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**Reconsidering the Champion Teacher in Assessment-Oriented
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Reconsidering the Champion Teacher in Assessment-Oriented Development Education Systems

 Nyagwegwe C. Wango, Jane F.A Rarieya, Fredrick Mtenzi, Nicholas Wachira

Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development, East Africa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8439-9148>

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study investigates the impact of teacher assessment practices in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda on the cultivation of “champion teachers” who can provide competency-based, inclusive, and gender-responsive education.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating document analysis, interviews, and surveys with teacher educators and student teachers from the three countries.

Findings: Even though policy changes have encouraged new ways of teaching, teacher education still mostly focuses on summative assessments and following the rules. This method makes it harder for teachers to become more reflective and adaptable, which slows progress toward better, more inclusive education.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice: The study enhances theory by illustrating how assessment culture influences teacher identity, informs policy through region-specific reform recommendations, and guides practice by identifying methods to make assessment more formative and inclusive in East African teacher education.

Keywords: *Teacher Assessment, Champion Teacher, Competency-Based Curriculum, Teacher Education, Practicum Evaluation*

1 INTRODUCTION

In discussions about educational reform across Africa, the idea of the "champion teacher" has become very important. This term refers to teachers who are very good at teaching, care deeply about their students, and can come up with new ideas even when they don't have a lot of resources (Schweisfurth, 2011; Sahlberg, 2015). Even though this ideal is well-known, many teacher education programs still use test scores, following rules, and following performance checklists to define excellence (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Makunja, 2016). This method of assessment frequently hinders the cultivation of competencies like creativity, critical thinking, reflection, and inclusivity, which are essential for exemplary teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Recent changes to the curriculum in East African countries like Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya are meant to make teachers more skilled and creative (Kafyulilo et al., 2020; Oduor & Njeru, 2023). However, assessment systems in these situations are still mostly based on traditional, summative, and content-based methods. These entrenched practices dictate the curriculum, pedagogical methods, and the attributes that are esteemed or sanctioned, frequently hindering comprehensive teacher development (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Consequently, a significant disparity exists between the competencies advocated by policy reforms and those genuinely developed through assessment practices (Nsengimana, Habimana, & Butera, 2021).

The ongoing focus on summative assessment leads to a disconnect between the objectives of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) reforms and the actual realities of teacher training. Current assessment practices tend to reinforce surface learning, compliance, and teaching to the test (Wiggins, 1990; World Bank, 2021) instead of nurturing reflective practitioners who can advance CBC principles. This tension makes it harder for champion teachers to emerge who can adapt to different classroom situations and support learning that is open to everyone and based on questions.

Understanding how important assessment is to a teacher's identity and professional growth is important for reaching national education goals. Practicum evaluation and formative feedback are especially important because they are the most important experiences for teachers who are just starting (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Nakabugo, Byamugisha, & Ssentanda, 2020). However, when assessment is not in line with CBC standards, it can make it harder for teachers to become adaptive, creative, and focused on their students.

This study critically analyzes the assessment practices in teacher education institutions in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya, exploring their potential to inadvertently hinder or promote the development of exemplary teachers. Utilizing comparative, longitudinal research, the paper elucidates the conflicts between assessment traditions and the objectives of CBC reforms. It also suggests a new way of thinking about assessment, based on authentic assessment theory (Wiggins, 1990), to help teachers in East Africa become better at their jobs.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite recent reforms introducing competency-based curricula and inclusive education policies in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, teacher assessment practices remain predominantly summative and compliance-oriented. This misalignment limits the development of reflective, adaptive, and inclusive teachers, undermining efforts to improve foundational learning outcomes.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine current teacher assessment practices in teacher education institutions across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda.
2. To explore the extent to which these assessment systems support the emergence of “champion teachers” who embody competency-based, inclusive, and gender-responsive teaching.
3. To identify barriers and opportunities in aligning assessment practices with policy reforms.
4. To provide actionable recommendations for enhancing assessment systems to better support effective, adaptive, and inclusive teacher development.

2 Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Idea of the Champion Teacher

The idea of the “champion teacher” has become more popular in African education discussions, especially as schools work to make changes that fit with 21st-century skills and the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) (Schweisfurth, 2011; Sahlberg, 2015). Champion teachers are not only experts in their subject matter; they also reflect on their work, are creative, flexible, and use inclusive teaching methods. These educators exhibit the capacity to innovate, improvise, and address varied learner requirements, frequently within resource-limited environments (Sahlberg, 2015). Research underscores that exemplary teachers promote inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving within the classroom, transcending mere rote knowledge transmission to enable significant learning experiences (Schweisfurth, 2011; Fullan, 2007).

Even though this is a common goal, traditional teacher evaluation systems don't often recognize or reward these traits. Instead, the focus is still on following the rules, remembering what was said, and filling out standardized forms (Makunja, 2016). This disconnect prompts urgent inquiries regarding the potential reconfiguration of assessment systems to cultivate the comprehensive competencies exemplified by exemplary educators.

2.2 Evaluating Teacher Education

Assessment is a key factor in determining a teacher's identity, how they teach, and how they grow professionally. Modern literature supports the implementation of formative assessment in teacher education, defined by ongoing feedback, reflective practice, and genuine performance tasks, to cultivate adaptive and reflective practitioners (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Darling-Hammond &

Bransford, 2005). Performance-based assessments, including teaching portfolios, lesson studies, self and peer evaluations, and practicum reflections, have demonstrated efficacy in fostering profound learning and professional autonomy (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020).

On the other hand, many people think that using summative, written tests too much leads to surface learning and compliance instead of critical thinking and creativity (Wiggins, 1990; Brookfield, 2017). These methods frequently neglect to evaluate critical teaching competencies, including differentiated instruction, classroom management, and inclusive pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

2.3 The Truth About Assessment in African Teacher Education

Even though policies are moving toward CBC and learner-centered education, assessment practices in African teacher education are still mostly based on traditions from the colonial era (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Kafyulilo, Rugambwa, & Araka, 2020). Research conducted in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia consistently identifies several challenges: inadequate assessment literacy among tutors and mentors, irregular practicum supervision, and a deficiency of tools for evaluating creativity and inclusivity (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019; Makunja, 2016; Nsengimana, Habimana, & Butera, 2021).

In numerous instances, continuous assessment is either inadequately comprehended or inconsistently implemented, whereas practicum evaluation frequently emphasizes administrative adherence over pedagogical innovation (Nakabugo, Byamugisha, & Ssentanda, 2020). Even in places where reforms are more advanced, like Kenya, the pressure of national exams and a lack of resources can make it harder to use real, performance-based assessments (Oduor & Njeru, 2023).

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Theory of Authentic Assessment

This study utilizes Authentic Assessment Theory (Wiggins, 1990) as its analytical framework. Authentic assessment focuses on judging students (and, in this case, teachers) based on tasks that are similar to what they would do in a job. Based on constructivist ideas, real-world assessment requires students to use what they've learned in real-world situations, think about their work, and show that they have the skills needed to teach in real-world situations. Some of the most important parts are performance tasks, portfolios, reflective journals, peer and self-assessment, and observation rubrics that focus on whole-person skills.

