



## USE OF COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A STUDY OF TEACHER PRACTICES IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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### **Abstract:**

Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) is one of the key elements of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya, and it is based on the idea that the learners should be evaluated as able to use knowledge and skills in real-life situations instead of remembering information they learned by heart. As put across by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), CBA is defined as the ability to use a collection of related knowledge, skills and abilities to properly complete some important tasks in a given environment. Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF, 2019) makes CBA one of the central changes to implement formative assessment practices in ways that would support the adoption of diagnostic methods to advance learning and increase outcomes. CBA is a key factor in pre-primary education, which helps to develop competencies that are important in lifelong learning. However, despite national policies, empirical data from different counties show implementation challenges. This research explored the extent to which pre-primary school teachers utilising competency-based assessment methods in their classrooms in Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County. The research design used was descriptive survey research with a mixed methodology where 202 primary schools, 384 pre-primary teachers and 202 head teachers were to be targeted. Multiple stages of sampling were used to select a sample for the study, and data were gathered through the use of questionnaires, interview schedules, and observation checklists. Analysis of quantitative data was conducted using descriptive statistics of

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frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, and analysis of qualitative data was conducted thematically. The results indicated that teachers' use of CBA was average due to many challenges. The study recommended that, to enhance the use of CBA, teachers should be trained regularly, resource availability should be improved, and county governments and school administrators should provide more support for the implementation of CBA in pre-primary schools.

**Keywords:** competency-based assessment, pre-primary school, teacher practices, Makueni County, CBC implementation

## 1. Introduction

Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) is a paradigm shift from the old norm-referenced assessment methods, which mainly emphasized the memorization of knowledge and the ranking of students. As defined by the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC, 2021), CBA is a systematic and deliberate continuous process of the collection of information in various sources in order to make decisions about what learners know and need to learn, what they have learned and can do. It entails developing avenues where the learner can make use of the acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in coming up with solutions to real-life challenges. This is unlike traditional examinations, which are normally one-time exams, administered after learning has occurred and have been mainly based on theory to confer certification.

CBA is significant in education to diagnose and track the progress of learners, feed-back and learners, parents, teachers and curriculum developers, guide selection and future study, and certification and promotion (KICD, 2019). In addition, competency-based assessment is seen as a major reformation that can bring formative assessment practices that can be adopted to advance diagnostic approaches that contribute to learning and better outcomes (BECF, 2019).

The shift towards competency-based education has become a trend worldwide as nations strive to equip their students with current skills to work in the current business environment. For instance, in China, the instructional design competence of pre-service preschool teachers has been improved significantly as a result of TPACK-based courses. Nonetheless, the studies show that at the initial phase of professional development, competency development has simplification, linearity, and dogmatism properties, which imply that building assessment competencies will need long-term and systematized professional assistance (Ren, Chano & Saihong, 2025). Likewise, teacher teachers in Vietnam have serious problems in preparing pre-service primary school teachers for competency-based education, such as the inability to understand the basics of CBE, an inability to match teaching practice with assessment, and the inability to build interdisciplinary competencies of teachers because of traditional practices in education and scarcity of resources (Phan, 2025).

Regionally, it is reported that there are very high discrepancies in the application of the Competency-Based Assessment (CBA), as in some instances, traditional examinations are still in use. In Rwanda, an example of this finding, the Rwanda Task Force Report (2019) has determined that many schools have the potential to achieve formative assessment; however, they are not equipped to do so due to the official policies that acknowledge its importance in the school. The lack of knowledge in teachers, as well as resources, only worsens this difficulty. Equally, according to reports by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE, 2013) and Paulo (2014), most educators in Tanzania still employ old-fashioned and traditional modes of assessment, despite reforms in the curriculum (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). An overview of these studies reveals that there are general issues that have impacted CBA uptake, with the first one being an over-dependence on exams, teacher capacity and lack of resources. This situation prompted the need to conduct research to establish whether Kenyan schools are encountering similar problems in their application of CBA.

