswahili strands are they concentrated?

By triangulating questionnaire, interview and observation data, the study identifies not only how large the needs are but exactly where they lie.

The study makes three contributions. Empirically, it examines pedagogical and content knowledge needs together and at the level of individual Kiswahili strands, and, to the researcher's knowledge, it is one of few studies to check Kiswahili teachers' reported needs against systematic observation of lessons under CBE. Methodologically, it shows how normalised Need Indices can be read alongside interview and observation evidence, so that divergence between what teachers report and what they do becomes analytically informative rather than a threat to validity. Theoretically and practically, it applies PCK and culturally responsive pedagogy to an African-language context and shows that the most consequential gaps — formative assessment and feedback, poetry pedagogy and culturally grounded grammar — are specific pedagogical content gaps that a low aggregate need conceals. For education researchers and policy-makers in the social sciences, this offers an evidence base for replacing generic CBE workshops with targeted, school-based professional development.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical framework: Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

The study was anchored in the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which provides a basis for understanding the forms of knowledge teachers need when they combine subject content, instructional approaches and technology. TPACK is concerned with teachers' capacity to make informed decisions about how technology can support the teaching of particular content through appropriate pedagogical approaches (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This is relevant to contemporary classrooms, where teachers are increasingly expected to use digital resources while keeping their practice learner-centred and pedagogically sound.

Mishra and Koehler (2006) developed the framework from the interaction among three broad areas of teacher knowledge: content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK) and technological knowledge (TK). It builds on Shulman's (1986, 1987) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), the idea that teaching expertise is neither subject knowledge nor general teaching skill alone but the transformation of content into forms learners can understand, and it adds technology. Rather than treating the three areas as independent competencies, TPACK emphasises the knowledge that develops where they intersect: PCK, technological content knowledge (TCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) and the integrated domain of TPACK itself (Figure 1).

TPACK was considered suitable because the professional development needs of Junior School Kiswahili teachers cannot be understood by examining technological competence, pedagogical competence or subject mastery in isolation. A teacher may know Kiswahili well but still need support in choosing learner-centred strategies for teaching a particular language concept; equally, a teacher able to operate digital tools may lack the knowledge to select and use them for teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar or literature. The framework therefore allowed the study to examine both the individual knowledge domains and the relationships among them.

This paper reports the pedagogical and content strands of the wider study. The technological domain and its intersections are examined in companion papers and are referred to here only where they bear on the findings. Within the study, the seven TPACK domains were operationalised for Kiswahili instruction as follows:

- **Technological knowledge (TK):** teachers' knowledge and ability to select and use technologies that can support Kiswahili instruction, including digital resources, multimedia, internet-based applications and communication platforms.
- **Pedagogical knowledge (PK):** teachers' knowledge of the principles and practices through which learning is organised and facilitated, including lesson planning, learner-centred strategies, classroom management, differentiation, assessment, feedback and the promotion of active participation.
- **Content knowledge (CK):** teachers' mastery of the Junior School Kiswahili language and literature content that they must interpret, organise and communicate accurately.
- **Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK):** the ability to transform Kiswahili content into forms learners can understand through suitable strategies, examples, activities and assessment.
- **Technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK):** understanding of how technology can support particular teaching approaches, such as participation, collaboration, inquiry, assessment and feedback, beyond simply operating equipment.
- **Technological content knowledge (TCK):** understanding of how specific technologies can represent or enrich particular Kiswahili content; for example, audio and video for oral literature and listening, or digital texts for reading and writing.
- **TPACK:** the integrated capacity to make coordinated decisions about content, pedagogy and technology, selecting a technology for a particular learning outcome and using it through a suitable pedagogical approach.

