Perceptions of Teachers and Learners on the Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instruction in Enhancing Communication Skills in Kiswahili language among Junior School Learners in Nandi North Sub County.

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine perceptions of teachers and learners on the effectiveness of learner-centered instruction in enhancing communication and collaboration skills in Kiswahili among junior secondary learners in Nandi North Sub-County. An explanatory sequential design was adopted, involving 102 Kiswahili teachers and 291 learners. Data were collected using questionnaires, observation checklists, and document analysis. Findings showed that learner-centered strategies were perceived positively, improving learner engagement, motivation, and oral communication. However, implementation was hindered by time constraints, large class sizes, and inadequate teacher training, leading to underuse of strategies such as peer feedback and debates. The study concludes that structured implementation and teacher capacity-building are necessary for maximizing the benefits of learner-centered methods. It recommends targeted training on diverse instructional and assessment strategies to enhance communication and collaboration competencies in Kiswahili classes.

Keywords: Perceptions, effectiveness, learner centered instruction, communication skills

1.1 Introduction

Communication and collaboration is one of the core competencies of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya that is targeted at equipping learners with competencies for effective interpersonal relationships and collaboration. Communication competency entails the ability to express ideas effectively, listen, and use language appropriately in diverse contexts (OECD, 2018).

All education systems have increasingly called upon to recognize the value of learner-centered instructional strategies to promote the acquisition of communication and collaboration skills among learners. Strategies allowing active engagement on the part of the learner have been recognized as essential in developing a learner's critical thinking, effective communication, and problem-solving ability (UNESCO, 2017). These teaching methods also contrast with traditional teacher-centered strategies, in which learners usually remain passive, by encouraging active participation, inquiry-based learning, and cooperation.

The shift towards learner-centered instruction is driven by the need to equip learners with essential 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. These skills are crucial for success in a rapidly changing global economy. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018), education systems worldwide are increasingly adopting learner-centered strategies to better prepare learners for the demands of the modern workforce.

The African education landscape has undergone serious reform in order to address low levels of achievement amongst learners and innovate teaching strategies to better meet the needs of the learners. As reflected in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, (CESA) 2016-2025 by the African Union, emphasis has been put on pedagogical strategies that actively engage learners, while promoting learner-centered strategies (African Union, 2016). Research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that learners attain more significant improvement in the acquisition of basic competencies, especially in subjects such as languages, mathematics, and science, with teachers who apply methods that are more learner-centered (Vavrus, Thomas, & Bartlett, 2011).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The introduction of the Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya marked a significant shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach to a more modern learner-centered model. Such a shift required extensive teacher training to equip teachers with the skills needed to implement the CBE effectively.

Although teacher training on the Competency-Based Education (CBE) is still ongoing, concerns have been raised regarding its sufficiency and effectiveness, particularly in developing key competencies such as communication and collaboration in the teaching of Kiswahili (MoE, 2017; KICD, 2018). In Nandi North Sub-county, the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (2023) has reported that teachers are concerned about their limited training on how to effectively implement learner-centered strategies in Kiswahili, especially in developing communication and collaboration competencies. In addition, classroom feedback from learners has revealed low motivation and limited participation in Kiswahili lessons, suggesting a disconnect between instructional methods and learners' needs. Despite the importance of Kiswahili in the Kenyan

education curriculum and the relevance of communication and collaboration skills for 21st-century learners, students in Nandi North Sub-county continue to underperform in these areas, according to the concerns of most parents. This paper therefore seeks to assess the perceptions of Teachers and Learners on the Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instruction in Enhancing Communication Skills in Kiswahili language among Junior School Learners in Nandi North Sub County.

2.0 Literature Review

Learner-centered instruction (LCI) has gained global traction as a progressive pedagogical approach that fosters active engagement and enhances language competencies. Kerkhoff et al. (2025) explored Kenyan teachers' perceptions of learner-centered teaching following professional development, using a culturally responsive and postcolonial lens. The findings revealed a strong theoretical support for active learning and democratic teacher roles. However, practical implementation was hindered by technological limitations and resource scarcity, especially in rural settings. While the study provided insight into teacher attitudes and broader instructional practices, it did not assess specific learner outcomes such as communication skills development in Kiswahili language instruction.

