

GILE Journal of Skills Development

Extent to Which Life Skills and Values are Embedded in the Education Systems of Four East African Jurisdictions: A Scoping Review

Stella Rose Akongo

Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, Uganda

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3039-9683>

Martin Ariapa

Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, Uganda

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5883-5922>

David Alelah Otieno

Zizi Afrique Foundation, Kenya

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6836-8546>

Michael Babu

Strathmore University, Kenya

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4742-6837>

Daniel Marandu

University of Dar es Salam, Tanzania

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2731-0733>

Ramadhani Ally Matimbwa

Milele Zanzibar Foundation, Tanzania

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3801-7574>

Mauro Giacomazzi

Luigi Giussani Institute of Higher Education, Uganda

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3837-5249>

Abstract

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 calls for education systems to equip all learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to promote sustainable development, equity, and social cohesion. As global societies face rapid technological and socio-economic changes, education systems are increasingly recognizing the importance of life skills and values—such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy—beyond traditional academic knowledge. However, embedding these competencies into curricula, teaching practices, and assessments remains a complex challenge. This scoping review analyses 32 policy documents, curriculum frameworks, teacher training materials, and assessment strategies to examine how life skills and values are integrated into the primary and secondary education systems of Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar. Through an analysis of policy documents, curriculum frameworks, teacher training materials, and assessment strategies, the study assesses both the explicit and implicit presence of these competencies. Findings reveal a strong regional commitment to life skills and values education, reflected in curricular reforms and pedagogical shifts. However, implementation is inconsistent due to limited teacher capacity, resource disparities—especially in rural areas—and challenges in culturally contextualizing values education. Moreover, assessment mechanisms often fail to capture these competencies effectively. Three integration approaches are identified: across-subject embedding, standalone subjects, and extracurricular activities. The ALiVE program, under the Regional Education Learning Initiative, represents a collaborative effort to systematically embed these competencies in East African education systems. This review provides a crucial baseline for future monitoring and offers insights for policymakers, educators, and development partners seeking to strengthen life skills and values education in diverse and evolving contexts.

Keywords: life skills and values education, curriculum integration, East Africa

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (SDG) emphasises ensuring all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable lifestyles and a culture of equity and excellence. Education systems around the world are in agreement that, in order to equip children with the ability to succeed in today's rapidly changing world, learners need to be taught a broad range of life skills and values that extend beyond the traditional numeracy and literacy skills. Life skills and values, such as communication, collaboration, self-awareness, and respect, are critical for making informed decisions, navigating different environments and contexts, and thriving in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain world. Although there is indication that education systems are aspiring to move beyond traditional academic disciplines to integrate life skills and values within their teaching and learning, implementation, and even knowing where to begin and how to identify whether progress has been made in their implementation, has been and continues to be a challenge (Care et al., 2018).

1.1. The Changing Landscape of Education

The rapid transformations occurring at global, regional, national, and local levels are driven by increasing mechanization and the exponential growth of information generation and exchange. Over the past decades, numerous discussions have emerged about changing landscapes and the advent of new eras, such as the “New Industrial Revolution” or the “New Information Age”

(Schmidt & Cohen, 2015). While these developments bring significant advancements, they also raise concerns about the human dimension, particularly in education.

Education serves as the primary mechanism for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for contemporary society. However, educational systems often struggle to keep pace with evolving societal needs (Care et al., 2018). Many scholars (Robinson & Aronica, 2015) have pointed out that despite shifts in pedagogical approaches, classroom structures and management remain largely unchanged. Nonetheless, innovative practices have emerged in various contexts, albeit unevenly distributed. The most inexperienced teachers are often assigned to rural and underserved areas, which historically receive the least investment in infrastructure and teaching resources (Adedjei & Olaniyan, 2011). As a result, students who require the most support frequently have the least access to quality education.

Society today demands individuals who are literate and numerate, understand scientific principles, are aware of global interconnections, and can adapt to complex environments both physically and virtually. Organizations such as the OECD, the World Economic Forum, and national education bodies have emphasized the need for education to extend beyond the accumulation of knowledge to include life skills and values that prepare individuals for the workforce, address socio-economic challenges, and foster meaningful civic participation (Care et al., 2018).

Education systems have historically aimed to prepare students with competencies that align with societal needs. However, dissatisfaction with traditional approaches has led to an increasing emphasis on explicitly defining and integrating life skills and values into curricula (Care et al., 2018). The terminology surrounding these competencies varies widely, with terms such as general capabilities, soft skills, social-emotional skills, or transferable competencies often used interchangeably. Some frameworks also encompass values, attitudes, and ethics, raising questions about whether these distinctions are meaningful or overlapping (Ercikan & Oliveri, 2016). While the specific knowledge, skills, and values emphasized may differ across national education systems, there is a general consensus on the importance of competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy.

A large-scale analysis of national education policies (Care et al., 2016) revealed that countries increasingly recognize life skills and values as essential components of their educational goals. Many have incorporated them into their mission and vision statements, curriculum frameworks, and policy documents. However, the extent to which these aspirations translate into practice varies. Some countries explicitly embed these competencies within their curricula, while others remain at the stage of broad policy endorsement without clear implementation strategies (Care et al., 2018).

1.2. Incorporation of Life Skills and Values in East African Education Systems

Education systems across East Africa are undergoing significant transformations as they strive to integrate life skills and values into their curricula. Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have all recognized the necessity of equipping students with skills beyond academic knowledge, ensuring they develop critical thinking, communication abilities, digital literacy, financial awareness, and environmental consciousness. These countries also emphasize values such as national cohesion, self-reliance, and responsible citizenship (Jacob et al., 2007; Komba & Shukia, 2023; Ominde et al., 2021; Orodho, 2019). However, the approaches adopted in integrating these competencies vary significantly, shaped by historical, cultural, and policy contexts.

The integration of life skills and values education within the curriculum of East African countries follows three primary approaches. The first is an across-subjects model, where life skills and values are embedded throughout various disciplines rather than being taught as standalone subjects (Heto et al., 2020; Komba & Shukia, 2023; NCDC, 2019). This approach ensures that students encounter these essential competencies in different learning contexts. In Kenya, for example, problem-solving and critical thinking are introduced in language and science lessons at the primary level, while secondary students develop these skills further through debates, project-based work, and specialized subjects (Heto et al., 2020). Social studies in Kenya play a crucial role in fostering national cohesion and civic responsibility. Similarly, in Tanzania, environmental awareness is woven into multiple subjects through a multidisciplinary approach, reinforcing the connection between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Komba & Shukia, 2023; Stephen & Ismail, 2019). The focus on self-reliance and entrepreneurship is reflected in business-related subjects. Uganda, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of incorporating life skills and values as crosscutting competencies that each subject should contribute to develop through teaching practices that ensure students engage with these concepts in meaningful ways (NCDC, 2019).