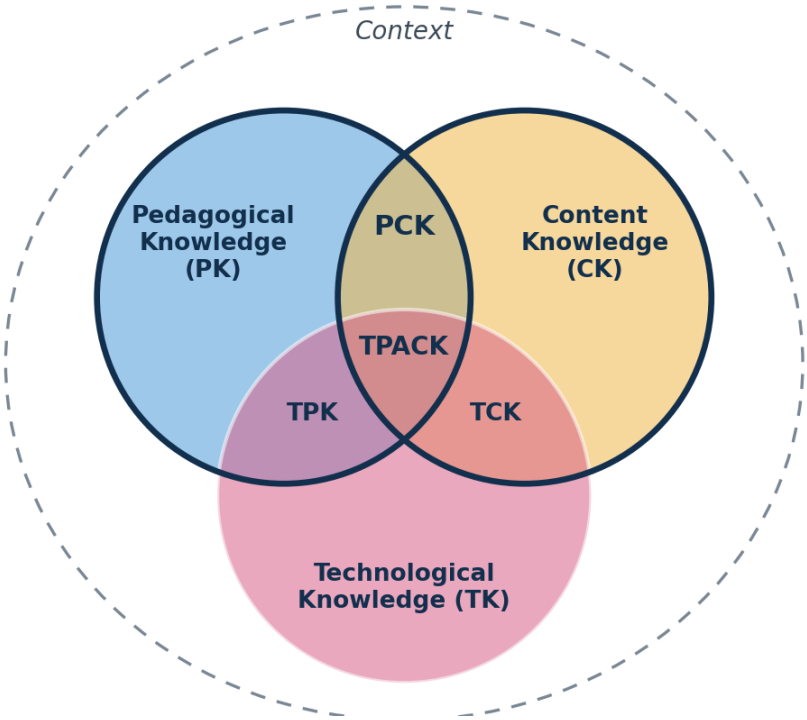


Figure 1. The TPACK framework and the domains examined in this paper
Note. Pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK) and their intersection (PCK) are the focus of this paper (bold outline). Adapted from Mishra and Koehler (2006).

In this study, TPACK therefore served as both an organising and an interpretive framework. It was used diagnostically to identify areas in which teachers needed further professional support, and to examine whether difficulties seen in lessons arose mainly from pedagogy, content or the interaction between them. A Need Index was computed for each domain from the questionnaire, and domain composite scores were computed from the observation checklist, so that the same framework structured the questionnaire, interview and observation evidence.

Professional development needs are not static. Changes in curriculum expectations, instructional resources, learner characteristics and educational technologies create new needs over time, so needs assessment has to be continuous if professional development is to remain responsive to classroom realities and to the evolving demands of CBE. This principle underlies the school-based, developmental support discussed in Section 2.5.

Pedagogical, content and pedagogical content knowledge

Shulman (1986, 1987) argued that teaching expertise is not the sum of subject knowledge and general teaching skill. It includes pedagogical content knowledge (PCK): knowing how to represent a particular topic, which examples and activities make it comprehensible, and what learners typically find difficult. As Section 2.1 explains, this paper focuses on the pedagogical (PK) and content (CK) domains and their intersection (PCK).

Under CBE, pedagogical knowledge involves translating curriculum designs into learning activities, facilitating learner participation, using instructional resources, managing classroom interaction and applying assessment that provides evidence of competency development (KICD, 2017). Studies of Kiswahili teachers report that, although subject matter is generally well interpreted, translating CBE competencies into lesson planning remains difficult (Mugera & Kafwa, 2024).

Content knowledge matters because teachers must understand what they teach before they can represent it for learners. At Junior School level, Kiswahili is taught as a single learning area that integrates language and literature (KICD, 2023), and the design leaves decisions such as class readers, supplementary texts and preferred teaching methods largely to teachers. Interpreting the curriculum and selecting materials therefore draw directly on content knowledge and PCK. PCK is the point at which the two meet: making a poem's structure and imagery accessible to Grade 7 learners, for example, requires both knowledge of verse forms and strategies for representing them.

Formative assessment and feedback

Formative assessment — gathering evidence of learning during instruction and using it to adjust teaching — is among the most powerful levers on achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Feedback is its core mechanism, and its effect depends on whether it tells learners where they are going, how they are doing, and what to do next (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). CBE places formative assessment at the centre of instruction, yet it is harder to enact than planning or delivery because it requires real-time judgement and adjustment. Under CBE, teachers are also expected to use varied continuous methods, such as portfolios, observation, projects, oral presentations and self- and peer-assessment, and to judge learners against demonstrated competencies rather than relative performance (KICD, 2017). Guskey (2002)

observed that such practices change only when teachers see them work in their own classrooms, which argues for classroom-embedded support.

Culture and content in Kiswahili teaching

Kiswahili is inseparable from the cultures that speak it. Oral literature, proverbs, poetry and communication norms carry cultural meaning, and the Junior School curriculum names culture (*utamaduni*) as a strand. Culturally responsive pedagogy holds that learning improves when teaching draws on learners' cultural knowledge and experiences (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In Kiswahili, this means connecting grammar to authentic use, and literature to learners' own oral traditions. Poetry is a particular challenge: *ushairi* combines prosody, figurative language and cultural reference, and requires both deep content knowledge and specific pedagogical strategies. Resources are a further constraint: Kiswahili instruction in Kenyan secondary schools has been described as heavily textbook-driven (Akala & Mulwa, 2017), and teachers report difficulty preparing and using instructional media (Ayoti & Moses, 2013), a particular limitation for performance-based strands such as oral literature and poetry.

Professional development models

Evidence from many systems shows that professional development changes practice when it is content-focused, active, collaborative, coached and sustained (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Coaching in particular has substantial effects on instruction (Kraft et al., 2018), and professional learning communities improve practice when teachers jointly examine classroom evidence (Vescio et al., 2008). From a sociocultural view, teachers learn, as learners do, through interaction with more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). These principles guide the interpretation of teachers' stated preferences in this study.

