

## Not Too Early, Not Too Late: A Framework for Career Guidance in Competency -Based Education (CBE)

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to develop a framework for providing career guidance to learners in Kenyan schools within a competency-based education framework. The framework will give guidance from early childhood to senior schools. It will help learners select careers and develop relevant competencies. Learners are often introduced late to career guidance, mostly when they must make key academic and career decisions, such as subject selection. This timing may limit their ability to make informed decisions about their future career pathways. The study uses a conceptual research design, grounded in a review and synthesis of existing literature on career development, school-based career guidance, and competency-based education. Relevant scholarly literature and policy documents were analyzed to identify key themes and stages of career development across educational levels. The study's findings suggest that effective career guidance should be implemented in four stages: identity formation in early childhood, career exploration in upper primary education, pathway alignment in junior school, and professional positioning in senior school. These stages follow the principles of competency-based education, which emphasize learner strengths, skill development, and informed pathway choices. The study concludes that career guidance should be integrated throughout the education system rather than delivered as a single intervention during adolescence. It recommends that schools include age-appropriate career awareness activities at all stages. Teachers should connect classroom learning to real-world professions. Parents and policymakers should support early career exposure to enhance learners' self-awareness and career readiness.

**Key terms:** Career guidance, competency-based education, framework, school-based career support.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Career guidance is a key part of education systems that aim to prepare learners for society, career progression, and the job market. In many systems, career guidance starts late, when students must choose subjects or prepare for higher education. This late start can be a big challenge, as career development begins in early childhood, long before adolescence. Early experiences, exposure to jobs, and the building of self-concept in childhood shape learners' views of their abilities and future options. Delaying career guidance may limit learners' opportunities for self-awareness and exposure, which are essential for making informed decisions about their future career pathways.

Delayed or poor career guidance is common in many African education systems, where school-based support is very limited. Some studies from the continent show that learners often choose careers with little advice or exposure to options. For example, a report from South African secondary schools found that students knew career guidance was important for their choices. However, some schools lacked well-organized programs or sufficient career information (Farao & du Plessis, 2024). A study in Uganda showed that school career guidance strongly shapes students' self-concept and majors. Yet, most learners still struggle with their interests, subject selections, and finding the right path due to poor support and exposure (Otwine et al., 2025). These findings suggest that a lack of systematic development systems in schools leads to confusion, poor subject selection, and little knowledge of career options among learners.

In recent years, education reforms in most countries have tended to reiterate the importance of ensuring that the system meets the requirements of modern economies. The shift to Competency-Based Education (CBE) is one of the significant reforms in this direction, as this style of education is based on developing skills and competencies, and on the practical application of knowledge in the real world, rather than memorizing academic materials. Competency-Based Education may be characterized as an educational model that focuses on the attainment and expression of skills and competencies, including critical thinking, communication, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving, necessary for effective participation in society and the workplace. This strategy obliges educators to emphasize learner-centered learning and the practical application of knowledge.

Kenya is one of the nations that has initiated massive education reforms by introducing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which replaced the old 8-4-4 system. The CBC framework aims to foster learners' potential, talents, and competencies and to encourage holistic development across the cognitive, social, and practical domains. The main attribute of the CBC system is the implementation of specialized learning pathways at the senior school level, when learners are supposed to choose pathways such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Social Sciences, or Arts and Sports Science. These career pathways are intended to enable learners to identify and pursue fields that align with their interests, talents, and career aspirations. However, the effectiveness of the pathways-based structure is contingent upon the availability of structured career guidance, which is critical in supporting learners to develop self-awareness, explore viable career pathways, and make informed choices regarding their learning pathways and future career progression within the Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework.

Although this focuses on the potential and nurturing of talents among learners under the CBC framework, in most Kenyan schools, structured career guidance programs are still at an early stage of introduction. In reality, career advice in most schools is reduced to an ad hoc career talk, a university visit, or a career

advice meeting in the later years of school. These methods might fail to help learners develop the self-awareness, exposure, and decision-making skills needed for career development. Learners might not be guided at an early and sustained professional stage to match their competencies to the right career streams and careers, unless career guidance is provided.