The education sector of Kenya has seen another revolution with the adoption of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) to replace the 8-4-4 curriculum in 2017. This change will advance the quality of education by refocusing on the attainment of knowledge and switching to the design and real-life application of knowledge and skills (Adongo, Opiyo & Ouda, 2025). At the heart of this reform is Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) that puts an emphasis on the assessment of the abilities of the learners to prove their competencies, as opposed to just memorizing the facts. The Competency-Based Assessment Framework of Early Years Education, developed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), describes the particular assessment methods, such as the application of observation, portfolios, checklists, and anecdotal records, that will ensure the comprehensive development of learners in different areas (UNESCO, 2021).

Recent studies in Kenya have shown worrying trends as far as CBA implementation is concerned. In a study by Warui (2025) conducted in the county of Nyeri, on the role of school-related variables in the use of CBA in pre-primary schools, it was observed that most teachers continue to use old norm-referenced tests that are not in correlation with the requirements of CBC. The research found that the motivation to practice CBA was low because of the lack of training, low-quality instructional material, a deficiency of infrastructure and teaching resources. Correlation analysis revealed significant negative correlations between teacher motivation and CBA use (-.797) and between resource availability and CBA use (-.584), indicating that these variables have strong effects on assessment practices.

In the case of Baringo County, Mutai (2024) has noted that numerous teachers still use to conduct traditional examinations, which are not as per the planned policy framework. On the same note, as Waweru (2018), KNUT (2019), and Harriet (2021) state, there is still a prevalence of tests in the assessment practices, indicating a sluggish or inefficient adoption of the CBA. The same tendency can be followed in the works of Ntwiga and Mwangi (2018), who observed that the majority of teachers use termly

written tests extensively, paying little or no attention to other crucial areas of learner development. These results support the importance of the present research study that aimed to examine the extent of use of CBA in pre-primary educational institutions. Further, a survey carried out in Baringo county on pedagogical skills and their implementation by teachers in Early Years Education in classroom assessment practices. (Kenyatta University, 2024). The results indicated that although 53.57 percent of teachers had to make a plan to evaluate learners with disabilities, 79 percent strongly depended on written assessment to evaluate their learners, and only 31.31 percent directed learners in making portfolios of showcase. The research reached a conclusion that teachers failed to employ diverse authentic assessment practices, and classroom assessment was not being done as suggested in the Competency-Based Assessment Framework.

The Makueni County, which is found in the Eastern Region of Kenya, has in practice initiated the Competency-Based Curriculum in the pre-primary schools within the county coordinated by the county government through the department of education and early childhood development. There is an indication that the county has been keen on early childhood education, and that this is depicted by the assurance of 959 teachers who participated in the program into permanent and pensionable employment, as well as a partnership with UNICEF to hold capacity building workshops among teachers in the Kilome, Kibwezi West and Kibwezi East (County Government of Makueni, 2025). The policy on Makueni County Education and Training (2022) describes the county as being dedicated to quality education and to assist the implementation of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the level of CBA use by teachers in classroom practices is not clear, despite these efforts.

Makokha (2024) evaluated the teacher preparedness towards Competency-Based Curriculum performance in the public junior secondary schools in Makindu Sub-County in Makueni County. The research found out that the majority of teachers in junior secondary schools were not familiar with the CBC system of education, and they were not well-equipped to apply the CBC. The study found such problems as designing assessments, fair grading, individualized assessment, access to assessment materials, and sufficient time to assess. Nonetheless, this research was on junior secondary schools and not on pre-primary and focused on teacher preparedness and not the extent of CBA usage; hence, the need for this study to establish the use of CBA in pre-primary schools in Makueni County.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Competency-based assessment in Kenyan pre-primary schools is essential in realizing the objectives of the Competency-Based Curriculum. CBA is more concerned with the capacity of learners to manifest competencies, which offers a more complete and valid representation of learner growth as opposed to the conventional evaluation procedures; however, even with the national policy directives and reforms of the curriculum, the

empirical research in different counties suggests that CBA implementation is fraught with issues.

Research conducted in Kenya noted that a large number of pre-primary teachers still use out-of-date norm-referenced tests that are not compatible with CBC requirements. All these studies bring about a trend of implementation issues in various counties hence indicating that the shift to CBA has not been equally effective. Nonetheless, no empirical studies have been conducted any specific study on the level of CBA use in pre-primary school teachers within Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County.

