



African Population and  
Health Research Center

## POLICY BRIEF



# ALIGNING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES WITH THE COMPETENCE-BASED CURRICULUM IN KENYA

The recent transition to the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) and Competence-Based Assessment (CBA) in Kenya aims to transform the education system into a more inclusive, equitable, and meaningful one. CBC aims to move from a focus on only passing exams to enhancing critical thinking and promoting independent learning. CBA seeks to address the challenges posed by traditional high-stakes testing by shifting focus to continuous, learner-centered assessment. This approach is expected to inform teaching practices and contrasts with the previous system's one-off, high-stakes terminal exam.

However, a recent study by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) reveals that old habits persist, with many schools continuing to use local joint tests modeled after the old system's one-off, high-stakes terminal exam, despite the government's ban on such tests in 2015. This policy brief highlights the implications of these practices on teaching methods, education cost,

student performance and wellbeing. The brief also emphasizes the need for enhanced teacher's training and collaboration to ensure a successful transition to CBC.



## The Study

In July and August 2023, APHRC surveyed 321 teachers from 61 public primary schools in three counties in Kenya: Embu, Kajiado, and Nairobi. The participating teachers taught Grades 5, 6, and 8, representing both CBC (Grades 5 and 6) and non-CBC (Grade 8) cohorts, operating under different assessment regimes within the same schools.

This transitional period presented a unique opportunity to gather valuable insights into teachers' experiences with two contrasting assessment frameworks: the outgoing, high-stakes Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the incoming, low-stakes, CBC-based Kenya Primary School Education Assessment (KPSEA). Mathematics and English teachers were targeted, given the subjects' prominence in both assessments.

The survey explored how assessment practices in the schools aligned with the teaching reforms envisioned in the CBC, among other aspects. Survey items were adapted from established tools, such as teacher modules in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), and supplemented with customized questions tailored to this study.

## Key Findings and Implications

- Despite their ban, 80% of teachers in CBC and non-CBC grades used county, sub-county, and zonal level tests ('local joint tests'), while 20% considered these tests the most significant assessments influencing teaching practices. This tendency may perpetuate curriculum narrowing and biased allocation of resources, such as teaching time, favoring high-performing students—a consequence that CBC is expected to alleviate.
- 70% of CBC grade teachers used local joint tests, indicating the persistence of old habits. This potentially focuses teaching practices on test preparation rather than the critical thinking and independent learning envisioned by CBC.



- The widespread use of unauthorized local joint tests contributes to a high-stakes testing environment, exacerbating student stress and anxiety levels, which may manifest as behavioral issues, decreased motivation, or school unrest.
- The unauthorized local joint tests impose an additional financial burden on parents, who are forced to cover the costs out of pocket, thereby exacerbating existing socioeconomic inequalities.



## Recommendations

1. **Comprehensive Training:** Provide teachers in-depth training on CBC principles, assessment practices, and pedagogical strategies.
2. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Foster collaboration and awareness among teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders (including parents) on the significance and benefits of CBC reforms.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly assess teaching practices and assessment approaches to ensure alignment with CBC/CBA principles.
4. **Continuous Professional Growth:** Invest in programs supporting teacher development, mentoring, and coaching to sustain effective CBC implementation.

## Conclusion

Addressing the persistence of old assessment practices is important to ensure a successful transition to CBC. By enhancing training, encouraging collaboration, and monitoring progress, we can align teaching methods with the desired learning outcomes, ultimately transforming the education system in Kenya.

## Action Items for the Ministry of Education

1. Intensify training programs for teachers on CBC principles and assessment practices.
2. Develop a national strategy to address the persistence of local joint tests.
3. Strengthen CBC implementation monitoring and evaluation strategies to assess impact and inform improvements.
4. Allocate more resources for teacher professional development and support in implementing CBC and CBA.



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This Policy brief is based on a [study](#) conducted by APHRC in partnership with the Center for Global Development (CGD).



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