Sivri and Sahin (2021) examined the adoption of learner-centered psychological principles by school administrators and teachers and its relationship with perceived school effectiveness. They found a positive correlation between learner-centered adoption and school performance. Although informative for understanding institutional readiness for LCI, the study focused more on perceptions of organizational effectiveness rather than exploring the pedagogical impact of LCI on learner communication outcomes, especially in subject-specific contexts like Kiswahili.

Benlahcene et al. (2020) investigated learner perceptions of learner-centered language instruction at a Malaysian university using the ECAM model. The results showed that learners positively perceived the approach, particularly cognitive mediation techniques. However, the study was limited to higher education and English language instruction, reducing its applicability to secondary school Kiswahili classes, which may have different classroom dynamics and pedagogical demands.

Du Plessis (2020) provided a South African perspective by exploring learner teachers' experiences and challenges with LCI. The study revealed that while pre-service teachers valued learner-centered methods, they often lacked a deep understanding and struggled with real-world application due to poor resource availability and inconsistent mentor support. Although the study highlighted practical challenges in adopting LCI, it focused on learner-teacher training and did not examine the role of LCI in communication skills development among learners.

Hemmati and Malayeri (2022) examined Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of LCI and identified institutional and cultural barriers to its implementation. The study highlighted a gap between teachers' theoretical understanding and classroom practices. Despite this valuable insight, the study

focused on foreign language instruction in a non-African context, thus lacking relevance to Kiswahili language teaching in Kenya's cultural and educational environment.

Abdelmageed and Omer (2020) focused on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in Sudan, revealing that teachers believed CLT enhanced learner speaking skills, but challenges like large class sizes and lack of authentic materials hindered its use. While CLT aligns closely with learner-centered philosophy, this study was confined to English instruction and did not consider learner perspectives, nor did it assess broader instructional strategies that contribute to communication development in Kiswahili.

Ly (2024) conducted a theoretical review of the role of teachers in promoting learner-centered learning. The findings emphasized that teachers must act as facilitators and adapt to learners' needs to foster autonomy and communication. Although the study synthesized valuable theoretical roles of teachers, it lacked empirical data and subject-specific focus necessary for understanding how such roles manifest in secondary Kiswahili instruction.

Khoury (2022) investigated SCL in online translator training in Jordan and revealed general learner and teacher support for the model, but also identified issues with time management and peer review. While this study offered relevant insights into learner-centered challenges and perceptions, it was situated in a higher education and online learning context, lacking relevance to in-person secondary Kiswahili classrooms in Kenya.

Bremner (2022) explored English teachers' conceptualizations of learner-centered education in Colombia. Teachers focused more on practical strategies like learner engagement than epistemological aspects such as power sharing. While this study broadened the scope of what constitutes LCI, its focus on teacher conceptual understanding, rather than observed instructional practices or learner outcomes in language learning, limits its utility for examining communication skills in Kiswahili.

Pan et al. (2024) studied the role of emotions and self-efficacy among teachers in Taiwan, finding that self-efficacy strongly predicted LCI adoption. Although the study contributes to understanding the psychological underpinnings of teacher engagement with learner-centered practices, it did not assess the impact on learner communication skills or consider cross-cultural contextual differences such as language subject specificity.

Tadesse et al. (2021) analyzed Eritrean teachers' perceptions of learner-centered interactive pedagogy and noted a disconnect between policy and practice, largely due to a lack of foundational support. Though the study was regionally relevant and used qualitative data to explore instructional challenges, it focused on general pedagogy and did not directly address communication development or learner perceptions in language classes.

