

Communication and Collaboration Competency and Loneliness among Grade 9 Learners in Wajir County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Communication and collaboration are key competencies in the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), intended to enhance teamwork, relationships, and emotional development. Yet some learners still experience loneliness, raising questions about how well collaborative skills meet their emotional needs. The study sought to examine the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners. A descriptive correlational design was used with 292 Grade 9 learners selected via stratified random sampling. Data was collected using research developed questionnaire based on collaborative learning theory and the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. Results showed that 50% of learners demonstrated high levels of collaborated communication, 43.33% moderate, and 6.67% low. Collaboration was measured using three indicators: Positive Interdependence (3.96), reflecting mutual support; Promotive Interaction (3.79), capturing active group engagement; and Individual Accountability (3.80), assessing each member's responsibility. The collaboration mean was 3.85, indicating high collaborative engagement. Participants reported a relatively high level of loneliness ($M = 2.90$) on a 4-point scale. Learners reported having friends and engaging with peers but also experienced emotional loneliness. The correlation between collaborative communication and loneliness was weak and statistically insignificant ($r = .045$, $p = .442$). The study concludes that communication and collaboration competencies alone are insufficient to reduce loneliness among Grade 9 learners. The findings highlight the need to complement the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum with structured social-emotional learning, guidance and counselling programs, and inclusive classroom practices that foster meaningful peer relationships and a stronger sense of belonging.

Keywords: Collaborated Communication, Loneliness, Junior School, Psychological Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

Communication and collaboration are essential competencies that support both academic performance and social development in learners. These skills involve the ability to express ideas clearly, work effectively with others, and solve problems together. They are recognized as critical elements of twenty-first-century education (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023; Prajapati, Sharma, & Sharma, 2017). From a psychological perspective, effective communication builds self-confidence, reduces anxiety, and enhances a sense of belonging. These factors are vital for promoting learners' mental well-being and successful adjustment within school environments.

Scoular, Duckworth, Heard, and Ramalingam (2025) explain that collaboration extends beyond simply working in groups. It is a structured and goal-oriented process in which learners contribute to shared tasks through mutual dependence and coordinated effort. The ACER Collaboration Framework identifies three key dimensions of effective collaboration: building shared understanding through explanation and clarification, contributing collectively by coordinating responsibilities, and regulating group activities through negotiation, conflict resolution, and performance evaluation. These processes are most effective when learners have relatively balanced knowledge, status, and shared goals, allowing each member to participate meaningfully.

In Kenya, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) places strong emphasis on developing core competencies that prepare learners for lifelong learning. These include communication and collaboration, critical thinking,

creativity, citizenship, digital literacy, self-efficacy, and problem-solving (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2021). Communication and collaboration are particularly important because they strengthen interpersonal relationships and support learners' participation in classroom and community activities. Dingili and Yungungu (2023) observe that the CBC promotes these competencies through learner-centred approaches such as group discussions, teamwork, role play, and educational trips. Similarly, Vacheishvili (2021) argues that collaborative learning not only facilitates knowledge sharing but also develops interpersonal skills that foster supportive learning environments. When nurtured from an early age, these competencies can strengthen resilience, improve peer relationships, and promote positive psychosocial development.

Despite these educational efforts, many learners continue to experience loneliness. Loneliness is a psychological state arising from perceived deficiencies in social relationships. Emotional loneliness reflects the absence of close, supportive relationships, whereas social loneliness results from limited integration into peer groups and social networks (Kwan, Gitimoghaddam, & Collet, 2020). Jefferson, Barreto, Verity, and Qualter (2023) note that loneliness often intensifies during early adolescence as learners become increasingly sensitive to peer acceptance, social identity, and belonging. Persistent loneliness has been associated with poor academic achievement, reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and behavioural difficulties (Loades et al., 2020).

Creating a strong sense of belonging within schools can protect learners from these adverse outcomes by fostering emotional safety, inclusion, and peer support (Palikara, Castro-Kemp, Gaona, & Eirinaki, 2021). Learners who feel connected to their school are more likely to develop healthy peer relationships and demonstrate emotional resilience. However, Wahyuni (2017) cautions that acquiring communication and collaboration skills does not automatically translate into effective interpersonal relationships. Learners may still experience social exclusion if these competencies are not effectively applied in authentic social contexts. This highlights the importance of examining whether communication and collaboration competencies actually contribute to learners' psychosocial well-being rather than assuming that competency acquisition alone leads to positive social outcomes.

