



An Assessment of Pedagogical Approaches Used in Developing Oral Skills in Kiswahili in Public Junior Schools in Baringo Central Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya emphasizes learner-centred approaches that promote the development of practical communication competencies. However, concerns remain regarding learners' ability to communicate effectively in Kiswahili, particularly in oral skills. This study evaluated the pedagogical approaches used in developing Kiswahili oral communication skills among learners in public junior secondary schools in Baringo Central Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from learners, Kiswahili teachers, and Heads of Department using questionnaires, classroom observation checklists, interview schedules, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that group discussions, debates, question-and-answer sessions, and oral presentations were commonly used, while storytelling and role play were less consistently implemented. Learners demonstrated generally low to moderate levels of oral communication competency, with difficulties in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, confidence, and participation. ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences in learners' oral communication competency across the pedagogical approaches ($p > .05$). Learners expressed mixed perceptions of the approaches, with some reporting that the methods were enjoyable and improved their speaking abilities, while others reported limited opportunities for active participation. Major implementation challenges included fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, large class sizes, and limited individualized feedback. The study concludes that although interactive pedagogical approaches are used, their inconsistent implementation limits their contribution to the development of Kiswahili oral communication competency. The findings provide useful evidence for Kiswahili teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and policymakers in strengthening learner-centred oral language instruction under CBE.

Keywords: Kiswahili; oral communication competency; pedagogical approaches; learner-centered instruction; Competency-Based Education; junior secondary schools

1. Introduction

Oral communication is a fundamental component of language learning because it enables learners to express ideas, interact with others, and participate in academic and social activities. Competency-Based Education (CBE) places emphasis on practical competencies, active learner participation, collaboration, and the application of knowledge in meaningful contexts. In language education, these principles require opportunities for learners to practice speaking and listening through interactive activities rather than relying mainly on teacher explanation.

In Kenya, Kiswahili is a national and official language and an important component of basic education. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the junior secondary school Kiswahili curriculum emphasize communication, learner engagement, collaboration, and practical application of language. Accordingly, approaches such as group discussions, debates, storytelling, role play, question-and-answer activities, and oral presentations are relevant to the development of oral communication competency (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2019, 2022, 2023).

Evidence from language education also indicates that oral language develops through meaningful interaction and repeated opportunities to communicate. Gràcia et al. (2021) highlight the importance of classroom practices that create opportunities for oral language use, while Mugera and Kafwa (2024) show that teachers' pedagogical competence is important in organizing competency-based learning experiences in Kiswahili. However, the extent to which these approaches are consistently implemented in public junior secondary schools, and how they relate to learners' oral communication competency, remains insufficiently documented in rural Kenyan contexts.

The present study therefore evaluated the pedagogical approaches used in developing oral communication skills in Kiswahili among learners in public junior secondary schools in Baringo Central Sub-County, Kenya. The study examined the approaches used, learners' oral communication competency, the relationship between pedagogical approaches and competency, learners' perceptions, and challenges affecting implementation.

2. Methods

A descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The study was conducted in public junior secondary schools in Baringo Central Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. The target population comprised 50 schools, 50 Heads of Department (HODs), 250 Teachers of Kiswahili, and 2,300 Grade 7–9 learners, giving a stated total population of 2,600 units. A 20% sampling proportion was used for the respondent categories, resulting in 10 schools, 10 HODs, 50 Teachers of Kiswahili, and 460 learners. Learners were selected systematically from class registers using a sampling interval calculated as $K = N/n$ and a random starting point.

Table 1. Target and achieved sample.

Category	Target	Sample	Response
Schools	50	10	8 (80%)
HODs	50	10	8 (80%)
Teachers of Kiswahili	250	50	38 (76%)
Grade 7–9 learners	2,300	460	334 (72.6%)

Data were collected using learner and teacher questionnaires, a classroom observation checklist, structured HOD interviews, and document analysis. The learner questionnaire examined pedagogical approaches, oral communication competency, perceptions, and challenges. Teacher questionnaires captured teaching practices and perceived learner competency and challenges. Classroom observations documented actual use of oral activities, learner participation, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, teacher facilitation, and peer interaction. Documents examined included lesson plans, schemes of work, curriculum designs, and assessment records.

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Qualitative information from HOD interviews, classroom observations, open-ended responses, and document analysis was analyzed thematically. Ethical procedures included informed consent for teachers and HODs, parental or guardian consent and learner assent for learners, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. The thesis reports clearance from the university Institutional Research Ethics Committee and authorization from NACOSTI and relevant education authorities.

3. Results

1 Pedagogical approach used

Learner responses showed that all six instructional activities were used, but with varying frequency. Debates had the highest proportion reporting that they were always used (24.0%), while oral presentations were most frequently reported as being used often (18.6%) or sometimes (24.3%). Group discussions were reported as sometimes used by 20.7%, often by 20.1%, and always by 18.0%. Storytelling and role play were less consistently reported. Teacher encouragement of participation was reported as often by 22.8% and always by 20.7% of learners.

Table 2. Learners' reported exposure to pedagogical approaches (n = 334).

