
REFORMING SERVICE DELIVERY AND PRODUCTIVITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE THROUGH COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN KENYA

Dr. Jane Kere Imbunya

School of Education and Social Sciences, Kaimosi Friends University

Email Address: imbunya.jk@gmail.com

Publication Date: May 2026

ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Public service reforms in Kenya have increasingly focused on enhancing efficiency, accountability, productivity, and citizen-centered service delivery. Despite numerous reform initiatives, including performance contracting, Results-Based Management (RBM), and the digitization of government services, persistent challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate skills, weak institutional capacity, and limited responsiveness continue to undermine effective public service delivery.

Purpose of the Study: This paper examines the role of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) as a transformative strategy for reforming service delivery and improving productivity within Kenya's public service sector.

Methodology: Drawing from Human Capital Theory, Competency Theory, and New Public Management (NPM) literature, the paper reviews empirical and theoretical literature on competency-based approaches in Kenya's education and training systems. The review focuses on their implications for workforce development and their potential contribution to public sector efficiency.

Findings: The study finds that CBET provides an appropriate framework for aligning public service skills with contemporary governance demands and labor market realities. It further establishes that competency-oriented training can enhance workforce productivity, strengthen service responsiveness, and support performance-driven public administration. Nonetheless, implementation is constrained by inadequate institutional preparedness, resistance to change, funding limitations, and limited trainer competencies.

Conclusion: The study concludes that CBET can support sustainable public sector transformation in Kenya by equipping public servants with practical competencies that enhance accountability, efficiency, responsiveness, and productivity.

Recommendation: The paper recommends the integration of CBET into public service human resource development, strengthening of institutional capacity, improvement of trainer competencies, and alignment of competency-based training with performance management systems.

Keywords: *Reforming, Service Delivery, Productivity, Public Service, Competency-Based Education*

INTRODUCTION

Public service delivery remains a critical determinant of socio-economic development and governance effectiveness in developing countries. In Kenya, the public service sector plays a central role in implementing government policies, promoting economic growth, and providing essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, security, and social protection. However, despite numerous reforms undertaken since independence, the Kenyan public service continues to experience significant challenges relating to inefficiency, low productivity, corruption, bureaucratic rigidity, and inadequate responsiveness to citizens' needs (Ong'era & Musili, 2019). The Government of Kenya has implemented several public sector reforms aimed at improving performance and accountability. These include structural adjustment programs, Results-Based Management (RBM), performance contracting, decentralization, e-government initiatives, and public financial management reforms. Nevertheless, many reform efforts have yielded mixed results due to inadequate institutional capacity, poor implementation frameworks, and insufficient workforce competencies (Marwa & Zairi, 2009).

In response to changing labor market demands and global educational transformations, Kenya has increasingly embraced Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) approaches in both basic and technical education systems. CBET emphasizes the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge required for effective performance in specific occupational contexts. Unlike traditional content-based education systems, CBET focuses on demonstrable competencies and learner outcomes (Thukia, 2025). This paper argues that CBET offers a viable framework for reforming public service delivery and enhancing productivity in Kenya by aligning public sector training with the practical competencies required in contemporary governance and administration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET)

Competency-Based Education and Training refers to an educational approach that prioritizes the acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies required for successful job performance. Competencies encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors necessary for effective workplace performance (Thukia, 2025). CBET differs from traditional education systems

in that it focuses on learner outcomes rather than content coverage; utilizes performance-based assessment rather than examination-centered evaluation; promotes individualized and flexible learning; ensures industry and workplace needs guide curriculum development; and places emphasis on practical application and problem-solving. The competency-based approach has gained global prominence due to rapid technological changes, globalization, and the growing need for employability skills and workplace adaptability (Ait Haddouchane et al., 2017).

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, advanced by scholars such as Becker (1964) and Schultz (1961), posits that investment in education and training enhances workers' productivity and economic value. According to this theory, a skilled and competent workforce contributes significantly to organizational performance and national development. Within the Kenyan public service context, CBET can be viewed as a strategic investment in human capital capable of improving employee efficiency, innovation, accountability, and responsiveness.