Existing studies have largely examined communication and collaboration in relation to academic achievement, learner engagement, teamwork, or the development of twenty-first-century skills (Nair & Fahimirad, 2019; Yeo & Lee, 2021). Other studies have investigated loneliness as an independent psychological construct associated with mental health and academic outcomes (Loades et al., 2020; Jefferson et al., 2023). However, few studies have examined the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among learners within competency-based education systems. The limited available evidence has mainly focused on secondary schools, universities, or educational settings outside sub-Saharan Africa, making it difficult to understand how these competencies influence learners' psychosocial experiences during early adolescence in primary education.

The Kenyan context presents a particularly important opportunity to address this gap. Grade 9 learners represent the first cohorts completing Junior School under the Competency-Based Curriculum and are expected to demonstrate communication and collaboration as core learning outcomes. At the same time, they are undergoing significant developmental, social, and emotional transitions that increase their vulnerability to loneliness and peer-related challenges. Yet, empirical evidence on whether the development of these competencies is associated with reduced loneliness among Kenyan learners remains scarce, particularly in marginalized and underserved counties such as Wajir, where social, cultural, and educational contexts differ substantially from those reported in existing international studies.

This study therefore investigates the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya. Guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning and development occur through social interaction and shared meaning, the study provides empirical evidence on whether the communication and collaboration competencies promoted by the CBC are associated with learners' emotional well-being. By focusing on Grade 9 learners in a marginalized Kenyan context, the study addresses an important gap in the literature and contributes to understanding the psychosocial outcomes of competency-based education in basic education settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Skills and Learner Loneliness

Effective communication is a key factor in reducing learner loneliness. Broeckelman-Post, Liu, Volz, and Frisby (2023) examined how students' communication skills and fear of public speaking influenced loneliness, belonging, and happiness. They found that strong communication skills significantly enhanced all three, while fear of public speaking increased loneliness and reduced connectedness. Psychologically, the findings emphasize the role of communication in fostering self-esteem, trust, and emotional well-being, while communication anxiety can trigger stress and social withdrawal. However, as the study focused on university students, it leaves a developmental gap regarding how these factors influence younger learners, such as adolescents in upper primary or lower secondary school. The current study addresses this by exploring the emotional impact of communication and collaboration at an earlier stage of development.

Language skills are not merely academic tools but fundamental components of emotional and social development. In a Swedish study, Riad, Allodi, Siljehag and Bölte (2023) found that children with strong vocabulary and storytelling abilities were better equipped to express emotions, initiate friendships, and navigate social situations, key elements of psychological well-being. From a developmental psychology lens, these findings underscore how language facilitates self-expression, empathy, and emotional regulation in school-aged children. However, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds demonstrated lower language proficiency, particularly when the dominant language was not spoken at home. While language ability did not directly predict mental well-being, limited communicative competence may act as a barrier to social inclusion and emotional support. Given that the study was conducted in Sweden, its applicability to Kenyan learners remains uncertain. This gives the need to explore how communication and collaboration skills influence loneliness and connectedness among junior school learners in Kenya.

Collaborative Learning and Feelings of Belonging

Collaborative learning has increasingly been recognized as a powerful tool in promoting both academic achievement and socioemotional development among learners. Siller and Ahmad (2024) examined the psychological effects of collaborative learning among Grade 6 students in Lahore. They found that group-based activities enhanced engagement, peer support, and a sense of classroom belonging, supporting socioemotional development through improved self-esteem and social competence. However, the study did not assess whether collaboration directly reduces feelings of loneliness or social isolation. This highlights the need for research on how collaborative learning can be structured to support both academic success and emotional well-being.

Classroom engagement strategies are vital not only for academic success but also for learners' emotional and social development. Sun et al. (2022) explored children's engagement through participant structure, comparing collaborative learning with direct instruction. Their findings showed that collaborative learning enhanced cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement by encouraging active participation and peer interaction, while direct instruction often resulted in passive learning. Although the study highlighted the social benefits of collaboration, it did not explicitly examine emotional outcomes such as loneliness, social inclusion, or emotional resilience. This points to a critical gap in understanding how communication and collaboration competencies contribute to learners' psychological well-being, beyond academic engagement.