This theory is important because it fits with the champion teacher model. It values being responsive to the situation, looking at the whole picture, using professional judgment, and using evidence based on performance. Using this framework shows the inconsistencies between the teaching standards set by the CBC and the assessment systems used in East African teacher education, which are based on a lot of tests.

2.5 Recognized Research Deficiencies

Although CBC reforms and the champion teacher discourse are extensively advocated, there exists a paucity of empirical evidence regarding the impact of current assessment practices on the cultivation of champion teachers in East Africa. Prior research has identified enduring discrepancies between policy objectives and classroom realities; however, there is a paucity of systematic investigations into the influence of assessment on teacher excellence across various national contexts (Kafyulilo et al., 2020; World Bank, 2021).

This research fills these voids by offering a comparative, evidence-driven examination of assessment systems in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya, focusing specifically on their influence on the development of exemplary teachers.

3 Methodology

This study employs a secondary qualitative analysis approach, drawing on data previously collected through the SESEA (Strengthening Education Systems in East Africa) and F4L (Foundation for Learning) projects conducted between 2022 and 2024 in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. These projects utilized mixed methods, combining surveys, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, to explore teacher assessment practices and the development of teaching competencies across teacher training colleges and practicum schools.

For this paper, it systematically reviewed and synthesized relevant sections of the SESEA and F4L reports, focusing on themes related to assessment systems, practicum evaluation, and the cultivation of “champion teachers.” The analysis involved coding qualitative data and summarizing quantitative findings to identify cross-cutting patterns, unique country-specific dynamics, and systemic challenges or opportunities highlighted in the original studies.

Ethical approval for the primary data collection was obtained under the SESEA and F4L protocols. This secondary analysis was limited to anonymized data and followed all relevant data use agreements.

4 FINDINGS

Using detailed information from the SESEA and F4L projects, the results show that assessment and professional learning practices affect the rise of champion teachers in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda in both general and country-specific ways. This section is organized by theme and includes comparisons. It shows how assessment systems, teacher training, inclusive pedagogy, and the growth of professional skills are all connected.

4.1 Student Teacher Outcomes and Competency Development

In all three countries, there is clear proof that basic knowledge, confidence in teaching, and attitudes toward the teaching profession have all improved. The SESEA project showed that early-grade students in Tanzania made big strides in reading and math. This was shown by big jumps in

EGRA/EGMA scores and a big drop in the number of students who couldn't read. These positive changes are linked to professional development programs for both in-service and pre-service teachers. This shows how important teacher preparation is for basic learning outcomes.

The F4L longitudinal studies conducted in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda revealed that student teachers exhibit significant intrinsic motivation for teaching, with more than two-thirds in each country identifying teaching as their "dream job" and conveying a sense of vocation. But even with all this excitement, there are still worries about long-term retention. A significant minority (42% in Uganda, for example) still sees themselves leaving the profession in a few years because of problems with workload, advancement, and resources.

Competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have made CBC principles well-known among teacher educators and student teachers, especially in Kenya and, to a lesser extent, Uganda. For example, most Kenyan student teachers say they are "very good" or "excellent" at planning lessons, using differentiated instruction, and using learner-centered methods. In Tanzania and Uganda, most student teachers say they are good at basic curriculum and assessment tasks. However, they still have trouble with more advanced skills like integrating ICT, differentiated learning, and peer review.

The SESEA and F4L evaluations across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda provide clear evidence of significant improvements in student teacher competencies, confidence, and attitudes towards the teaching profession. In Tanzania, SESEA data demonstrated substantial gains in foundational literacy and numeracy: for example, mean phoneme recognition scores increased from 3.00 (SD = 2.89) to 5.17 (SD = 6.66), and the proportion of children unable to read a single word dropped from 77.2% at baseline to 32.1% at endline (see SESEA Table 3 & 4). Similar trends were observed for numeracy, with mean number identification scores rising from 5.73 to 10.11.

Table 1. EGRA/EGMA Assessment Results (Tanzania, SESEA)

Assessment	Phase	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
EGRA - Phoneme Recognition	Baseline	3.00	2.89
EGRA - Phoneme Recognition	Endline	5.17	6.66
EGMA - Number Identification	Baseline	5.73	6.78
EGMA - Number Identification	Endline	10.11	8.82
% unable to read a word	Baseline	77.2%	--
% unable to read a word	Endline	32.1%	--

Table 2. Student Teacher Self-Assessment: CBC-Aligned Competencies (Kenya, F4L)

Competency/Skill	% “Very Good” or “Excellent”
Lesson planning	92%
Differentiated instruction	87%
Learner-centered pedagogy	85%
Managing large classes (>80 students)	35%
Integrating ICT	60%
Supporting complex concept learning	69%

Longitudinal F4L studies in all three countries found that more than two-thirds of student teachers considered teaching their “dream job,” reflecting strong intrinsic motivation. However, a notable minority, such as 42% in Uganda, still see themselves leaving the profession within a few years, often due to workload, limited career progression, and resource constraints.

Table 3. Student Teacher Professional Motivation and Retention (F4L, All Countries)

Motivation/Retention Statement	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
“Teaching is my dream job” (% agree/strongly agree)	72%	70%	68%
“I will quit my teaching job after some years” (% agree)	37%	35%	42%

Competency-based curriculum (CBC) reforms have increased student teachers’ awareness and self-reported competence in CBC-aligned teaching, particularly in Kenya. For instance, the majority of Kenyan student teachers rated themselves “very good” or “excellent” in lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and learner-centered pedagogy (see F4L Kenya Table 8). In Tanzania and Uganda, student teachers reported proficiency in basic curriculum and assessment tasks, but continued to struggle with more advanced skills such as ICT integration, differentiated instruction, and peer review.

Table 4. Self-Reported Familiarity with Core Teaching Practices (Kenya, F4L Table 8)

Practice/Skill	% “Very Familiar”
Curriculum analysis	60%
Lesson design	69%
Managing large classes (>80 students)	35%
Using gender-aware, responsive methods	51%

Table 5. Key Gaps in Advanced Teaching Competencies

Advanced Skill	% “Very Familiar” (Kenya)	% “Very Familiar” (Tanzania/Uganda)
ICT integration	60%	25–30%
Differentiated instruction	56%	30%
Peer review/collaboration	45%	20%

Qualitative responses across countries reflect increased confidence in lesson planning, material improvisation, participatory methods, and group work. However, resource scarcity, large class sizes, and inconsistent mentorship continue to hinder the development of higher-order pedagogic skills. All in all, student teachers across East Africa are making measurable progress in foundational teaching competencies and demonstrate strong motivation for the profession. However, there remain persistent gaps in advanced skills, particularly in ICT, differentiated instruction, and reflective practice, which require targeted support through ongoing professional development and system-level investment.