Career guidance is the systematic process through which people are helped to understand their capabilities, passions, ideals, and prospects, with a view to making informed choices regarding education, training, and employment opportunities. In schools, career guidance incorporates career awareness programs, mentorship, exposure to various professions, career counseling and experiential learning opportunities. As a rule, an effective career guidance program is developmental in character, that is, it transforms with the various levels of learning as the cognitive capabilities, interests and self-concepts of the learners are enhanced.

Career development theories from a developmental perspective emphasize that career development is a lifelong process shaped by the continuous interaction between personal characteristics and environmental factors. Children begin forming impressions of jobs and careers in early childhood, and these impressions continue to evolve as they explore their environments and encounter social influences within school settings. Therefore, career guidance should not be viewed as a single intervention implemented only during adolescence, but rather as an ongoing developmental process integrated across all levels of education.

This developmental approach is fundamental in competency-based education systems such as Kenya's CBC. At the junior and senior school levels, learners need to choose their pathways. As a result, they require coordinated avenues to develop self-awareness, explore career-related choices that match their competencies with possible pathways, and make plans for future specialization. By supporting students in understanding the connection between what they learn in the classroom and practical job options, a career guidance method provides a progressive model that can successfully serve the objectives of competency-based education.

This article proposes a career guidance developmental framework for competence-based education systems, with specific consideration of the Kenyan CBC. The model posits that career guidance should be developed at an early age and build steadily through four levels of school education, encompassing identity formation during early childhood, career exploration during upper primary education, pathway alignment during junior school, and professional positioning during senior school. By incorporating career guidance into these developmental stages, schools can be more effective in helping learners develop self-awareness, search for opportunities, match competencies with learning paths, and equip them for future careers.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Career Development as a Lifelong and Developmental Process**

Career development is widely recognized as a continuous, lifelong process that begins at an early age and continues throughout a person's life. Theories of early career development emphasize that people develop career aspirations and occupational self-concepts gradually as they encounter different experiences, interact with diverse people, and are exposed to various environments. The developmental career theory states that, even at an early age, when children are not yet old enough to make formal career choices, they

begin forming ideas about work and their capabilities (Howard & Walsh, 2021). These impressionable views shape subsequent educational decisions and career desires.

The life-span, life-space theory by Super is one of the most influential theoretical viewpoints in career development, as it conceptualizes career development as a consecutive sequence of developmental stages marked by changing self-concepts and work preferences (Super, 1990). The theory was developed decades ago, but modern researchers still consider it important for understanding how career development unfolds across successive stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Savickas, 2021). Based on this view, early childhood is a sensitive phase during which children begin to develop interests and values and form beliefs about what they are capable of doing.

In the same vein, Gottfredson's circumscription and compromise theory holds that children narrow their career choices based on perceptions of social demands, gender roles, and presumed capabilities (Gottfredson, 2005). Recent research confirms that children's occupational desires begin to be shaped early in primary school and are highly influenced by the social realms of the family, school, and media exposure (Howard & Ferrari, 2023). The two theoretical views emphasize the need to initiate career awareness programs at an early stage of the educational process to broaden children's knowledge of available career choices.

Studies also tend to support the view that learners' career self-efficacy, confidence, and motivation develop through early exposure to career-related experiences (Kuijpers, 2025). Once learners are introduced to various careers and motivated to pursue their hobbies at a young age, they tend to develop more realistic career goals and make wise educational decisions in their later years at school.

## **Career Guidance in School Contexts**

Career guidance at school plays a significant role in helping learners make career development decisions by offering a systematic opportunity for exploration, introspection, and choice. Good career guidance programs help learners realize that education, personal competencies, and job opportunities are interrelated. Such programs usually involve career counseling, mentorship, exposure trips, career fairs and experiential learning.

Research indicates that career guidance programs are highly effective in shaping learners' career goals, academic motivation, and educational achievement (OECD, 2021). Students who receive continuous career advice throughout their educational experience show better career decision-making processes and are more confident in their learning choices.