Communication and collaboration are key competencies for academic success and positive social interaction. They enhance group learning and support emotional well-being and connectedness in school. In a quasi-experimental study, Ningsiha et al. (2025) assessed the effects of Discovery Learning, Cooperative Learning, and Problem-Based Learning on junior high students in Indonesia. Using a posttest-only control group design with 450 participants, the study found that all methods enhanced communication and collaboration, with PBL being the most effective. While the study highlights the importance of student-centered approaches in building core competencies, it does not explore their impact on emotional outcomes such as loneliness. This limits understanding of how improved communication and collaboration relate to learners' emotional well-being.

Communication and Collaboration as Predictors of Learner Loneliness

Mursidi, Lestari, and Suhartini (2023) investigated the effects of collaborative learning on interpersonal intelligence among Grade 3 students in Indonesia. Their experimental study found that engaging in group-based activities enhanced students' communication abilities and strengthened their capacity to form and maintain social relationships. These findings highlight the role of collaborative learning in nurturing social competence, a key component of emotional intelligence and well-being in children. However, the study was limited to younger learners, leaving it uncertain whether similar developmental benefits apply to older children, such as those in Grade 6, who experience more complex emotional and social challenges. Moreover, while the research focused on interpersonal intelligence, it did not explore its influence on psychological constructs such as loneliness, belonging, or emotional well-being, which are critical during late childhood and early adolescence. This gap suggests the need for further research to examine how collaborative learning supports emotional adjustment and mental health in older primary school learners.

While collaborative learning is widely recognized for improving academic outcomes, its emotional impact is less explored. Niyonsaba, Nkurunziza, and Hakizimana (2022) studied the effect of collaborative learning on chemistry performance among Rwandan secondary students. Using a quasi-experimental design, they found that collaborative strategies significantly enhanced academic achievement. However, the study focused solely on cognitive gains, overlooking emotional aspects such as loneliness, belonging, and connectedness. This highlights a gap in understanding how communication and collaboration influence emotional well-being, particularly among primary school learners.

Okeke and Akobi (2023) examined the impact of collaborative learning on social skills among primary school pupils in South Africa. Using a quasi-experimental design with 130 primary five learners, they found that collaboration improved social skill acquisition, with no gender differences. However, the study focused on behavioral outcomes and overlooked the emotional aspects of peer interaction, such as inclusion, connectedness, and loneliness. Since social skills are tied to emotional well-being, the lack of attention to how communication and collaboration affect feelings of loneliness highlights a key research gap.

Ayako (2023) investigated the influence of the CBC core value of love on learner engagement among Grade Six learners at Wajir School for the Deaf. The study found that promoting love as a core value enhanced learners' participation, cooperation, and engagement in classroom activities. These findings suggest that the values embedded within the CBC can foster positive learner interactions. However, the study focused on core values rather than the specific competencies of communication and collaboration and did not examine psychosocial outcomes such as loneliness. The present study addresses this gap by investigating whether communication and collaboration competencies are associated with loneliness among Grade Nine learners in Wajir County.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that learning and cognitive development are shaped primarily by social interactions and the cultural context in which individuals live. According to this theory, psychological growth does not occur in isolation; instead, it is constructed through engagement with others, particularly via shared activities, communication, and culturally mediated experiences.

A central tenet of sociocultural theory is the role of language as the primary cultural tool for learning. Vygotsky argued that language is not only a means of communication but also a mechanism for thinking, reasoning, and regulating emotions. Through interactions mediated by language and guided by more knowledgeable others, learners internalize social meanings, develop higher-order cognitive abilities, and form a sense of identity and belonging.

In the school context, collaborative learning provides opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, share responsibilities, and internalize social norms. Effective interaction in such settings promotes both intellectual development and socio-emotional adjustment. When collaboration is meaningful and emotionally supportive, learners experience social connectedness, emotional security, and psychological well-being. Conversely,

superficial or emotionally detached interactions may leave learners feeling isolated or lonely, even when they participate in group activities.

This theoretical framework is particularly applicable to Grade 9 learners, who are navigating a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, sensitivity to peer relationships, and heightened emotional awareness. At this stage, social interactions play a critical role in shaping self-concept and emotional health. This study uses sociocultural theory to explain why the mere presence of collaboration competencies may not be sufficient to reduce loneliness unless these interactions are meaningful and emotionally supportive.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the application of communication and collaboration core competencies among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya.
2. To assess the levels of loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya.
3. To determine the relationship between communication and collaboration core competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya.

Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between communication and collaboration core competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya.

METHODS

The study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya. Grade 9 learners were selected because they constitute the first cohort under Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which emphasizes communication, collaboration, identity formation, and life skills.