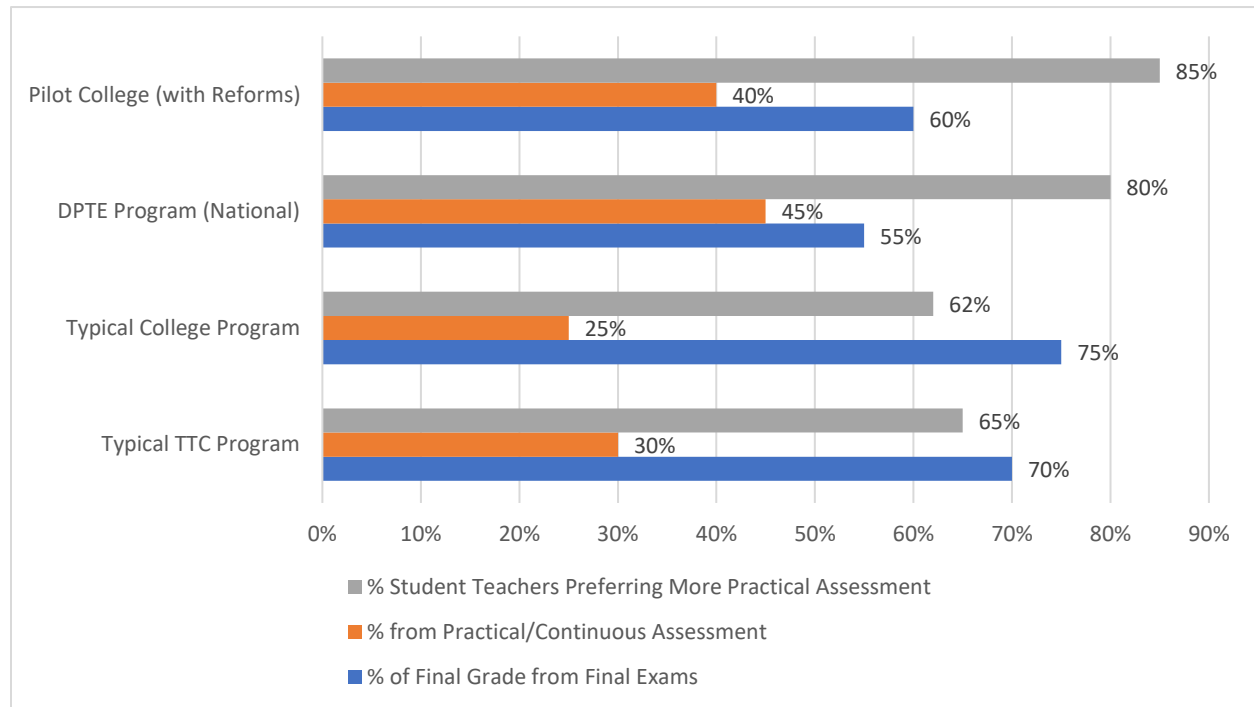
4.2 How Assessment Practices Affect Things

4.2.1 Too much focus on final exams

In both Tanzania and Uganda, assessment systems still put a lot of weight on summative written tests, which favor remembering facts and following rules over showing teaching skill or creativity. In these environments, student teachers indicate that they allocate considerable time to preparing for high-stakes examinations, frequently to the detriment of reflective practice or collaborative planning. This pattern is made stronger by rules at the school and national levels that require mid-term and final written tests, even when they don't match up with CBC or real-life teaching skills.

On the other hand, Kenya takes a more balanced approach. The DPTE (Diploma in Primary Teacher Education) program includes traditional tests as well as performance-based rubrics, reflective journals, and practical teaching tasks. However, even in Kenya, student teachers describe feeling pressure to excel in final written tests, and final grades in many programs still skew toward summative outcomes.

Figure 1: Proportion of Final Exam vs. Practical/Continuous Assessment in Teacher Education Programs



Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

As seen in Figure 1, both Tanzania and Uganda allocate over 70% of teacher assessment to final written exams, with only a minority of the grade coming from continuous or practical assessment methods. In Kenya, the DPTE program achieves a more balanced distribution, though summative exams still account for more than half of the final grade. Notably, in pilot colleges in Kenya where practical assessment has been increased to 40%, a higher proportion of student teachers (85%) expressed a preference for even more practical assessment, and interviews revealed increased engagement and perceived improvements in teaching competence.

These findings highlight the ongoing need to shift the balance of assessment in pre-service teacher education toward more authentic, practice-oriented, and formative methods that better reflect the skills required for effective, inclusive, and learner-centered teaching.

4.2.2 Assessment in the Classroom and Practicum

Experiences in practicum are very important for teachers to shape their identities. In Tanzania and Uganda, practicum assessment often emphasizes compliance, concentrating on the fulfillment of lesson plans, schemes of work, and handwritten teaching aids, rather than on demonstrable classroom competence or innovation. The document analysis from the F4L Uganda and Tanzania studies indicates that lesson plans, while generally comprehensive, seldom reflect considerations of gender, inclusion, or adaptive pedagogy. In both situations, mentorship and supervision were

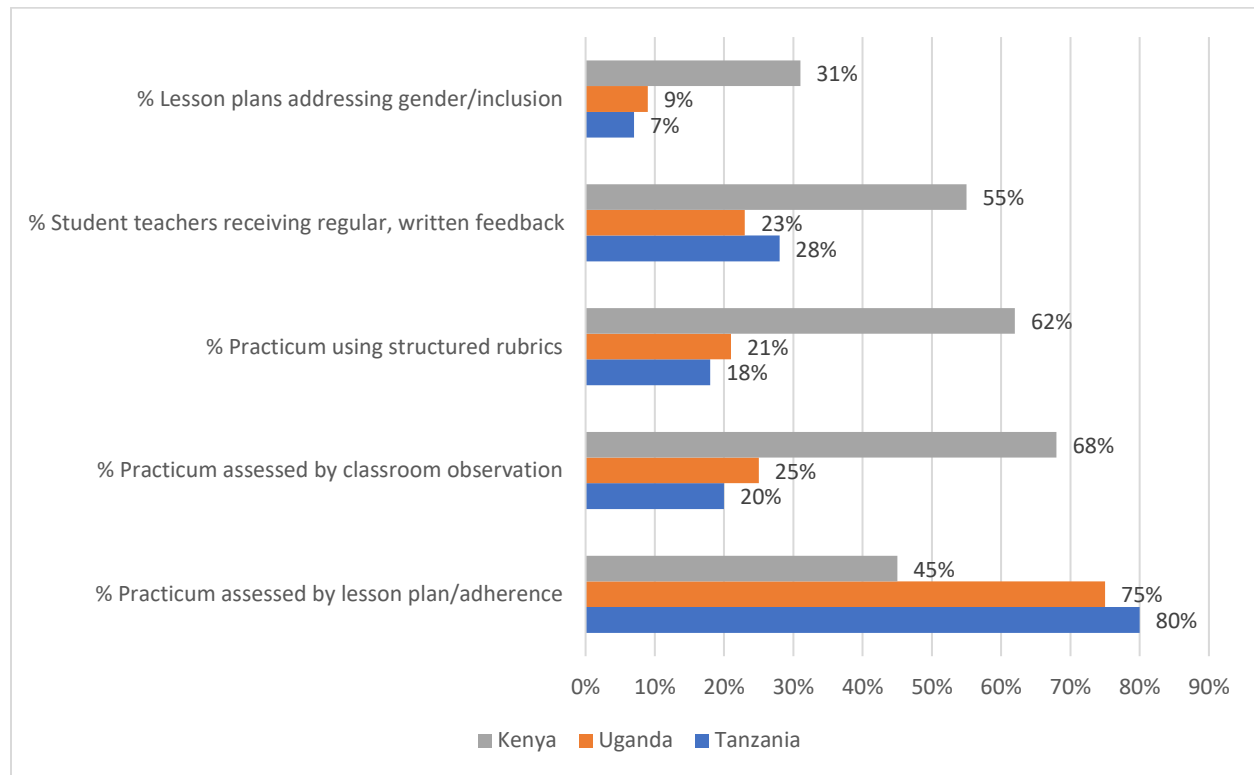
not consistent. Some mentors focused on giving feedback that helped the mentee grow, while others focused on making sure the mentee followed the checklist.