Nevertheless, in most parts of the world, career guidance is still regarded as a sporadic or isolated activity in many schools, but not a systematic developmental activity. Career guidance, in most instances, is introduced only at advanced stages of school education, when students are required to choose subjects or prepare to apply to higher education institutions. These methods might not provide learners with sufficient knowledge to make informed choices about their future careers.

Recent studies point to the need for career guidance to be implemented across educational levels rather than presented as a single intervention at the adolescent stage (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2023). A

developmental career guidance approach ensures that learners progressively develop the skills needed for career decision-making, such as self-awareness, career exploration, goal setting, and adaptation.

## **Career Guidance in African Education Systems**

The role of structured career guidance has become more pronounced in most African education systems, where learners often encounter difficulties accessing accurate career and professional advice. Research studies in various African nations have shown that career guidance services in schools are immature and haphazardly practiced. To illustrate, studies in South Africa found that, despite learners' awareness of the significance of career guidance, most schools lacked trained career counselors, sufficient resources, and formal career development programs (Farao & du Plessis, 2024). Consequently, learners usually use parents, peers, or unofficial sources of information when making career choices.

Equally, research in Uganda has shown that career guidance in schools has a significant impact on career self-concept and desired level of education among students, but most schools do not have formal career guidance systems (Otwinea et al., 2025). Researchers in Nigeria and Ghana have also cited the lack of career counseling services as an important factor in wrong subject selection and poor matching of student interest and course of study (Okolie et al., 2023).

These difficulties point to the necessity of more systematic career guidance in African systems of education. In their research, scholars state that successful career guidance must be part of the education system and must be applied at various levels of education gradually instead of being viewed as an additional service (Adewumi & Mosito, 2023).

## **Career Guidance within Competency-Based Education**

Competency-Based Education (CBE) has been a widely discussed topic on the international level as a kind of education that is oriented towards the development of practical skills, competencies, and outcomes that are learner-centered. Competency-based education focuses on nurturing skills to help learners put the knowledge into practice in the real world, as opposed to the traditional education systems that emphasize memorization and passing of exams.

The learners are supposed to acquire competencies in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving (UNESCO, 2021). These are competencies that are strongly associated with career readiness and employability in contemporary labor markets.

The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) in Kenya is one of the major reforms in the education sector in Africa, whose purpose is to align education with the needs of the twenty-first century. The CBC model puts a high value on the potential of learners, their development of talent and readiness to engage in future professions. Among its major characteristics is the introduction of specialized learning pathways in senior school, whereby learners are given the option of STEM, Social Sciences, and Arts and Sports Science pathways (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2019).

Although the CBC framework is focused on talent identification and learner development, scholars have questioned the preparedness of the schools to assist learners in making informed choices of pathways. The learners might not easily match their skills, hobbies, and academic abilities with their paths without structured career guidance programs (Waweru, 2023).

It has therefore been suggested by experts in the field of education that competency-based education systems must have robust career guidance models that enable learners to gradually build career awareness, seek opportunities and specialize. Career guidance at CBE levels will guarantee that students acquire skills and knowledge on how to apply the acquired skills to career prospects in the real world. Even though some of the literature stresses the role of career development and career guidance in schools, most studies focus on secondary school or higher education. There has been little focus on the ways of developmental organization of career guidance throughout the schooling process, especially in competency-based education systems.

Moreover, although studies on career guidance in Africa have noted great hurdles in practice, scant scholarly literature has advanced the design of systems that can streamline career guidance in the new competency-focused systems of education, like Kenya's CBC. This paper aims to discuss this gap by suggesting a career guidance developmental framework that is in line with the competency-based education stages. The framework focuses on early identity, exploration of career, pathway alignment, and professional positioning as the developmental steps of the career in the school system.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study used a conceptual research design approach, which employed a qualitative review and synthesis of the existing literature on career development, school-based career guidance, and competency-based education (CBE). Conceptual research designs are suitable for all studies that look forward to uniting both theoretical and empirical knowledge with the view of creating new models or frameworks that can guide policy and educational practice (Jaakkola, 2020). In the study, the conceptual approach was applicable to derive a developmental framework of career guidance based on the principles of competence-based education and execution of competency-based curriculum (CBC) in Kenya.