A sample of 292 learners was selected using stratified random sampling based on gender and school locality to ensure adequate representation of the target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Communication and collaboration competencies were measured using a researcher-developed 30-item questionnaire based on collaborative learning theory and the communication and collaboration competencies outlined in the CBC (KICD, 2021; Scoular et al., 2025). The instrument assessed three dimensions: Positive Interdependence, Promotive Interaction, and Individual Accountability, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Content validity was established through expert review, while pilot testing with 30 Grade 9 learners from a non-participating school confirmed the clarity of the items and demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87, .85, .89$, and $.90$ for the overall scale).

Loneliness was assessed using the 20-item UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 (Russell, 1996), a widely validated instrument with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from $.89$ to $.94$. Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 4 = Often), with higher scores indicating greater loneliness.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) summarized the data, while Pearson's product-moment correlation examined the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness.

Research authorization were obtained from the relevant ethics committee and educational authorities. Written parental consent and learner assent were obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage were ensured throughout the study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics

The age distribution shows most learners (54.5%) are 14 years old, followed by 15-year-olds (32.9%) and those above 15 (12.7%), suggesting age may influence social skills and vulnerability to loneliness, especially among older learners. Gender distribution is nearly balanced (50.7% male, 49.3% female), allowing for meaningful comparisons in communication and collaboration tendencies. Most learners (85.6%) attend public schools, which often face challenges such as larger class sizes and fewer resources, potentially limiting individual attention. However, these conditions may also foster greater face-to-face interaction and active play, promoting interpersonal skills and social engagement compared to solitary internet-based activities. Regarding siblings, 80.8% come from large families (3 or more), which may enhance social skills but could limit individual emotional support. Living arrangements show 57.2% live with both parents, offering stability, while 42.8% live with single parents or guardians, which may affect emotional well-being and communication. Only 31.2% have home internet access, which may limit online collaboration but could simultaneously encourage more in-person interaction and peer engagement.

Objective 1: Application of Communication and Collaboration Core Competencies

The study assessed the extent to which Grade 9 learners applied communication and collaboration core competencies using a structured questionnaire grounded in collaborative learning theory. The assessment focused on three key constructs: Positive Interdependence, Promotive Interaction, and Individual Accountability. The findings are presented in the following tables: Table 1 outlines Positive Interdependence, Table 2 presents Promotive Interaction, and Table 3 details Individual Accountability.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Positive Interdependence among Grade 9 Learners

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I understand that my group cannot succeed unless everyone helps.	4.10	.645
I feel good when my classmates and I solve problems together.	4.24	.618
I learn better when we share our ideas in a group.	4.47	.500
Everyone in the group has something important to contribute.	4.12	.839
I try to finish my part of the work so my team can succeed.	3.85	.896
I feel like an important part of the group.	2.30	1.042
I remind others of our group goals when we get distracted.	3.90	.870
I help others because their success helps the whole group.	3.27	1.008
I try to understand what my teammates are thinking.	3.50	1.203
My success depends on how well we work as a team.	4.54	.499
Composite Mean	3.83	.419

Learners demonstrated a high level of Positive Interdependence, with a composite mean of 3.83 (SD = 0.42), indicating strong teamwork, mutual support, and shared responsibility. Most learners recognized the importance of contributing to group success, sharing ideas, and supporting peers. However, some learners reported lower

feelings of individual importance within the group (e.g., “I feel like an important part of the group”), suggesting a need for strategies that enhance inclusivity and recognition of individual roles. These findings reflect a strong orientation toward group cohesion and cooperative engagement among learners.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Promotive Interaction among Grade 9 Learners

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I enjoy talking with classmates during group work.	4.12	.628
I listen carefully to what others say in my group.	4.30	.490
I ask questions when I do not understand what my friends are saying.	4.45	.538
I give suggestions to help others solve problems.	4.16	.785
I respect my classmates' opinions during discussions.	3.93	.807
I take turns when sharing my ideas.	2.30	1.042
I build on my classmates' ideas when we are solving problems.	3.91	.874
I stay focused during group discussions.	3.26	1.017
I explain my thinking clearly to my group.	3.49	1.194
I speak politely when disagreeing with others in my group.	4.54	.499
Composite Mean	3.85	.408

Learners reported a high level of promotive interaction ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.49$), reflecting active engagement, respectful communication, and willingness to support and learn from peers. Most learners spoke politely during disagreements, asked questions when unclear, listened attentively, and enjoyed interacting with classmates, indicating a positive group dynamic. However, some learners showed variability in collaborative discipline and clarity of communication, particularly in taking turns, staying focused, and clearly expressing their thoughts. These findings suggest that while promotive interaction is generally strong, targeted strategies could further enhance communication skills and group engagement.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Individual Accountability among Grade 9 Learners