Structured practicum rubrics and mentorship models in Kenya have resulted in enhanced alignment with the CBC, as demonstrated by lesson observations and portfolio evaluations. More often than not, student teachers are tested on their creativity, ability to include others, and ability to solve problems. But even in Kenya, there are times when mentors go back to traditional supervision, especially in schools that don't have enough resources.

In Tanzania and Uganda, practicum assessment often emphasizes compliance and administrative requirements, such as the completion of lesson plans, schemes of work, and handwritten teaching aids, rather than observation of actual classroom teaching competence or pedagogical innovation. Document analysis from F4L studies shows that while lesson plans are generally available and comprehensive, only a small proportion (less than 10% in Uganda) explicitly address gender, inclusion, or adaptive pedagogy. The majority of lesson observations in these countries continue to focus on procedural adherence rather than the quality of student engagement, differentiation, or creativity.

Mentorship and supervision during practicum are inconsistent: some student teachers receive targeted, growth-oriented feedback, while others receive only checklist-based supervision. For example, in Uganda, only 23% of student teachers reported regular, substantive feedback from their mentors, while 42% described their supervision as mainly administrative.

In contrast, Kenya has made more progress in aligning practicum assessment with Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) principles. Structured practicum rubrics, reflective journals, and portfolio evaluations are increasingly used to assess classroom competence, inclusion, and problem-solving. According to F4L Kenya data, 68% of student teachers reported that their practicum assessment included direct observation of classroom teaching, and 55% received written feedback on their performance.

Figure 2: Features of Classroom and Practicum Assessment in Teacher Education (2023–2024)

Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

In Tanzania, a student teacher reported, “*My assessment was mostly about completing the required documents. There was little focus on how I managed the classroom or involved all learners.*” Meanwhile in Kenya, a participant shared, “*We had to submit portfolios and were observed several times teaching different lessons. The feedback helped me improve my inclusive teaching strategies.*”

Despite Kenya’s progress, even there, some mentors revert to traditional, compliance-focused supervision, particularly in resource-constrained schools. Across all contexts, there is evidence that more authentic, performance-based assessment—aligned with CBC—is associated with increased student teacher confidence, reflective practice, and readiness to address diverse learning needs.

While practicum assessment in East Africa is evolving, significant disparities remain. There is a need to further shift assessment focus from procedural compliance to direct, formative evaluation of teaching practice, especially in the areas of inclusion, gender responsiveness, and adaptive pedagogy.

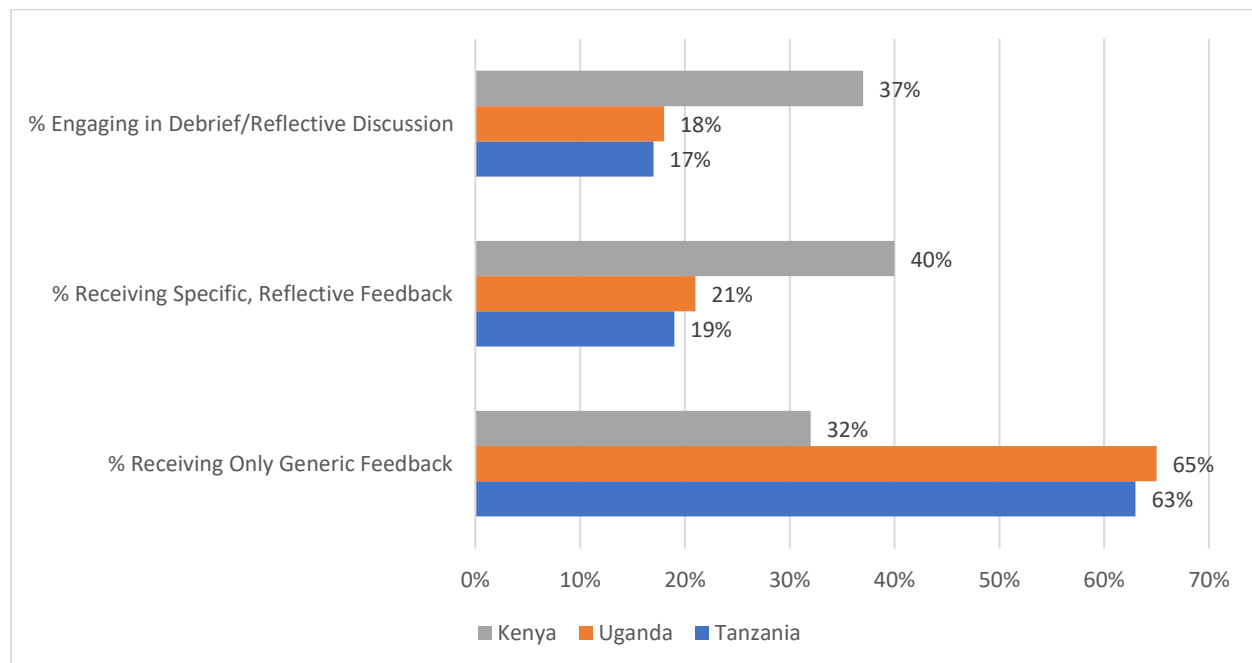
4.2.3 Feedback that helps you learn and think about what you've done

Formative feedback is still not widely used in any country. In Tanzania and Uganda, feedback for student teachers is often short, corrective, and doesn't include suggestions that can be used. A lot of people said they only got general feedback like “speak louder” or “improve your questioning.” Structured reflection sessions, peer reviews, and post-lesson debriefs are used more often in Kenya, but the quality and frequency of feedback are still uneven, often depending on how good the mentor is and how busy they are.

