

Teacher as a Facilitator and Development of Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills among Junior School learners in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, a teacher was placed as the central authority and the sole custodian of knowledge in the learning process. With the rapid changes in technology, education stakeholders have found themselves asking whether a teacher should just be a transmitter of information or should act as a facilitator who guides learners in developing desired competencies. The goal of this study was to investigate how the teacher as a facilitator enhances the abilities to think critically and solve problems in learners within the framework of contemporary education. This research employed descriptive research design. The study was anchored on Constructivism theory. The study targeted a population of 6,805 participants who included 65 Heads of Institutions, 5 Curriculum Support Officers, 520 Teachers and 6,215 learners. Simple Random and Purposive Sampling were employed to get a sample size of 363. Data was collected by use of interviews for Heads of Institution and Curriculum Support Officers while questionnaires were administered to Grade 8 Class Teachers and Grade 8 Learners. Education experts from department of education assessed the content, construct and face validity to ensure that the instruments have covered all the aspects of the research variables before the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted in one Junior School in Chiakariga Sub-County to ascertain dependability of the study tools whereby Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient average of 0.78 was established. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 31 for questionnaires and thematic analysis for the interviews. Descriptive statistics used were mean, frequencies, standard deviation, percentages and charts. Qualitative data was presented narratively while Quantitative data was presented in tables. The study findings indicated that teachers as facilitators of learning plays a critical role on the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners. The study findings recommended that teachers should strengthen their role as facilitators by increasing learner-centered approaches. The results may also provide a basis for further research.

Key Words: Teacher, Facilitator, Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, Skills.

Background Information

Globally, the current state of education systems is undergoing significant transformations. With the rapid changes in technology and philosophical developments, it has led to a change from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches. Learner-centered approaches emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving abilities which are needed to solve the twenty- first century challenges (Aadil & Sojida, 2025). Traditionally, teaching was centered on the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. This traditional teaching approaches dominated most formal education systems hindering the acquisition of essential skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, with the rise of constructivism and social constructivism theories of learning that place an emphasis on how experiences and social interactions help students to build their knowledge respectively, there is an increased gaining access of information by students through digital technologies. Due to the evolving societal needs learners are anticipated to develop diverse 21st century skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills which has led to a change in the teacher's role within the classroom instruction (Munyaradzi et al.2020). A skill is a procedure of performing a

given task to achieve a certain level which is acquired through experience, practice and training (Lamri, J., & Lubart, T.2023).

Garba, et. al., (2025), defined critical thinking as an active mental process of conceiving, using, assessing and analyzing data acquired from experiences or observation as a basis to conviction and behavior. To enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills, it is the mandate of the teacher to expose the learners to various learning experiences and opportunities that foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills. A study by Szucs (2022), in Europe on the Role of Teachers in the 21st century confirmed that, despite the teacher being the central authority in the learning process, the teachers are now providing information and guiding the learners on how to tackle that information. With the new changes in technology and access to information, this role in the 21st century makes the teacher to be regarded as a facilitator who ought to facilitate the educational process. The main goal of teachers as facilitators is to set goals and organize the process of learning. Abdallah et.al. (2024), on student-centered teaching in developing countries shifts the focus from the teacher as a sole provider of information to a facilitator who guides the educational process in the classroom. They adopted the competency-based education that encouraged student-centered approaches embracing different teaching approaches such as inquiry- based learning and project-based learning which encourages critical thinking, exploration and problem-solving skills.

