



INTEGRATION OF CORE COMPETENCIES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF KISWAHILI LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study examined the integration of core competencies and their influence on the teaching and learning of Kiswahili among Grade Six learners in Nairobi County, Kenya. Anchored on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the study sought to determine teachers' ability and preparedness to integrate core competencies, the extent of their incorporation in Kiswahili instruction, and the challenges influencing effective implementation. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting 14 primary schools (two public and twelve private). The sample comprised 112 respondents, including 84 Grade Six pupils, 14 Kiswahili teachers, and 14 heads of departments, selected through purposive and random sampling techniques. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, and analyzed using descriptive statistics through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that most teachers demonstrated moderate confidence and ability in integrating core competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking into

Kiswahili lessons. However, the use of experiential and digital approaches, including debates and technology-based learning, remained limited. Private schools exhibited higher levels of implementation compared to public schools, largely due to better resource availability and training opportunities. Key challenges identified included inadequate teaching materials, limited digital infrastructure, insufficient teacher preparation, time constraints, and low parental involvement. The study concludes that effective integration of core competencies enhances learners' communication, creativity, and appreciation of the Kiswahili language. It recommends continuous professional development for teachers, provision of adequate ICT and learning resources, and structured parental engagement programs to strengthen the implementation of Competency-Based Education in Kiswahili teaching.

Keywords: Core Competencies, Kiswahili Teaching, Competency-Based Education, Experiential Learning

INTRODUCTION

Globally, educational systems are increasingly emphasizing the integration of core competencies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Core competencies encompassing communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-efficacy are considered essential for preparing learners to navigate complex, rapidly changing societies (Catacutan et al., 2023; González-Salamanca et al., 2020). In the United States, frameworks such as the “21st Century Learning Partnership” have institutionalized these competencies across curricula, while European countries like Sweden and Italy integrate democratic values, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills into language instruction (Moret Zamorano, 2024; Conti & Romano, 2021). Research shows that embedding these skills within classroom practice promotes not only academic outcomes but also social and personal development (Bianchi, 2023; Nykyporets et al., 2024). In the Kenyan context, the introduction of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) represents a paradigm shift from content-driven education to learner-centered teaching aimed at nurturing holistic development (Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development [KICD], 2017). The CBE prioritizes the development of key competencies alongside foundational knowledge, emphasizing active learning, problem-solving, and practical engagement in real-world contexts. Language subjects, particularly Kiswahili, provide a critical platform for developing these competencies due to their inherent focus on communication, expression, and cultural understanding. Kiswahili, as Kenya's national language, plays a pivotal role in fostering national identity, intercultural understanding, and literacy skills (Rop, 2023). In primary education, it is a core subject that supports not only

linguistic proficiency but also cognitive and social competencies. Competency-based approaches encourage students to engage creatively with Kiswahili as a language through activities such as storytelling, debates, riddles, and essay writing. These activities foster communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking competencies that are central to the CBE framework (KICD, 2021). Despite this emphasis, implementation challenges persist, including limited teacher preparedness, resource constraints, and uneven integration of experiential learning strategies.

While the CBE has been operational in Kenya for several years, empirical evidence suggests that the integration of core competencies in Kiswahili instruction remains inconsistent. Studies indicate that teachers often rely on traditional, conventional or teacher centered methods and underutilize experiential or digital approaches that promote active learning (Ondimu, 2018; Zeiger, 2018). Furthermore, disparities exist between private and public schools in terms of resources, professional development opportunities, and teaching infrastructure, potentially impacting the effectiveness of competency-based learning. Without adequate integration of core competencies, learners may fail to develop the full range of skills envisioned by the CBE, limiting their preparedness for higher levels of education and broader societal engagement. This study examines the integration of core competencies in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili in Grade Six classrooms in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Specifically, it seeks to determine the ability, preparedness and extent to which Kiswahili teachers integrate the core competencies during teaching. This study explores the challenges influencing the effective implementation of competency-based teaching strategies. The findings of the study are significant for multiple stakeholders. For teachers, it provides insights into current practices, gaps, and opportunities for professional development in competency-based pedagogy. For policymakers and curriculum developers, it offers evidence-based recommendations for improving CBE implementation, particularly in language education. Finally, for learners, effective integration of core competencies can enhance communication skills, critical thinking, creativity and digital literacy, thus fostering holistic development and readiness for future academic and societal challenges.