The research was thus aimed to fill this gap by determining the level at which the Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County-based teachers in pre-primary schools use competency-based assessment procedures in their classroom practices.

### **2.1 Research Objective**

To determine the level to which pre-primary school educators in Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County, use a competency-based assessment approach in their classrooms.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The present study was informed by the Educational Change Model developed by Michael Fullan (1991) that offers a framework through which the application of educational innovations can be explained. According to Fullan, effective education change should involve consideration of three stages: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. The model establishes the key variables that play a role in the implementation, and these include the nature of the change (need, clarity, complexity, quality), the local variables (district, community, principal, teachers), and external variables (government policies, support agencies). This framework is especially applicable in the context of determining the adoption of CBA practices by pre-primary teachers based in Kibwezi West Sub-County and the contributing factors. The model recommends that CBA should be implemented properly to ensure that the teachers realise that the change is necessary, they should be properly instructed about the assessment practices, and they should have sufficient support at the school level and outside agencies.

### **4. Literature Review**

Competency-Based Assessment (CBA) is a paradigm shift that is a departure from the conventional norm-referenced assessment methods that emphasized mainly knowledge recall and ranking of students. KNEC (2021) defines CBA as a deliberate, systematic, ongoing process of collecting information by more than one source to make decisions about what learners know, need to learn, learned and can do. Similarly, the Basic

Education Curriculum Framework (BECF, 2019) characterizes competency-based assessment as one of the main reforms to support the adoption of formative assessment practices to promote the use of diagnostic approaches to improve learning and its results. The framework also explains that competencies are to be evaluated over a time period, with the focus no longer being on high-stakes examinations but on formative assessment.

There are several very important roles of assessment in education. KICD (2019) asserts that assessment aids in diagnosis and tracking of progress of a learner, offers feedback to the learners, parents, teachers and curriculum developers and implementers, direct choices as well as future courses, and enables certification and advancement to the next level of development.

The tendency towards competency-based education has become a travel wave in different parts of the world as countries are trying to prepare students with the latest skills to work in the modern world of business. Nevertheless, research studies suggest that the extent of implementation is different in different settings. In China, for example, Ren, Chano and Saihong (2025) investigated the teaching and learning design skills of pre-service preschool teachers based on TPACK-based courses in China. The research concluded that although competency-based approaches are introduced, in the first stage of the professional development, competency development is simplified, linear and dogmatic. This means that the development of assessment competencies takes long-term and systematic professional support. This research found that pre-service teachers only showed moderate levels of competence in planning and implementing assessment practices, and several of them have difficulty going beyond basic, mechanical use of assessment tools.

In Australia, Molloy (2024) examined how early school educators struggle with the challenge of preparing learners to participate in performance-based assessment and, at the same time, uphold a pedagogic responsibility to prepare competency-based assessment. The paper has found tension in how the students are prepared to take high-stakes assessments and how they would be prepared to take authentic competency-based approaches. Teachers claimed that external accountability measures could have pressure on them, which usually motivated them to focus more on traditional assessment techniques rather than more formative ones, which are more competency-based. This research indicated that although the policy supported CBA, its application was not complete and widespread, as teachers applied competency-based approaches selectively and inconsistently to training pre-service teachers in primary schools. The researchers discovered that even teacher educators were inconsistently aware of the CBE principles and could not align activities in teaching to assessments. The level at which competency-based assessment was modelled in teacher preparation programs was also found to be minimal since most teacher educators were using the traditional assessment methodologies, although they championed the use of competency-based assessment. This has caused a disconnect between what pre-service teachers were learning and what they learned during training in Nyeri County. Research by Warui (2025) was aimed at identifying how much CBA was used in both public and privately-run pre-primary