Activity	Never n (%)	Rarely n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Often n (%)	Always n (%)
Group discussions	72 (21.6)	66 (19.8)	69 (20.7)	67 (20.1)	60 (18.0)
Debates	68 (20.4)	59 (17.7)	66 (19.8)	61 (18.3)	80 (24.0)
Storytelling	70 (21.0)	67 (20.1)	61 (18.3)	62 (18.6)	74 (22.2)
Role play	59 (17.7)	78 (23.4)	69 (20.7)	62 (18.6)	66 (19.8)
Question-and-answer	65 (19.5)	58 (17.4)	80 (24.0)	62 (18.6)	69 (20.7)
Oral presentations	59 (17.7)	68 (20.4)	81 (24.3)	62 (18.6)	64 (19.2)
Teacher encourages participation	65 (19.5)	63 (18.9)	61 (18.3)	76 (22.8)	69 (20.7)

Teachers' self-reports similarly showed variation in frequency. Group discussions were most commonly reported as used sometimes (37%), debates as always (29%), question-and-answer as always (26%), and oral presentations as often (40%). Storytelling and role play were less consistently used.

Classroom observations confirmed that discussions were present in most lessons, while role play was observed less frequently. Document analysis showed that oral skills were included in most lesson plans and competency-based outcomes were stated, but structured assessment of oral skills was minimal.

2 Learners' oral communication competency

Learners' self-reported competency was mixed across the assessed dimensions. For fluency, 21.3% agreed and 22.8% strongly agreed that they could speak Kiswahili fluently, while 19.8% strongly disagreed and 17.4% disagreed. For pronunciation, 19.2% agreed and 23.4% strongly agreed that they pronounced Kiswahili words correctly. Clarity of expression, active participation, confidence in responding to questions, and participation in debates or discussions showed similar mixed responses. Classroom observations indicated short, hesitant sentences, frequent pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, code-switching, and limited peer-to-peer interaction.

Table 3. Selected indicators of learners' oral communication competency (n = 334).

Indicator	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Speak Kiswahili fluently	66 (19.8)	58 (17.4)	63 (18.9)	71 (21.3)	76 (22.8)
Pronounce Kiswahili words correctly	53 (15.9)	63 (18.9)	76 (22.8)	64 (19.2)	78 (23.4)
Express ideas clearly	59 (17.7)	82 (24.6)	65 (19.5)	67 (20.1)	61 (18.3)
Actively participate in oral activities	69 (20.7)	74 (22.2)	65 (19.5)	68 (20.4)	58 (17.4)
Respond confidently to questions	70 (21.0)	71 (21.3)	72 (21.6)	63 (18.9)	58 (17.4)
Participate in debates/discussions	61 (18.3)	75 (22.5)	63 (18.9)	64 (19.2)	71 (21.3)

3 Relationship between pedagogical approaches and competency

ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences across the six competency models for any of the pedagogical activities. All significance values were greater than .05. The closest results were storytelling in Model 5 ($F = 2.256, p = .063$), teacher encouragement of participation in Model 1 ($F = 2.265, p = .062$), and oral presentations in Model 3 ($F = 2.205, p = .068$); none met the conventional .05 significance threshold.

Table 4. ANOVA results for pedagogical activities and oral communication competency.

Teaching activity	Model 1 F (p)	Model 2 F (p)	Model 3 F (p)	Model 4 F (p)	Model 5 F (p)	Model 6 F (p)
Group discussions	0.383 (.821)	1.637 (.165)	0.590 (.670)	1.032 (.391)	1.501 (.202)	0.536 (.710)
Debates	1.564 (.184)	0.857 (.490)	0.303 (.876)	0.935 (.444)	0.711 (.585)	1.307 (.267)
Storytelling	1.588 (.177)	1.302 (.269)	0.596 (.666)	0.761 (.551)	2.256 (.063)	1.235 (.296)
Role play	0.640 (.634)	0.141 (.967)	1.639 (.164)	0.924 (.450)	0.376 (.826)	1.637 (.165)
Question-and-answer	1.580 (.179)	0.607 (.658)	1.097 (.358)	0.803 (.524)	1.043 (.385)	0.591 (.669)
Oral presentations	1.033 (.390)	0.757 (.554)	2.205 (.068)	0.262 (.902)	0.280 (.891)	1.392 (.237)
Teacher encourages participation	2.265 (.062)	0.033 (.998)	1.026 (.394)	0.634 (.639)	1.454 (.216)	1.588 (.177)

4 Learners' perceptions

Learners expressed mixed perceptions of the pedagogical approaches. More learners agreed that the teaching methods helped improve speaking skills (23.4%) than disagreed (18.6%), and enjoyment of oral lessons was relatively high, with 21.9% agreeing and 22.8% strongly agreeing. Satisfaction with opportunities to speak was lower, with 23.1% disagreeing compared with 21.6% agreeing. Responses on the interest of activities, confidence, and preference for interactive methods were also mixed. Classroom observations showed that some learners actively participated while others remained passive, with a small number dominating oral interactions.

