

Incorporation of Values and Life Skills Assessment in the National Assessments Systems in Kenya



A POLICY BRIEF

September 2023

Introduction

Since 2017, Kenya has been implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) which focuses on developing learners' competencies, skills, and knowledge to meet the needs of the 21st century. The CBC is structured into two levels: the Early Years Education (EYE) and Basic Education (BE) levels. Early Years Education (EYE) level covers pre-primary education for children aged 3 to 5 years. Basic Education (BE) level covers primary education (Grade 1 to Grade 6) and junior secondary education (Grade 7 to Grade 9). The plan was to roll it out to upper primary and secondary levels in subsequent years with the first cohort of Junior Secondary School having been received in 2023.

Under the CBC, the curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of learners, focusing on seven key core competencies: communication and collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and imagination, citizenship, digital literacy, learning to learn, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the CBC places importance on learner-centered teaching methods, active learning, and the integration of co-curricular activities into the curriculum.

With the great focus on nurturing values and life skills, it has become important for education stakeholders to reflect on the assessment systems. There is need to explore how to more effectively incorporate assessment of believe skills and values in the national assessment systems.

The Research Process

This brief draws from a number of research pieces conducted under the project Adapting Assessments into Policy and Learning (ADAPT)- Adolescent 21st Century Skills in Kenya, Uagnda and Tanzania. The research was conducted in four main stages.

First, a formative study on Utilization on utilization of past and present learning assessments was carried out. The research covered Ministry of Education officials, officials from Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC), Teachers Service Commission (TSC), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which conduct learning assessments, academics and development partners in the education space. The study helped in deepening understanding of the key ecosystem issues regarding the extent to which learning assessments have been used to inform policy and practice and the extent to which they have included 21st Century skills and values.

Secondly, the research findings were then synthesized and summarized into context analysis briefs. The briefing papers provided an overview of the key actors in the assessments space, success factors, benefits/impacts, challenges, and barriers to the utilization of learning assessments. The briefs also helped identify the key ecosystem issue to guide the ecosystem diagnosis. Two questions emerged: 1) "why the current learning assessments in primary and secondary education were not integrating the assessment of 21st Century skills acquisition in Kenya?", and 2) "what are the effects of not assessing 21st Century skills in Kenya among primary and secondary school learners?"