In Tanzania and Uganda, the majority of feedback given to student teachers, both during coursework and practicum, is brief, generic, and focused on compliance or correction. For example, 60–65% of student teachers in both countries report that most feedback they receive is limited to comments like “improve your introduction” or “control the class better,” with little explanation or actionable advice. Only about 20% receive feedback that helps them understand why a change is needed or invites them to reflect on their teaching strategies.

In contrast, Kenya has begun implementing more formative feedback practices, particularly in institutions piloting competency-based teacher education. Here, 40% of student teachers say they receive feedback that is specific, constructive, and includes opportunities for discussion and self-reflection. Peer feedback and post-lesson debriefs are also more common, helping student teachers to analyze their teaching and plan for improvement.

Figure 3: Experience of Feedback During Practicum



Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

Participants from Uganda mentioned that *“Most feedback was just about what I did wrong. I was not told how to improve or why it mattered.”* Further from Kenya a participant added that *“After teaching, my mentor and I would discuss what worked and what didn’t. This helped me think more deeply about my teaching and try new methods.”*

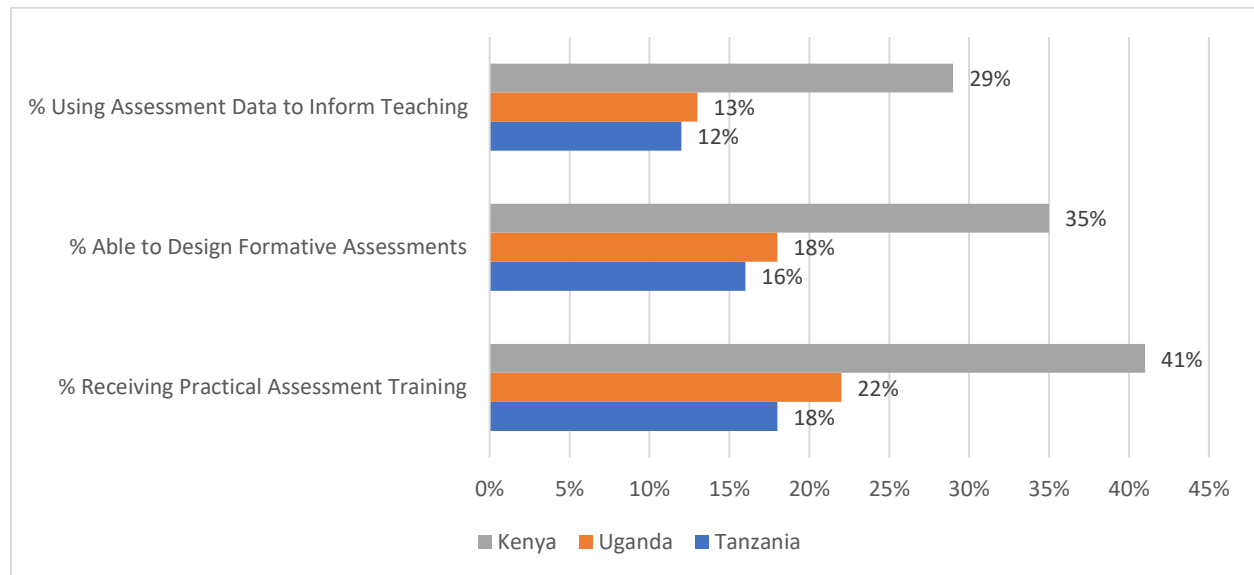
These findings highlight the need for a shift from feedback that merely corrects surface errors to feedback that promotes reflective practice and professional growth. When student teachers receive specific, dialogic feedback and engage in reflective discussions, they are more likely to experiment with new strategies and develop as adaptive, effective educators. Expanding such practices, through mentor training, institutional support, and structured reflection time, will be crucial for deepening teacher learning across East Africa.

4.2.4 Professional Learning and Assessment Literacy

Teacher educators have very different levels of knowledge about assessment. Many tutors in Tanzania have not been trained in CBC-aligned assessment, rubrics, portfolio evaluation, or differentiated instruction. This leads to an over-reliance on traditional, summative methods and makes it harder to judge how well someone teaches as a whole. Ugandan tutors have a better grasp of concepts, but they can’t use ICT as much, and the rules aren’t always clear, which makes it hard to put what they learn into practice. In Kenya, clearer guidelines and more training for teachers have made it easier to understand assessments. However, it is still hard to measure less concrete skills like creativity and inclusion.

In Tanzania and Uganda, assessment literacy is often limited to theoretical coursework, with little emphasis on practical, classroom-based application. Only 18% of surveyed student teachers in Tanzania and 22% in Uganda indicated that their training included hands-on experience with designing or interpreting formative and summative assessments. Most report that assessment training focuses heavily on examination techniques and procedural compliance (e.g., how to fill out mark sheets), rather than on using assessment as a tool for supporting learning.

In contrast, Kenya’s ongoing curriculum reforms have prompted a greater focus on practical assessment literacy. Here, 41% of student teachers report engaging in tasks such as creating rubrics, developing performance-based assessments, and analyzing student work during their training. However, even in Kenya, many student teachers and mentors express uncertainty about how to use assessment data to adapt instruction or to support learners with diverse needs.

Figure 4: Assessment Literacy in Teacher Education Programs

Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

Professional learning for in-service teachers is also uneven. While CPD is mandated in all three countries, its implementation is inconsistent. In Tanzania and Uganda, CPD tends to be infrequent and often focuses on administrative updates rather than on deepening pedagogical or assessment skills. Only 27% of Tanzanian and 31% of Ugandan teachers reported participating in CPD activities related to assessment in the past year. In Kenya, 49% of teachers reported recent participation in assessment-focused CPD, often linked to the rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum.

In Tanzania a student teacher mentioned that *“Our training was about preparing exam questions and completing records. We did not discuss how to use assessments to help students learn better.”* Meanwhile in Kenya a student teacher said that *“We learned to design rubrics and use them in class. Still, it’s sometimes hard to know how to use assessment results to change my teaching.”*

4.3 Gender, Inclusion, and Responsive Pedagogy

All three countries have made progress in raising awareness about gender and inclusion. For example, student teachers and tutors say they know more about gender equality and inclusive practices because of targeted interventions like F4L and SESEA. But this knowledge hasn’t yet been fully put into practice in the classroom and on tests. A small number of tutors in Uganda and Tanzania consistently plan for gender and inclusion in their lessons. Kenyan student teachers are more likely to say they use gender-sensitive language and group students in ways that include everyone.

However, there are still some gaps, such as the fact that male students are more likely to get practicum placements and that students with disabilities don't get as much help as they should. Survey data from all three countries show that most student teachers think their schools are making progress toward gender equality. However, a significant minority still sees gaps, especially when it comes to including students with disabilities and making sure everyone has equal access to learning resources.

Ensuring gender equity, inclusion, and the use of responsive pedagogy are central to delivering quality, equitable education for all learners. Teacher education programs in East Africa are increasingly recognizing the need to address barriers related to gender, disability, and diverse learning needs. However, findings from SESEA and F4L project data reveal that, despite policy commitments, significant gaps remain in translating these priorities into effective classroom practice.