The reviewed literature collectively emphasizes a strong theoretical and practical advocacy for learner-centered instructional strategies. However, gaps are evident across these studies, particularly in their limited focus on the specific impact of such methods on learners' communication skills in Kiswahili. Most studies either center on English instruction, higher education, or the perspectives of teachers alone, without triangulating with learner experiences or actual classroom practices. In contrast, our study fills these gaps by integrating both teacher and learner perspectives within the specific context of Kiswahili instruction in Kenyan secondary schools, offering empirical evidence on how learner-centered strategies such as group discussions, presentations, and interactive activities directly influence communication skill development. While our findings echo global concerns such as large class sizes and insufficient resources, they also highlight the promise of LCI in building learners' verbal confidence and expressive abilities. This localized, dual-perspective insight provides a more comprehensive understanding of how learner-centered methods can be refined to meet the communicative needs of Kiswahili learners.

2.1 Gaps in Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates strong global support for learner-centered instruction (LCI) but reveals significant gaps concerning its impact on communication skills within Kiswahili language classrooms in Kenya. Most existing studies focus on English or foreign language instruction (Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020; Hemmati & Malayeri, 2022) or are situated in higher education contexts (Benlahcene et al., 2020; Khoury, 2022), making their findings less applicable to secondary school Kiswahili settings. Furthermore, many studies emphasize teacher perceptions or institutional readiness (Kerkhoff et al., 2025; Sivri & Sahin, 2021) without triangulating data from learners or examining specific communication outcomes. Methodologically, a large proportion of the research relies on single approaches such as surveys or theoretical analyses, providing limited insight into actual classroom practices and learner experiences.

3.0 Methodology

The explanatory sequential design served well the purpose of this study on learner-centered instruction, whereby quantitative data was first collected and analyzed from the questionnaires for teachers and learners; afterwards, the collection of data through observation checklist and document analysis. 112 Teachers of Kiswahili and 390 junior secondary learners (Grade 7, 8 and 9) from Nandi North Sub-County made up the study's sample for the study. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 29 and Excel to generate the measures of central tendency presented in tables and figures. Observations from the checklists and document analysis were analyzed by thematic analysis and presented in quantitative text. The respondents' privacy, respect and confidentiality was strictly protected, and where appropriate, numbers were used

4.0 Results

4.1 Response Rate

Among Teachers of Kiswahili, the response rate of 91% (102 out of 112 sampled) was achieved. In contrast, the response rate among Grade 7, 8, and 9 learners was slightly lower, at 75% (291 out of 390). While this is not as high as the rates for schools and teachers, it still represents a solid level of participation for learner respondents in educational studies. According to Sataloff and Vontela (2021), a response rate exceeding 60% is sufficient for adequately representing the target population and supports the validity of conclusions and recommendations based on the collected data.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study sampled 102 Kiswahili teachers and 291 learners from junior secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County, Kenya. Among teachers, 84.3% were female and 15.7% male, reflecting the national trend of female dominance in language teaching roles. The majority (81.4%) were aged 25–30 years, with 67.6% having 1–5 years of teaching experience, suggesting a relatively young and less experienced workforce. In terms of academic qualifications, 74.5% held bachelor's degrees, 18.6% master's degrees, and 6.9% diplomas, indicating strong academic preparedness.

Learner demographics revealed a near gender balance (51.5% male, 48.5% female) and an age distribution dominated by 13–15 years (88%), consistent with junior secondary school age norms. Learners were drawn from Grade 7 (49.8%), Grade 8 (26.8%), and Grade 9 (23.4%). Most respondents (76.3%) had completed mid-term exams, providing reliable performance data. Academic performance analysis showed that 61.9% met expectations, 23.7% exceeded expectations, while only 14.4% fell below expectations, suggesting overall positive learning outcomes. These findings provide a contextual understanding of the participants and their potential influence on the implementation and effectiveness of learner-centered instructional strategies.