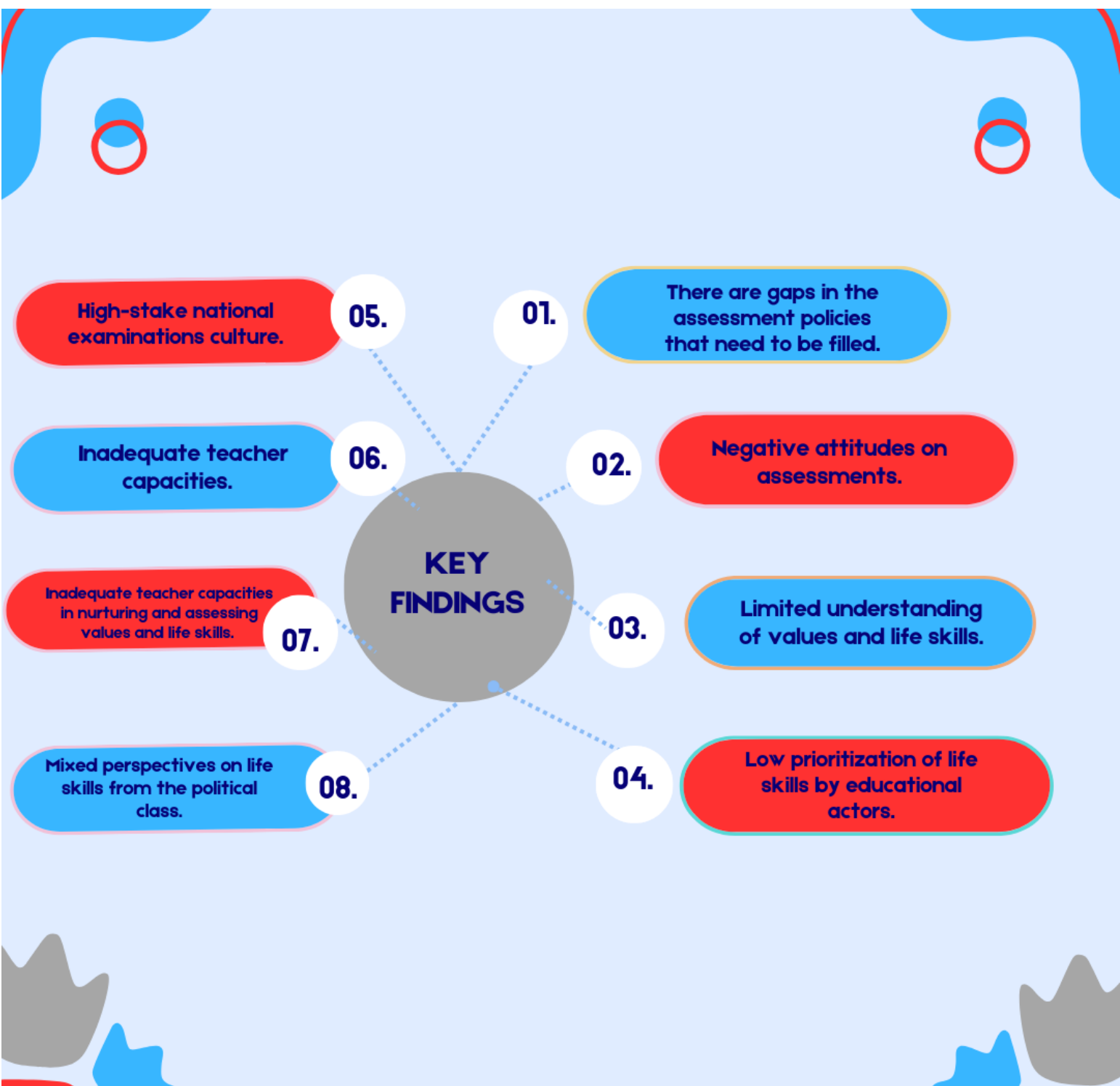
Then a social network analysis was conducted to unearth the connections and links between assessment actors and identified gaps in collaboration in conceptualization, design, implementation and utilization of learning assessments in Kenya.

Lastly, an ecosystem diagnostic workshop was conducted with identified key stakeholders to diagnose and map the education ecosystems, with respect to integration of assessment of 21st Century skills, the extent to which learning assessments have been used to inform policy and practice, and how best these data be used to improve educational policy and practice in the three target countries.

KEY FINDINGS

The implementation of CBC has come with various changes, including a shift from summative assessments (end-of-level exams) to formative assessments, which are continuous and comprehensive evaluations of learners' progress. The new assessment approach is intended to provide a more accurate reflection of students' abilities and inform teaching strategies.

While the culture of assessing skills and competencies is taking root, the research and the systems diagnosis and mapping identified the following as the barriers to incorporation of life skills assessments in the education assessment systems in Kenya that may need to be addressed to strengthen implementation of CBC.



Barriers to Incorporation of Values and Life Skills Assessments

- **There are gaps in the assessment policies that need to be filled:** Actors in the education space pointed out that the existing education policies lack strategies for implementation and monitoring of assessments. There is also no specific policy or guidelines on assessment of 21st century skills.
- **Negative attitudes on assessments:** Actors in the Kenyan education space report that there is a negative attitude towards assessments in general. This has spilled over to the assessment of values and lifeskills. This has continued to strengthen the focus on grades and less on life skills competency.
- **Limited understanding of values and life skills:** The area of 21st century skills is a new area of focus for education stakeholders not just in the Kenyan context but Africa at large. Education actors in Kenya, identified low levels of understanding of the 21st Century skills in Kenya. Most stakeholders lacked clarity and often asked "which are the core 21st Century skills for a Kenyan child?". This is coupled with the lack of sensitization of stakeholders such as communities, parents, teachers, and children on the importance of acquiring 21st century skills.
- **Low prioritization of life skills by educational actors:** While the CBC presents a shift from just a focus on academic achievement, actors still contend that the shift in mindsets of those within the education systems is yet to happen. Most actors and policymakers still consider values and life skills as peripheral competencies in education, therefore not worth the attention. There is currently poor alignment between the teacher training curriculum and children's needs.
- **High-stake national examinations culture:** The CBC is a new curriculum framework that aims to shift the focus from an exam-oriented approach to a competency-based approach, emphasizing skills, talents, and attitudes. Despite this, actors in the education system report that examinations are still considered the key measure of learning outcomes and by education managers and teachers. This means a lot of effort is put in preparing learners for national examinations at the expense of values and life skills. Participants also reported that the school environment is very competitive and focused on grades and less on life skills competency.
- **Inadequate teacher capacities in nurturing and assessing values and life skills:** While the Kenyan government has made significant progress in teacher upskilling to deliver the CBC curriculum, the training is still considered inadequate to equip teachers to nurture and assess life skills. The training efforts have also left out the larger cross-section of teachers and students who are still going through the 8-4-4 systems of education. This coupled with the fact that the pre-service teacher training does not sufficiently incorporate values and life skills and assessments has compounded the challenge. These included issues like inadequate teacher training and the inadequate alignment of the teacher training curriculum with the current children's needs.
- **Mixed perspectives on life skills from the political class:** Actors also listed the lack of political will from high-level political leaders in the education sector leading to poor resourcing and lack of collaboration between the MOE and other agencies working in the values and life skills space. There is poor alignment between curriculum development and assessment.