A study by Rwigema and Andala (2022), on the Implementation of Competency Based Education in Rwanda confirmed that teachers face a lot of challenges when implementing a new curriculum especially in terms of curriculum content and teaching methodologies which makes it difficult to enhance learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The adoption of competency-based education in Rwanda confirmed that, the teaching approaches that a teacher uses helps to determine how the students learn therefore helping in the acquisition of competency-based education competencies such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Integrating technology in teaching makes learning more interesting and engaging to learners and therefore the teacher needs to have the technological skills. The study confirmed that, 61.3% of the total population were not exposed to technological skills making it a challenge to apply the twenty-first century skills such as abilities to think critically and solve problems among learners (Rwigema & Andala, 2021). Kenya and Tanzania adopted a curriculum which was too much exam-oriented that did not instill practical skills in students which are crucial in the 21st century job market. This necessitated a shift to a curriculum with the philosophy of education on self-reliance with a goal of instilling practical skills in students which are important in the 21st century job market (Cheptoo & Ramdas, 2020). The core competencies of the CBE framework are the abilities to think critically and solve problems, collaboration and communication among others. These core competencies help learners to gain the 21st century job market needs.

A study by Munyi (2022), in Tharaka Nithi County on the teacher's capacity building and its influence on effectiveness in schools found that teacher's capacity in pedagogy act as the central key to 21st century. The teacher who acts as a facilitator provides a conducive environment where learners can have engaging and active learning enhancing abilities in critical thinking and problem-solving. A study done by Ireri, et, al., (2020), on structural modification/ inclusive education challenges argued that teachers in the 21st century are expected to be a facilitator of learning. Many school teachers lack the training, resources and classroom infrastructure to successfully fulfill their role as a facilitator therefore undermining learner's development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among learners. There is limited information in Tharaka South Sub-County on the 21st century roles of the teacher as a facilitator who promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners.

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, education placed the teacher as the central authority in the learning process in charge of transmitting information to the learners. The Kenya Competency Based Curriculum advocates for an education that encourages learner-centered approaches that aims at engaging learners in the learning process. However, with the rise of learner-centered approaches, the traditional instructor's role as a mere transmitter of information is being challenged by considering the need to foster abilities in critical thinking and problem-solving among learners. Even though the competency-based education (CBE), emphasizes on fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the traditional teacher roles hinders the development of critical thinking

and problem-solving skills among learners. This gap hinders the ability to obtain an educational system that provides learners with critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that are required for the empowerment of the learners and the society in the 21st century.

Objective

This study sought to determine the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning on development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

Research Question

The study was guided by the question: What is the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning on development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design. Descriptive research design helped in giving a systematic analysis on what the current teachers are doing to encourage development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in learners. The target population comprised of 6,805 subjects. The study used purposive sampling to select schools. The sample size for this study was determined based on the Kathuri and Pals (1993) sample determination table which suggest that a population of 6805 gives a sample size of 363. The sample size of 363 respondents comprised of 10 Heads of Institution, 5 Curriculum Support Officer's, 10 Grade 8 Class Teachers and 338 Grade 8 Learners whereby Heads of institutions', curriculum support officer's and teachers were purposively selected while learners were selected based on purposive and simple random sampling. Questionnaires for teachers and learners while interview guides for HOI's and CSO's were used to collect data. With the help of the university supervisors, the researcher was able to ensure the face, content and construct validity. The reliability of the research instruments was establish through a pilot study whereby the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient had an average value of 0.77

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the study showed that 47.6% of learners were male while 51.2% were female, and 1.2% of learners preferred not to say their gender. Among teachers who responded , 40.0% were male and 60.0% were female. The findings also showed that 42% of the learners aged 14 years followed by 31.1% who aged 13 years, 20.7% were 15 years and 6.2% of learners aged 16 years and above. The findings from the study showed that 37.5% of learners had been in their schools for 2-3 years, 18% had been in their current school for 4-5 years, 18.9% had been in their school for 6-7 years, 19.85 for more than 7 years while 5.6% had been in their school for less than a year. The findings also showed that 80% of the teachers had Bachelor's Degrees while 20% has Master's Degrees.