The systematic review of secondary sources was used as a method to gather data, and peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, books, and institutional reports about career development and competency-based education were included in the list of secondary sources. The literature search was conducted with specific attention to the studies written not earlier than 2019 and not later than 2025 so that the recent scholarly work and current education reforms could be included. Relevant literature was identified using academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and publications on education policy in international organizations. The search terms were career guidance in schools, career development in childhood, competency-based education, career education in Africa and career guidance in Kenya.

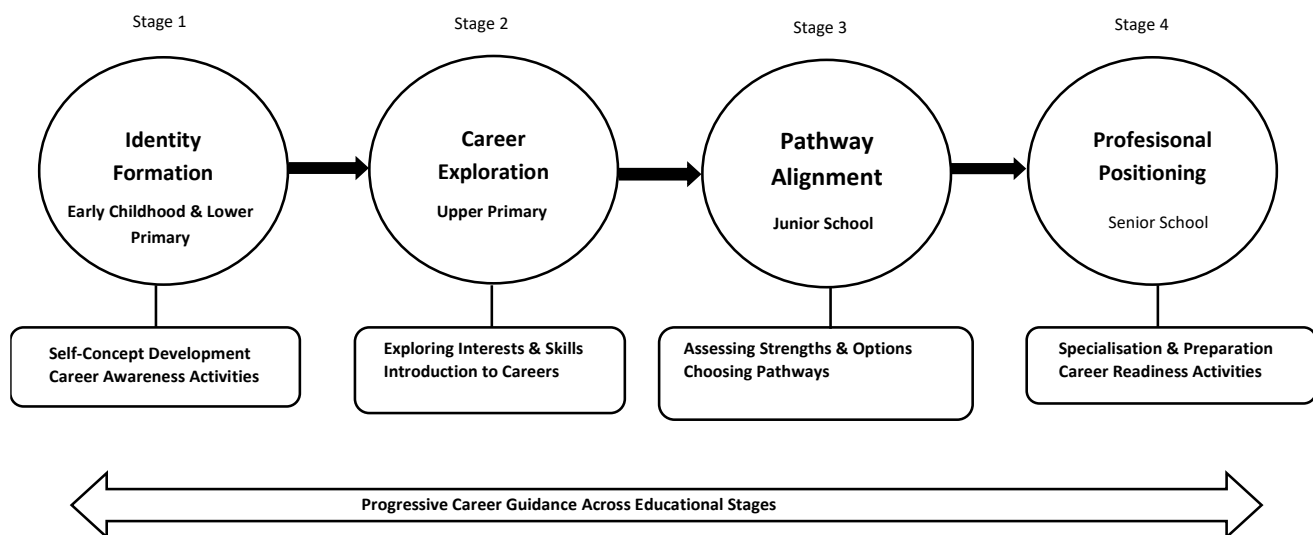
The purposive sampling strategy was used to focus on the literature that specifically deals with the research objectives and situational pertinence to the African education systems (Campbell et al., 2020). A total of some 45 academic sources and policy documents were first identified, and 28 important sources were chosen to be reviewed in detail.

The study employed thematic analysis, which presupposes defining and synthesizing common patterns and ideas in the literature (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The discussion aimed to develop career development phases and align them with competency-based education frameworks, which guided the proposed four-stage career guidance model.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A Developmental Framework for Career Guidance in Competency-Based Education

Synthesis of literature has indicated that career development is an evolutionary process that keeps changing as cognitive, social and emotional development of learners change. The analysis also revealed that career guidance programs are effective and need to be offered at every level of schooling, and not introduced at the adolescent level. This paper suggests a four-stage model of career guidance development based on the thematic synthesis of the literature concerning the structure of competency-based education and the use of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) application in Kenya. The paradigm consists of four developmental phases, namely identity formation, career exploration, pathway alignment, and professional positioning.