4.3 Teachers Perceptions on Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instructions
Teachers were questioned on their perceptions on the effectiveness of learner centered instructions, seeking to find out whether; group discussions, role-playing activities, encouraging learners to ask questions, peer feed-back, learner presentations, interactive teaching and learner centered strategies work out effectively. The results obtained are presented in the table below.
Key: SA- Strongly Agree**, A-**Agree**, N-**Neutral**, D-**Disagree**, SD-**Strongly Disagree, F-Frequency, %-Percentage

Table 1 Teachers Perceptions on Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instructions

Statement	F/%	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Group discussions in Kiswahili enhance learners' confidence in speaking	F	83	19	0	0	0	4.8137
	%	81.4	18.6	0	0	0	
Role-playing activities in Kiswahili improve learners' ability to express themselves clearly.	F	60	30	12	0	0	4.4706
	%	58.8	29.4	11.8	0	0	
Encouraging learners to ask questions enhances their communication skills.	F	37	65	0	0	0	4.3627
	%	36.3	63.7	0	0	0	
Peer feedback in Kiswahili lessons strengthens learners' communication abilities.	F	37	40	25	0	0	4.1176
	%	36.3	39.2	24.5	0	0	
Learner presentations in Kiswahili foster effective communication skills.	F	48	54	0	0	0	4.4706
	%	47.1	52.9	0	0	0	
Learner-centered instruction helps learners articulate their ideas more effectively in Kiswahili.	F	77	13	12	0	0	4.6373
	%	75.5	12.7	11.8	0	0	
Interactive teaching methods increase learners' participation in Kiswahili language classes	F	67	35	0	0	0	4.6569
	%	65.7	34.3	0	0	0	
Learner-centered strategies improve learners' verbal communication skills in Kiswahili.	F	56	27	19	0	0	4.3627
	%	54.9	26.5	18.6	0	0	

The table shows teachers' perceptions on learner centered instruction. The findings indicate a strong positive endorsement of learner-centered methods, with the majority of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements presented. There were no instances of disagreement across any of the items, reflecting a consensus among teachers about the value of these instructional strategies.

One of the most highly rated strategies was group discussions, which had the highest mean of 4.8137. This suggests that teachers strongly believe group discussions significantly enhance learners' confidence in speaking Kiswahili. Similarly, interactive teaching methods also received high praise (mean = 4.6569), with all teachers either agreeing or strongly agreeing that these strategies increase learner participation. These results highlight a common belief that engagement and interaction are central to language acquisition, especially in a subject like Kiswahili that relies heavily on verbal expression.

Other learner-centered methods such as role-playing and learner presentations were also positively received. Role-playing was perceived to help learners express themselves more clearly (mean = 4.4706), though a small portion of respondents (11.8%) were neutral, indicating a slightly lower level of certainty or perhaps less familiarity with this approach. Learner presentations, on the other hand, had unanimous agreement on their effectiveness, suggesting they are widely practiced and appreciated for fostering communication skills.

The data also reveals that encouraging learners to ask questions (mean = 4.3627) is seen as a critical element in developing communication abilities. This emphasizes the importance of creating a classroom environment where learners feel comfortable expressing themselves. Similarly, peer feedback was viewed positively (mean = 4.1176), though it had the highest neutrality (24.5%) among all items. This could point to a need for more structured peer assessment training or exposure to this method to maximize its effectiveness.

The effect of learner-centered instruction in improving learners' ability to articulate ideas was affirmed by the respondents (mean = 4.6373). This reinforces the idea that when learners are given the opportunity to take an active role in their learning, their communication skills significantly improve.

It was also observed that teachers were responsive, acknowledging feedback and contributions from students. This is an important aspect of creating a supportive learning environment. Teacher responsiveness helps build a rapport with students, increases their motivation, and encourages them to contribute more in class. It also validates student ideas and fosters a sense of belonging in the classroom.