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I complete my part of the group work on time.	4.12	.619
I take responsibility when I make a mistake in the group.	4.30	.489
I ask for help when I am stuck with my task.	4.45	.525
I always try my best even when working with others.	4.17	.781
I review my work before presenting it to the group.	3.93	.807
I let others know when I have finished my task.	2.31	1.042
I try to understand the topic well so I can help the group.	3.91	.873
I check if I have done what was expected of me.	3.27	1.021
I help others only after I have done my own part.	3.49	1.203

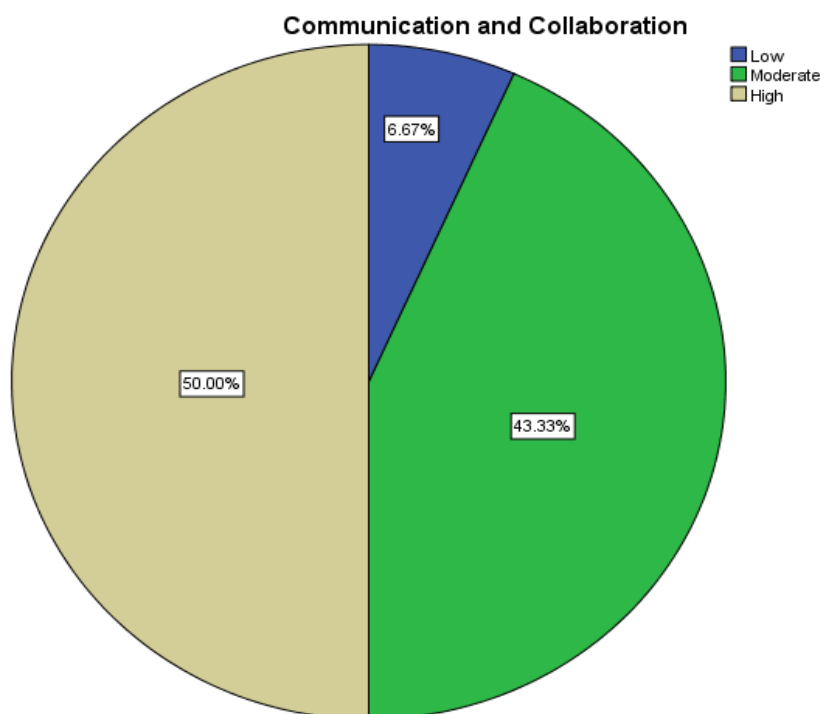
I know that everyone in the group must do their share of work.	4.42	.661
Composite Mean	3.84	.414

Learners demonstrated a high level of individual accountability ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.49$), indicating a strong sense of personal responsibility toward group tasks. Most learners sought help when needed, recognized the importance of contributing to the group, took responsibility for mistakes, and completed tasks on time, reflecting commitment and reliability. However, some learners were less consistent in informing others when tasks were completed or in monitoring their responsibilities, highlighting areas for improvement in task follow-through and communication. The findings suggest that learners generally uphold their individual roles, supporting overall group success.

Distribution of Learners' Communication and Collaboration Skills

To assess learners' levels of communication and collaboration, the researcher averaged their responses to Likert-scale items on social interaction, inclusion, and peer relationships. Items were rated on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating stronger collaboration. Mean scores were categorized as follows: 1.00–1.79 (Very Low), 1.80–2.59 (Low), 2.60–3.39 (Moderate), 3.40–4.19 (High), and 4.20–5.00 (Very High). For reporting in Figure 1, these were grouped into Low, Moderate, and High.

Figure 1



The data reveals that 50.00% of learners demonstrate high levels of communication and collaboration, indicating a strong tendency toward cooperative learning and interpersonal engagement. Another 43.33% of learners fall into the moderate category, suggesting they engage in collaborative practices but may require further support to enhance consistency and effectiveness. A smaller proportion, 6.67%, are categorized as low, highlighting a group of learners who may struggle with teamwork, peer interaction, or classroom participation.