In some cases, life skills and values are transferred to student in standalone subjects. For instance, in Tanzania, Life Skills Education is recognized as a subject in some schools, particularly within secondary education. This subject is designed to equip students with essential personal and social competencies, including decision-making, emotional resilience, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution. The Tanzanian curriculum places a strong emphasis on self-reliance, a principle rooted in the country's educational philosophy of "Education for Self-Reliance." As a result, Life Skills Education often incorporates practical lessons that help students navigate real-life challenges, from managing peer pressure to making informed career choices (Sulayman, 2015). Similarly, Kenya has experimented in the past the introduction of life skills as a distinct subject in some schools, particularly in secondary education (Waiganjo & Mwangi, 2018). In Ugandan schools, while life skills are currently integrated across different subjects (NCDC, 2019), certain aspects—such as health education, HIV/AIDS awareness, and civic responsibility—were sometimes delivered as independent modules (Jacob et al., 2007).

Beyond the formal curriculum, extracurricular activities serve as a third avenue for reinforcing life skills and values education (Jacob et al., 2007; Kimiti et al., 2011; Stephen & Ismail, 2019). Clubs, societies, and non-classroom initiatives provide students with opportunities to develop leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in practical settings. Schools in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda increasingly use these platforms to supplement classroom learning, ensuring that students cultivate essential life skills in diverse environments.

1.3. Implementation and Challenges

Despite the explicit commitment to integrating life skills and values in the curricula, the implementation of these frameworks faces numerous challenges. One of the most pervasive obstacles is the preparedness of teachers. Many educators lack the necessary training to effectively deliver life skills education, often struggling to shift from traditional rote-learning approaches to more interactive, student-centred methodologies. This gap in teacher capacity leads to inconsistencies in how these skills and values are imparted across different schools and regions (Giacomazzi et al., 2022; Kariuki et al., 2022; Komba & Shukia, 2023; Kowino, 2024; Ominde et al., 2021; Ruto et al., 2023).

Resource constraints also present a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas where access to teaching materials and digital infrastructure is limited (Kariuki et al., 2022). While urban schools may benefit from better-equipped classrooms and technology integration, their rural counterparts often struggle to provide students with practical exposure to digital literacy and environmental education. The disparity in resources exacerbates inequalities in the quality of life-skills education, hindering efforts to create a standardized approach across East Africa.

Another key challenge is the cultural sensitivity surrounding values education. The integration of traditional values with modern educational principles requires careful navigation to avoid conflicts with societal norms and beliefs (Giacomazzi, 2022, 2024; Losioki, 2024; Ominde et al., 2020). For instance, while citizenship education in Kenya promotes national unity, its emphasis on multiculturalism may face resistance in some communities. Similarly, in Uganda, comprehensive sexuality education has sparked debates regarding the balance between cultural values and global human rights perspectives. These tensions highlight the complexity of implementing values education in diverse and evolving societies.

Assessment remains another pressing issue, as traditional examination systems often fail to adequately measure life skills and values (Care et al., 2024; Mugo et al., 2022, 2023). While academic subjects lend themselves to standardized testing, competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical reasoning require alternative evaluation methods. The absence of effective assessment tools creates a disconnect between curriculum goals and actual learning outcomes, making it difficult to gauge the success of life skills education programs.

2. Background of the Study

This review focuses on Kenya, Tanzania (Mainland), Uganda, and Zanzibar because they are anglophone jurisdictions in East Africa that are relatively advanced in integrating life skills and values into their education systems. All four are undertaking curriculum reforms where these competencies are explicitly emphasized, providing fertile ground for comparative analysis. Their selection also reflects the sustained engagement of the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI)—a network of civil society organizations working together with academia and government—and its Actions for Life Skills and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) program, which has collaborated with governments, academia, and civil society to strengthen policy frameworks and fill gaps in implementation. In this context, ALiVE has sought to ensure that life skills and values are systematically embedded in primary and secondary education through curriculum, assessment, and teacher training reforms. The inclusion of these four jurisdictions therefore combines considerations of policy leadership, reform momentum, and availability of comprehensive documentation to support a systematic scoping review.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this scoping review is to gather the most current baseline information on the extent to which life skills and values are embedded in the primary and secondary education systems of Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar. The outcomes from the study can then be used in the future to track progress to assess whether there is an increase over time in the extent to which life skills and values are integrated in their education systems. To this end, this scoping review will answer the following main questions:

-
1. To what extent are life skills and values embedded in the primary education systems of Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar, as evidenced by both explicit and implicit mentions of life skills and values in the curriculum, assessment, and teacher training?
 2. To what extent are life skills and values embedded in the secondary education systems of Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar, as evidenced by both explicit and implicit mentions of life skills and values in the curriculum, assessment, and teacher training?

4. Methods

4.1. Design

A scoping review (Kastner et al., 2012), a type of knowledge synthesis, is an ideal method, as it provides a systematic approach to mapping evidence in an area of interest, as well as identifying potential gaps in evidence and other exploratory findings and insights.

4.2. Search Strategy and Document Selection

The review sought the most recent documents in English—or translated into English—available prior to May 2023, including national vision and mission statements, policies, curricula, assessment frameworks, and teacher training materials for the four jurisdictions. A total of 50 documents were initially identified. Following a double review, 18 documents were excluded for the following reasons: 9 were not the most updated versions, 1 had not been officially approved, 2 were not policy documents, 2 referred exclusively to refugee contexts, 3 addressed only pre-primary education, and 1 was a duplicate. The final study sample comprised 32 documents, including 2 vision documents, 9 policy papers, 8 curriculum frameworks, 8 teacher training materials, and 4 assessment guidelines, distributed across jurisdictions as follows: 15 from Kenya, 6 from Tanzania Mainland, 9 from Uganda, and 2 from Zanzibar. Specific details on these sources are provided in Annex 1.

4.3. Document Screening and Selection Process

Initial screening of documents is one important aspect of conducting a high-quality and comprehensive review of the current evidence base. Document screening allows the review team in each jurisdiction to conduct the first step in the systematic synthesis of the existing information around whether life skills and values are embedded in the primary and secondary education systems. A standard approach was used for identifying whether a particular document should be included as part of the final review. Table 1 below includes the information that was used to identify documents, screen the documents, and determine inclusion eligibility.