**Figure 1: Developmental Framework for Career Guidance in Competency-Based Education**

#### Stage 1: Identity Formation (Early Childhood and Lower Primary)

The initial stage of career development is the early childhood and lower primary, though this stage is the period when the learner starts building up the self-concept, their interests and perceptions towards work. According to research, children begin to develop occupational thoughts and personal beliefs as early as the initial primary school (Howard & Ferrari, 2023). At this point, career guidance does not entail the selection of a particular career, but instead it entails fostering curiosity, confidence, and a sense of various forms of work.

In competency-based education systems, this phase coincides with the focus on the formation of the basic competencies, including creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Children can learn the importance of work in society through activities like storytelling of occupations, role plays, classroom discussions of community helpers and exposure to various occupations. Introducing learners to diverse career paths at a young age has been found to expand children's career dreams and prevent the narrowing of career options at an early stage due to stereotypical beliefs or a lack of information (Gottfredson, 2005; Howard & Walsh, 2021).

Kenyan CBC system of lower primary education is oriented towards fostering the talents and interests of the learners. At this level, activities of career awareness can be incorporated with the aim of building self-confidence and curiosity, which will be of importance in subsequent career exploration.

In addition, co-curricular activities such as music, creative arts, play-based competitions, and sports provide early opportunities for learners to express emerging talents and interests. These activities complement classroom learning by enabling children to explore their abilities in less formal contexts, thereby strengthening self-concept and confidence. Early participation in such activities has been associated with broader career awareness and reduced stereotyping of occupational roles (Howard & Walsh, 2021).

## **Stage 2: Career Exploration (Upper Primary)**

The second phase happens at the upper primary education level when the students start getting acquainted with various career areas and the connection between school subjects and future jobs. At this age, learners are better placed to consider their passions and strengths, and thus, it is a perfect time to organize the career exploration process.

It is argued that career exploration in middle childhood enhances the career self-efficacy of learners and their motivation to pursue academic learning (Kuijpers, 2025). Young individuals are better placed to have extended career plans and a sense of meaning in their studies when they are exposed to a wide range of career choices at an early age. Examples of career guidance activities in this stage are career research projects, classroom discussions relating learning areas to careers, simulated career role-plays, and introductory entrepreneurship activities. These activities ensure that the learner realizes the practicality of learning and also gains valuable skills like communication, creativity and teamwork.

Co-curricular activities play a critical role at this stage by exposing learners to diverse fields beyond the academic curriculum. Participation in clubs, sports, drama, music, science fairs, and entrepreneurship activities allows learners to experiment with different skill areas and discover latent talents. Such experiences enhance career exploration by linking interests to practical competencies and potential career domains.

In the CBC system, the upper primary education is based on the principle of learner-centered education and the development of skills. The approach to combine career exploration with classroom instruction can enable learners to open their eyes to how their competencies relate to a future career, and this will support the importance of education in practice.

## **Stage 3: Pathway Alignment (Junior School)**

The third phase happens in the junior school (Grades 7-9) and aims at assisting the learners in matching their budding strengths, interests, and academic achievements with possible educational and career discoveries. This is one of the critical stages in the Kenya CBC system since learners are meant to graduate into special learning tracks in senior school.

According to the literature on career development, adolescents start forming more specific vocational identities and career preferences at the age of early adolescence (Savickas, 2021). At this level, the learners

enjoy the advantage of organized career guidance practices that enable them to evaluate their strengths, experiment with various careers and know the pathway requirements.

Strategies that help achieve effective career guidance at this stage would be the psychometric tests, career guidance mentorship programs, career fairs, job shadowing and educational visits to workplaces. These experiences enable learners to get a real-life experience in professional settings, and learners get to know the skills that are needed in various occupations.

At this stage, co-curricular engagement becomes more structured and can significantly inform pathway alignment decisions. Participation in specialized clubs, competitions, and talent-based programs (such as STEM clubs, debate societies, performing arts, and sports teams) provides practical evidence of learners' strengths and preferences. These experiences, when integrated with career guidance processes, support more informed and realistic pathway selection.

Research performed on African education systems indicates that students undergoing structured career guidance at the adolescent stage show higher confidence in making career and educational choices (Otweina et al., 2025). Consequently, it is essential to empower career guidance at a junior level school to be able to support the decision of learners to make adequate pathway decisions within the CBC.