schools. The research design used was the descriptive correlational study, where 63 teachers and 22 head teachers were used as the sample size. The results found out that the average mean of the CBA application in both public and private schools did not differ significantly ( $p$ -value .731), hence, both school types encountered equal difficulties in adopting CBA. The research also made significant negative correlations between teacher motivation and CBA use (-.797) and between resource availability and CBA use (-.584), indicating that the low motivation and lack of resources significantly impeded the implementation of CBA in Early Years Education. In Baringo County, Mutai (2024) found out that the written tests were the most used method to evaluate their learners by 79 percent of teachers, and only 31.31 percent of teachers instructed their learners to create showcase portfolios. Further, teachers did not apply a range of genuine assessments; classroom assessment was not applied as suggested under the Competency-Based Assessment Framework, but rather, they had been performing conventional examinations. This has been attributed to the fact that, despite the changes in the curriculum, traditional ways of assessment are still being used, meaning that changes are being adopted slowly. The researchers observed that the level of CBA usage was still low a few years after the implementation of CBC, indicating that teacher assessment practices are difficult to transform. Likewise, Ntwiga and Mwangi (2018) used Kiambu County to study the assessment practice among early childhood education learners. The research established that the majority of the teachers give the learner termly written examinations with little or no attention given to other essential parts of learner development. The level of the CBA usage proved to be extremely low, and teachers paid almost all their attention to the cognitive development with written tests and dismissed the psychosocial, emotional, and physical aspects of the development.

Ismail, Shavega, and Kigobe (2024) investigated the capacity of pre-primary teachers in Tanzania to apply competency-based strategies. Using a descriptive case study design, which involved interviewing, observing and reviewing documents of 15 participants, comprising teachers, school heads, and quality assurance officers in the Dar es Salaam area, to acquire data. The thematic analysis of the data showed that most teachers were not proficient enough to use CBA and continued to use traditional instructional methods, including written exercises and examinations. The research suggested that the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should develop context-specific assessment strategies and instruments to fit pre-primary education. The research, however, was constrained by the qualitative nature, small sample size and geographic scope, which was within the Tanzanian territory. Conversely, the current research uses more data collection instruments (questionnaires) and a larger sample to ensure reliability.

Mogoro, Mushi, Makwinya, and Kalungwizi (2025) explored secondary school teachers' knowledge of skill-based assessment and its application in Tanzania using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model and constructivist theory. The study exhibited patterns and views by applying thematic analysis through semi-structured interviews among 16 teachers in eight randomly selected public schools. Results showed that the use of CBA

practices was low, leading to recommendations to improve teacher training, provide resources, and provide long-term support. However, the study's conclusions were based on a small qualitative sample and were limited to secondary education. The present research, in comparison, is focused on pre-primary school educators and is based on a mixed-method design and a larger and more varied sample to enhance the reliability and applicability of the data.

Mutiso and Odhiambo (2022) evaluated the teacher preparedness of alternative assessment approaches in Machakos County, specifically on the application of portfolios. The opinions of teachers about alternative assessment were positive, yet the usage of the latter was still restricted. The knowledge of using portfolio-based assessment was poor, and the mean use of CBA tools was moderate (mean = 3.0880). These results show that although the awareness of alternative assessment is growing, the practice is lagging in the classroom. In contrast to this study that concentrated on primary schools and teacher preparedness, the current study concentrates on pre-primary teachers and the specific challenges they are facing in implementing CBA.

## **5. Research Methodology**

### **5.1 Research Design**

The research design used was a descriptive survey research design, which was suitable for getting information about schools and teachers to demonstrate the current state of affairs. Apuke (2017) describes descriptive research design as appropriate to preliminary and exploratory research because it allows researchers to analyze associations between variables to explain phenomena.

### **5.2 Research Approach**

The study was considered to utilize a mixed-methods research design, and a concurrent triangulation design was followed (Creswell, 2015). Data were collected by use of questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists, which made it possible to collect in-depth and multifaceted information. The dependent variable was the use of CBA in pre-primary schools, and the independent variable was the CBA practices of teachers in pre-primary schools.

### **5.3 Location of the Study**

It was carried out in Makueni County, the Eastern region of Kenya, Kibwezi West Sub-County. This region was specifically chosen since CBA was still an issue, and teachers were reported to give exams rather than make assessments (Mathias, 2018). Moreover, there was no such study that was known to have been done in Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County.

#### **5.4 Target Population**

All 202 primary schools in Kibwezi West Sub-County, 151 public and 51 privates were included in the target population in this study. There were also 384 pre-primary teachers and 202 head teachers of primary school (Ministry of Education, 2020).