Empirical research demonstrates that the integration of core competencies positively influences learners' outcomes. For instance, participation in group discussions, storytelling, and collaborative writing enhances communication, collaboration, and creative expression. Problem-solving tasks and analytical exercises foster critical thinking and independent learning. Similarly, the use of ICT tools for language research and presentation develops digital literacy and technological competence, which are increasingly relevant in contemporary education (Nilsson & Bergman, 2022; Nykyporets et al., 2024). Learners exposed to these integrated approaches also demonstrate increased self-confidence, motivation, and appreciation for Kiswahili language and

literature, reflecting the holistic objectives of the CBE framework. Despite the documented benefits of competency integration, several gaps remain in the literature, particularly concerning Kiswahili instruction in Grade Six classrooms in Nairobi County. Few studies have explored the extent to which experiential and digital learning methods are incorporated, the comparative performance between public and private schools, or the relationship between teacher preparedness, resource availability, and student engagement. Furthermore, limited research exists on how systemic challenges, including infrastructural constraints, time pressures, and socio-cultural influences, affect the practical implementation of the CBE in Kiswahili teaching. The present study addresses these gaps by examining teachers' ability and preparedness to integrate core competencies, the extent of integration in Kiswahili lessons, the challenges affecting implementation, and the effects on learners' communication, collaboration, creativity, and appreciation of Kiswahili. By providing evidence from both public and private schools, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of competency integration in the Kenyan primary education context and offers insights for policy, teacher training, and classroom practice. In conclusion, the literature underscores the critical role of experiential learning, teacher preparedness, resource availability, and parental engagement in the effective integration of core competencies in Kiswahili instruction. International and national studies collectively highlight that well-prepared teachers, supportive infrastructure, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches result in enhanced communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and self-efficacy among learners. The Kenyan CBE emphasizes these outcomes, yet practical implementation faces challenges that require targeted interventions. By investigating these dynamics in Nairobi County, Grade Six classrooms, the current study provides empirical evidence to inform strategies for improving the teaching and learning of Kiswahili in alignment with competency-based education principles.

This study is anchored on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which posits that learning is a cyclical and interactive process that occurs through the integration of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Kolb emphasizes that learning is most effective when learners are actively engaged in meaningful experiences rather than passively receiving information. In language education, particularly Kiswahili instruction under Kenya's Competency-Based Education (CBE), this theoretical framework is highly relevant. This study's objectives aim: to investigate the preparation of the Kiswahili teachers in integrating the core competencies during teaching, the extent to which Kiswahili teachers integrate the core competencies and the challenges the Kiswahili teachers experience during integration of the core competencies. Learners acquire knowledge and skills through participatory activities such as storytelling, riddles, debates, collaborative writing, and digital exercises, which foster communication, collaboration, creativity,

critical thinking, and problem-solving. Ondimu (2018) acknowledges that there has been in-service training of head teachers in preparation for the implementation of the competency-based education and they are ready to implement the competency-based curriculum. Furthermore, the Kenya Curriculum Development Commission (2017) states that teachers are required to make efforts to integrate the elements of the new competency-based education into lesson plans, they need to have advanced skills in the use of teaching strategies that are necessary to make learning effective and efficient. Teachers who receive comprehensive training and professional development are more likely to plan lessons that incorporate experiential and collaborative strategies, utilize ICT tools effectively, and provide meaningful feedback that supports student growth (Ondimu, 2018). In-service training programs prepare teachers to embed communication, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving activities into Kiswahili instruction, equipping them with strategies to overcome classroom challenges such as diverse learner abilities, limited resources, and large class sizes. Moreover, teachers' understanding of the CBE objectives and core competencies allows them to align instructional practices with curriculum expectations, ensuring that learning outcomes are relevant and attainable. Resource availability and infrastructural support are additional factors influencing the integration of core competencies. Studies in Kenya and other sub-Saharan contexts indicate that inadequate teaching materials, limited access to ICT resources, and lack of digital infrastructure hinder the implementation of competency-based approaches (Ndayambaje, 2018; Wasonga et al., 2023). In Kiswahili classrooms, the absence of textbooks, audio-visual aids, and digital tools restricts opportunities for experiential learning and student engagement. Private schools often perform better in competency integration due to smaller class sizes, better resource allocation, and more frequent teacher training, whereas public schools face systemic constraints that limit both teacher effectiveness and learner outcomes. Time constraints and curricular pressures further exacerbate these challenges, as teachers struggle to cover content while simultaneously facilitating competency-based activities. In addition, cultural and linguistic factors, such as the influence of mother tongue or Sheng', affect students' participation and language proficiency, highlighting the complex interplay between socio-cultural contexts and curriculum implementation. In Kenya, the Competency-Based Education emphasizes learner-centered pedagogy, focusing on the development of skills, values, and attitudes alongside knowledge acquisition (KICD, 2021). In Kiswahili instruction, this framework translates into the use of teaching and learning activities that promote both language proficiency and the development of core competencies. For instance, creative writing exercises encourage students to express original ideas, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills. Essay writing and formal letter composition provide opportunities for critical thinking, structured communication, and reflective