Methodology

Design, setting and participants

A descriptive convergent mixed-methods design was used (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The study took place in the 62 Junior School centres of Nyamache Sub-County, a largely rural area across four educational zones (Gesario, Kiokio, Men and Nyago). It was selected for its erratic enrolment, linked to teacher–parent disputes and frequent learner transfers, and for below-average KPSEA results (Kisii County Director of Education, 2023). Class sizes vary widely, with some teachers managing more than 50 learners and others fewer than 30 (Ministry of Education, 2023). In the 2022 KPSEA, 8 of the 62 centres were below expectations, 33 approaching, 17 meeting and 4 exceeding expectations, and 37 centres enrolled more than 40 learners (Sub-County Director of Education, 2023). Of 90 questionnaires distributed to Grade 7 and 8 Kiswahili teachers (population 106), 77 were returned (85.6%). Twelve teachers were purposively selected for interviews and for three observed lessons each (36 lessons), a number consistent with the point at which saturation is typically reached in homogeneous purposive samples (Guest et al., 2006). All four Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) were interviewed.

Instruments

Questionnaire. Adapted from the TPACK-Deep scale (Kabakçı Yurdakul et al., 2012) and written in Kiswahili. Pedagogy items covered the strands taught most, enjoyment of teaching each strand, frequency of teaching methods, reasons for preferring or avoiding methods, and

use of teaching resources. Content items covered resources used for each literary and language strand, use of planning documents, the CBE core competencies developed through Kiswahili, teaching and learning techniques, and the influence of CBE induction training.

Interviews. Semi-structured guides asked teachers about their main methods, classroom management challenges, assessment, content difficulties, resource sources, and preferred forms of support.

Observation checklist. A 22-item present/absent checklist adapted from the Classroom Observation Tool for Language Instruction (COTLI) developed by ACTFL, and modified for Junior School Kiswahili, had six sections: lesson planning (3 items), classroom management (3), teaching strategies (7), assessment and feedback (3), technology integration (2), and use of Kiswahili language resources (4: appropriate use, frequent use, incorporation of cultural references, and encouraging learners to communicate in Kiswahili). Two further items — monitoring, and support in content preparation and delivery — were recorded on the observation record alongside the checklist; they are reported but marked as supplementary. Domain composite scores were computed for each lesson topic (*mada*).

Validity and reliability

Three Maseno University specialists reviewed all instruments, followed by a pilot with 10 teachers and 1 CSO. Test–retest reliability was $r = .724$ ($p = .018$). Two trained observers independently coded all 36 lessons, with $\kappa = .801$ (95.1% agreement over 792 item-observations).

Analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed descriptively in SPSS. For each TPACK domain a Need Index was computed: negatively worded items were reverse-coded, each respondent's items were averaged, and the composite was min–max normalised to a 0–1 scale where higher values indicate greater need. Interview and open-ended data were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with Kiswahili responses translated during analysis. Findings from the three sources were compared to identify convergence, complementarity and divergence.

Ethics

The Maseno University Scientific and Ethics Review Committee approved the study and NACOSTI issued a research licence. Participants gave informed consent and were told the study was developmental, not evaluative. Questionnaires were anonymous and interviewees are identified by codes. No data were collected on learners.

Results: Pedagogical Needs

Aggregate need

The Pedagogical Need Index was $M = 0.366$ ($SD = 0.142$), the lowest of the three TPACK domains, compared with content ($M = 0.391$, $SD = 0.234$) and technology ($M = 0.527$, $SD = 0.162$). Teachers therefore saw pedagogy as their relative strength.

Methods and emphasis

Discussion (*majadiliano*) was the most frequently used method, used "often" by 81.8% of teachers, and lecture (*mhadhara*) the least, used often by 16.9% (Figure 2). Grammar (*sarufi*)

was the most emphasised strand (44.2% of teachers), followed by literature (36.4%) and language (28.6%), then communication (18.2%) and composition (16.9%); culture (*utamaduni*) was least emphasised (14.3%). On a five-point scale, teachers enjoyed teaching grammar most (M = 4.55, SD = 0.77), followed by oral literature (M = 4.21) and literary texts (M = 4.12); poetry (M = 3.97) and composition (M = 3.77, SD = 0.84) were enjoyed least. Nearly all teachers (74 of 77; 96.1%) used teaching resources.