#### **5.5 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

The sampling technique used in the study was purposive sampling, where Kibwezi West Subcounty was chosen, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling of 15 percent of the total number of preschools were chosen. Overall, 31 preschools and 31 headteachers were randomly chosen out of 202 preschools. Sixty pre-primary teachers were used in the study.

#### **5.6 Data Collection Techniques**

Upon attaining the required approvals, the researcher made pre-test visits to the sampled schools to introduce the respondents to the study and clarify the purpose. To acquire information about physical facilities and teaching-learning materials, an observation checklist was employed, and the corresponding information was collected and recorded. The data collection methods employed were questionnaires and interviews carried out on the Pre-primary teachers and the head teachers, respectively.

#### **5.7 Data Analysis**

The data obtained in schools was tabulated, checked and purified to ensure that any inaccuracy or missing answers were pointed out. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations) were used to summarize the quantitative data. The outcomes of the analysis of data were presented in the form of frequency tables. Thematic and content analysis were used to analyze qualitative data of head teachers.

#### **5.8 Logistical and Ethical Issues**

An introductory letter to Kenyatta University Graduate School by the researcher was applied to obtain a research permit by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Then, consents to gather data in schools were obtained in the Makueni County and Kibwezi West Sub-County education offices. To increase the level of confidentiality, data collected through questionnaires and interviews were considered confidential and were only used for research purposes. Participants were given codes instead of real names to maintain anonymity, as they were not identified.

### **6. Findings and Discussion**

#### **6.1 Extent of Teachers Using CBA in Pre-primary Schools**

The research was conducted to determine the extent of CBA use among pre-primary teachers. Table 1 provides the results.

**Table 1: Frequency of Teachers' Use of CBA**

S. No.	Use of CBA	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	Use CBA to measure achievement of learning outcomes	1	1.7	6	10	18	30	35	58.3	60	100
2.	Use a variety of CBA methods to measure the achievement of competencies	1	1.7	12	20	13	21.7	34	56.7	60	100
3.	Use a variety of assessment methods for learners to demonstrate that they have acquired the set competencies.	0	0	11	18.3	23	38.3	26	43.3	60	100
4.	Provide continuous feedback to learners to help them learn more.	0	0	14	23.3	29	48.3	17	28.3	60	100
5.	Provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate mastery of their learning.	0	0	14	23.3	9	15	37	61.7	60	100
6.	Use formative assessment to monitor learning and provide feedback	0	0	4	6.7	28	46.7	28	46.7	60	100
7.	Use summative assessment to determine learners' achievement of set learning outcomes.	1	1.7	7	11.7	21	35	31	51.7	60	100
8.	Design CBA tests to measure children's learning	7	11.7	11	18.3	33	55	9	15	60	100
9.	Use CBA tools to measure children's learning	1	1.7	7	11.7	30	50	22	36.7	60	100
10.	Give feedback immediately to children's work during assessment	6	10	8	13.3	24	40	22	36.7	60	100

According to Table 1, the majority of teachers indicated that they used CBA with varying degrees of frequency, from sometimes to always. These results indicate that teachers had some amount of CBA implementation. To acquire more information about the general usage, the mean scores were calculated, and the findings are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Average Mean Scores in Teachers' Use of CBA in Pre-primary Schools**

S. No.	Use of CBA	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	1. Use CBA to measure achievement of learning outcomes	60	1	4	3.45	.746
2.	2. Use a variety of CBA methods to measure the achievement of competencies	60	1	4	3.33	.857
3.	3. Use a variety of assessment methods for learners to demonstrate that they have acquired the set competencies	60	2	4	3.25	.751
4.	4. Provide continuous feedback to learners to help them learn more	60	2	4	3.05	.723
5.	5. Provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate mastery of their learning	60	2	4	3.38	.846
6.	6. Use formative assessment to monitor learning and provide feedback	60	2	4	3.40	.616