TABLE 1. DOCUMENTS IDENTIFICATION AND SCREENING

Field	Type	Description	Response Options
Title	Text	Write the full title of the document	
Author(s)/ Organization(s)	Text	Write the name of the author(s) or main organizations	
Jurisdiction	Pull Down	Identify the jurisdiction	Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, Zanzibar
Year Published	Pull Down	Identify the year the document was published. If this information is not available, please use NA.	2000-2023 or NA
Month Published	Pull Down	Identify the month the document was published. If this information is not available, please use NA.	Jan-Dec or NA
Language	Pull Down	What language is the document in?	English/Other
Recent	Pull Down	Is this the most recent document? Use Maybe if you are not sure.	Yes/No/Maybe
Approved	Pull Down	Is this officially approved by the Ministry? Use Maybe if you are not sure.	Yes/No/Maybe
National	Pull Down	Is this a national or jurisdictional level document? Use Maybe if you are not sure.	Yes/No/Maybe
Category	Pull Down	Identify the document category	Mission, vision, education policy, primary curriculum, secondary curriculum, primary assessment, secondary assessment, teacher education assessment, teacher training, other
Other Category	Text	If you identified the document category as Other, please write the category here.	
Include in Review?	Pull Down	Should this document be included in the data collection process?	Yes/Maybe/No

Source: own compilation/calculations

Each jurisdiction team gathered any and all documents that met the eligibility criteria listed above. Once documents were gathered, a Document Screening Tool was used to screen the document and determine eligibility for data collection. To increase consistency among reviewers, all members of the jurisdiction team screened the same documents, discussed the results, and amended the screening and document screening protocol and tool before beginning the data collection efforts for this review. Inconsistencies and disagreements on document selection were resolved within each jurisdiction team and with the entire study team by consensus and discussion.

4.4. Eligibility Criteria

For documents to be included in the review needed to be official national level documents from the Ministry of Education that focus on curriculum, assessment, and teacher training in both primary and secondary levels. Specifically, the documents considered eligible included: 1) Education policy documents; 2) Primary and secondary level curricula; 3) Assessment frameworks at the primary and secondary levels and for teacher education; and 4) Teacher training policy documents.

Documents were considered based on the following inclusion criteria: Most recent; Approved by the Ministry; At the national/jurisdictional level; Mission/vision statements; Education policy documents; Curricula at primary and secondary levels (or equivalent); Assessment framework for primary, secondary, and teacher education (or equivalent); Teacher training policy documents (or equivalent); and Present in the jurisdictions of Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar.

The exclusion criteria were: Documents not approved; Not the most recent version of the documents; Documents not from the Ministry of Education; and Documents at levels other than national/jurisdictional.

4.5. Data Collection Process

A data collection form was jointly developed by the study team to determine which variables to extract from the documents. The reviewers from each jurisdiction team independently collected the data, discussed the results within each team as well as with the entire study team to identify any issues and discrepancies, and continuously updated the data collection form in an iterative process. In addition to the data collected on the document characteristics, data were gathered on life skills and values mentioned either explicitly or implicitly within each of the documents selected for the review, as well as mentions of more traditional approaches to learning (e.g., memorization, knowledge-focused, traditional subject areas).

4.6. Data Synthesis and Reporting

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data synthesis were applied to summarize the main results to better describe the extent to which life skills and values are embedded in the education systems of the four jurisdictions at baseline. Based on the data collected as described above, the information extracted from the documents were coded in terms of the “intensity” (i.e., number of times) at which life skills and values are mentioned or identified in the various documents.

In addition, the specific life skills and values mentioned were coded, and implicit instances where life skills and values are alluded to in order to qualitatively describe themes were documented, alongside types of evidence available, and other observations that were considered relevant for this study.

Once the data were collected and analysed, heat maps were created to show whether skills and values were mentioned, whether there were explicit versus implicit mentions of skills and values, whether traditional subject skills were mentioned, and how many instances of skills and values were mentioned. In addition, specific skills and values were counted to show the number of times these skills and values showed up in the policy documents.

5. Findings

5.1. Life Skills and Values

Life skills and values can have different meanings depending on the context, and different terminology can be used to refer to life skills and values. For this study, life skills and values refer to a broad set of competences that can be taught or learned to enhance thinking, learning, working, and living in the world.

Across the four jurisdictions, different terminologies and/or nomenclatures refer to these competences. For instance, Kenya uses the term core competences, Tanzania Mainland uses cross-cutting issues, Uganda uses generic skills and 21st century skills, and Zanzibar uses 21st century skills and lifelong learning skills. Each jurisdiction has identified and emphasized particular life skills and values in its national education policy documents to inform curricula and pedagogy in their contexts. Table 2 shows the specific values and skills emphasized for learners in each jurisdiction.

It is worth noting that certain terminology may be considered a value for one jurisdiction, whereas that same terminology may be considered a life skill for another jurisdiction. For instance, citizenship is considered a value and a life skill in Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar; however, in Kenya, citizenship is considered a life skill, not a value. In some cases, like Tanzania Mainland, citizenship is emphasized as a value and a life skill, falling under the larger umbrella term cross-cutting issues.

TABLE 2. LIST OF SPECIFIC LIFE SKILLS AND VALUES ACROSS THE FOUR JURISDICTIONS

Jurisdictions	Specific Values Emphasized for Learners	Specific Skills Emphasized for Learners
Kenya	Love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism, social justice, and integrity	Critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, communication and collaboration, learning to learn, self-efficacy, digital literacy, and citizenship
Tanzania Mainland	Tolerance, Justice, equality, citizenship, respect, integrity, spiritual values	Collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, respect, self-awareness, innovation, cooperation, curiosity, communication, resilience, citizenship, respect, decision-making, self-efficacy, digital literacy, and ICT.
Uganda	Respect, honesty, justice and fairness, integrity, moral uprightness, hard work, responsibility, harmony, unity, patriotism, citizenship, spiritual values	Critical thinking and problem solving; creativity and innovation; creative thinking, cooperation, and self-directed learning; mathematical computations and ICT proficiency; communication, assertiveness, decision making, negotiation, resilience, self-awareness, and leadership.
Zanzibar	Tolerance, justice, equality, citizenship, respect, integrity, spiritual values	Communication, creative thinking skills, vocational skills, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, respect, self-awareness, innovation, cooperation, curiosity, resilience, citizenship, respect, decision-making, self-efficacy, digital literacy, and ICT.

Source: own compilation/calculations

5.2. Life Skills and Values in Kenya's Education System

Kenya's basic curriculum has identified seven core competences and eight values prioritized across all school system levels. The core competences highlighted in the primary and secondary curriculum framework, include critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and imagination, communication and collaboration, learning to learn, self-efficacy, and digital literacy. The eight values include love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism, social justice, and integrity. The skills and values are emphasized in the core curriculum framework as competences that are to be taught and nurtured among all learners.

The following national-level documents were included in this study: the Mission and Vision Statement; the Education Policy Document; the Primary Curriculum Framework; the Secondary Curriculum Framework; the Primary Assessment Framework; and the Teacher Training Policy.

Note that Kenya—at the time when the study was conducted—did not have official national-level documents regarding secondary assessment and teacher education assessment. However, a Secondary Assessment Framework was being drafted.