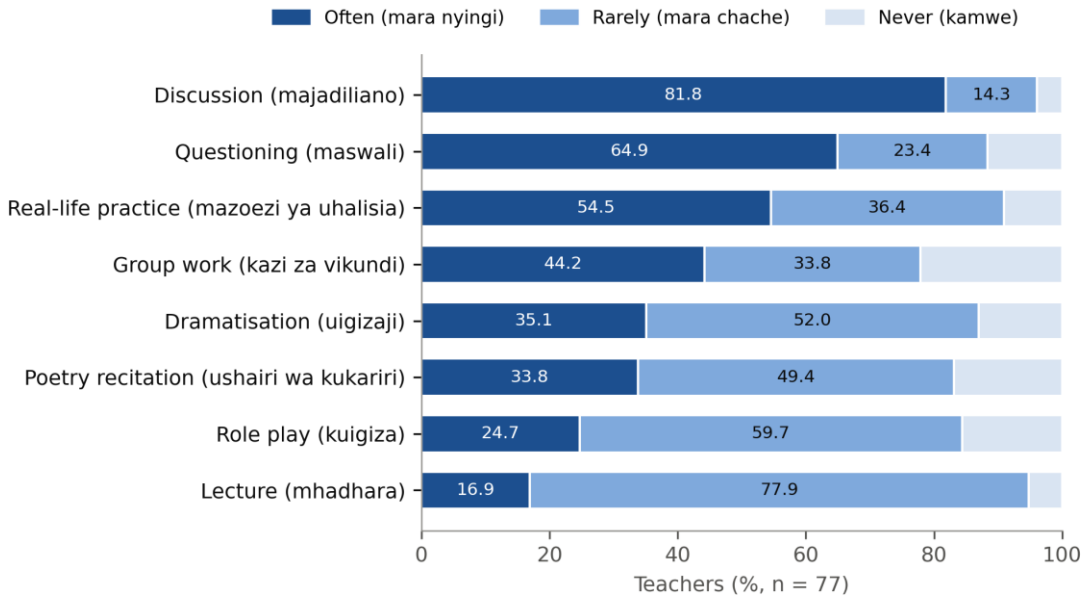


Figure 2. Frequency of use of teaching methods (% of teachers, n = 77)
Note. Kiswahili response labels in parentheses.

For developing CBE competencies specifically, however, the most frequent *teaching* techniques were demonstration and teacher exposition (both M = 3.68), and the least frequent was debate (M = 3.05). Among *learning* techniques, discussion was most frequent (M = 3.91) and problem-solving least (M = 3.45). Teachers rated CBE induction training as having most influenced their learner assessment (M = 3.66) and least influenced their lesson delivery (M = 3.35).

Table 1
Techniques used to develop CBE competencies and perceived influence of CBE induction training (n = 77)

Area	Item	Mean
Teaching techniques	Teacher exposition	3.68
Teaching techniques	Demonstration	3.68
Teaching techniques	Experiments	3.40
Teaching techniques	Projects	3.35
Teaching techniques	Role play	3.23
Teaching techniques	Field trips	3.08
Teaching techniques	Debates	3.05
Learning techniques	Discussion	3.91
Learning techniques	Answering questions	3.84
Learning techniques	Learning by doing	3.74
Learning techniques	Problem-solving	3.45
Influence of CBE induction	Learner assessment	3.66

Area	Item	Mean
Influence of CBE induction	Preparing teaching materials	3.60
Influence of CBE induction	Lesson planning	3.56
Influence of CBE induction	Preparing schemes of work	3.52
Influence of CBE induction	Teaching with technology	3.39
Influence of CBE induction	Lesson delivery	3.35

Note. Higher means indicate more frequent use or greater perceived influence.

Asked why they avoided certain methods, teachers cited time above all: role-play and group work were seen as taking longer than a lesson allows and as harder to manage with lower-achieving learners.

Teachers' accounts

Table 2

Pedagogy themes from teacher interviews (n = 12)

Theme	Teachers	%
Primary method learner-centred (discussion, role play, inquiry, cooperative learning)	12	100.0
Requested CBE-aligned assessment training	5	41.7
Large class size a top management challenge	3	25.0
Time constraints a top challenge	3	25.0
Learner discipline a top challenge	2	16.7
Primary method lecture/teacher-centred	0	0.0

"My classes often have between 45 and 55 learners, making it difficult to give individual attention to every learner." (T5)

All 12 teachers described learner-centred, participatory methods as their main approach, and none named lecture as a preferred or primary method. T5, for example, described organising "debates, storytelling competitions, poetry recitations, role plays, dramatization, group discussions, educational games, peer teaching, and collaborative projects." The constraints teachers named were practical rather than a lack of skill or willingness: large classes and time pressure were each raised by three teachers, and learner discipline by two.

Observed practice

Table 3 shows the proportion of the 36 observed lessons in which each pedagogical practice was recorded. Practice was near-universal at the planning stage and weakened as lessons moved toward monitoring, management and assessment.