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7.	7. Use summative assessment to determine learners' achievement of set learning outcomes	60	1	4	3.37	.758
8.	8. Design CBA tests to measure children's learning	60	1	4	2.80	1.086
9.	9. Use CBA tools to measure children's learning	60	1	4	3.28	.940
10.	10. Give feedback immediately to children's work during assessment	60	1	4	3.03	.956
	<b>Overall Mean</b>				<b>3.23</b>	

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean scores of the use of CBA by the teachers varied between 2.80 and 3.45, with the overall mean being 3.23. This average usage (mean=3.23 out of 4) means that although the teachers showed their understanding of CBA, its usage in the day-to-day teaching was irregular. Further breakdown of individual items showed that the pre-primary teachers were not doing well when it comes to designing CBA tools to measure the learning of children (mean=2.80), which was the lowest rated item. The finding implies that the suggested procedures that are recommended to determine the degree to which the learners have attained the determined outcomes have not been fully applied. Remarkably, most of the teachers who had been trained by the county government programs (County Government of Makueni, 2025) were unable to make proper use of CBA, despite the fact that 95 percent of all educators had been trained on the program.

These results are in line with those of Warui (2025), who discovered low motivation towards CBA because of the insufficiency of training, ineffective teaching material, absence of infrastructure, and insufficiency of teaching resources in Nyeri County. The research indicated that there were negative significant correlations between teacher motivation and CBA use (-.797) and resource availability and CBA use (-.584) which means that the two factors had significant effects on the assessment practices. Further, the study found that teachers had little knowledge about CBA and could not use it consistently because they were confused about its significance. Similarly, Mogoro, Mushi, Makwinya, and Kalungwizi (2025) explored the knowledge of skill-based assessment and its application by secondary school teachers in Tanzania using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model and the constructivist theory. The study exhibited patterns and views by applying thematic analysis through semi-structured interviews among 16 teachers in eight randomly selected public schools. Results showed that the use of CBA practices was low, which led to the recommendation of improvement in training of the teachers, provision of resources and long-term support.

In order to examine the factors that lead to the inability to use CBA effectively, the data from interviews and observations were reviewed and discussed. The observation checklist results indicated that half of the teachers lacked curriculum designs that should be used to direct assessment practices and as reference materials. This observation is alarming considering that the KICD-designed curriculum outline offers systematic instructions on the learning outcomes, proposed learning experience, and competency evaluation criteria (Teachers Kenya Hub, 2025). The lack of such documents could have

been a factor that caused a challenge in the design of suitable assessment tools by teachers.

The majority of head teachers (96.7%), stated that CBA also posed a great challenge to the teachers, and this perhaps was one of the reasons why it was not widely used and was not easy to develop tools. They observed that not all teachers were very familiar with CBA, and others had not mastered the art of creating the right assessment tools yet. Moreover, the high pupil-teacher ratios, time limitations and heavy workloads were also mentioned as the leading factors to low usage of CBA, as shown by some of their statements:

*"... The fact that most of the teachers show a low level of knowledge of how to use certain assessment tools indicates that the use and development of CBA might be extremely minimal. Some of the tools they do not understand how to interpret, hence they do not use them. They should have additional training on CBA. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Government School 2)*

*"... They are unfamiliar with the use and development of some of the CBA tools, such as journals. This implies that they fail to integrate different assessment tools in the process of teaching. Teachers are mostly dependent on exams that are mostly summative. They occasionally utilize CBA, but they simply do not have enough time, and the workload predetermines that they have no opportunity to develop and carrying out an assessment with each learner. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, State School. 1)*

*"... They rarely create assessment tools; however, as much as they use CBA on occasions, they have large classes, which cannot be used to assess a person individually. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Private School 3)*

Such qualitative results can be echoed by Phan (2025), who discovered that the teacher educators in Vietnam are struggling because of the systems of traditional education and the scarce resources they have to implement CBE. The observation that teachers do not use some assessment tools because of their limited understanding also concurs with Ren, Chano and Saihong (2025), who observed that in the early phase of the professional development process, competency growth is characterized by simplification as teachers tend to use assessment methods which are familiar and less complicated.