learning. Oral literature activities, including storytelling, riddles, and role-play, cultivate communication, collaboration, and cultural awareness. Additionally, digital literacy is promoted as students utilize computers, tablets, or audio-visual devices to conduct research, compose assignments, and present their work. Such activities align with Kolb's experiential learning cycle by providing concrete experiences, encouraging reflection, facilitating conceptual understanding, and enabling students to experiment with newly acquired knowledge. The CBE framework emphasizes that teachers must create inclusive and participatory learning environments, where learners engage meaningfully with language and apply competencies in authentic contexts (Ondimu, 2018). This study focuses on Grade Six classrooms in Nairobi City County, Kenya, examining both public and private primary schools. It aims at addressing the integration of core competencies in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili language.

Table 1. Content arrangement of the introduction part

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBE implementation • Kiswahili teaching and learning • Global integration of CBE • Disparities in integration of the core competencies • Uneven integration of core competencies • Limited studies on systemic challenges • Insufficient studies on ICT integration • Assess preparation of teachers • Examine extent of integration • Identify challenges in integration of core competencies |
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METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for examining the integration of core competencies and their effects on teaching and learning in Grade Six Kiswahili classrooms. A descriptive survey design enables researchers to systematically collect, summarize, and interpret information about current practices, perceptions, and challenges (Creswell, 2014). The design facilitated an understanding of both the teachers' perspectives and students' experiences, as well as differences across school types, including public and private primary schools in Nairobi County. By adopting this approach, the study aimed to capture the breadth of practices and challenges related to competency-based education in Kiswahili teaching.

Table 2. Description

Type of study	Qualitative and quantitative
Research Design	Descriptive survey

Research participants

This study was carried out in public and private primary schools. The target population comprised Grade Six Kiswahili teachers, heads of Kiswahili departments, and Grade Six students in selected primary schools within Nairobi County. Specifically, the study focused on 14 primary schools, including two public and twelve private institutions, reflecting both the diversity and distribution of schools in the region. The total population of interest included 14 Kiswahili teachers, 14 heads of Kiswahili departments, and 840 students, amounting to 868 participants. The selection of Grade Six was intentional, as this class is a critical stage in implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which emphasizes integration of core competencies across all subjects (KICD, 2021). A sample of 112 respondents was selected using a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed to select Kiswahili teachers and heads of departments because these individuals directly implement the curriculum and possess the knowledge required to provide detailed insights into teaching practices. The student sample was selected through simple random sampling, with six students chosen from each school to represent a diverse set of experiences and abilities. The final sample comprised: 14 Kiswahili teachers, 14 heads of departments and 84 Grade Six students. This sampling strategy ensured representation across both public and private schools while maintaining feasibility in data collection and analysis.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Multiple instruments were utilized to gather comprehensive data. Structured questionnaires were administered to Kiswahili teachers to collect quantitative data on their ability, preparedness, and extent of integration of core competencies. Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) were used to quantify perceptions and self-reported practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with heads of departments and selected teachers to gather qualitative insights on challenges, perceptions, and experiences related to the integration of core competencies. The interview guide contained open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate on teaching strategies, resource limitations and professional development needs. Non-participant observations were conducted to examine teaching practices, student engagement and the actual incorporation of competencies in Kiswahili lessons. A standardized observation checklist was used, capturing indicators such as

use of experiential methods, collaboration activities, digital tools, and creativity-promoting exercises. This triangulation enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted in two primary schools not included in the main sample to test the reliability and clarity of the data collection instruments. Cronbach's alpha was computed for the questionnaire, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which indicated good internal consistency. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the instruments, particularly the wording of items and the observation checklist, ensuring that they accurately captured the intended constructs. Data collection was carried out over a period of four weeks. Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the study were obtained from the Kenya National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the respective school administrators. Before data collection, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and provided with consent forms. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers during school hours and collected after completion. Interviews were conducted in quiet, private spaces within the schools to encourage candid responses. Each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Classroom observations were conducted during Kiswahili lessons over a two-week timeframe.