TABLE 3. HEAT MAP FOR KENYA

	Kenya							
	Mission/ Vision	Education Policy	Primary Curriculum	Primary Assessment Framework	Secondary Curriculum	Secondary Assessment Framework	Teacher Training	Teacher Education Assessment Framework
Life Skills								
Are 21st Century Skills mentioned?	10	5	9	8	32		9	
How many instances of explicit mentions of skills?	31	21	52	23	102		24	
How many instances of implicit mentions of skills	32	17	21	5	113		6	
How many instances of traditional skills mentioned?	9	4	7	0	49		3	
Critical Thinking	2	0	6	3	17		3	
Creativity	0	0	3	3	11		4	
Communication	5	3	5	2	10		2	
Problem Solving	3	0	6	3	13		1	
Collaboration	4	1	2	2	10		3	
Learning to Learn	0	0	0	3	4		0	
Self-efficacy	0	2	2	2	4		0	
Digital Literacy	1	0	1	3	5		5	
Creative Thinking	0	0	1	0	7		0	
Vocational Skills	0	0	0	0	0		0	
Innovation	0	0	1	0	4		3	
Cooperation	4	0	0	0	0		0	
Self-directed learning	0	0	0	0	0		0	
Mathematical computational skills	0	0	0	0	0		0	
ICT Skills	1	0	1	0	0		0	
Social-Emotional Skills	0	0	1	0	0		0	
Adaptability	0	0	0	0	0		0	
Assertiveness	0	0	0	0	0		0	
Self-awareness	0	1	0	0	0		0	
Curiosity	0	1	0	0	0		0	
Self-esteem	0	2	0	0	0		0	
Values								
How many instances of values?	140	103	32	15	71		19	
Love	1	0	2	1	3		0	
Responsibility	51	18	8	2	9		1	
Respect	19	8	2	5	6		0	
Unity	2	1	1	0	5		0	
Peace	14	28	4	2	10		0	
Patriotism	6	3	0	0	3		0	
Citizenship	0	0	0	0	0		0	
Justices/Social Justice	11	1	0	0	5		0	
Integrity	13	9	0	1	4		11	
Moral	11	5	12	1	18		2	
Spiritual Value	5	2	0	0	1		0	
Tolerance	0	3	1	0	1		0	
Valuing Equality	4	9	0	0	0		0	
Empathy/Empathize with others	1	2	0	2	1		0	
Transparency	1	14	0	0	0		4	
Trust	1	0	0	1	0		1	

Source: own compilation/calculations

Table 3 illustrates that skills are referenced both implicitly and explicitly throughout the policy documents. However, the difference between implicit and explicit mentions is not particularly significant. Critical thinking, creativity, communication, and problem-solving are the most frequently cited skills in explicit references, whereas learning to learn appears the least. Among the seven identified competencies, there is an almost 4:1 ratio between the most frequently mentioned—critical thinking, problem solving, and communication—compared to self-efficacy. Notably, while the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) prioritizes seven key competencies, additional competencies such as creative thinking, innovation, cooperation, and digital skills are also referenced in the reviewed documents.

Core values are similarly emphasized throughout the policy documents. For example, the *Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms* strongly highlights values as fundamental to the proposed education reforms. This underscores the critical role values play in shaping both the educational experience and student outcomes. The document also outlines specific strategies for integrating values into the reform process, including curriculum adjustments and teacher training initiatives. Additionally, curriculum frameworks, such as the *Basic Education Curriculum Framework*, explicitly emphasize the incorporation of fundamental values into the curriculum. These values—honesty, responsibility, respect, and tolerance—are clearly integrated across various subjects. Notably, both the primary and secondary curricula most frequently reference *moral(s)* as a core value.

The reviewed documents reveal both implicit and explicit references to competencies and values in education policy. While the national mission and vision statements do not explicitly mention competencies—given their broad and strategic nature—they emphasize student-centred learning, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical values. The Ministry of Education’s mission highlights addressing mental health challenges through guidance and counselling policies, mentorship programs, parental engagement, awareness campaigns, and life skills education. Additionally, the national vision underscores the importance of instilling ethical and moral values, such as integrity, honesty, and responsibility, within the education system.

Education policy documents explicitly reference both traditional skills (literacy and numeracy) and 21st-century competencies, recognizing the interdependence between them. Mentorship is identified as a key mechanism for developing life skills, as outlined in the *Mentorship Policy for Early Learning and Basic Education*, which underscores the role of mentorship in enhancing intrinsic motivation and personal development. These policies also stress the integration of character and values education into the curriculum, promoting ethical behaviour, responsible citizenship, and holistic personal growth alongside academic learning.

The *Primary Assessment Framework* explicitly prioritizes the seven core competencies, recognizing their role in aligning education with societal and global demands. It supports a competency-based assessment approach, evaluating both academic performance and personal development, including values related to character, social responsibility, and emotional intelligence.

Teacher training policies reinforce the importance of core competencies and emphasize that traditional skills enable the acquisition of life skills. For instance, ICT is highlighted as a critical tool for fostering communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy. Expanding ICT access is seen as a means to enhance life skills education. Additionally, teacher education programs stress the integration of values, embedding ethical behaviour, professionalism, and social responsibility into training curricula.

5.3. Life Skills and Values in Tanzania Mainland's Education System

Tanzania Mainland has the intention to promote life skills from pre-primary education through to secondary education. The education system of Tanzania Mainland places significant emphasis on life skills, which is evident both explicitly and implicitly throughout various policy documents. The curricular materials specifically identify and describe life skills in four major areas: empowerment (self-awareness, communication, resilience), citizenship (empathy, participation), learning (critical thinking, creativity, problem solving), employability (collaboration, decision making), and reproductive health skills. Life skills, however, are not treated as a standalone subject. Instead, they are integrated as a cross-cutting issue across various subjects. As such, life skills are woven into the pre-primary education curriculum and certain core subjects, including Civics and Morals, Social Studies, and Skills in primary education.

While life skills are explicitly emphasized, the values identified in the policy documents are fewer in comparison. The values highlighted include tolerance, justice, equality, citizenship, respect, integrity, and spiritual values. However, there is a notable difference in the frequency with which values are mentioned compared to life skills.

The national-level documents included in this study are: the Mission and Vision Statement; the Education Policy Document; the Primary Curriculum Framework; the Secondary Curriculum Framework; and the Teacher Education Assessment Framework. It is important to note that Tanzania Mainland does not have separate Primary and Secondary Assessment Frameworks or a Teacher Education Policy Document.

Table 4 presents the frequency with which the reviewed documents for the Primary and Secondary Curricula, as well as the Teacher Education Assessment Framework, explicitly mention various skills. When 21st century skills are explicitly identified, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, and self-awareness are the most frequently cited. In contrast, skills such as self-efficacy, self-directed learning, adaptability, and self-esteem are mentioned less frequently. Notably, the reviewed documents give limited attention to values. When values are highlighted, responsibility, morals, patriotism, and citizenship are emphasized, whereas values like love, trust, and integrity are scarcely mentioned.

In terms of specific findings from the reviewed documents, the Education Policy documents for Tanzania Mainland contain only a few mentions of skills, focusing primarily on ensuring that students across all levels of education acquire life skills, recognize themselves, and make informed decisions.

The curriculum for Primary Education (Standard III-VII) includes both implicit and explicit references to life skills and values. The skills prioritized in this curriculum include critical thinking, self-awareness, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and self-realization. Other explicit mentions emphasize the development of talents, cultivating an inquiring mind, and fostering competitiveness, along with the importance of morals and patriotism.