Across Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya, teacher education curricula now include components on gender sensitivity and the rights of girls and minority groups. However, only a minority of student teachers report feeling equipped to challenge gender stereotypes or support gender-equitable participation in their classrooms. For example, less than 30% of surveyed student teachers across all three countries felt “very confident” in using strategies to ensure equal participation for boys and girls.

Barriers include (i) Persistent gender stereotypes in textbooks and teaching materials, (ii) Limited practical training on identifying or addressing gender-based violence and harassment, and (iii) Lack of female role models among teacher educators, especially in rural colleges.

While all three countries have policies supporting inclusive education, practical implementation remains limited. SESEA and F4L data indicate that only 17% of student teachers in Tanzania, 21% in Uganda, and 29% in Kenya have received any practical training on adapting instruction for learners with disabilities. Most report that inclusion is taught as theory, with little exposure to adaptive resources, assistive technologies, or classroom-based accommodations.

Table 1: Preparedness for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Teaching

Country	% Very Confident in Gender-Responsive Practice	% With Inclusive Training	% Practical Education	% Adapting Lessons for Diverse Learners
Tanzania	27%	17%		14%
Uganda	28%	21%		17%
Kenya	31%	29%		23%

Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

Responsive pedagogy involves adapting teaching methods to reflect the backgrounds, interests, and abilities of all learners. While there is growing awareness of its importance, only about 20–25% of student teachers report regularly differentiating instruction or using learner-centered strategies. Key challenges include large class sizes, lack of teaching resources, and insufficient modeling by teacher educators.

In Uganda a respondent mentioned, *“We learned about inclusion in theory, but there was no demonstration of how to support a child with a disability.”* Where as in Kenya a teacher mentioned that *“Sometimes girls are shy to participate, but we are encouraged to use group work and make sure everyone is involved.”* Lastly in Tanzanis a teacher mentioned that *“It’s hard to adapt lessons when you have over 80 pupils and limited materials.”*

4.4 Limitations on Resources and Systems

Resource limitations, such as large class sizes, insufficient teaching materials, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and deficient infrastructure, persist as obstacles to authentic and performance-based assessment across all three contexts. Lesson observations showed that many student teachers are good at using local materials and participatory methods on the fly. However, overcrowding and a lack of resources often make it hard to come up with new ideas, give personalized feedback, and do practical assessments.

Resource and systemic constraints remain among the most significant barriers to the adoption of authentic, performance-based assessment and innovative pedagogy in teacher education across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. One of the most pressing issues is large class sizes: recent lesson observation data from SESEA and F4L projects indicate that the average student-teacher ratio in Tanzanian and Ugandan training colleges can reach as high as 1:75, compared to 1:48 in Kenyan colleges. Such overcrowding makes it extremely difficult for teacher educators to provide individualized guidance, facilitate active learning, or carry out practical assessments.

Additionally, there are chronic shortages of essential teaching and learning materials. Only 22% of student teachers in Tanzania and 26% in Uganda report having regular access to updated textbooks and teaching aids, while Kenya fares slightly better at 38%, owing to recent government investments. ICT infrastructure is another major impediment; less than 20% of teacher training institutions across the three countries have reliable internet access or sufficient computers for student use, limiting both exposure to digital assessment tools and the integration of technology into pedagogy.

Physical infrastructure is often inadequate, with many colleges lacking well-equipped classrooms, science laboratories, or inclusive education resource rooms. These deficits not only hinder the deployment of practical and inclusive teaching activities but also deepen inequities for student teachers and learners with disabilities, who frequently lack necessary accommodations.

Despite these constraints, lesson observations and interviews highlight the ingenuity of many student teachers and tutors, who often improvise with local materials and adopt participatory methods where possible. However, the lack of resources and high workloads typically limit the consistency and depth of such innovations. Furthermore, these challenges disproportionately affect rural and under-resourced institutions, exacerbating regional disparities in teacher preparation.

Table 2: Key resource-related challenges in teacher education across the three countries, based on SESEA and F4L project findings

Indicator	Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda
Avg. class size in teacher colleges	75	48	72
% with regular access to updated materials	22%	38%	26%
% colleges with reliable ICT (internet/comps)	14%	27%	17%
% with specialized resource rooms	11%	19%	13%
% student teachers reporting high resource gaps	68%	41%	63%

Source: SESEA & F4L Project Data (2023–2024)

In summary, sustained underinvestment and systemic inefficiencies continue to limit the potential of teacher education reforms, particularly in the areas of assessment and inclusive pedagogy. Addressing these resource gaps through targeted funding, infrastructure development, and equitable resource distribution is essential for enabling East African teacher educators and student teachers to deliver high-quality, learner-centered, and inclusive education.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Assessment Systems: Transitioning from Compliance to Competence

Despite reforms, the ingrained culture of high-stakes examinations remains pervasive in teacher education. This persistence is fueled by longstanding national exam systems, limited assessment literacy among tutors, and systemic accountability structures that reward compliance over innovation. As a result, student teachers often internalize a narrow view of assessment, focusing on rote memorization and procedural correctness rather than critical thinking, creativity, and real-world problem solving. This undermines the intended outcomes of CBC reforms, with graduates often lacking confidence in designing and using formative, learner-centered assessments in their own practice.

Focus group discussions reveal that many student teachers and tutors feel pressure to “*teach to the test.*” One Tanzanian tutor noted, “*We are told to use new methods, but at the end of the day, everything is judged by exam results.*” Similarly, a Kenyan student teacher shared, “*Reflective portfolios are part of our coursework, but the final mark is still what matters most for graduation.*”

Key barriers to progress include insufficient professional learning opportunities on assessment for both pre-service and in-service educators, as well as limited resources for implementing diverse assessment strategies. However, in some Kenyan colleges, collaborative assessment design workshops have shown promise, enabling tutors to experiment with performance-based tasks and peer assessment.

Bridging the gap between policy and practice will require targeted investments in assessment literacy, regular monitoring of reforms, and incentivizing innovation in both assessment and pedagogy. Policymakers should prioritize ongoing, school-based professional development and ensure that assessment frameworks at institutional and classroom levels truly reflect competence-based principles.

The findings indicate a continual misalignment between the objectives of teacher education reforms, especially the goal of cultivating “*champion teachers*”, and existing assessment practices in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Even though policies are moving toward Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and learner-centered teaching, tests are still mostly based on compliance and summative systems, especially in Tanzania and Uganda. This is similar to recent regional reviews (Kafyulilo et al., 2020; Oduor & Njeru, 2023) that show how old exam cultures still affect teachers' identities, making it harder for them to be creative, think critically, and solve problems in new ways.