Objective 2: Levels of Loneliness among Learners

To assess learners' levels of loneliness, the study utilized the UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 developed by Daniel W. Russell (1996). This standardized instrument measures subjective feelings of loneliness and perceived social isolation among adolescents and young adults. Learners responded to 20 items using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Often). Positively worded items were reverse-scored before computing the

overall loneliness score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of loneliness. Mean scores were subsequently categorized into four levels: 1.00–1.75 (Very Low Loneliness), 1.76–2.50 (Low Loneliness), 2.51–3.25 (Moderate Loneliness), and 3.26–4.00 (High Loneliness). The results, summarized in Table 4, present the distribution of Grade 9 learners across the different levels of loneliness.

Table 4 Levels of Loneliness among Learners

	N	Mean	SD
I feel that I am in tune with the people around me.	292	1.62	1.079
I feel that I lack companionship.	292	3.82	.560
I feel that there is no one I can turn to.	292	3.83	.592
I feel alone.	292	3.61	.496
I feel part of a group of friends.	292	1.60	.889
I feel that I have a lot in common with the people around me.	292	1.18	.518
I feel that I am no longer close to anyone.	292	3.54	.787
I feel that my interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.	292	3.78	.518
I feel outgoing and friendly.	292	2.27	1.162
I feel close to people.	292	1.88	1.056
I feel left out.	292	2.99	1.172
I feel that my relationships with others are not meaningful.	292	3.80	.478
I feel that no one really knows me well.	292	3.77	.528
I feel isolated from others.	292	3.77	.597
I can find companionship when I want it.	292	1.36	.671
There are people who really understand me.	292	2.40	1.271
I feel shy.	292	1.62	1.079
I feel that people are around me but not with me.	292	3.82	.560
There are people I can talk to.	292	3.83	.592
There are people I can turn to.	292	3.61	.496
Composite Mean		2.90	.155

The mean loneliness score was 2.90 (SD = 0.155). Based on the study's interpretation scale (2.51–3.25 = Moderate Loneliness), the findings indicate that Grade 9 learners experienced a moderate level of loneliness.

Item-level analysis showed that learners moderately agreed with several statements reflecting feelings of loneliness and social isolation. The highest mean scores were recorded for "I feel that there is no one I can turn to" (M = 3.83, SD = 0.592), "There are people I can talk to" (M = 3.83, SD = 0.592), "I feel that I lack companionship" (M = 3.82, SD = 0.560), "I feel that people are around me but not with me" (M = 3.82, SD = 0.560), and "I feel that my relationships with others are not meaningful" (M = 3.80, SD = 0.478). Learners also

reported relatively high agreement with "I feel that my interests and ideas are not shared by those around me" ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.518$), "I feel that no one really knows me well" ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.528$), "I feel isolated from others" ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.597$), "I feel alone" ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.496$), and "I feel that I am no longer close to anyone" ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.787$).

After reverse scoring, the positively worded statements recorded comparatively lower mean scores, indicating that many learners perceived lower levels of social connectedness. These included "I feel that I have a lot in common with the people around me" ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 0.518$), "I can find companionship when I want it" ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 0.671$), "I feel part of a group of friends" ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.889$), "I feel that I am in tune with the people around me" ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 1.079$), "I feel shy" ($M = 1.62$, $SD = 1.079$), "I feel close to people" ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.056$), "I feel outgoing and friendly" ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.162$), and "There are people who really understand me" ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.271$).

The relatively small overall standard deviation ($SD = 0.155$) indicates that learners' responses were highly consistent, suggesting that perceptions of loneliness were fairly similar across the sample. The findings suggest that although learners participate in social interactions within the school environment, many continue to experience moderate feelings of loneliness and limited emotional connectedness. This implies that communication and collaboration activities promoted through the Competency-Based Curriculum may enhance peer interaction but may not be sufficient on their own to address learners' emotional and social support needs.

Objective 3: Relationship between Communication and Collaboration Competencies and Loneliness

To determine the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness, Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed and presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Correlation between Communication and Collaboration and Loneliness among Learners

		Communication and Collaboration	Loneliness
Communication and Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	1	.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.442
	N	292	292
Loneliness	Pearson Correlation	.045	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.442	
	N	292	292

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a very weak positive and statistically insignificant relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners ($r = .045$, $p = .442$, $N = 292$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .002$) indicated that communication and collaboration competencies accounted for only 0.2% of the variance in learners' loneliness, demonstrating a negligible practical effect. These findings suggest that communication and collaboration competencies have minimal explanatory power in predicting learners' levels of loneliness. Consequently, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the application of communication and collaboration competencies and their relationship with loneliness among Grade 9 learners in Wajir County, Kenya, within the framework of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Specifically, the study sought to assess learners' communication and collaboration

competencies, determine their levels of loneliness, and establish whether a relationship exists between the two variables. The findings contribute to understanding the psychosocial outcomes associated with the implementation of the CBC at the junior school level.