Table 3

Observed pedagogical practice (36 lessons)

Section	Practice	% of lessons
Lesson planning	Clear learning objective	100.0
Lesson planning	Well-organised lesson plan	100.0
Lesson planning	Appropriate instructional materials	97.2
Classroom management	Positive learning environment	97.2
Classroom management	Student engagement techniques	72.2
Classroom management	Effective behaviour management	66.7
Teaching strategies	Effective content delivery	97.2
Teaching strategies	Differentiated instruction	97.2
Teaching strategies	Encourages participation and questions	97.2

Section	Practice	% of lessons
Teaching strategies	Variety of strategies	94.4
Teaching strategies	Lesson presented clearly	94.4
Teaching strategies	Appropriate teaching aids	83.3
Teaching strategies	Student involvement	83.3
Assessment and feedback	Uses assessment to adjust instruction	75.0
Assessment and feedback	Constructive feedback	66.7
Assessment and feedback	Formative assessment	63.9
Supplementary[a]	Support in content preparation and delivery	97.2
Supplementary[a]	Monitoring	58.3

[a] Recorded on the observation record alongside the 22-item checklist; not included in the inter-rater reliability estimate.

Teaching strategy items ranged from 83.3% to 97.2%, whereas the three assessment and feedback items averaged 68.5%, the weakest section.

Integration of the strands

Convergence. Questionnaire, interviews and observation agree that instruction is discussion-driven: discussion was the most-used method (81.8%), all interviewees described learner-centred approaches, and participation was encouraged in 97.2% of lessons.

Complementarity. The questionnaire showed that time limited the use of role-play and group work; interviews specified why — classes of 45 to 55 learners and short lessons.

Divergence. Observation surfaced weaknesses the self-report did not. Teachers rated assessment as the area CBE training had most improved, yet formative assessment and feedback were among the least observed practices. Similarly, while no interviewee named lecturing as a main method, teacher exposition was among the most-used techniques for developing competencies.

Results: Content Knowledge Needs

Aggregate need

The Content Knowledge Need Index was M = 0.391 (SD = 0.234): higher than pedagogy, lower than technology, and the most variable of the three, suggesting that content needs differ considerably between teachers.

Resources by strand

Table 4 shows which resources teachers used for each strand. Grammar relied heavily on the Kiswahili textbook (64.9%). Oral literature drew on radio and field trips (61.0% each). Composition was the only strand where resource persons or Kiswahili scholars (*wasomi wa Kiswahili*, 61.0%) outranked the textbook. Poetry (*ushairi*) had the lowest use of six of the seven resources and never exceeded 28.6%.

Table 4
Resources used by strand, n (%) of 77 teachers

Resource	Grammar	Composition	Oral literature	Written literature	Poetry
Kiswahili textbook	50 (64.9)	41 (53.2)	39 (50.6)	33 (42.9)	22 (28.6)
Newspapers (*Taifa Leo*)	18 (23.4)	38 (49.4)	46 (59.7)	38 (49.4)	10 (13.0)
Pictures	19 (24.7)	40 (51.9)	40 (51.9)	33 (42.9)	18 (23.4)
Audio (radio)	24 (31.2)	35 (45.5)	47 (61.0)	21 (27.3)	20 (26.0)
Video and television	14 (18.2)	35 (45.5)	40 (51.9)	37 (48.1)	13 (16.9)
Kiswahili scholars / resource persons	18 (23.4)	47 (61.0)	26 (33.8)	35 (45.5)	19 (24.7)
Field trips	19 (24.7)	30 (39.0)	47 (61.0)	34 (44.2)	18 (23.4)

Interviews explained how teachers obtain materials. All twelve used Sub-County and Junior School Kiswahili WhatsApp groups as their main channel, collaborated within their departments, and consulted teachers with national examiner experience for assessment materials. When asked which strand shared resources had helped, three named oral literature, two grammar, two composition — and none named poetry.

Planning and competencies

Almost all teachers (98.7%) planned before teaching. The curriculum design was consulted regularly by 83.1% and lesson plans by 62.3%, but schemes of work by only 39.0%, and 18.2% had never used a written lesson plan (Table 5). Teachers rated collaboration (M = 3.61), creativity (M = 3.52) and problem-solving (M = 3.52) as the CBE competencies Kiswahili most develops, and citizenship (M = 3.18) as the least. Teachers' recommendations centred on more instructional resources, more lesson time for Kiswahili, and greater emphasis on literature.

Table 5
Use of planning documents, n (%) of 77 teachers

Document	Regularly	Rarely	Never
Curriculum design (*mtaala*)	64 (83.1)	11 (14.3)	2 (2.6)
Lesson plan (*mpango wa somo*)	48 (62.3)	15 (19.5)	14 (18.2)
Learner progress record	39 (50.6)	28 (36.4)	10 (13.0)
Record of work covered	38 (49.4)	29 (37.7)	10 (13.0)
Scheme of work (*mpango wa kazi*)	30 (39.0)	43 (55.8)	4 (5.2)

Teachers' accounts

Table 6
Content themes from teacher interviews (n = 12)

Theme	Teachers	%
Inadequate print or digital materials as main content challenge	12	100.0
Reported integrating cultural/indigenous knowledge	12	100.0
Reported cross-curricular integration	12	100.0