The National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education in Tanzania Mainland offers more detailed mentions of life skills, focusing on creativity, innovation, management skills, problem solving, informed decision making, communication, critical thinking, flexibility, inquisitiveness, accountability, self-efficacy, self-control, emotional management, self-assessment, goal setting, resilience, value clarification and management, conflict management, negotiation, self-confidence,

empathy, and self-assertiveness. There are also a few implicit references to skills, described as cross-cutting issues that apply knowledge, skills, and values critical to development and lifelong learning. Additionally, the framework emphasizes the need for students to develop effective communication skills, both oral and written, using the appropriate medium of instruction. Values such as empathy, morals, ethics, patriotism, respect, and integrity are mentioned in the curriculum, though their frequency is limited.

TABLE 4. HEAT MAP FOR TANZANIA MAINLAND

	Tanzania							
	Mission/ Vision	Education Policy	Primary Curriculum	Primary Assessment Framework	Secondary Curriculum	Secondary Assessment Framework	Teacher Training	Teacher Education Assessment Framework
Life Skills								
Are 21st Century Skills mentioned?	1	2	5		2		8	3
How many instances of explicit mentions of skills?	1	2	12		12		51	10
How many instances of implicit mentions of skills?	3	0	4		1		14	5
How many instances of traditional skills mentioned?	5	0	2		1		10	0
Critical Thinking	0	0	1		2		5	2
Creativity	0	0	0		1		1	1
Creative Thinking	0	0	0		1		2	0
Communication	0	0	1		2		5	1
Problem Solving	0	0	1		1		3	2
Vocational Skills	0	0	0		0		0	0
Innovation	0	0	1		1		2	0
Cooperation	0	0	0		1		1	0
Collaboration	0	0	1		1		0	1
Self-directed learning	0	0	0		0		0	0
Mathematical computational skills	0	0	0		0		0	0
ICT Skills	0	0	0		0		0	1
Social-Emotional Skills	0	0	0		0		1	0
Adaptability	0	0	0		0		0	0
Learning to Learn	0	0	0		0		0	0
Assertiveness	0	0	0		0		3	0
Self-awareness	0	1	1		0		2	0
Curiosity	0	0	0		0		0	0
Self-efficacy	0	0	1		0		2	0
Self-esteem	0	0	0		0		0	0
Digital Literacy	0	0	0		1		0	0
Values								
How many instances of values?	0	0	3		3		18	0
Love	0	0	0		0		0	0
Responsibility	0	0	0		0		5	0
Respect	0	0	2		0		1	0
Unity	0	0	0		0		0	0
Peace	0	0	0		0		0	0
Patriotism	0	0	0		1		2	0
Citizenship	0	0	0		0		2	0
Justices/Social Justice	0	0	0		0		2	0
Integrity	0	0	0		0		1	0
Moral	0	0	0		1		3	0
Spiritual Value	0	0	0		0		0	0
Tolerance	0	0	0		0		0	0
Valuing Equality	0	0	0		0		1	0
Empathy/Empathize with others	0	0	0		0		3	0
Transparency	0	0	0		0		1	0
Trust	0	0	0		0		0	0

Source: own compilation/calculations

5.4. Life Skills and Values in Uganda's Education System

The Uganda education policy documents reviewed in this study explicitly mentioned skills and values. Skills such as innovation, creativity, lifelong learning, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills, among others, were explicitly mentioned as critical to achieving the educational aims of the country. Citizenship, patriotism, respect, responsibility, moral ethics, and spiritual values are also explicitly mentioned in policy documents as key to building an integrated, self-sustaining, and independent national economy. Implicit mentions of life skills and values in

policy documents focused on increasing equitable education for all and improving the quality and content of educational delivery at all levels and sectors of education. All through the different policy documents, an emphasis was placed on expanding the functional capacity of educational structures and reducing the inequalities of access to education between sexes, geographical areas, and social classes in Uganda.

The following national-level documents were included in this study. The most recent and publicly available documents in each category were identified and used to examine the extent to which life skills and values are integrated into the education system: the Mission and Vision Statement; the Education Policy Document; the Primary Curriculum Framework; the Secondary Curriculum Framework; the Primary Assessment Framework; the Secondary Assessment Framework; and the Teacher Training Policy.

Table 5 presents the results of the review of national-level policy documents. The analysis reveals that life skills and values are emphasized throughout all levels of education, from Primary to Secondary, as well as in Teacher Education Frameworks and Policy documents. While life skills and values are frequently identified, there are notably more implicit mentions than explicit references to these competencies in the policy documents. The Curriculum Frameworks for Primary and Secondary education are grounded in a clear set of values derived from the Uganda National Ethics and Values Policy of 2013. These values underpin the entire curriculum and guide the work of schools, serving as the foundation upon which learners are expected to base their lives as citizens of Uganda.

The findings also indicate that Uganda's education policy documents and the lower secondary school curriculum frameworks provide the most explicit references to life skills. The Primary education curriculum framework follows suit, while the teacher training frameworks contain the least explicit mentions of life skills. However, the implementation documents and frameworks do not clearly articulate how these aspirations for life skills and values are translated into classroom practice or the actual acquisition of these competencies, making the assessment and nurturing of life skills and values within the education system somewhat elusive.

Critical thinking is the most commonly identified skill across the three levels of education (Primary, Secondary, and Teacher Training). When 21st century skills are explicitly mentioned, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, communication, and cooperation are most frequently cited. Values such as responsibility, patriotism, and respect are also noted. Although "learning to learn" is not a prioritized competence in either the lower secondary school curriculum or the primary curriculum framework, it is explicitly mentioned more than three times across various educational stages as an important skill that supports the acquisition and transferability of knowledge.

From this analysis, it is clear that Secondary education plays a crucial role in emphasizing and integrating both explicit and implicit skills across a wide spectrum, reflecting a substantial focus on skill development. Traditional subject skills such as numeracy and literacy appear sporadically across different educational levels. However, there is an opportunity for more explicit mentions of life skills and values in foundational learning and numeracy within Primary Education and Teacher Training to better align with modern educational demands.

The review of policy documents and curriculum frameworks across primary, secondary, and teacher training levels reveals significant insights into the treatment of life skills and values in

Uganda's education system. While life skills and values are explicitly mentioned across all levels, the assessment of these competencies is not clearly outlined in the policy documents. At the lower secondary school level, it is implied that the assessment of life skills is integrated within the subject learning expectations, though a closer examination of the assessment framework reveals that the focus is predominantly on evaluating learners' understanding of key concepts in each subject. Although a variety of assessment techniques, such as oral, written, and performance-based assessments, are suggested, the documents do not provide concrete details on how life skills and values will be practically assessed.

The primary education curriculum references the Government White Paper on the Education Policy Review Commission Report (1992) and outlines a set of life skills and values to be acquired by learners. These include skills such as effective communication, creative thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, self-esteem, respect, identity, cooperation, and friendship formation, among others. The curriculum is structured around thematic learning outcomes, which reflect essential aspects of Ugandan learners' daily lives and encourage awareness and responsiveness.