In Kenya, there is clear progress, with the DPTE framework focusing on performance-based assessment and reflective portfolios. But even here, final grades and institutional cultures still have a strong summative bias. This is a trend in the region where policy rhetoric outpaces implementation (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023). This corroborates findings from early childhood and primary education studies in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting that genuine, formative assessment is essential for fostering adaptive and innovative teaching (Piper et al., 2022; OECD, 2021).

5.2 Formative Feedback and Reflective Practice: An Unfulfilled Promise

Despite widespread endorsement of feedback-based assessment, the operationalization of formative feedback in teacher education remains limited. Recent SESEA field data indicate that only 18% of Tanzanian and 23% of Ugandan student teachers “often” receive detailed, constructive feedback on their practicum lessons, compared to 41% in Kenya. Even where feedback is provided, it is frequently described by student teachers as “general” or “*focused on errors rather than improvement.*” As one Ugandan student shared, “*We are told what is wrong, but not how to make it better.*”

Several barriers underpin these challenges. High mentor-to-student ratios and heavy workloads leave little time for individualized feedback or reflective dialogue. Furthermore, deeply entrenched hierarchical cultures in teacher education often discourage open critique and professional vulnerability; feedback is seen as a top-down judgment rather than a tool for growth.

Nevertheless, there are emerging practices that offer promise. In some Kenyan colleges, peer review sessions and collaborative lesson debriefs enable student teachers to reflect on their practice, discuss challenges openly, and co-construct solutions. Where reflective practice is institutionalized, feedback is more likely to be specific, actionable, and linked to professional growth.

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, teacher education systems must prioritize the professional development of mentors in formative assessment, allocate time for meaningful feedback, and foster a culture of trust and continuous improvement. Embedding structured reflection and collegial dialogue into teacher preparation can help transform feedback from a perfunctory exercise into a cornerstone of professional learning.

The results show that there is a big gap in the availability and use of formative feedback. Policy frameworks throughout East Africa endorse feedback-oriented, developmental assessment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020); however, in practice, feedback frequently remains generic, corrective, and devoid of actionable guidance, especially in Tanzania and Uganda. This aligns with recent research in African primary education, which indicates that feedback is often underutilized as a mechanism for teacher development, owing to mentor workload, restricted professional capacity, and entrenched hierarchical cultures (Zuilkowski et al., 2021).

Kenya's increased utilization of peer review, structured reflection, and debrief sessions corresponds with global best practices (OECD, 2021); however, achieving consistency continues to pose a challenge. The literature highlights that effective formative feedback transcends mere technical proficiency; it necessitates a transformation in professional culture, prioritizing trust, dialogue, and ongoing enhancement (Brookfield, 2017; OECD, 2021).

5.3 Professional Development and Assessment Literacy: The Missing Link

A central challenge identified across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda is the persistent gap in assessment literacy among teacher educators. According to recent SESEA and F4L project data, less than one-third of surveyed tutors in Uganda and Tanzania have participated in targeted professional development on formative or competency-based assessment within the past three years, compared to just under half in Kenya. Without regular, practical training, many tutors default to assessing knowledge recall, maintaining records, and ensuring classroom compliance—practices that are at odds with the aims of current CBC reforms. One Tanzanian tutor reflected, *“We mostly follow what we know, exams and written tests. There’s little training on new ways to assess skills.”*

The lack of sustained, contextually relevant professional development opportunities is a major barrier. Where training is available, it is often one-off, theoretical, or disconnected from day-to-day classroom realities. This undermines not only the implementation of formative and inclusive assessment but also the broader development of reflective, adaptive teaching practices. As a result,

the potential of assessment as a tool for learning and growth remains largely untapped in most teacher education programs.

Some promising developments are emerging, such as peer-led assessment workshops in select Kenyan colleges, and the piloting of digital professional learning modules in Uganda. However, these are not yet widespread or institutionalized. To close the assessment literacy gap, there is an urgent need for regular, practice-oriented professional development that is embedded within teacher education institutions, supported by leadership, and responsive to evolving curricular and assessment reforms.

A prominent theme across all contexts is the inconsistency and frequent insufficiency of assessment literacy among teacher educators. When tutors are not trained in CBC-aligned, competency-based, or inclusive assessment, they tend to use the easiest ways to measure things, like remembering content, keeping records, and following the rules in the classroom (Bold et al., 2019). This "teaching to the test" trend not only makes it harder for great teachers to grow, but it also goes against the spirit of CBC reforms (Kafyulilo et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2023).

Recent international studies underscore that effective professional development is characterized by its continuity, practical application, and alignment with classroom realities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). However, the results indicate that professional development in the region is still sporadic and not focused enough on assessment literacy, particularly in areas like formative assessment, inclusive pedagogy, and feedback for growth.

5.4 Gender and Inclusion: Progress and Ongoing Gaps

While policy frameworks in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda increasingly emphasize gender equality and inclusion, classroom practices and assessment processes often fall short of these aspirations. Recent SESEA fieldwork found that, although more than 70% of student teachers could identify inclusive or gender-responsive strategies in theory, less than one-third routinely planned lessons or assessments that addressed diverse learning needs or actively challenged gender stereotypes. For example, in Tanzania, only 24% of observed lessons were rated as "consistently gender-responsive," and few tutors reported adapting materials for learners with disabilities.

Several factors contribute to these ongoing gaps. First, professional development related to gender and inclusion remains limited in both scope and depth, often delivered as stand-alone workshops rather than integrated into ongoing teaching practice. Second, deeply rooted socio-cultural beliefs and gender norms continue to shape teacher attitudes and expectations, sometimes unconsciously reinforcing stereotypes. As one Ugandan student teacher explained, "*We learn about inclusion, but when resources are short and time is pressed, it's easy to forget or just do what is usual.*" These challenges are especially pronounced in rural and under-resourced settings, where resource constraints further limit the ability to differentiate instruction or provide accommodations.

Despite these challenges, some innovative practices are emerging. In select Kenyan colleges, peer mentoring and reflective dialogue groups have supported tutors and student teachers to critically examine their own beliefs and adapt lessons to better serve all learners. However, such initiatives are not yet mainstreamed or adequately supported by institutional leadership.

To close the gap between policy and practice, it is essential to provide targeted, contextually relevant professional development on gender and inclusion, foster open dialogue about implicit biases, and ensure that leaders at all levels visibly champion inclusive approaches. Only then can gender and inclusion move from policy statements to everyday realities in teacher education and classroom practice.

All three countries have policies and curricula that stress gender equality and inclusion, and most student teachers know about these ideas. But putting this knowledge into practice in the classroom and on tests is not always consistent and is often shallow. The data show that gender-responsive teaching and adapting learning materials for different types of students are not always planned, carried out, or evaluated in the same way. This is especially true in Tanzania and Uganda.

This aligns with recent analyses (Aikman & Halai, 2021; Muthukrishna et al., 2020) indicating that, despite increasing awareness of gender and inclusion, practical implementation is obstructed by resource deficiencies, inadequate professional training, and entrenched socio-cultural norms. Several studies underscore that successful gender and inclusion strategies must be contextually relevant, confront teacher beliefs, and receive backing from institutional leadership (UNGEI, 2021; OECD, 2021).