Theme	Teachers	%
Wanted PLCs, peer observation and lesson study	10	83.3
Wanted mentoring or coaching by experienced teachers or CSOs	10	83.3
Wanted CSOs/HODs to observe lessons and give feedback	7	58.3
Wanted more support for oral/integrated language skills	6	50.0
Wanted CSOs to shift from administrative supervision to instructional coaching	5	41.7
Wanted more support for literature	2	16.7
Wanted more support for grammar	2	16.7

"Limited availability of updated teaching materials is my biggest challenge." (T1)

All 12 interviewed teachers named inadequate print or digital materials as their main content challenge, and all said they integrated cultural and indigenous knowledge and linked Kiswahili to other learning areas. T5 described combining printed, digital and locally available resources, adding presentations, videos and podcasts "whenever technology is available". Half of the teachers asked for more support in oral and integrated language skills, and two each asked for support in literature and grammar, so requests for help centred on materials and oral skills rather than on core grammar or literature content.

Observed content practice

Of the four Kiswahili-resource items, appropriate use of Kiswahili resources and encouraging learners to communicate in Kiswahili were each recorded in 33 of 36 lessons (91.7%), and frequent resource use in 31 (86.1%). Incorporation of cultural references was recorded in only 21 lessons (58.3%), the joint-lowest item on the observation record. Table 7 breaks content practice down by strand.

Table 7
Observed Kiswahili resource use and cultural references, by strand (% of lessons)

Strand	Lessons	Appropriate resource use	Frequent resource use	Teaching aids used	Cultural references
Grammar	9	88.9	77.8	55.6	0.0
Composition	5	100.0	100.0	100.0	80.0
Oral literature	4	75.0	75.0	100.0	75.0
Written literature	5	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Poetry	4	75.0	50.0	50.0	50.0

Across all eight lesson topics, the content-domain composite was lowest in poetry (56.3%) and grammar (63.9%) and highest in written literature and culture (100% each); the overall content composite was 81.9%, against 86.6% for pedagogy and 91.7% for technology (Figure 3). Pedagogy and technology composites varied less across topics.

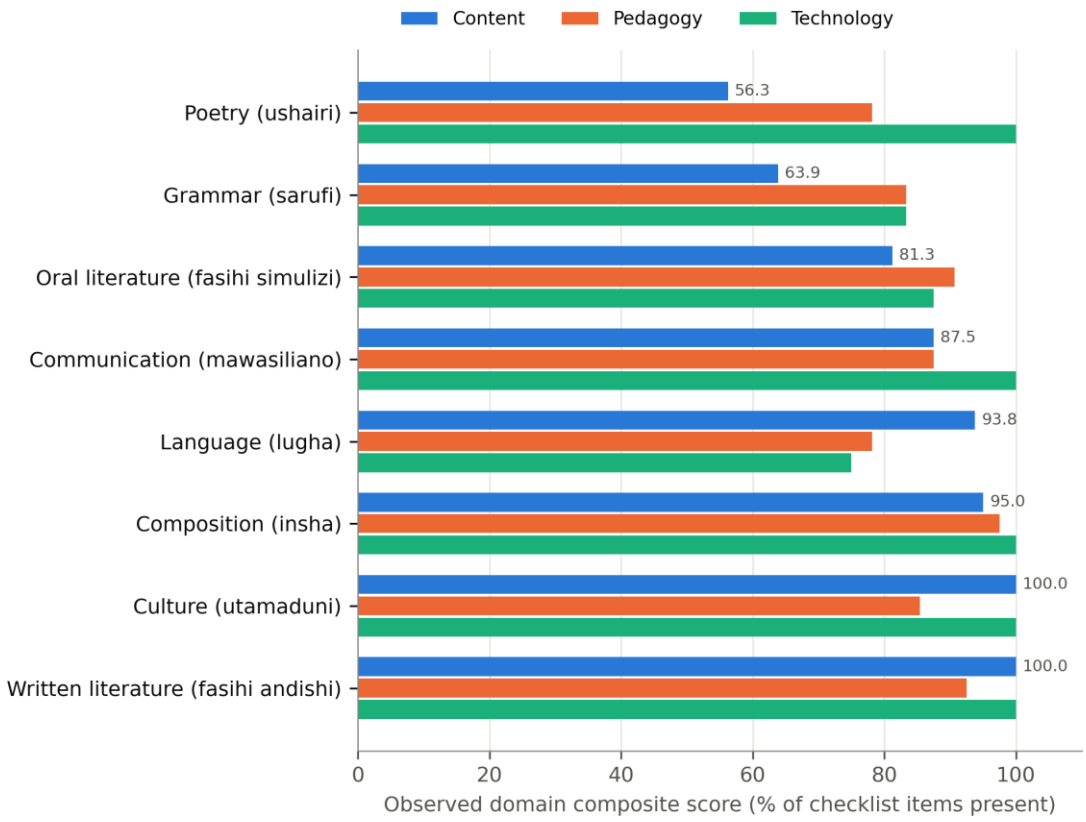


Figure 3 Observed domain composite scores by lesson topic (36 lessons)

Note. Lessons per topic: grammar 9, composition 5, written literature 5, oral literature 4, poetry 4, language 4, culture 3, communication 2. Scores for topics with few lessons are indicative only.