Key Policy Suggestions

As Kenya progresses towards a Competency Based curriculum, the following are policy suggestions to support implementation of the curriculum and strengthen incorporation of life skills and values in national assessments systems for better educational outcomes.

- **There is need for sensitization of stakeholders on the role and assessment of 21st century skills.** Improve conceptualization and understanding of learning assessments including life skills among teachers, development partners, parents and teachers through sensitization, advocacy, and training. Other education stakeholders should also be sensitized on how to assess 21st Century skills and establishment of a common shared platform to ease access and utilization of assessment data. How can the training be institutionalized at the policy level for teachers, parents and other stakeholders.
- **Increase collaboration among all the stakeholders in education:** All partners in education should collaborate and have one voice in relation to learning assessments and their adoption to improve policies. The collaboration among stakeholders is key but should begin with developing a shared understanding of the core values and life-skills that we desire for the Kenyan child and focus our collaboration on the specific skills.
- **There is need for capacity building across all levels of education in life skills assessments:** The teacher trainers should be oriented and retrained on how to nurture and assess life skills among learners. This could be done through workshops, seminars, or conferences among others, to equip teachers with the required competencies to assess the 21st century skills among learners. The training should be institutionalized at the policy level for teachers, parents and other stakeholders for greater sustainability and uniformity in implementation. There is also need to incorporate values and life skills in the teacher pre-service teacher training curriculum so that that new graduates come out with these competencies already engrain in them.
- **Establish a research section at MoE to conduct and coordinate research.** The research section will analyze, translate and disseminate the research findings from learning assessments and coordinate their utilization to inform policy and decision making. This office will also coordinate the different research institutions conducting research in education and build collaboration amongst them.
- **Eliminate duplication of initiatives in schools:** There is a need to improve coordination between the public and private partners to ensure harmonization and coherence of initiatives and interventions. Currently, similar initiatives and interventions are targeted at the same beneficiaries (teachers and learners) by different partners, and this tends to fatigue the beneficiaries in some way. This could be achieved, for example, through public private partnerships.
- **Translate and disseminate policies from MOE to education officials, teacher educators and teachers.** This can be through the formation of a task force that brings information from the ministry to all stakeholders in the education sector. With this approach, the communities and all stakeholders will be made aware of the policy guideline on the role of life skills among learners.
- **Incorporate life skills assessments to ensure holistic evaluation of learners.** This includes drafting guidelines and tools for the assessment of life skills and values among learners. All stakeholders need to be sensitized on the availability and use of these tools. There should be systems to monitor and evaluate how teams are utilizing the tools.
- **Create a conducive environment for assessment of 21st century skills.** This might include improvements of the teacher-learner, learner-instructional material, and learner-classroom ratios.
- **There is need to allocate more resources to life skills and values learning and assessment.** Provision of adequate financial and research materials to facilitate development of assessment tools, training, and dissemination of findings to all the end users such as teachers, learners and communities.

References and Citations:

Republic of Kenya (2017). *Basic education curriculum framework*. Nairobi: Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.

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