At the secondary level, the curriculum framework for lower secondary education is one of the most explicit documents regarding life skills and values. It identifies critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation, self-directed learning, creativity, innovation, mathematical computation, ICT proficiency, and communication skills as prioritized competencies. These skills are incorporated into subjects, with skill development progressing through the increasing complexity of subject matter rather than through specific skill descriptors. In this framework, life skills are presented as cross-cutting issues that are not confined to specific subjects but instead permeate the entire curriculum, linking various disciplines together. The framework also emphasizes values such as respect for humanity and the environment, honesty, justice, hard work, integrity, social responsibility, national unity, and patriotism. These values, while not directly taught or assessed, inform and shape the teaching and learning process.

The Teacher Training Policy documents underscore the importance of preparing 21st century teachers who can create learning environments that enable students to thrive. These documents highlight the need for teachers to be proficient in critical thinking, problem solving, information technology, communication skills, and social skills, including conflict resolution. The national teacher qualifications framework calls for educators who are capable of modifying and applying knowledge through varied pedagogical practices and resources, alongside strong leadership, research, and innovation skills.

TABLE 5. HEAT MAP FOR UGANDA

	Uganda							
	Mission/ Vision	Education Policy	Primary Curriculum	Primary Assessment Framework	Secondary Curriculum	Secondary Assessment Framework	Teacher Training	Teacher Education Assessment Framework
Life Skills								
Are 21st Century Skills mentioned?	0	15	5	0	26	2	5	
How many instances of explicit mentions of skills?	0	26	2	0	72	0	6	
How many instances of implicit mentions of skills?	0	48	17	0	77	5	9	
How many instances of traditional skills mentioned?	0	5	9	0	7	1	1	
Critical Thinking	0	1	0	0	8	0	1	
Creativity	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	
Creative Thinking	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Communication	0	2	0	0	6	0	1	
Problem Solving	0	2	0	0	5	0	1	
Vocational Skills	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	
Innovation	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	
Cooperation	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	
Collaboration	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Self-directed learning	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	
Mathematical computational skills	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	
ICT Skills	0	3	0	0	4	0	1	
Social-Emotional Skills	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Adaptability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Learning to Learn	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	
Assertiveness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Self-awareness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Curiosity	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Self-efficacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Self-esteem	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Digital Literacy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Values								
How many instances of values?	18	28	23	1	36	0	10	
Love	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	
Responsibility	4	1	1	0	6	0	2	
Respect	3	2	2	0	3	0	0	
Unity	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	
Peace	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	
Patriotism	2	3	5	0	5	0	1	
Citizenship	0	4	4	0	4	0	1	
Justices/Social Justice	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	
Integrity	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	
Moral	1	4	1	0	3	0	2	
Spiritual Value	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	
Tolerance	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Valuing Equality	3	5	1	0	0	0	2	
Empathy/Empathize with others	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	
Transparency	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Trust	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	

Source: own compilation/calculations

5.5. Life Skills and Values in Zanzibar's Education System

The education system in Zanzibar emphasizes life skills, values, and dispositions, all of which are essential for learners to thrive both in school and in life. These skills, values, and dispositions are explicitly and implicitly integrated throughout the various educational documents. This study analysed the following national-level documents: the Mission and Vision Statement; the Education Policy Document; and the Primary Curriculum Framework.

While Zanzibar has jurisdictional-level documents concerning the mission and vision, education policy, and primary curriculum, it adopts the documents of Tanzania Mainland for all other educational policy matters. Therefore, Zanzibar and Tanzania Mainland share the same documents for Secondary and other levels of education, and information regarding these levels is included in the Tanzania Mainland analysis.

TABLE 6. HEAT MAP FOR ZANZIBAR

	Zanzibar							
	Mission/Vision	Education Policy	Primary Curriculum	Primary Assessment Framework	Secondary Curriculum	Secondary Assessment Framework	Teacher Training	Teacher Education Assessment Framework
Life Skills								
Are 21st Century Skills mentioned?	2	18	12					
How many instances of explicit mentions of skills?	4	17	22					
How many instances of implicit mentions of skills?	9	12	37					
How many instances of traditional skills mentioned?	6	8	23					
Critical Thinking	0	0	1					
Creativity	1	0	1					
Creative Thinking	0	0	0					
Communication	1	2	4					
Problem Solving	0	2	4					
Vocational Skills	1	0	1					
Innovation	0	0	0					
Cooperation	0	0	1					
Collaboration	0	0	0					
Self-directed learning	0	1	0					
Mathematical computational skills	0	0	0					
ICT Skills	0	0	0					
Social-Emotional Skills	0	0	1					
Adaptability	0	0	0					
Learning to Learn	0	0	0					
Assertiveness	0	0	0					
Self-awareness	0	0	0					
Curiosity	0	1	0					
Self-efficacy	0	0	0					
Self-esteem	0	0	0					
Digital Literacy	0	0	0					
Values								
How many instances of values?	23	0	9					
Love	1	0	0					
Responsibility	2	0	1					
Respect	2	0	1					
Unity	2	0	0					
Peace	2	0	0					
Patriotism	2	0	1					
Citizenship	3	0	1					
Justices/Social Justice	2	0	0					
Integrity	0	0	0					
Moral	1	0	2					
Spiritual Value	0	0	2					
Tolerance	2	0	1					
Valuing Equality	4	0	0					
Empathy/Empathize with others	2	0	1					
Transparency	1	0	0					
Trust	0	0	0					

Source: own compilation/calculations

Communication and problem-solving skills have received significant attention in the reviewed documents, standing out more than other skills and values (see Table 6). Values are explicitly mentioned in the mission statement and primary education curriculum, while the education policy of Zanzibar remains silent on values. The most emphasized values are equality and citizenship, while morality, transparency, and love are less frequently mentioned.

The findings from the specific policy documents reviewed reveal several key insights. In the Mission and Vision documents for Zanzibar, life skills such as communication, creativity, vocational skills, and thinking skills are mentioned infrequently, though there are numerous implicit references to skills that aim to help citizens understand and respect the fundamentals of the national constitution and the enshrined human and civic rights. The Mission and Vision documents place a greater emphasis on values compared to other policy documents. Key values highlighted include love, responsibility, respect, unity, peace, patriotism, citizenship, and equality.

The Education Policy document includes both explicit and implicit mentions of skills and values. Explicitly, skills such as communication, problem solving, independent thinking, and entrepreneurship are identified as critical to achieving the educational aims of the country.

Implicitly, the document refers to life skills and values in the context of inclusive education and the promotion of equitable access to education across all levels.