Integration of the strands

Convergence. Three independent sources identify poetry as the weakest strand: the lowest questionnaire resource use, no mention in interview accounts of shared resources, and the lowest observed content score.

Complementarity. Half of interviewees asked for help with integrated language skills, which helps explain why reading received the least technological support in the questionnaire (reported in a companion paper): the gap lies in how to teach skills together, not only in materials.

Divergence. Every interviewee said they integrate cultural knowledge, yet cultural references appeared in only 58.3% of observed lessons and in none of the nine grammar lessons. Grammar was also the most emphasised and most enjoyed strand, so the least contextualised teaching occurs where teachers spend the most time.

Discussion

A low average that hides a specific gap

Pedagogy had the lowest Need Index, and on most observed indicators teachers performed well. Planning, a positive climate, clear delivery and encouragement of participation were

close to universal. This is a genuine strength and a credit to earlier CBE preparation. But the aggregate masks a consistent pattern: practice is strongest when it can be prepared in advance and weakest when it depends on responding to learners in real time. Monitoring (58.3%, a supplementary item), formative assessment (63.9%), feedback (66.7%) and behaviour management (66.7%) all require the teacher to read the class and adjust.

This matters because formative assessment and feedback are among the strongest influences on learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and sit at the heart of CBE. Teachers appear aware of the need: 41.7% of interviewees asked for CBE-aligned assessment training. Yet they also rated assessment as the area their CBE induction had most improved. One interpretation is that induction improved teachers' knowledge of assessment *requirements* — rubrics, records, reporting — more than their *use* of assessment evidence during lessons. Professional development should therefore shift from assessment documentation to assessment for learning in the classroom.

Large classes help explain the gap. With 45 to 55 learners, circulating, checking understanding and giving individual feedback are hard, and group work is harder to manage. Training in formative assessment must therefore include techniques designed for large classes, such as whole-class response strategies, structured peer assessment and quick exit tasks.

Learner-centred in principle, mixed in practice

All twelve interviewees described their teaching as learner-centred and none named lecturing. The questionnaire largely agreed. Yet when asked specifically how they develop CBE competencies, teachers ranked demonstration and teacher exposition highest and debate lowest, and problem-solving was the least-used learning technique. Teachers may be combining brief exposition with discussion, which is reasonable, but the pattern also suggests some social desirability in interview accounts. The more demanding learner-centred techniques — debate, problem-solving, role-play — remain less common, largely because of time and class size.

Poetry: the most consistent content gap

Content need was moderate overall, but it was concentrated. Poetry was the least-resourced strand in the questionnaire, the only strand absent from teachers' accounts of shared resources, and the lowest-scoring topic in observation. This convergence across three independent sources makes *ushairi* the clearest content priority in the study. Teachers also enjoyed teaching poetry less than any strand except composition (M = 3.97).

The pattern is consistent with a PCK gap rather than a simple content gap (Shulman, 1986). Teachers found resources for oral literature (radio, field trips) and for composition (resource persons), showing they can match materials to strands, whereas grammar relied mainly on the textbook (64.9%), in line with descriptions of Kiswahili instruction as textbook-driven (Akala & Mulwa, 2017). For poetry, no equivalent solution had emerged. Poetry requires teachers to know the forms of Kiswahili verse and to have strategies for making prosody, imagery and meaning accessible — recitation, performance, audio recordings of poets, comparison with song, and learners' own composition. Without such strategies, poetry lessons fall back on the textbook, and teachers' informal networks, which work well for other strands, do not fill the gap.

Culture: professed but not practised in grammar

Every interviewee said they integrated cultural knowledge, yet cultural references appeared in only 58.3% of lessons — the weakest item on the whole checklist — and in none of the nine grammar lessons. Grammar was also the strand teachers taught most and enjoyed most. The result is that the most frequent Kiswahili lessons are also the least culturally grounded. Culturally responsive pedagogy suggests that grammar taught through proverbs, oral narrative and authentic community language would be more meaningful to learners (Gay, 2018). Integrating culture into grammar is a specific PCK skill that professional development can model directly.

The low weighting of culture in the curriculum emphasis data (14.3%) and in observed lesson topics (3 of 36 lessons, 8.3%), together with the low rating of citizenship among competencies (M = 3.18), point the same way. Both are areas where Kiswahili is well placed to contribute, and both are under-used.