New Public Management Theory

The New Public Management (NPM) paradigm advocates for efficiency, accountability, performance measurement, and customer-oriented service delivery in public administration. NPM reforms emphasize results-oriented management practices borrowed from the private sector (Hood, 1991). CBET aligns with NPM principles because it focuses on measurable competencies, performance outcomes, and continuous improvement. By shifting the focus from inputs to outputs and outcomes, CBET supports the NPM agenda of creating a performance-driven public sector (Marwa & Zairi, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Sector Reforms in Kenya

Kenya's public service reform agenda dates back to the post-independence era but intensified in the 1990s following economic liberalization and structural adjustment programs. Key reform initiatives have included civil service rationalization, performance contracting, anti-corruption measures, decentralization, and the digitization of government services (Ong'era & Musili, 2019). Hope (2012) observes that Kenya's public sector reforms, aimed at improving governance, reducing poverty, and enhancing service delivery, have often been constrained by institutional

inefficiencies, inadequate leadership, and resistance to change. In addition, Marwa and Zairi (2009) argue that performance-oriented reforms in Kenya have encountered challenges related to weak organizational cultures, insufficient employee motivation, and inadequate performance measurement systems. The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) identifies administrative capacity building, institutional strengthening, and human resource development as essential pillars for effective public service transformation (Ong'era & Musili, 2019).

Competency-Based Education and Training in Kenya

Kenya's transition toward competency-based education emerged from concerns regarding the inadequacy of traditional education systems in producing graduates with practical and employable skills. The introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and reforms in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions represent deliberate efforts to align education with labor market demands (Thukia, 2025). Bunyi (2015) notes that competency-based education aims to equip learners with practical competencies relevant to societal and economic needs. Maina (2015) further explains that TVET reforms in Kenya were designed to operationalize competency-based approaches through institutions such as the Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC) and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA). Recent comparative studies on East African competency-based reforms demonstrate that Kenya's CBC reforms emphasize critical thinking, communication, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy (Mwangi & Barasa, 2025).

CBET and Workforce Productivity

Research indicates that competency-based approaches enhance workforce productivity by improving job relevance, adaptability, and practical performance capabilities. Competency-oriented training helps bridge the gap between education and labor market requirements (Ait Haddouchane et al., 2017). In the public service context, CBET can improve technical competence, problem-solving abilities, ethical conduct, leadership skills, customer service orientation, innovation capacity, and digital literacy. These competencies are essential for modern public administration and effective service delivery.

Challenges Facing CBET Implementation in Kenya

Despite its potential benefits, CBET implementation in Kenya faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient trainer competencies, funding limitations, weak institutional coordination, resistance to pedagogical change, and inadequate learning resources (Bunyi, 2015; Maina, 2015). Furthermore, public discourse highlights concern regarding inadequate teacher preparedness, limited facilities, and implementation inconsistencies across different regions and institutions.

CBET AND REFORMING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY IN KENYA

Aligning Skills with Public Service Needs

One of the major weaknesses of traditional public service training systems is their emphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than workplace competencies. CBET addresses this gap by aligning training with specific job requirements and performance outcomes. In Kenya's public service, CBET can help develop competencies in policy implementation, strategic planning, ICT integration, financial management, customer relations, ethics and integrity, and leadership and governance. This alignment enhances employee effectiveness and institutional productivity.

Enhancing Accountability and Performance

Competency-based systems emphasize measurable outcomes and performance standards. This orientation supports public sector accountability mechanisms such as performance contracting and Results-Based Management. By defining clear competency standards for public officers, government institutions can improve performance evaluation, identify skill gaps, enhance merit-based promotions, and strengthen service accountability.

Supporting Digital Transformation

Kenya's public service is increasingly embracing digital governance through e-government systems, online service platforms, and workflow automation (Thuku & Mwangi, 2015). CBET can equip public servants with digital competencies necessary for electronic records management, online citizen engagement, data analysis, cybersecurity awareness, and digital communication. Such competencies are critical for improving efficiency and reducing bureaucratic delays.

Promoting Ethical and Citizen-Centered Service Delivery

Ethical competence is central to effective public administration. CBET frameworks can integrate ethics, integrity, professionalism, and public accountability into training programs. Research on public sector ethics in Kenya demonstrates that reforms aimed at enhancing ethical compliance contribute to improved citizen trust and service responsiveness (M’Mugambi et al., 2020).