Learners Views on Teacher as Facilitator of Learning

The participants were asked to indicate their agreement with statements on teacher as a facilitator and development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners. The statements were measured by a likert-type scale with values as follows: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The results of frequencies, mean, standard deviation and percentages on learner's views on teacher as a facilitator of learning are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Learners Views on Teacher as Facilitator of Learning

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
My teachers help me in finding solutions to everyday life problems rather than giving direct answers.	338	4.3	0.98	176 (52.1)	127 (37.6)	12 (3.6)	8 -2.3	15 (4.4)

My teachers help me reflect on what I have learned and how I have solved certain class problems.	338	4.09	1.043	139 (41.1)	135 (39.9)	32 (9.5)	18 (5.3)	14 (4.2)
My teacher uses technology during the learning process.	338	2.86	1.476	55 (16.3)	94 (27.8)	26 (7.7)	75 (22.2)	88 (26.0)
My teacher gives all the learners chance to make an informed decision in the classroom.	338	3.84	1.351	143 (42.2)	104 (30.8)	21 (6.2)	34 (10.1)	36 (10.7)
My teacher asks questions that make me think deeply.	338	3.87	1.446	164 (48.5)	86 (25.4)	15 (4.4)	25 (7.5)	48 (14.2)

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics on learners' views regarding the teacher as a facilitator of learning and learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The study findings show that learners generally had positive views on the role of teachers as facilitators of learning. Most of the items recorded mean scores above 3.5 suggesting that learners agreed that their teachers used facilitative practices such as socratic scaffolding (open-ended questions), dialogue (Think-Pair-Share) and guided discovery learning which supports critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, the item on the use of technology recorded a lower mean indicating that technology integration remained a weak area.

Responses on whether teachers helped learners find solutions to everyday life problems rather than giving direct answers showed that most of the agreed that their teachers helped them find solutions instead of simply providing answers. Only a few of the learners were undecided, while the minority disagreed. The mean and a standard deviation indicated that learners strongly perceived their teachers as guides who encourage them to solve problems. This finding supports the idea that teachers were not merely transmitting answers but were encouraging learners to think through problems and identify possible solutions. The findings align with research findings by Jaswal and Behera (2023) which found out that blended learning provided an environment that gives teachers a chance to act like facilitators who guide learners during the learning process.

Responses on whether teachers helped learners reflect on what they had learned and how they had solved certain class problems showed that majority of learners agreed that their teachers supported reflection during learning. Only a few were undecided while minority disagreed. The mean and standard deviation showed that learners generally agreed that teachers encouraged them to think about what they had learned and how they had solved problems. Reflection is important in developing critical thinking because it helps learners move beyond memorising content to examining their own reasoning process. Therefore, this finding suggests that teachers were helping learners develop metacognitive skills which are necessary for problem-solving. These findings are in line with the findings by Fyfe et al., (2022) which concluded that guiding students through metacognitive reflection during learning helps learners to improve their performance and enhances problem-solving skills.

Regarding responses on whether teachers used technology during the learning process showed that minority agreed. Only a few of the learners were undecided while majority disagreed. This means that majority of learners disagreed that teachers used technology during the learning process. The item had low mean and a standard deviation which indicated that technology use was limited or inconsistent. This finding is important because technology can support inquiry, access to information, collaboration and problem-solving. Therefore, limited use of technology may reduce learners' exposure to digital resources that could strengthen their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The findings align with a research findings by Kathula et. al, (2025) which supported that, even though CBE had succeeded in making learning centered around the learners, most of the facilitators lacked the necessary training to intergrate technology in learning becoming a major downfall reducing the chances of development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners.

Responses on whether teachers gave all learners a chance to make informed decisions in the classroom showed that majority of learners agreed that teachers gave them opportunities to make informed decisions. Only a few were undecided while minority disagreed. The mean and standard deviation showed that most learners believed that classroom facilitation gave them opportunities to participate in decision-making. Such

opportunities are important because critical thinking requires learners to compare ideas, consider alternatives, make choices and justify decisions. These findings align with research by Sangwa et al. (2025) who argued that student-centered approaches which emphasized on learner's autonomy and active engagement in the learning process promoted learner's critical thinking as well as problem-solving skills.