The first objective examined the application of communication and collaboration competencies among Grade 9 learners. The findings revealed that learners generally demonstrated high communication and collaboration competencies, with high composite mean scores for Positive Interdependence ($M = 3.83$), Promotive Interaction ($M = 3.85$), and Individual Accountability ($M = 3.84$). Furthermore, half of the learners (50.0%) exhibited high communication and collaboration competencies, while 43.3% demonstrated moderate competencies and only 6.7% exhibited low competency levels. These findings suggest that most learners have developed the collaborative behaviors envisioned under the Competency-Based Curriculum, including teamwork, shared responsibility, respectful communication, and active participation in collaborative learning activities.

These findings support the collaborative learning framework advanced by Scoular et al. (2025), which conceptualizes collaboration as coordinated teamwork characterized by shared goals, mutual dependence, and collective responsibility. Similarly, Mursidi et al. (2023), Niyonsaba et al. (2022), and Ningsiha et al. (2025) reported that collaborative learning enhances learner participation, interpersonal interaction, and problem-solving skills. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that Grade 9 learners in Kenyan junior schools are generally acquiring the communication and collaboration competencies envisaged under the Competency-Based Curriculum.

The second objective sought to determine the levels of loneliness among Grade 9 learners. The findings indicated that learners experienced a moderate level of loneliness ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.155$). Although learners generally participated in collaborative classroom activities, many continued to report feelings associated with loneliness, including lacking companionship, feeling isolated, perceiving that no one truly understood them, and experiencing limited meaningful social relationships. The relatively small standard deviation indicates that these experiences were fairly consistent across the study population.

These findings are consistent with those of Jefferson et al. (2023) and Kwan et al. (2020), who observed that adolescence is characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity and an increased need for peer acceptance, belonging, and emotional support. Similarly, Broeckelman-Post et al. (2023) found that ineffective interpersonal communication contributes to loneliness, while Riad et al. (2023) argued that meaningful social relationships depend not only on communication skills but also on the quality of interpersonal interactions. The present findings suggest that although learners actively engage in collaborative classroom activities, these interactions alone may not adequately address adolescents' emotional and social needs.

The third objective examined the relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness among Grade 9 learners. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a very weak positive and statistically insignificant relationship between communication and collaboration competencies and loneliness ($r = .045$, $p = .442$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .002$) indicated that communication and collaboration competencies accounted for only 0.2% of the variance in learners' loneliness, demonstrating a negligible practical effect. Consequently, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that communication and collaboration competencies were not significantly associated with learners' levels of loneliness.

The absence of a statistically significant relationship suggests that communication and collaboration competencies alone are insufficient to explain learners' experiences of loneliness. Although learners demonstrated strong collaborative skills and participated actively in group learning, these competencies did not necessarily translate into stronger emotional connectedness or reduced loneliness. The negligible coefficient of determination further indicates that nearly all the variation in loneliness is explained by factors other than communication and collaboration competencies. These factors may include peer acceptance, family support, emotional security, self-esteem, school connectedness, inclusivity, and the overall quality of learners' social relationships.

The findings partially agree with Wahyuni (2017), who observed that collaborative learning improves classroom participation but does not automatically produce positive psychosocial outcomes. Learners may work effectively in groups while still experiencing exclusion, unequal participation, or limited emotional support. Likewise, Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) and Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) argued that communication competencies strengthen interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being. However, unlike those studies, the present study found that communication and collaboration competencies alone did not significantly predict loneliness among Grade 9 learners. This difference may be explained by contextual and methodological differences, as previous studies examined broader interpersonal competencies and psychosocial adjustment, whereas the present study focused specifically on communication and collaboration competencies within classroom learning under the Competency-Based Curriculum.

The findings further suggest that the quality of learners' interactions may be more important than simply engaging in collaborative activities. Learners may possess appropriate communication and collaboration skills but still experience loneliness if classroom interactions are not inclusive, emotionally supportive, and characterized by genuine peer acceptance. This highlights the importance of teachers intentionally creating classroom environments that promote empathy, trust, mutual respect, equal participation, and meaningful peer relationships alongside collaborative learning activities.