CHALLENGES TO REFORMING PUBLIC SERVICE THROUGH CBET

Despite its transformative potential, several barriers may hinder the effective implementation of CBET in Kenya’s public service sector. First, public institutions often exhibit bureaucratic cultures resistant to innovation and change. Transitioning from traditional training models to competency-based systems requires significant cultural and organizational transformation. Second, effective CBET implementation requires substantial investment in training infrastructure, digital technologies, trainer development, assessment systems, and learning materials. Many public institutions face budgetary limitations that may undermine reform efforts. Third, successful CBET implementation depends heavily on competent trainers and assessors. Many trainers in Kenya’s public sector lack adequate exposure to competency-based pedagogies and assessment methods. Finally, without robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, competency-based reforms may fail to achieve intended outcomes; public institutions require integrated systems for tracking competency acquisition and workplace performance.

CONCLUSION

Kenya’s pursuit of effective public service delivery and enhanced productivity necessitates innovative approaches to human resource development and institutional reform. Competency-Based Education and Training offers a strategic framework for equipping public servants with relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values required in contemporary governance environments. By emphasizing practical competencies, measurable outcomes, and workplace relevance, CBET can significantly contribute to improved accountability, efficiency, citizen responsiveness, and institutional performance within Kenya’s public service sector. However, successful implementation requires strong political commitment, adequate resource allocation, institutional capacity building, and continuous stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, integrating

CBET into public service reforms can support Kenya's broader development agenda, including the realization of Kenya Vision 2030 and sustainable governance objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the government should institutionalize CBET within public service training institutions, including the Kenya School of Government and sector-specific training centers. It should also strengthen the capacity of trainers, supervisors, and human resource managers to implement competency-based instruction and assessment effectively. Public service recruitment and promotion should further be aligned with competency frameworks, with emphasis on practical skills, performance, and workplace readiness rather than academic qualifications alone.

In addition, the government should invest in ICT infrastructure and e-learning systems to support competency-based training and digital service delivery. Public institutions should also develop integrated monitoring systems for tracking competency acquisition, employee performance, and institutional productivity. Finally, effective CBET implementation should be supported through collaboration among government ministries, universities, TVET institutions, professional bodies, the private sector, and development partners.

REFERENCES

- Ait Haddouchane, Z., Bakkali, S., Ajana, S., & Gassemi, K. (2017). The application of the competency-based approach to assess the training and employment adequacy problem. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1702.03699>
- Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bunyi, G. (2015). *Competency-based education in Kenya: Contending with the imperatives for successful implementation* [Master's thesis, Kenyatta University]. Kenyatta University Institutional Repository.
- Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1), 3–19.
- Hope, K. R. (2012). Managing the public sector in Kenya: Reform and transformation for improved performance. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 2(4), 128–143. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v2i4.2650>
- M'Mugambi, D. K., Okeyo, W., & Muthoka, M. (2020). Public sector reforms in compliance with public service ethics: The case of county governments in Kenya. *African Journal of Emerging Issues*, 2(12), 1–21.

- Maina, E. W. (2015). *TVET reforms, policies and challenges* [Master's thesis, Kenyatta University]. Kenyatta University Institutional Repository.
- Marwa, S., & Zairi, M. (2009). In pursuit of performance-oriented civil service reforms (CSRs): A Kenyan perspective. *Measuring Business Excellence*, 13(2), 34–43.
- Mwangi, A. K., & Barasa, J. O. (2025). Comparative adoption and contextualisation of competency-based curricula: Evidence from Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. *Sentam Org Journal of Educational Research*.
- Ong'era, A., & Musili, B. M. (2019). *Public sector reforms in Kenya: Challenges and opportunities* (KIPPRA Working Paper No. 29). Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis.
- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1–17.
- Thukia, W. J. (2025). Kenya's education reform: Embracing a new learning framework. *SAGE Journals*.
- Thuku, L. X. W., & Mwangi, K. E. (2015). Towards efficient service delivery: The role of workflow systems in public sector in Kenya. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1503.05678>