## **6.2 Frequency of Use of Specific CBA Tools**

The paper went further to review the particular CBA tools which are often utilized by teachers to measure the learning of children. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Teachers' Frequency of Use of CBA Tools**

S. No.	Tool	Yes		No		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	Oral questions	52	86.7	8	13.3	60	100
2.	Observation	49	81.7	11	18.3	60	100
3.	Exams	38	63.3	22	36.7	60	100
4.	Rubrics	35	58.3	25	41.7	60	100
5.	Written tests	33	55.0	27	45.0	60	100
6.	Portfolios	13	21.7	47	78.3	60	100
7.	Projects	6	10.0	54	90.0	60	100
8.	Practical work	6	10.0	54	90.0	60	100

Table 3 below represents the frequency of the most common CBA tools teachers used to evaluate children's learning, which were oral questions (86.7%), observation (81.7%), rubrics (58.3%), written tests (55%), and examinations (63.3%). This indicates that they are more likely to be used by the teachers in the evaluation of the learners. On the other hand, the most underutilized tools were portfolios (21.7%), projects (10%), and practical work (10%). According to the teachers, they preferred commonly used tools since it is less time-consuming to create, easier to administer, cheaper, and manageable due to their overworked workload.

These results are in line with Kenyatta University (2024) in Baringo County, which observed that 79 percent of the teachers put much emphasis on the written tests and just 31.31 percent encouraged learners to create showcase portfolios. The research found that there was not a range of authentic assessment models and classroom assessment was not in place recommended in Competency-Based Assessment Framework. In addition, a study in Baringo County in Kenya by Mutai (2024) found that that 79% of teachers were using written tests and only 31.31% of teachers used portfolios. The research concluded that the amount of CBA use remained low for a few years following the adoption of CBC.

Such findings, however, contradict Isaac et al (2024) findings partially, who indicated that oral/aural questions, rubrics and portfolios were widely used by teachers as compared to questionnaires, journals, anecdotal records, rating scales and observation checklists, whose usage was not rampant. It is possible that the difference can be due to contextual differences, such as differences in the training of teachers and access to resources in different regions.

In order to learn more about the preference of teachers towards some tools and not others, head teachers were interviewed. They stated that congested classes and an inadequate budget to fund the acquisition of files and other evaluation resources were some of the factors that led to the underutilization of more holistic CBA tools. The following are some of their sentiments:

*"... Others like observation, rubrics and oral questions are preferred by some teachers due to their ease of construction and usage. They are also not complex, particularly observation, which can be administered in large classes. One of the teachers is also untrained, and*

*applying oral questions appears easier as it is an easy technique. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Private School 3)*

*"... My instructors mainly rely on oral questions and observation, as these are the least complicated to develop and implement in their classes. (Head Teacher Pre-primary, Public School 8)*

*"...In my pre-primary classroom, oral questions and observation are more popular among teachers. They are not timely, but are user-friendly in administration. Educators do not do much marking, and as such, they like the approaches. They are also simple to build as per what has been learnt." (Pre-school Head Teacher, Public School 18)*

This paper also investigated with head teachers why portfolios, projects and practical work were not extensively used. Cost, especially in projects where learners are expected to buy some materials, was named as the main factor, lack of expertise on the part of the teacher in creating such tools and the long time it takes to create and make it a reality. The following sentiments by the head teachers were an indication of these:

*"... Exams and oral questions are simple to apply and less costly in comparison with the project approach and others. There are 21 learners in my teacher and the second teacher is on maternity leave, hence the current combination of the class. A single teacher cannot consistently compose and make use of rubrics. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Public School 9)*

*"...Parents do not encourage learning; some do not even want to purchase such simple things as files and books. Teachers also claim that journals and portfolios are complex. Moreover, there are classes of large size and only one teacher, and it would be time-consuming to record them without the required assessment materials." (Head, Pre-primary, Public School 4)*

*"... My community is illiterate, and parents do not support education much. Almost no projects and even practical activities are possible due to the claims of parents that they are not able to afford the items needed. Others hold off purchases, others do not contribute at all and some believe that teachers are in line with the aim of gaining personal interest and not with the purpose of learning. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Privatized School 3)*

*"... The teachers do not have sufficient assessment resources like books, pens, and colored files required for portfolios. Having a big class enrolment, it is difficult to monitor all learners on a regular basis, particularly in classes with mixed ability where workloads are very high. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Public School 18)*

*"... Observation is largely utilized by my pre-primary school teacher. Their knowledge and adequate skills make them rarely employ portfolios and project practices, as they are time-consuming. (Pre-primary Head Teacher, Public School 3)*

These qualitative results are consistent with the findings of Warui (2025) who cited poor training, instructional materials, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient teaching resources to be some of the challenges that plagued CBA implementation. The result that the teachers do not use portfolios and projects because of complexity and time also appeals to Phan (2025) because the teacher educators are unable to integrate interdisciplinary competencies because there are established conservative practices and a number of resources.