The kind of support teachers want

Teachers' preferences make most sense against their experience of training so far. In the wider study, 36 of the 77 questionnaire respondents (46.8%) had received in-service training and 41 (53.2%) had not, while 9 of the 12 interviewees (75%) had. Among those who had not attended, the most common reason was not knowing about, or not being invited to, training (15 responses), followed by the absence of any offered training and financial constraints (8 each; Table 8). As one teacher wrote, "I have never been invited to attend one." Participation was therefore limited more by institutional barriers than by unwillingness to learn.

Table 8

Teachers' experience of in-service training

Aspect	**Theme**	**n**	**%**
Participation (questionnaire, n = 77)	Had received in-service training	36	46.8
	Had not received training	41	53.2
Reasons for not attending	Not aware of, invited to or selected for training	15	38
	No training offered	8	20
	Financial constraints	8	20
	Scheduling or logistical conflicts	5	13
Strengths of training attended	Improved subject or pedagogical knowledge	12	27
	Interactive, learner-centred pedagogy	7	16
	Practical, relevant content	7	16
Weaknesses of training attended	Time constraints	17	39
	Resource or infrastructure limitations	9	20
	Theory-heavy, little practical exposure	4	9
	Lack of follow-up support	2	5

Note. Percentages for reasons, strengths and weaknesses are shares of coded responses to open-ended questionnaire items, as reported in the wider study. Strengths related to digital skills (20%) are reported in the companion technology paper.

Teachers who had attended valued gains in subject and pedagogical knowledge (27% of coded responses) and learner-centred, practical content (16% each). The weaknesses they named, however, were largely structural: too little time (39%), limited resources (20%), too much theory (9%) and little follow-up (5%). These are the features that research links to the limited effect of short, one-off events (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2002).

Against this background, teachers asked for professional learning communities, peer observation, lesson study and mentoring (83.3% each), and 41.7% wanted CSOs to move from administrative supervision to instructional coaching. The four Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs) interviewed agreed: all emphasised learner-centred, competency-based pedagogy, coaching and mentoring through professional learning communities, and continuous rather than one-off professional development, and three (75%) named funding and ICT infrastructure as preconditions for success. All four also called for multi-stakeholder collaboration in implementation. These preferences match the evidence on effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and on coaching in particular (Kraft et al., 2018). They also fit the gaps observed: responsiveness, feedback and cultural integration are best learned by watching, trying and being observed, not by attending a lecture on them (Guskey, 2002). Teachers' existing WhatsApp groups offer a base that could be extended to poetry resources and assessment exemplars.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Junior School Kiswahili teachers in Nyamache Sub-County have a sound pedagogical base and workable content knowledge. Their needs are not general but specific: using assessment evidence during lessons, giving feedback, managing large classes, teaching poetry, and grounding grammar in culture. Generic CBE workshops that re-teach lesson planning and learner-centred methods will add little. Eight recommendations follow.

1. **Shift assessment training from documentation to classroom practice.** KICD and KNEC should provide Kiswahili exemplars of formative assessment — questioning routines, oral-performance rubrics, peer assessment and feedback protocols — designed for classes of 45 or more.
2. **Make poetry a professional development priority.** CSOs and teacher educators should develop and share a *ushairi* resource bank (audio recordings, performance tasks, annotated poems) and run lesson study cycles on poetry.
3. **Model culturally grounded grammar.** Training should show how to teach *sarufi* through proverbs, oral narrative and authentic texts, so that culture is integrated where teachers spend most time.
4. **Move CSOs toward instructional coaching.** CSO visits should include observation, a post-lesson conference and agreed targets, as teachers requested, rather than document checks alone.
5. **Formalise teachers' networks.** Existing Kiswahili WhatsApp groups can become moderated professional learning communities, with quality-checked materials for under-served strands.
6. **Institutionalise needs-based development as a termly cycle.** The Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education should set training priorities from regular needs assessment and follow each training with classroom implementation, coaching, observation and feedback, rather than isolated workshops.

7. **Protect time for school-based learning.** Head teachers should timetable peer observation, mentoring and lesson study, and heads of department should use classroom evidence to set focused goals in formative assessment, feedback, behaviour management and cultural integration.
8. **Strengthen preparation in teacher-training institutions.** Pre-service and in-service courses should include competency-based assessment, differentiated instruction, large-class management and culturally responsive, integrated language teaching.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study was confined to one sub-county. Questionnaire and interview data are self-reported, and the gap between reported and observed cultural integration suggests some social desirability. The Need Indices are descriptive and were not tested for statistical differences. Kiswahili-specific studies of Junior School under CBE are few, so part of the supporting literature comes from other learning areas, particularly English. Future research should test targeted interventions — for example, lesson study on poetry or coaching in formative assessment — using quasi-experimental designs with learner outcome measures. Repeating the needs assessment in other sub-counties would show how far the findings transfer across resource contexts, and following teachers over time would allow participation in targeted professional development to be linked to learner achievement.

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