This study makes an important contribution to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the psychosocial outcomes of communication and collaboration competencies within Kenya's Competency-Based Curriculum. While previous studies have primarily emphasized the academic, behavioural, and cognitive benefits of collaborative learning, the present study extends this body of knowledge by examining its relationship with learners' emotional well-being. The findings demonstrate that although communication and collaboration competencies are well developed among Grade 9 learners, they do not independently predict loneliness. These results suggest that competency development alone is insufficient to address learners' emotional well-being and should therefore be complemented by structured social-emotional learning, peer support programs, counselling services, and initiatives that strengthen learners' sense of belonging.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. Teachers should continue promoting communication and collaboration through learner-centred instructional approaches while deliberately fostering inclusive classroom environments where every learner feels valued, respected, and emotionally supported. School counsellors should strengthen programs that promote emotional resilience, positive peer relationships, and social adjustment. Curriculum developers and policymakers should also integrate social-emotional learning more explicitly into the Competency-Based Curriculum to ensure that learners' emotional well-being develops alongside communication and collaboration competencies.

Future research should investigate other factors influencing loneliness among junior school learners, including self-esteem, emotional intelligence, peer acceptance, family relationships, school connectedness, teacher support, and school climate. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies would further clarify how communication and collaboration competencies interact with these psychosocial factors as learners progress through junior and senior secondary education.

Limitations

Although the communication and collaboration questionnaire demonstrated good content validity through expert review and high internal consistency reliability, it was a researcher-developed instrument and was not subjected to exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis. Future studies should further examine its construct validity using larger and more diverse samples.

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APPENDIX 1

Demographic Information

Please fill in the following information. Your answers will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

1. **Age**
☐ 14 years, ☐ 15 years, ☐ Above 15
2. **Gender**
☐ Male ☐ Female
3. **Type of School** ☐ Public ☐ Private
4. **Number of Siblings**
☐ None ☐ 1–2 ☐ 3–4 ☐ 5 or more
5. **Who do you live with most of the time?**
☐ Both parents ☐ Mother only ☐ Father only ☐ Guardian/Other
6. **Do you have access to the internet at home?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

Part B: Communication and Collaboration Competencies

Instructions: Read each statement carefully. Tick (✓) the box that best shows what you think or feel.
Scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Not Sure 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly Agree

Positive Interdependence

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	I understand that my group cannot succeed unless everyone helps.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I feel good when my classmates and I solve problems together.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I learn better when we share our ideas in a group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Everyone in the group has something important to contribute.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5	I try to finish my part of the work so my team can succeed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I feel like an important part of the group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I remind others of our group goals when we get distracted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	I help others because their success helps the whole group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I try to understand what my teammates are thinking.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	My success depends on how well we work as a team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Promotive Interaction

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
11	I enjoy talking with classmates during group work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	I listen carefully to what others say in my group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I ask questions when I do not understand what my friends are saying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	I give suggestions to help others solve problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I respect my classmates' opinions during discussions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	I take turns when sharing my ideas.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	I build on my classmates' ideas when we are solving problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	I stay focused during group discussions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	I explain my thinking clearly to my group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	I speak politely when disagreeing with others in my group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Individual Accountability

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
21	I complete my part of the group work on time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22	I take responsibility when I make a mistake in the group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23	I ask for help when I am stuck with my task.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24	I always try my best even when working with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25	I review my work before presenting it to the group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26	I let others know when I have finished my task.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27	I try to understand the topic well so I can help the group.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28	I check if I have done what was expected of me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

29	I help others only after I have done my own part.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30	I know that everyone in the group must do their share of work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Loneliness Scale

Instructions: The following statements describe how people may feel in their daily lives. Please read each statement carefully and indicate how often each statement describes you by ticking (✓) the response that best reflects your experience. Use the following scale: **1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, and 4 = Often.**

No.	Statement	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)
1	I feel that I am in tune with the people around me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I feel that I lack companionship.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I feel that there is no one I can turn to.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I feel alone.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I feel part of a group of friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I feel that I have a lot in common with the people around me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	I feel that I am no longer close to anyone.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	I feel that my interests and ideas are not shared by those around me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	I feel outgoing and friendly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	I feel close to people.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	I feel left out.	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	I feel that my relationships with others are not meaningful.	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	I feel that no one really knows me well.	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	I feel isolated from others.	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	I can find companionship when I want it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
16	There are people who really understand me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
17	I feel shy.	☐	☐	☐	☐
18	I feel that people are around me but not with me.	☐	☐	☐	☐
19	There are people I can talk to.	☐	☐	☐	☐
20	There are people I can turn to.	☐	☐	☐	☐