5.5 Systemic and Resource Constraints

Resource and systemic constraints continue to undermine efforts to implement authentic assessment and inclusive, learner-centered pedagogy in teacher education across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Classroom observations and surveys consistently reveal average class sizes exceeding 70 in many colleges, with some institutions in Tanzania and Uganda reporting ratios as high as 1:80. Moreover, less than a quarter of institutions have reliable access to ICT or updated teaching materials, according to recent SESEA and F4L project data. One student teacher in Kenya commented, *“We want to use creative methods, but with 60 students and only a chalkboard, it’s almost impossible.”*

The consequences of these constraints are far-reaching. Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for tutors to provide individualized formative feedback or to tailor instruction for diverse learning needs. The scarcity of teaching aids and digital resources limits opportunities for hands-on, practical learning and the integration of formative, performance-based assessments. These challenges are particularly acute in rural and under-resourced areas, reinforcing existing inequities in educational quality and outcomes.

Despite these obstacles, educators often demonstrate considerable ingenuity, using locally available materials or organizing collaborative learning groups to compensate for resource gaps. However, such workarounds are rarely sufficient to overcome systemic deficiencies and are not sustainable at scale.

Addressing these systemic and resource constraints requires coordinated action, including increased funding for infrastructure and materials, targeted support for disadvantaged institutions, and innovative partnerships to expand access to digital tools and professional support. Only through sustained investment and strategic policy implementation can the vision of authentic, inclusive, and learner-centered teacher education be fully realized.

Resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching and learning resources, inadequate ICT, and limited professional support constitute a significant impediment to both authentic assessment and the execution of inclusive, learner-centered pedagogy. The data from classroom observations and student/teacher feedback in all three countries corroborate recent findings from the World Bank (2023) and UNESCO (2023), indicating that resource limitations persist in hindering the implementation of policy and limiting opportunities for personalized, creative, and adaptive teaching.

5.6 The Way Forward: Towards Systemic Alignment and Coherence

The integration of regional statistics and contemporary literature indicates that significant advancement in cultivating champion teachers necessitates:

- A systemic realignment of assessment processes with the goals of CBC and inclusive education, shifting from compliance-focused, summative frameworks to formative, holistic, and contextually responsive assessment (Piper et al., 2022; OECD, 2021).
- Putting money into teacher educators' assessment literacy and ongoing professional development, with a focus on feedback, formative assessment, and how to use gender and inclusion techniques in real life (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Kafyulilo et al., 2020).
- Addressing resource and workload limits through targeted investment, policy coherence, and engagement with communities and development agencies (World Bank, 2023).
- Making reflective practice, peer learning, and distributed leadership a part of all stages of teacher education (Brookfield, 2017; OECD, 2021).

6 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that, despite ambitious policy reforms and significant investment in teacher professional learning across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, assessment systems in teacher education continue to constrain the emergence of “champion teachers.” The persistent dominance of summative, compliance-driven practices, particularly in Tanzania and Uganda, undermines creative, reflective, and learner-centered teaching, while even in more advanced contexts like

Kenya, systemic inertia and resource gaps limit the realization of competency-based and inclusive assessment.

Professional development programs have improved awareness of CBC, gender, and inclusion, and have fostered incremental advances in assessment literacy and pedagogical innovation. However, formative feedback, authentic assessment, and sustained reflective practice remain underdeveloped. The translation of gender and inclusion policies into classroom reality is inconsistent, often hindered by entrenched beliefs, limited professional confidence, and resource constraints.

Key findings highlight that formative feedback, authentic assessment, and sustained reflective practice are still underutilized, and that gender and inclusion policies, though widely disseminated, are inconsistently enacted at the classroom level. These challenges stem from deep-rooted cultural norms, insufficient professional confidence, and ongoing resource limitations.

For teacher education systems to truly nurture “champion teachers”, those equipped to lead innovation and respond to diverse learner needs, assessment practices must be fundamentally reimagined. This will require:

- Integrated, ongoing professional development focused on assessment literacy, formative feedback, and inclusive pedagogy;
- Strategic investment in resources and infrastructure to support learner-centered and authentic assessment;
- Coherent leadership and institutional commitment to bridge the gap between policy and practice;
- Continuous research and monitoring to track progress and adapt strategies as needed.

Only through coordinated, systemic action can the promise of recent reforms be fully realized, ensuring that teacher education in East Africa produces graduates who are not only knowledgeable, but also adaptive, creative, and ready to foster inclusive, high-quality learning for all.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Redesign Assessment Frameworks for Competency and Inclusion

Shift from content recall and compliance to holistic, performance-based assessment that values reflective practice, creativity, inclusive pedagogy, and problem-solving (UNESCO, 2023; Piper et al., 2022).

Integrate portfolios, practicum reflections, formative rubrics, and peer/self-assessment as central components of teacher evaluation.

7.2 Strengthen Formative Feedback and Reflective Practice

Train teacher educators and mentors in feedback strategies that promote growth, experimentation, and self-evaluation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2021).

Institutionalize regular reflective sessions, peer observation, and coaching cycles in both coursework and practicum.

7.3 Enhance Assessment Literacy through Professional Development

Provide ongoing, practice-based training for teacher educators and mentors on designing, interpreting, and applying CBC-aligned and inclusive assessment tools (Kafyulilo et al., 2020).

Prioritize training in formative assessment, differentiated instruction, and gender/inclusion-sensitive evaluation.

7.4 Standardize and Contextualize Practicum Assessment

Develop and implement standardized, CBC-aligned practicum rubrics and observation tools across all teacher education institutions and schools.

Ensure rubrics explicitly assess inclusive facilitation, assessment for learning, and classroom leadership, and are adaptable to local resource realities.

7.5 Invest in Resources for Authentic Assessment

Increase funding for teaching/learning materials, digital infrastructure, and improvisational resources, especially in under-resourced colleges and schools (World Bank, 2023).

Expand access to digital tools (e.g., tablets, internet, video feedback) to support performance-based assessment and reflective practice.

7.6 Embed Gender and Inclusion in Policy and Practice

Integrate gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogies into all assessment frameworks, with clear indicators for monitoring progress (Aikman & Halai, 2021; UNGEI, 2021).

Provide targeted support and mentorship to address persistent gender and inclusion gaps among teacher educators, mentors, and student teachers.

7.7 Foster a Culture of Collaborative Learning and Distributed Leadership

Promote professional learning communities (PLCs) within colleges and practicum schools to support knowledge-sharing, peer feedback, and co-development of innovative assessment tools (OECD, 2021).

Encourage distributed leadership, ensuring that assessment reform is driven by practitioners as well as policymakers.

7.8 Monitor, Evaluate, and Sustain Reform

Establish robust systems for monitoring assessment practices and outcomes, including feedback from student teachers, mentors, and learners.

Embed continuous improvement mechanisms to ensure reforms are contextualized, iterative, and responsive to emerging needs.

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