#### **Stage 4: Professional Positioning (Senior School)**

The last phase of the proposed model is in senior school (Grades 10-12) and is aimed at preparing learners to enter higher education, technical training or the workforce. At this level, students are supposed to advance their skills in the respective domains that they have chosen, and have some real-world experience in the working conditions.

Career guidance at this stage should be aimed at enabling learners to understand the requirements for university admission, professional qualifications, and expectations in the labor market. It should also help learners understand the requirements of various careers aligned to their chosen career pathways. For example, a STEM pathway may lead a learner into fields such as health sciences, engineering, or statistics, depending on the specific tracks selected. At this point, learners should clearly understand what each career pathway and track entails, as well as the specializations they will be preparing for and directing their studies toward.

Attachments, Internships, mentorship programs, structured career mentoring, and portfolio development are among the key activities that help prepare learners for successful post-secondary transitions. These can be complemented by career talks and guest speaker sessions, job shadowing, industry visits, career fairs, and exhibitions that expose learners to a wide range of occupational pathways. Additional support may include skills development workshops, leadership and soft-skills training, psychometric and aptitude assessments, and work-readiness programs. Learners can also benefit from project-based learning, community service learning, alumni engagement initiatives, entrepreneurship and financial literacy training, digital career exploration tools, volunteering opportunities, and guidance and counselling services that promote informed decision-making and effective career planning.

It has been proposed that opportunities for experiential learning, including internships and exposure to the workplace, considerably increase the career preparedness and professional identity of students (OECD,

2021). In the competency-based education systems, these experiences allow the learners to use their competencies in practice.

Kenyan CBC model has a senior school that is oriented to specialization in the pathways of STEM, Social Sciences, Arts and Sports Science. Formalized career counselling at this level has the potential to enable learners to formulate effective education objectives, build effective career portfolios, and make successful transitions to higher education or work.

Co-curricular activities at the senior school level further support professional positioning by offering opportunities for skill refinement, portfolio development, and career exposure. Achievements in areas such as sports, arts, leadership, and innovation can contribute to career portfolios and facilitate access to scholarships, higher education opportunities, and professional networks. These activities therefore serve as important platforms for transitioning from competency development to real-world career engagement.

### **Implications for Competency-Based Education**

The suggested framework proves that career guidance must be introduced at every phase of schooling as a process, and it cannot be put forth as an isolated intervention when an adolescent. The given developmental strategy is rather similar to the concepts of competency-based educational methodology, which underline the continuous development of learners, practical skills, and the possibility to apply knowledge in practice.

Through integrating career guidance in a competency-based education system, schools are able to assist learners to cultivate self-awareness, discover career opportunities, match competencies with pathways and equip them in professional careers. This kind of approach would not only increase the career readiness of learners but also increase the general objective of competency-based education, which is the readiness of learners to make a meaningful contribution to society and the workforce. Co-curricular activities should be recognized as integral components of career guidance within competency-based education, as they provide practical contexts for identifying, nurturing, and demonstrating learner competencies across diverse domains.

### **Inclusion of Stage-Based Curriculum and Learners with Special Needs**

An important consideration within competency-based education is the provision of a stage-based curriculum for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Unlike age-based progression, stage-based approaches allow learners to advance based on demonstrated competencies, pace of learning, and individual capabilities. Within the Kenyan CBC framework, this model is particularly relevant for learners who may not follow conventional academic pathways but demonstrate strengths in practical, technical, and life skills domains (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2019).

Career guidance within such a framework must therefore be inclusive and differentiated, recognizing that learners with special needs require structured pathways that emphasize skills-based training, functional independence, and employability. Studies conducted on this indicate that effective career development programs for learners with special needs focus on early exposure to vocational skills, continuous assessment of abilities, and transition planning into technical training institutions or the workforce (UNESCO, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Integrating career guidance into stage-based curricula ensures that these learners are not excluded from career development processes but are instead supported in identifying and nurturing their abilities in practical and skills-oriented fields. This aligns with the broader goals of competency-based education, which emphasize equity, inclusion, and the recognition of diverse learner potentials. Consequently, career guidance frameworks must incorporate adaptive strategies, specialized mentorship, and pathways linked to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability, are adequately prepared for meaningful participation in society and the labor market.