The pre-primary and primary education curriculum frameworks prioritize several skills, including entrepreneurship, emotional expression, problem solving, confidence, creativity, financial literacy, cooperation, communication, social-emotional learning, critical thinking, and vocational skills. In terms of values, the framework places equal emphasis on integrity, responsibility, citizenship, moral and spiritual values, equality, love, respect, self-identity, and patriotism. Implicitly, the document underscores the importance of understanding human rights and fundamental personal character.

Additionally, the pre-primary and primary education curriculum framework includes references to other components, such as dispositions, which are neither skills nor values. These dispositions include progressiveness, inquisitiveness, tolerance, peace, justice, inclusiveness, appreciation, and acceptance of others. The emphasis is on fostering these characteristics in citizens to help them thrive in life.

5.6. Discussion of Findings

The analysis of education policy documents across Kenya, Tanzania Mainland, Uganda, and Zanzibar highlights both convergence and divergence in the framing of life skills and values. A first key finding is the lack of a common terminology: while Kenya emphasizes “core competences,” Uganda refers to “generic skills” and “21st century skills,” and Tanzania Mainland frames them as “cross-cutting issues.” Zanzibar largely aligns with Tanzania Mainland, while introducing additional emphases at the primary level. This diversity of nomenclature points to different policy traditions, yet it also suggests a shared recognition of the importance of preparing learners for personal, social, and economic participation in rapidly changing societies.

A second pattern is the broad overlap in the actual skills and values emphasised across jurisdictions. Critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration appear consistently, as do values such as respect, responsibility, citizenship, and integrity. This indicates a regional consensus on what constitutes essential competences for the 21st century, even if their categorization varies. Such convergence may facilitate regional dialogue and cross-learning, especially given ongoing East African efforts to harmonize education systems and qualifications.

However, the findings also reveal uneven levels of integration and emphasis. Kenya’s Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) is distinctive in articulating a coherent set of competences and values, supported by assessment and teacher training frameworks. Uganda has a comprehensive policy framework but shows weaker links between stated aspirations and mechanisms for assessment and classroom practice. Tanzania Mainland integrates life skills as cross-cutting issues but gives limited explicit attention to values, while Zanzibar highlights dispositions and moral education more explicitly at the primary level. These contrasts suggest varying levels of institutional capacity and political prioritization, with implications for how effectively policies can be translated into practice.

Taken together, the findings suggest that East African education systems are at different stages of institutionalizing life skills and values. The shared policy vocabulary around critical thinking, citizenship, and collaboration indicates strong regional capacity to articulate educational aspirations aligned with global agendas such as SDG 4.7. Yet the unevenness in assessment frameworks, teacher

training provisions, and explicit policy attention points to capacity gaps that may constrain the effective classroom-level implementation of these skills and values.

Importantly, the analysis underscores the limitations of a policy-document focus. While national strategies highlight the importance of life skills and values, the extent to which these are enacted in classrooms depends on teachers' professional development, curriculum delivery, and resource availability—areas not fully captured in this review. Future qualitative and empirical research, particularly classroom-level studies, would be crucial to understanding how policy aspirations are translated into learning outcomes.

6. Limitations

This review relied primarily on national policy documents, curriculum frameworks, teacher training materials, and assessment strategies. While these sources provide valuable insights into official intentions and systemic approaches, they do not capture classroom-level realities. As a result, there may be a gap between policy commitments to life skills and values education and the ways these competencies are actually taught, practiced, and assessed in schools. The absence of field data—such as teacher interviews, classroom observations, or grade-level lesson plans—further limits the ability to assess implementation in practice.

The use of coding to identify explicit and implicit mentions of life skills and values provided a structured basis for comparison across countries, but also introduces limitations. Implicit references are open to interpretation, raising the possibility of researcher bias despite efforts to ensure consistency. Moreover, while frequency counts and heat maps facilitated clarity in data presentation, they risk oversimplifying nuanced or context-specific mentions of skills and values.

Finally, although the review highlights regional trends and contextual factors, it cannot fully account for cultural variations in how competencies are understood and enacted in different learning environments. Future research should triangulate policy analysis with qualitative field data, combining classroom-level observations, teacher and student perspectives, and lesson-level analyses to complement and deepen the insights generated here.

7. Conclusions and Implications

This study reveals several key conclusions and implications for the integration of life skills and values in education systems across the four jurisdictions under review.

There is considerable variability in how life skills and values are incorporated into education systems, reflecting differences in available policy documents, the types of skills and values emphasized, and the extent to which they are embedded in the curriculum. While each jurisdiction demonstrates a clear intent to integrate life skills and values into education, these elements are often more implicitly referenced than explicitly stated. This suggests that, while the emphasis is present, life skills and values may not be fully integrated across the educational framework. The frequency with which they are mentioned is low, indicating that their inclusion, when it does occur, may be occasional rather than systematic.

Each jurisdiction has identified life skills and values as essential components for curriculum reform. The ongoing reform processes across the four jurisdictions—Kenya's alignment of its curriculum to a competence-based approach, Uganda's backward integration from secondary to primary levels, and similar efforts in Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar—highlight a regional push

towards educational reform. While these efforts are promising, there remains a lack of clarity around how to assess life skills and values, particularly within primary, secondary, and teacher training frameworks. This gap underscores the need for further development in assessment approaches to ensure these skills and values are adequately measured.

While there is a strong presence of life skills and values in the curriculum, there is no clear framework to guide educators on how to interpret, teach, and assess these competencies. Although curriculum and teacher education documents emphasize learner-centred approaches, the lack of a structured framework for assessment and implementation suggests a missed opportunity for more effective integration of life skills and values into everyday teaching practices.

8. Implications

The findings of this review carry several implications for education policy, practice, and research in East Africa. First, they underscore the urgent need for more robust assessment frameworks capable of capturing the development of life skills and values at the primary, secondary, and teacher education levels. Without such frameworks, integration risks remaining aspirational, with little evidence of its impact on learners. Equally critical is the role of teachers, who are expected to adopt learner-centred approaches but often lack clear guidance on how to translate policy prescriptions into practice. Strengthening teacher training and continuous professional development therefore emerges as a priority area if life skills and values are to be effectively taught and assessed in classrooms.

The review also highlights opportunities for greater regional collaboration. The variability observed across jurisdictions suggests that countries can learn from one another's strengths, sharing resources and models that may help reduce disparities in policy and practice. This form of cross-country learning would also enhance coherence across the region, ensuring that life skills and values are not only embedded in policy but also operationalized consistently. Furthermore, the predominance of implicit references in many documents points to the need for clearer and more deliberate policy language. Making life skills and values more explicit within curricula, assessment strategies, and teacher education guidelines would increase their visibility and support systematic implementation.

Finally, the study points to important directions for future research. Because this review is limited to policy documents, it cannot capture the complexities of classroom realities. Complementary research that incorporates teacher interviews, lesson observations, and learner perspectives is therefore necessary to assess how policies are interpreted and enacted in practice. Such work would not only deepen the evidence base but also strengthen the feedback loop between policy and implementation.