Data Analysis

The objectives of the study and the research questions guided the data analysis process. SPSS computer software was employed to analyze data. Quantitative data were collected, organized, and entered into SPSS computer files. Responses obtained from teachers' questionnaires were categorized and coded. These responses were then entered into SPSS computer files. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed based on the objectives of the study. Responses from interviews were organized, numerically coded, and entered into SPSS computer files. The data were collected in line with the objectives of the study and analyzed using percentages, statistics, and measures. SPSS computer software was useful in analyzing large volumes of data quickly and easily, and it also facilitated the generation of charts, graphs, and tables that could be customized to meet the specific needs of the researcher. Qualitative data collected through questionnaires, interview guides, and observation guides were analyzed qualitatively by organizing the data according to the variables under study and then entering them into a computer for analysis. Data from the research instruments were used to assess the level of preparation, the extent of the Kiswahili teachers to integrate the core competencies and the challenges experienced during integration.

Table 3. Contents of research method

Descriptive survey research design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kiswahili teachers • Heads of department • Grade six students • Purposive and random sampling techniques • Questionnaire • Standardized observation checklist • Interview guide • Quantitative data analysis • Qualitative data analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that there are gaps in availability of resources, experience of the Kiswahili teachers and their qualifications. 85.7% of the Kiswahili teachers have more than one year of experience in integrating the core competencies. The Kiswahili teachers who attended training demonstrated a better ability to integrate core competencies than those who had not attended the training programs. Public schools have limited access to instructional resources which hinders integration of the core competencies. The findings revealed that private school teachers have been more involved with the training of the competency-based curriculum, a situation that can improve their ability to effectively integrate core competencies into teaching. Private school teachers have attended competency-based curriculum training more frequently than public school teachers. Attendance at such trainings improves the ability of the Kiswahili teachers to integrate core competencies into the teaching of Kiswahili.

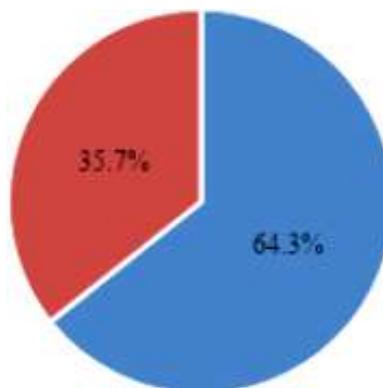


Figure 1. Teacher's training attendance

(Key: Blue- Received training; Red- Not received)

The findings were obtained from the questionnaires issued to the Kiswahili teachers. The results in figure 1 indicate that majority of teachers (64.3%) have received training, which is a positive step toward the implementation of core competencies. However, the relatively large number of teachers (35.7%) who have not received training points to a gap that may hinder equitable integration of core competencies across all schools. The results show that although teachers generally feel confident and capable of integrating core competencies into the teaching and learning of Kiswahili, there is room for improvement in training, lesson planning, and assessment practices. Although there are teachers that have no experience in various core competencies such as creativity. Teachers with higher levels of preparation and professional development appear to be more successful in integrating core competencies into their teaching. Private schools, overall, demonstrated better teacher preparedness, greater attendance at competency-based curriculum training, and a stronger ability to integrate core competencies, which is likely a result of stronger support systems and greater investment in professional development.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Methods Used in Teaching Kiswahili by School Type

Method	Distribution of Teachers by School Type			
	Public Frequency	%	Private Frequency	%
Discussion Very often	2	100.0%	4	33.3%
Frequently	0	0.0%	5	41.7%
A little	0	0.0%	3	25.0%
Not at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Lecture method Very often	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Frequently	0	0.0%	4	33.3%
A little	1	50.0%	7	58.3%
Not at all	1	50.0%	1	8.3%
Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Demonstration Very often	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
Frequently	0	0.0%	5	41.7%
A little	2	100.0%	5	41.7%
Not at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