## **Integration of Gifted Learners in Career Guidance**

In addition to stage-based considerations, the study acknowledges the importance of addressing the needs of gifted and talented learners within the Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework. Gifted learners often exhibit advanced cognitive abilities, creativity, and task commitment, which necessitate differentiated career guidance approaches. If not adequately supported, such learners may experience underachievement, disengagement, or misalignment between their potential and career pathways (Renzulli, 2012).

Career guidance for gifted learners should therefore be proactive, flexible, and enriched with opportunities that match their advanced abilities and interests. This includes early exposure to specialized career paths, mentorship programs, acceleration options, and access to interdisciplinary learning experiences. Within the CBE framework, this aligns with the emphasis on personalized learning pathways and the nurturing of individual competencies (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Furthermore, guidance programs should incorporate psychometric assessments and career counselling strategies tailored to identify and develop high potential in diverse domains, including STEM, arts, leadership, and innovation. Teachers and career counselors must be trained to recognize giftedness beyond academic performance, considering multiple intelligences and socio-emotional characteristics (Subotnik et al., 2011).

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusion:** This paper has suggested a four-step model of career guidance in the Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Kenya, where career guidance should be progressive, developmental, and constant throughout the early childhood to senior school. The model unites the processes of identity development, career exploration, pathway alignment, and positioning in the occupation and emphasizes the contribution of schools, parents, and the overall education system to career readiness.

The results highlight that initial career awareness and guidance enable learners to build self-concept, confidence and competencies, whereas planned exploration and alignment activities, in later years, help to make informed choices and facilitate transfer to higher education, vocational training or the workforce. African case studies, such as Kenyan schools, and evidence support the idea that learners who are provided with systematic guidance throughout the stages have a higher chance of making informed choices of paths, higher levels of career self-efficacy, and meaningfully participate in competency-based learning (Otwine et al., 2025; Kuijpers, 2025).

The inclusion of career guidance into the CBE framework will guarantee that not only do the learners gain knowledge, but they are also equipped to learn practical skills, real-world experience, and professional preparedness that aligns with labor market demands and societal needs.

**Recommendations:** Integrating career guidance into School-Based Assessment (SBA) through the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) would institutionalize career development processes, promote continuous learner reflection, and enhance parental involvement in career decision-making. The study further recommends that structured career guidance activities be systematically integrated at every level of schooling within the Competency-Based Education (CBE) framework through the Ministry of Education and curriculum developers, in order to ensure continuity and coherence across learning stages. Schools should also invest in teacher capacity building by providing training to teachers and career guidance counselors on developmental career guidance strategies, career exploration tools, and competency-based approaches. In addition, parents should be actively engaged and empowered with appropriate guidance techniques to support career awareness at home, particularly during early childhood and upper primary levels.

Furthermore, schools are encouraged to establish partnerships with industries, universities, and community organizations to facilitate practical exposure programs such as internships, job shadowing, and mentorship opportunities for learners. Education stakeholders should also develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track learners' progress through different stages of career guidance and assess the impact of these practices on career choices, competencies, and overall preparedness.

The study further emphasizes the importance of inclusivity by recommending that career guidance frameworks deliberately incorporate strategies to identify and support gifted and talented learners through differentiated guidance, accelerated exposure opportunities, and specialized mentorship. Additionally, career guidance frameworks should align with stage-based curricula by supporting skills-oriented pathways, particularly for learners with special educational needs, through strengthened linkages with technical and vocational education institutions. This approach should focus on early identification of learner strengths and guide them toward relevant skills-based careers, ensuring inclusivity and equitable access to career development opportunities.

Collectively, these recommendations highlight that career guidance in Kenyan schools and similar African contexts is neither premature nor delayed, but rather a critical and timely process that must be effectively integrated to nurture learners' potential, confidence, and lifelong career development readiness.

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