The findings on whether teachers asked questions that made learners think deeply show that majority of learners agreed that teachers used questions that encouraged deep thinking. Only a few of learners were undecided while minority disagreed. The mean and standard deviation showed that teachers commonly used questioning as a strategy for promoting critical thinking. Questions that require learners to explain, justify and analyse ideas help them develop deeper understanding and problem-solving skills. These findings are consistent with research findings by Abudi and Gallardo (2024) which argued that when teachers target higher-order categories of Bloom's Taxonomy of analyzing and evaluating, encourages a pathway for advanced critical thinking.

Overall, Table 1 shows that learners generally view teachers as facilitators who helped them solve everyday problems, reflect on learning, make informed decisions and think deeply. The strongest area was teachers helping learners find solutions to everyday life problems, while the weakest area was the use of technology during learning. This suggests that teachers were already applying several learner-centred strategies, but technology integration required improvement.

Teachers' Views on Teacher as a Facilitator of Learning and Development of Learners' Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Table 2 presents teachers views on teacher as facilitator of learning.

Table 2: Teachers Views on Teacher as Facilitator of Learning

	N	Mean	Std. Dev	SA(%)	A(%)	U(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
I often encourage learners to collaborate online resources alongside textbooks to solve real life problems	10	4.1	0.738	3 (30.0)	5 (50.0)	2 (20.0)	--	--
I often present learners with complex real-life problems or scenarios and guide them to find solutions independently	10	4.4	0.516	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)	--	--	--
I often design classroom activities that encourages learners to explore concepts and solve problems based on prior learning experience	10	4.4	0.516	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)	--	--	--
I often provide equal opportunities to learners not only the brilliant ones but also the slow learners to provide ideas and solutions in solving problems	10	4.5	0.527	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	--	--	--
I often use probing questions that requires learners to think deeper before giving an explanation	10	4.2	0.632	3 (30.0)	6 (60.0)	1 (10.0)	--	--
I often use teaching strategies that encourage active learner participation	10	4.6	0.516	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)	--	--	--

Findings in Table 2 presents teachers' views on their role as facilitators of learning and how this role contributes to learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The findings show that teachers rated themselves positively across all facilitation practices. All items recorded mean scores above 4.0, indicating strong agreement that teachers used facilitative approaches in the classroom.

On whether teachers encouraged learners to use online resources alongside textbooks to solve real-life

problems showed that majority of teachers agreed that they encouraged learners to collaborate with online resources and textbooks while minority were undecided. The mean and standard deviation suggested that teachers recognised the importance of using additional learning resources beyond textbooks. However, when compared with learners' responses on technology use there appears to be a gap between teachers' perception and learners' experience. While teachers reported encouraging online resources many learners indicated that technology was not commonly used during learning. This may mean that teachers recommend online resources verbally but actual classroom use of technology remains limited. The findings on integration of technology does not align with research findings by Kathula et. al (2025) which concluded that despite successful shift to CBE, there has been a challenge in intergration of technology into the learning process which brings about a great downfall in the implementation of CBE hence reduces the chances of development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners'.

The findings on whether teachers presented learners with complex real-life problems or scenarios and guided them to find solutions independently showed that all teachers agreed with the statement. The mean and a standard deviation showed that teachers believed they provided learners with real-life problems and guided them to solve them independently. These findings aligns with a research by Sangwa et al. (2025) who argued that learner centered approaches of teaching emphasized on active engagement of learning whereby the teacher is seen as a facilitator who guided the learning process. The findings are also supported by Kerkhoff et al. (2025) who confirmed that having a learner centered approach does not reduce the teacher role rather it aims at shifting the teacher's role from a mere transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of learning by guiding the learners.

Additionally, the study sought to examine whether teachers designed classroom activities that encouraged learners to explore concepts and solve problems based on prior learning experiences. All teachers agreed with the statement. The mean and standard deviation indicated that teachers reported using activities that connected new learning to learners' previous knowledge. This is important because learners develop critical thinking when they relate new concepts to what they already know, compare ideas and apply previous learning to new problems. These findings are consistent with a comprehensive prior-meta –review (2023) that argued that classroom activities such as group discussions and exploring concepts based on prior knowledge increases their ability to think critically and solve problems.