Storytelling	Very often	0	0.0%	3	25.0%
	Frequently	0	0.0%	6	50.0%
	A little	2	100.0%	3	25.0%
	Not at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Questions & answers	Very often	2	100.0%	4	33.3%
	Frequently	0	0.0%	8	66.7%
	A little	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Not at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Debate	Very often	0	0.0%	3	25.0%
	Frequently	0	0.0%	4	33.3%
	A little	1	50.0%	5	41.7%
	Not at all	1	50.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Dialogue	Very often	1	50.0%	5	41.7%
	Frequently	1	50.0%	4	33.3%
	A little	0	0.0%	3	25.0%
	Not at all	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Role playing	Very often	0	0.0%	1	8.3%
	Frequently	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	A little	1	50.0%	9	75.0%
	Not at all	1	50.0%	2	16.7%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

The findings in table 4 obtained from the questionnaires issued to the Kiswahili teachers, indicate that the teachers frequently integrate the core competencies in their teaching. The teachers use discussions, storytelling, role playing and question and answer techniques to actively involve learners during teaching. Communication skills are found to be prioritized in the classroom. Integration of collaboration in teaching was found to be minimal, indicating a gap in promoting teamwork. Incorporation of digital devices into lessons was minimal, while debate and experiential activities were minimally used. The discussion method was used most frequently by all teachers in public schools and was also used to a large extent in private

schools. Storytelling and dialogue also showed significant use in private schools. This was revealed during classroom observations. However, other methods, such as role-playing, showed limited use both in private and public schools, largely due to limited time allocated for a lesson. Discussion, storytelling, and dialogue were the most frequently employed strategies on both the public and private schools, promoting communication and collaboration among students. These methods correspond to the CBC's emphasis on learner-centered approaches that foster critical thinking and creativity (KICD, 2021). The findings indicate that students actively participated in discussions frequently but collaborated with peers less frequently.

Table 5. Teaching Methods Used Depending on the School Type

Communication Skills					
		Public		Private	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Textbooks	Yes	1	50.0%	10	90.9%
	No	1	50.0%	1	9.1%
	Total	2	100.0%	11	100.0%
Radio	Yes	1	50.0%	0	0.0%
	No	1	50.0%	12	100.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Television	Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	No	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Computer	Yes	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
	No	2	100.0%	10	83.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Wall charts	Yes	1	50.0%	6	50.0%
	No	1	50.0%	6	50.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Sound recorders	Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	No	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Picture charts	Yes	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
	No	2	100.0%	10	83.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

Oral literature materials	Yes	0	0.0%	1	8.3%
	No	2	100.0%	11	91.7%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Magazines	Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	No	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Library	Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	No	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

Table 5 shows the teaching methods used to improve communication and collaboration skills in public and private schools. These methods include textbooks, radio, television, computers, wall charts, audio recorders, picture charts, oral literature materials, and newspapers. Despite these positive outcomes, integration of competencies such as digital literacy and self- efficacy remained limited, particularly in public schools. This was revealed from the classroom observation checklist. This is due to the limited access to ICT resources, inadequate training, and infrastructural constraints. The findings of this study are similar to those of other studies that reveal uneven core competency implementation.

Table 6. Table 4. Challenges facing integration

	Distribution of Heads of Departments by School Type				
		Public		Private	
			Number	%	Number
Lack of adequate resources, especially for digital devices	Yes	2	100.0%	7	58.3%
	No	0	0.0%	5	41.7%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Lack of electricity and Internet in schools	Yes	2	100.0%	8	66.7%
	No	0	0.0%	4	33.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Lateness to school by students	Yes	1	50.0%	6	50.0%
	No	1	50.0%	6	50.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Lack of sufficient books	Yes	2	100.0%	8	66.7%
	No	0	0.0%	4	33.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

Insufficient time to conduct research	Yes	2	100.0%	5	41.7%
	No	0	0.0%	7	58.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Insufficient materials	Yes	2	100.0%	6	50.0%
	No	0	0.0%	6	50.0%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Students are affected by their mother tongue and sheng'	Yes	1	50.0%	5	41.7%
	No	1	50.0%	7	58.3%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Lack of research Materials	Yes	1	50.0%	7	58.3%
	No	1	50.0%	5	41.7%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%
Parents not cooperating enough in buying the necessary materials for their children	Yes	1	50.0%	7	58.3%
	No	1	50.0%	5	41.7%
	Total	2	100.0%	12	100.0%