The results demonstrate a strong consensus among teachers on the value of learner-centered strategies in Kiswahili instruction. While some strategies like peer feedback may benefit from further development or training, the general perception is strongly positive. This supports the continued use and integration of learner-centered instructional strategies in Kiswahili classrooms to enhance learner communication and engagement. This aligns well with the findings of Kerkhoff et al. (2025), whose case study in rural Kenya revealed that learner-centered teaching practices significantly improved learner participation and motivation, especially in under-resourced settings. Teachers in that study emphasized how strategies like group discussions, learner-led activities, and contextualized instruction fostered a more engaging and responsive learning environment.

Similarly, Emanuel, Vuzo, and Maro (2022) examined teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of Kiswahili literature in Tanzania and found a comparable trend. While many educators expressed positive attitudes toward learner-centered methods, practical implementation was often constrained by factors such as class size, lack of resources, or limited professional development opportunities. Their study also revealed that while strategies like dramatization, peer teaching, and discussions were favored, more technical elements—such as peer feedback and formative assessment required additional teacher training to be applied effectively.

Together, these studies and the present findings suggest that while learner-centered instruction is broadly embraced and seen as beneficial in enhancing learner communication and engagement, full realization of its potential depends on sustained teacher support, training, and resource allocation. Nevertheless, the strong positive perception confirms that these strategies should remain a priority in Kiswahili instruction moving forward.

4.4 Learners' Perceptions on Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instructions

Learners were questioned on their perceptions about the effectiveness of learner centered instructions, seeking to find out whether; Learner centered instruction actively engages them in Kiswahili lessons, if they feel motivated to express themselves during discussions work out effectively, if group work in class improve their communication skills in Kiswahili, if learner-centered methods make Kiswahili lessons more enjoyable and interactive, if they learn more effectively in Kiswahili classes when they participate in discussions, if Participating in discussions helps them build confidence in speaking Kiswahili. The results obtained are presented in the table below. **Key: SA-** Strongly Agree**, A-**Agree**, N-**Neutral**, D-**Disagree**, SD-**Strongly Disagree, F-Frequency, %-Percentage

Table 2: Learners' Perceptions on Effectiveness of Learner Centered Instructions

Statement	F/%	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Learner centered instruction actively engages me in Kiswahili lessons	F	149	75	64	0	3	4.2612
	%	51.2	25.8	22	0	1	
I feel motivated to express myself during discussions	F	222	66	3	0	0	4.7526
	%	76.3	22.7	1	0	0	
Group work in class improve my communication skills in Kiswahili	F	216	60	12	3	0	4.6804
	%	74.2	20.6	4.1	1	0	
Learner-centered methods make Kiswahili lessons more enjoyable and interactive	F	222	60	6	3	0	4.7216
	%	76.3	20.6	2.1	1	0	
learn more effectively in Kiswahili classes when I participate in discussions	F	160	110	12	3	6	4.4261
	%	55	37.8	4.1	1	2.1	
Participating in discussions helps me build confidence in speaking Kiswahili.	F	186	96	6	3	0	4.5979
	%	63.9	33	2.1	1	0	

Table 2 presents the perceptions of learners on effectiveness of learner centered instructions. On active Engagement in Kiswahili Lessons**,** a combined 77% of learners (51.2% SA, 25.8% A) agreed that learner-centered instruction actively engages them in Kiswahili lessons. The mean of 4.26 indicates a strong positive perception of engagement. This aligns with findings by Nzomo and Kariuki (2021), who noted that active learning strategies increase learner participation and attentiveness, especially in language classes where learner interaction is critical.

On motivation to **e**xpress **o**neself in discussions**,** 99% (76.3% SA, 22.7% A) reported feeling motivated to express themselves during class discussions, with a high mean of 4.75. This suggests that learner-centered instruction significantly encourages self-expression. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, such interactions are crucial in promoting linguistic and cognitive development (Eggen & Kauchak, 2020).

On **i**mprovement of **c**ommunication **s**kills **t**hrough **g**roup **w**ork**,** 94.8% of learners (74.2% SA, 20.6% A) believed that group work improves their communication skills in Kiswahili, with a mean of 4.68. This highlights the role of collaborative learning in language development. As supported by Gichuhi and Wambugu (2022), cooperative learning fosters articulation, turn-taking, and contextual vocabulary use, which are key in language acquisition.