5 Challenges affecting implementation

The principal learner-related challenges were fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, difficulty participating in debates or discussions, limited vocabulary, and mother tongue interference. For fear of making mistakes, 23.4% agreed and 18.6% strongly agreed. Lack of confidence was reported by 22.2% who agreed and 19.2% who strongly agreed. Difficulty participating in debates or discussions was reported by 23.7% who agreed and 19.8% who strongly agreed. Teachers also identified large class size as an important challenge; 47.4% reported teaching more than 50 learners per Kiswahili class. Document analysis further indicated minimal structured assessment of oral skills.

Table 5. Selected learner-reported challenges (n = 334).

Challenge	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Difficulty pronouncing some words	78 (23.4)	65 (19.5)	63 (18.9)	59 (17.7)	69 (20.7)
Insufficient vocabulary	74 (22.2)	66 (19.8)	61 (18.3)	67 (20.1)	66 (19.8)
Mother tongue interference	76 (22.8)	63 (18.9)	67 (20.1)	70 (21.0)	58 (17.4)
Fear of making mistakes	69 (20.7)	52 (15.6)	73 (21.9)	78 (23.4)	62 (18.6)
Lack of confidence	67 (20.1)	62 (18.6)	67 (20.1)	74 (22.2)	64 (19.2)
Limited opportunities to practise	78 (23.4)	60 (18.0)	56 (16.8)	62 (18.6)	78 (23.4)
Difficulty participating in debates/discussions	57 (17.1)	68 (20.4)	64 (19.2)	79 (23.7)	66 (19.8)
Methods do not encourage participation	58 (17.4)	73 (21.9)	63 (18.9)	69 (20.7)	71 (21.3)

4. Discussion

The findings show that public junior secondary school teachers in Baringo Central Sub-County use a range of learner-centered and interactive approaches in Kiswahili oral instruction. Group discussions, debates, question-and-answer sessions, and oral presentations were more consistently reported than storytelling and role play. This pattern is consistent with the emphasis of CBE on active participation and practical communication (KICD, 2019, 2022, 2023). The observation findings, however, suggest that the presence of an approach does not necessarily mean that all learners receive sustained opportunities to participate. This is important because the development of oral communication depends on meaningful and repeated language use. Gràcia et al. (2021) similarly emphasize classroom practices that create opportunities for oral language development.

Learners' competency results indicate that oral communication remains uneven. While some learners reported confidence in fluency and pronunciation, substantial proportions reported difficulties in clarity of expression, participation, and responding confidently to questions. The observation evidence reinforced these patterns through reports of hesitant speech, pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary, and code-switching. These findings point to the need for oral communication instruction that moves beyond exposure to activities toward sustained learner practice and feedback. This is consistent with the emphasis placed by Mugeru and Kafwa (2024) on teacher pedagogical competence and the organization of learner-centered learning experiences in Kiswahili.

The absence of statistically significant differences across the ANOVA models is an important finding. Although interactive activities were commonly used and qualitative evidence indicated benefits for participation and oral practice, the statistical analysis did not establish significant differences across groups. The results therefore do not provide sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the pedagogical activities, as implemented in the study context, were associated with differences in the six assessed competency dimensions. The near-significant p-values for storytelling, teacher encouragement, and oral presentations should be interpreted as non-significant results rather than evidence of an effect.

Learners' mixed perceptions further suggest that the quality and consistency of implementation matter. Learners generally recognized the potential of the teaching methods to improve speaking and reported enjoying oral lessons, yet many were dissatisfied with opportunities to speak. This finding is relevant to CBE because learner-centered instruction requires meaningful participation rather than simply the inclusion of interactive activities in lesson plans.

The classroom observations and document analysis support this interpretation: oral activities were present in planning, but structured oral assessment and broad learner participation were limited.

Finally, the challenges identified by learners and teachers show that oral communication develops within a wider classroom environment. Fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, and large classes can reduce opportunities for individual participation and feedback. These challenges indicate that improving oral communication requires attention to both instructional strategy and implementation conditions. Teacher professional development and supportive classroom environments are therefore important components of strengthening competency-based Kiswahili instruction (Mugera & Kafwa, 2024; Nyamosi, 2024).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study concludes that a variety of learner-centered pedagogical approaches are used in Kiswahili oral instruction, but their implementation is inconsistent. Learners' oral communication competency was generally low to moderate, with weaknesses in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, confidence, and participation. ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences across the pedagogical approaches for the six competency models ($p > .05$). Learners' perceptions were mixed, and implementation was affected by learner-related challenges and classroom conditions, particularly fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, and large class sizes.

Teachers should implement interactive oral activities consistently and ensure that participation is distributed across learners rather than concentrated among a few individuals. Group discussions, debates, storytelling, role play, question-and-answer sessions, and oral presentations should be accompanied by structured feedback and repeated opportunities for speaking and listening practice. Schools and education stakeholders should strengthen professional development in learner-centered pedagogy and oral assessment, while classroom management strategies should be used to make interactive activities feasible in large classes. Oral communication should also be assessed continuously and systematically within Kiswahili instructions.

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