The results highlighted in table 6 show several challenges, including lack of resources, infrastructural constraints, and socio-economic factors, that significantly impact the integration of core competencies in Kiswahili teaching. Although some schools show resilience through better resource allocation or management, structural problems persist across both public and private institutions. To determine the perspectives of Kiswahili teachers on the integration of the core competencies in Kiswahili teaching, content analysis was used and the results were presented using quotes and texts. The findings derived from the quotes and texts revealed that teachers lack adequate teaching resources and sufficient time to prepare properly for the integration of the core competencies. The findings of the study support those of Ndayambaje (2018) which showed that despite all teachers in primary schools being trained on how to implement the curriculum, some of them were resistant to the changes. Also, the lack of adequate teaching materials has been reported as another issue that has led to the non-implementation of new secondary schools in Rwanda. The results also showed that time constraints significantly affect teachers' ability to incorporate core competencies into their teaching. This challenge is experienced in classrooms with large numbers of students or where lesson times are shorter, too short to allow for meaningful engagement with students. The feeling of being unable to manage these constraints reflects a lack of motivation for teachers. Although teachers recognize the potential benefits of incorporating core competencies, the lack of sufficient time to prepare and implement lessons effectively reduces their motivation. Time constraints were another significant barrier. Teachers reported difficulty completing lessons and incorporating

competency-based activities within the allocated classroom periods. Teachers also highlighted the challenge of limited parental engagement and some students' resistance to fully participating in activities. This lack of parental support reduces the effectiveness of integrating the core competencies, as students may fail to bring the required materials or complete the assigned activities. Teachers face an additional burden trying to manage these gaps, which affects their perception of the effectiveness of competency-based teaching methods. Parental engagement was also limited, particularly in public schools, reducing the effectiveness of home-based reinforcement of competencies. Only 35.7% of respondents acknowledged parental involvement in providing learning materials, which indicates a gap in fostering an enabling environment for student-centered learning. Low parental support may affect students' motivation, autonomy, and engagement in competency-based tasks. The study identified several systemic challenges affecting the integration of core competencies. Resource inadequacy emerged as a major concern, with public schools lacking access to digital devices, textbooks, and experiential learning materials. These constraints hinder teachers' ability to diversify instructional strategies and cater to students with varied learning styles. Similar challenges were reported by Mbarushimana and Allida (2018) in Rwanda, highlighting a regional trend in resource-dependent disparities in implementing competency-based curricula. The findings provide empirical support for Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory in the context of occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Teachers who were able to facilitate this cycle effectively contributed to more meaningful learning experiences and competency development among students. language education. Students actively engaged in experiential tasks—such as collaborative discussions, storytelling, and problem-solving exercises—demonstrated higher levels of skill acquisition and conceptual understanding. The study reinforces the idea that effective learning.

This study examined the integration of core competencies in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili among Grade Six learners in Nairobi City County, with particular attention to teacher preparedness, instructional practices, and contextual challenges influencing implementation. The findings indicate that Kiswahili teachers generally demonstrate moderate confidence and conceptual understanding of core competencies, especially communication and creativity. However, the depth and consistency of integration across competencies remain uneven, particularly in relation to digital literacy, collaboration, and experiential learning strategies. Teachers' self-reported confidence in integrating core competencies aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes active engagement and reflection as central to meaningful learning (Kolb, 1984). Classroom practices such as discussions, storytelling, and

dialogue—frequently reported in this study—reflect the concrete experience and reflective observation stages of Kolb’s learning cycle. These approaches support learners’ communicative competence and creativity, corroborating earlier studies that associate experiential and participatory language instruction with improved learner engagement and language proficiency (Nilsson & Bergman, 2022; Rop, 2023). Despite this positive orientation, the study reveals limited use of higher-order experiential strategies, including debates, role-play, collaborative problem-solving, and technology-enhanced learning. Less than a quarter of the teachers reported regular use of digital tools, suggesting a gap between CBE policy expectations and classroom realities. This finding is consistent with previous research in the Kenyan context, which highlights insufficient teacher training and inadequate ICT infrastructure as key barriers to effective competency-based implementation (Ondimu, 2018; Wasonga et al., 2023). The limited integration of digital literacy constrains learners’ exposure to authentic language use and multimodal learning experiences that are essential for contemporary communication skills. The study further demonstrates significant disparities between public and private schools in the integration of core competencies. Teachers in private schools reported higher levels of preparedness, more frequent use of varied instructional strategies, and better access to teaching and learning resources. These differences appear to be influenced by factors such as smaller class sizes, greater availability of ICT resources, and more frequent professional development opportunities. While these findings mirror international and regional studies on resource-driven inequities in competency-based education (González-Salamanca et al., 2020; Mbarushimana & Allida, 2018), they raise important concerns about equity in CBE implementation within the Kenyan primary education system. Learner outcomes reported in the study suggest that integration of core competencies positively influences communication skills, vocabulary development, creativity, and appreciation of Kiswahili. Students demonstrated increased confidence in expressing themselves and improved performance in essay writing and oral activities. These findings support the CBE’s emphasis on holistic development and resonate with research showing that competency-based language instruction enhances both academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Bianchi, 2023; Conti & Romano, 2021). However, given the largely descriptive nature of the data, these outcomes should be interpreted as associative rather than causal. Several systemic challenges emerged as significant constraints to effective integration of core competencies. These include inadequate teaching and learning materials, limited access to digital infrastructure, insufficient instructional time, and low levels of parental engagement. Time constraints, in particular, restricted teachers’ ability to plan and implement experiential activities that require extended learner interaction. Additionally, socio-linguistic influences such as mother tongue interference and the use of Sheng’ affected