As for whether teachers provided equal opportunities to all learners, including both brilliant and slow learners, to provide ideas and solutions when solving problems, the findings showed that all teachers agreed that they provided equal opportunities to learners. The finding suggests that teachers viewed facilitation as an inclusive process where all learners are encouraged to participate. These findings are supported by Sangwa et al. (2025) who argued that student-centered approaches which emphasized on learner's autonomy and active engagement in the learning process promoted learner's critical thinking as well as problem-solving skills. Additionally on whether teachers used probing questions that required learners to think deeply before giving an explanation showed that majority agreed while minority were undecided. The mean and standard deviation showed that most teachers used probing questions as a facilitation strategy. Probing questions are important because they move learners from simple recall to explanation, analysis and justification. This finding agrees with learners' responses where most learners also indicated that teachers asked questions that made them think deeply.

Responses on whether teachers used teaching strategies that encouraged active learner participation showed that all teachers agreed that they used strategies that promoted active learner participation. The mean and standard deviation showed that teachers strongly perceived themselves as using learner-centred approaches. This is supported by Sangwa et al. (2025) who noted that learner-centered approaches emphasized on active engagement of learners in the learning process promoting learner's critical thinking as well as problem-solving skills. Overall, Table 2 shows that teachers strongly believed they were performing their role as facilitators of learning. The strongest area was the use of teaching approaches that encourage active learner participation, followed by provision of equal opportunities to all learners. Teachers also reported presenting complex real-life problems, designing exploratory activities and using probing questions. However, the comparison between teachers' and learners' responses suggests that while facilitation practices were generally present, technology-supported learning was still limited from the learners' perspective.

Curriculum Support Officers' Views on Teacher as a Facilitator of Learning

Curriculum Support Officers reported that teachers were encouraged to make learners active participants in lessons rather than passive recipients of information. They also reported that teachers were encouraged to give learners projects for research and small tasks that enabled them to share ideas. Curriculum support officer's recommended group work, discussions, role play and open-ended questions that make learners think. Curriculum Support Officers identified several gaps, including teachers rushing to cover the syllabus, large classes making practical activities difficult, inadequate teacher skills in critical thinking and problem-solving, too much focus on content coverage, and limited training in CBE methods. These findings suggest that although facilitative teaching strategies were recommended, implementation was affected by structural and professional challenges.

Heads of Institutions' Views on Teacher as a Facilitator of Learning

Heads of Institutions reported that teachers acted as guides in the learning process by helping learners interpret curriculum design activities and guide them on how to work on tasks in different learning areas. Heads of Institutions also described teachers as key agents of learning in all areas and as resource persons in knowledge acquisition. This finding suggests that teachers' facilitative role extended beyond academic instruction. Heads of Institutions also linked facilitation to Competency Based Curriculum and Competency Based Education. They stated that CBC/CBE is learner-centred and that the teacher is expected to facilitate or guide learners rather than lecture. They referred to the learning model involving engagement, exploration, extension, explanation and evaluation. Heads of Institutions also reported that teachers helped learners think critically and solve problems by giving them real-life situations, life-related questions and practical challenges. Heads of Institutions also indicated that teachers helped learners think critically by involving them in activities requiring analysis, reasoning, decision-making and open-ended responses. Some mentioned fieldwork, group work, research involvement and community service activities

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the objective of the current study, the following conclusion was made:

The teacher as a facilitator of learning plays a critical role in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners in Tharaka South Sub-County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. When teachers act as facilitators of learning, learners are encouraged to participate actively, reflect on their learning, solve everyday problems, make informed decisions and think deeply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that teachers should strengthen their role as facilitators by increasing learner-centered strategies such as group discussions, role play, projects, open-ended questions, peer learning, problem-solving tasks and real-life scenarios

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher suggests that a study should be done to examine the effect of technology integration on the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills among junior school learners.

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