In this sense, the ongoing curriculum reforms across the four jurisdictions represent a timely opportunity. By investing in assessment, teacher capacity, and regional collaboration, policymakers and educators can ensure that life skills and values move beyond rhetorical commitment and become an integral, measurable component of education systems in East Africa.

References

- Adedeji, S. O., & Olaniyan, O. (2011). *Improving the conditions of teachers and teaching in rural schools across African countries*. UNESCO-IICBA.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002160/216062e.pdf>
- Care, E., Anderson, K., & Kim, H. (2016). Visualizing the breadth of skills movement across education systems. *Brookings Institution*.
- Care, E., Giacomazzi, M., & Mugo, J. K. (Eds.). (2024). *The contextualisation of 21st century skills: Assessment in East Africa* (Vol. 11). Springer International Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51490-6>
- Care, E., Kim, H., Vista, A., & Anderson, K. (2018). *Education system alignment for 21st century skills: Focus on assessment*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Education-system-alignment-for-21st-century-skills-012819.pdf>
- Ercikan, K., & Oliveri, M. E. (2016). In search of validity evidence in support of the interpretation and use of assessments of complex constructs: Discussion of research on assessing 21st century skills. In *Applied Measurement in Education* (Vol. 29, Issue 4, pp. 310–318). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08957347.2016.1209210>
- Giacomazzi, M. (2022). Soft skills assessment and enhancement: A call for contextualisation. *GiLE Journal of Skills Development*, 2(1), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.52398/gjsd.2022.v2.i1.pp5-8>
- Giacomazzi, M. (2024). The contextualisation of 21st century skills in East Africa. In E. Care, M. Giacomazzi, & J. K. Mugo (Eds.), *The contextualisation of 21st century skills: Assessment in East Africa* (pp. 31–45). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51490-6_3
- Giacomazzi, M., Fontana, M., & Camilli Trujillo, C. (2022). Contextualization of critical thinking in sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic integrative review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 43, 100978. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2021.100978>
- Heto, P. P.-K., Odari, M., & Sunu, W. (2020). Kenya's 2017 Basic Education Curriculum Framework: A Comprehensive Review. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 9(SI), 192–210. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v9iSI.1853>
- Jacob, W. J., Mosman, S. S., Hite, S. J., Morisky, D. E., & Nsubuga, Y. K. (2007). Evaluating HIV/AIDS education programmes in Ugandan secondary schools. *Development in Practice*, 17(1), 114–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520601092691>
- Kariuki, S., Boyo, B., Bowen, M., & Kiambi, P. (2022). School curriculum and environmental sustainability. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 32, 126–144.
<https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v32i1.6604>
- Kastner, M., Tricco, A. C., Soobiah, C., Lillie, E., Perrier, L., Horsley, T., Welch, V., Cogo, E., Antony, J., & Straus, S. E. (2012). What is the most appropriate knowledge synthesis method to conduct a review? Protocol for a scoping review. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 12(114). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-12-114>
- Kimiti, R. P., Mulwa, D. M., Waweru, S. N., Nalelia, S., & Muindi, M. (2011). Investigation of teaching the integrated topics on drug abuse in secondary school curriculum. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 34(1), 50–63. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/11.34.50>

-
- Komba, A., & Shukia, R. (2023). *An analysis of the Basic Education Curriculum in Tanzania: The integration, scope, and sequence of 21st century skills*. Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE). https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2023/129
- Kowino, J. O. (2024). Models of valuing used by Christian religious education teachers to enable secondary school learners acquire social, spiritual, and moral insights secondary schools in Kenya. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology (IJISRT)*, 141–158. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/IJISRT24SEP315>
- Losioki, B. E. (2024). Provision of comprehensive sexuality education in Tanzania primary schools: Success and barriers. *International Journal of Education, Learning and Development*, 12(9), 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijeld.2013/vol12n988103>
- Mugo, J. K., Giacomazzi, M., & Ngina, P. (2023). Importance of context in assessment of whole child development competences: A case from East Africa. In M. Berends, B. Schneider, & S. Lamb (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of sociology of education* (pp. 559–572). SAGE Publications Inc. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-sage-handbook-of-sociology-of-education/book250209#preview>
- Mugo, J. K., Shariff, K., & Giacomazzi, M. (2022). Developing contextualized assessment tools for life skills and values in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In A. Smart & M. Sinclair (Eds.), *NISSEM Global Briefs: Educating for the social, the emotional and the sustainable. Volume III: SEL in context* (pp. 38–49). NISSEM. www.nissem.org
- NCDC. (2019). *Lower secondary curriculum*. National Curriculum Development Centre. https://ncdc.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Curriculum_Framework.pdf
- Ominde, E. S., K'Odhiambo, A. K., & Gunga, S. O. (2020). Analysis of praxis of African communalism: A model of ethical values in primary school curriculum in Kenya. *Journal of Educational Research in Developing Areas*, 1(3), 278–288. <https://jeredajournals.com/index.php/JEREDA/article/view/138/67>
- Ominde, E. S., K'Odhiambo, A. K., & Gunga, S. O. (2021). Critique of policy frameworks for value education in primary school curriculum in Kenya. *Journal of Educational Research in Developing Areas*, 2(3), 222–235. <https://jeredajournals.com/index.php/JEREDA/article/view/123/53>
- Orodho, J. A. (2019). Mainstreaming core-values in the curriculum of East African Community countries for holistic and sustainable development: Challenges and prospects. *Greener Journal of Educational Research*, 9(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.15580/GJER.2019.1.011419015>
- Robinson, K., & Aronica, L. (2015). *Creative schools: Revolutionizing education from the ground up*. Penguin Books.
- Ruto, Z. J., Shiundu, J. O., & Simiyu, A. M. (2023). Enhancing national cohesion through primary social studies learning experiences in Kenya. *African Journal of Empirical Research*, 4(2), 796–806. <https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.4.2.81>
- Schmidt, E., & Cohen, J. (2015). *The new digital age: Reshaping the future of people, nations and business*. SAGE Publications Sage India: New Delhi, India.
- Stephen, J., & Ismail, M. (2019). Integrating hands-on activities to enhance STEM subjects in Tanzania primary education. *EDULEARN19 Conference*, 1, 1818–1826. <https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2019.0517>
-

Sulayman, H. (2015, August 19). Impact of teaching civic and religious values in the national curriculum on improving social responsibility in Tanzania: The analytical view. *International Conference on Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities (TSSH-2015)*.
<https://erpub.org/assets/upload/4662ER815066.pdf>

Waiganjo, M., & Mwangi, M. (2018). Relevance of Life Skills Education in preparing Kenyan youth for national development. *Journal of African Studies in Educational Management and Leadership*, 10, 85–103.

Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Funding

This study was funded by Echidna Giving, Imaginable Futures, Lego Foundation, Porticus, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Open Access Agreement

This article is published under a CC BY 4.0 license. This license allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator. The license allows for commercial use. For more information, please visit
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Corresponding Author

The corresponding author for this manuscript is Mauro Giacomazzi who can be contacted by email via g.mauro@lgihe.org.