To have meaningful teaching and learning, there must be enough instructional materials. According to observable, the researcher found that the assessment books were inadequate in 63.3 percent of the schools that had them; 51.7 percent of learners did not have adequate exercise books. This implies that not all the learners had the required materials, and teachers did not have reference books, thus restraining the successful application of assessment tools, like portfolios and project work. The discovery is consistent with the study by Mauko, Barasa and Likoko (2025), which found that the use of instructional resources has a significant impact on learning outcomes in state-owned primary schools in Makueni County. The above findings agree with Ismail, Shavega, and Kigobe (2024), who discovered that most teachers were not adept enough to implement CBA and continued to use conventional methods of instruction that involved written activities and tests. Their thematic analysis also identified big gaps in teacher capacity to adopt competency-based approaches, which directly underpin head teacher observations of a lack of expertise.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Findings and Conclusions**

The aim of the research was to determine the extent to which pre-primary school teachers use CBA. Results indicated that the use of CBA is moderate, and there is not much success in designing CBA tools. Teachers favored oral questions, observation, rubrics, and written tests in comparison with the suggested CBA tools such as portfolios, projects, and practical work. It can be concluded that CBA in pre-primary schools in Kibwezi West Sub-County, Makueni County, has been implemented only to a small degree. Although the county government's efforts to train teachers and enhance their terms of employment (County Government of Makueni, 2025) have substantial gaps, there remains ample room for the practical application of competency-based assessment practices at the classroom level. The continuous use of the conventional approach to assessment implies that, without addressing the obstacles in the training context, training alone will be insufficient.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **8.1 Pre-primary Teachers**

- 1) To enhance their knowledge and skills and the effective application of a large variety of CBA tools, teachers need to regularly participate in refresher courses provided by the government and other interested parties.
- 2) To enhance their knowledge and practice of CBA, teachers need to obtain and use reference books and curriculum designs. The KICD curriculum designs offer systematic instructions on the outcome of learning, proposed learning experiences, and the guidelines for evaluating the competencies that could be useful in implementing CBA efficiently.

### **8.2 County Government**

- 1) The County Government ought to engage in regular teacher training and refresher courses to increase the competence of teachers and the effective use of CBA in schools. The findings indicate that continuous and systematic professional growth is needed as opposed to occasional teacher training.
- 2) County Government ought to enhance the learning and teaching environment by hiring more teachers, cutting the size of classes, building more classrooms, and providing sufficient teaching and learning opportunities and resources, as this was a major challenge that influenced the effective use of CBA.

### **8.3 School Management and Administrators**

- 1) The school management should also arrange sensitization forums where parents will be educated about CBA because they failed to support the learning process by providing learning materials. Portfolio and project assessment techniques in which home support is necessary cannot be implemented successfully without the involvement of parents.
- 2) Schools ought to marshal funds to deal with the lack of resources that prevent effective implementation of CBA. This can involve the budget allocation of assessment books, portfolio materials and other resources that are required in a comprehensive competency-based assessment.
- 3) School setting should be enhanced by building additional classrooms and addressing high student-teacher ratios to support proper utilisation of CBA. Reduced classes would allow teachers to administer one-on-one assessments and have a broader range of assessment instruments.

### **8.4 Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)**

KICD, in partnership with the Makueni County Government, ought to create a broader set of assessment and teaching- learning resources specific to CBA since the scarcity of tool variety was cited as a major obstacle to successful implementation. Portfolio, project,

and practical work simplified instructions and examples may assist in overcoming the notion that these procedures are too complicated for teachers.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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