On **e**njoyment and **i**nteractivity in Kiswahili **l**essons**,** 96.9% of learners indicated that learner-centered methods make Kiswahili lessons more enjoyable and interactive, scoring a mean of 4.72. This affirms the argument by Omoke and Onyango (2020) that learner-centered strategies enhance lesson appeal, leading to increased learner motivation and reduced classroom anxiety.

On effectiveness in learning **t**hrough **p**articipation**,** about 92.8% (55% SA, 37.8% A) agreed that participating in discussions helps them learn more effectively in Kiswahili. The mean of 4.43 reinforces this positive outlook. Participation allows learners to internalize content better by discussing and reflecting on it, a key tenet of constructivist learning theories (Bruner, 2019).

Finally, 96.5% of the learners (63.9% SA, 33% A) believed that discussions help build their confidence in speaking Kiswahili. With a mean of 4.60, this underscores the value of learner-centered classrooms in supporting language fluency and self-assurance. According to Chege and Wanjiru (2021), such instructional practices foster a safe space for practice and constructive feedback, which are essential in boosting language confidence.

The findings from the observation checklist showed that Student confidence and willingness to express themselves in Kiswahili was observed. This indicates that the students felt comfortable using the language, which is vital for language acquisition. Confidence in speaking and writing is fundamental for mastering a language, and this finding suggests that students are being given opportunities to practice and develop their Kiswahili skills.

Findings from the document analysis indicated that developing learners' communication competencies is a central focus in the implementation of learner-centered teaching strategies. In 91% of the lesson plans, activities were included to support the development of oral and written communication skills. Such activities included class presentations, poetry recitation, and structured dialogues. These strategies provided learners with platforms to articulate their thoughts in Kiswahili, thereby improving their fluency, vocabulary use, and self-expression.

However, while communication was well-addressed through presentations and group sharing, debates were less frequently employed as a tool for building argumentative and persuasive language skills. This gap was acknowledged by several teachers during focus group discussions. Many expressed that logistical challenges, including time constraints and large class sizes, hindered the

effective use of debates despite their acknowledged potential in promoting critical thinking and language precision.

Results from learners revealed that they valued opportunities to express themselves in class, noting improvements in their confidence when speaking Kiswahili in front of peers. Teachers corroborated these perceptions, highlighting cases where formerly shy or passive learners gradually developed verbal confidence through routine engagement in oral tasks. One teacher described a notable transformation in a learner who, after participating in weekly group discussions, began volunteering to lead class presentations.

Feedback practices in relation to communication skills were present in 90% of the reviewed records of work. Teachers provided both oral and written feedback on learners' speaking and writing abilities, though the level of specificity varied. Some feedback focused on content and fluency, while others lacked depth in areas such as tone, audience awareness, or use of language conventions. Teachers noted a need for more professional development on providing formative, criterion-based feedback in oral communication contexts.

5.0 Conclusions

It is concluded that both teachers and learners view learner-centered instructional strategies positively, particularly in enhancing engagement, enjoyment, and communication in Kiswahili lessons. High levels of learner motivation and self-expression were reported, indicating that these strategies foster a conducive learning environment. However, some methods such as peer feedback and debates were underutilized, largely due to logistical challenges like time constraints and large class sizes. The findings suggest that while perceptions are favorable, there is a need for more targeted training and support for teachers to fully implement and structure these strategies effectively, especially in developing learners' verbal confidence and oral communication through structured feedback.

6.0 Recommendations

Diversify Assessment Strategies: Teachers should be trained to use a broader range of assessment methods, including projects, presentations, and peer assessments. This will provide a more holistic evaluation of learners' abilities and learning progress.

Promote the Use of Formative Assessment: Teachers should be encouraged to regularly use formative assessments and adjust their teaching based on feedback. This will allow for more personalized instruction and help cater to the diverse needs of learners.

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