learners' participation and language proficiency, underscoring the need for context-responsive pedagogical strategies. Teachers' qualitative accounts further illuminate the tension between curriculum expectations and classroom feasibility. While teachers acknowledged the pedagogical value of competency-based approaches, many expressed frustration stemming from resource limitations, workload pressures, and insufficient institutional support. These findings reinforce the view that successful implementation of CBE depends not only on teacher awareness but also on sustained systemic support, including targeted training, adequate resourcing, and collaborative partnerships with parents and communities.

Table 7. Content parts of Results and Discussion

Data presented using tables and figures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of Kiswahili teachers • Extent of integration • Challenges experienced during integration • Uneven integration of core competencies • Student involvement during integration • Classroom instruction based on teacher-centered methods • Parental Engagement • Resource Provision • Professional Development

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of core competencies in Grade Six Kiswahili teaching in Nairobi City County is partially realized, with notable strengths in promoting communication and creativity but significant gaps in experiential, collaborative, and digital learning practices. Teachers generally demonstrate conceptual awareness and moderate confidence in implementing competency-based approaches; however, their capacity to translate this awareness into consistent classroom practice is constrained by contextual and systemic factors. Anchored in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, the findings affirm that learner-centered and participatory instructional strategies enhance students' engagement, language proficiency, and appreciation of Kiswahili. Nevertheless, the uneven integration of competencies—particularly digital literacy and collaboration—indicates a misalignment between CBE ideals and instructional realities, especially in public primary schools. The study also highlights inequities in resource distribution and professional development opportunities between public and private schools, which significantly influence the quality of CBE

implementation. Without deliberate interventions to address these disparities, the promise of competency-based education as an equitable and transformative reform remains difficult to achieve. Overall, the study underscores the need for a multi-level approach to strengthening the integration of core competencies in Kiswahili teaching. This includes continuous teacher professional development focused on experiential and digital pedagogy, improved provision of teaching and learning resources, realistic curriculum pacing, and enhanced parental engagement. Addressing these interconnected factors is essential for realizing the CBE's goal of nurturing competent, confident, and linguistically proficient learners who can effectively participate in both academic and societal contexts.

Further research should be conducted in other counties in Kenya. Such research could be similar to this study but would be more comparative in terms of integration of the core competencies in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili in both public and private schools. Further research should be done to address the integration of the core competencies in the teaching and learning of other subjects both in private and public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study underscore the need for targeted interventions to strengthen competency integration in Kiswahili teaching:

Professional Development: Continuous teacher training programs should focus on experiential methods, digital literacy, and effective integration of core competencies. Peer-learning platforms and mentorship programs can enhance knowledge sharing among teachers.

Resource Provision: The government and school administrators should prioritize access to ICT tools, textbooks, and experiential learning materials, particularly in public schools, to reduce inequities in teaching and learning outcomes.

Curriculum Implementation: Schools should adopt structured strategies to integrate core competencies systematically, including lesson planning that embeds communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity across all Kiswahili lessons.

Parental Engagement: Schools should implement structured programs to involve parents in supporting competency-based learning at home, including workshops and communication channels that facilitate resource provision and reinforcement of skills.

DECLARATION IN THE USE OF AI

The content of this manuscript is solely for the authors. No AI tools were used.

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