

LEARNING MEMO

KPLAY COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Introduction

The Kenya Play Project (KPLAY) is a holistic, systemic, and gender-responsive initiative promoting creative learning in Kwale and Kilifi counties, two of Kenya's most underserved regions. Aligned with the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), KPLAY equips teachers with actionable methodologies to enhance STEM, foundational literacy and numeracy, and soft skills. Since its inception during the Covid-19 pandemic, KPLAY has expanded to 309 schools. As the project nears its conclusion in March 2025, it is imperative to outline sustainability strategies that ensure the long-term success of its key components, particularly the Communities of Practice (CoPs). These CoPs have emerged as a cornerstone for teacher capacity-building within the CBC framework, enabling teachers to engage in collaborative learning and professional growth by sharing insights, best practices, and innovative methods. KPLAY introduced CoPs to sustain teacher support and enhance classroom practices beyond formal training sessions. The project established CoPs across all participating schools, targeting teachers trained in creative learning methodologies, and designed them to foster collaboration among educators, encourage creativity, experimentation, and peer learning, and provide a platform for sharing resources, conducting peer observations, and co-teaching. To ensure effectiveness, the KPLAY team conducted specialized training sessions outlining the objectives, structure, and benefits of CoPs, cultivating a culture of continuous professional development and collaborative learning within schools. Each school-based CoP developed its own action plan and meeting schedule, empowering teachers to train and mentor fellow educators, share good practices and teaching prompts, conduct peer-to-peer observations and co-teaching sessions, and engage in collaborative problem-solving and innovation. These activities created a robust and dynamic environment where teachers acted as mutual resources, fostering professional growth and improving classroom practices. The CoPs became vibrant networks of educators committed to learning and reforming their instructional methods collaboratively. KPLAY has

identified strategies to ensure the longevity and impact of CoPs, including institutionalizing CoPs into school improvement plans, training teacher leaders to facilitate meetings and mentor peers, collaborating with county education offices to provide resources and ongoing support, establishing mechanisms to track CoP effectiveness, and developing recognition programs for active CoPs and exemplary teachers to incentivize participation. These strategies aim to ensure CoPs remain a sustainable and impactful part of the educational landscape in Kwale and Kilifi counties. By fostering collaborative learning and professional growth, these communities have transformed teacher support and classroom practices, and with these sustainability measures, KPLAY's vision for enhanced teacher capacity and student learning outcomes will continue to thrive



Image 1: Teacher from Kikoneni Zonal CoP collaborating during a tech session.

Establishment of KPLAY Communities of Practice

KPLAY initiated Communities of Practice (CoPs) in 2021, starting with 11 schools on a voluntary basis. While there was limited activity in 2022, significant progress was made in 2023. During this period, 211 schools successfully established active CoPs, complete with structured work plans to guide their discussions and activities in Kwale and Kilifi counties. To deepen the understanding of CoP implementation, Education Design Unlimited (EDU) organized a learning sprint, bringing together various education sector organizations that have integrated CoPs into their projects. This session aimed to identify effective strategies suited to the local context



and provide insights for strengthening CoP implementation in Kenya's education ecosystem.

The learning sprint highlighted the importance of organizational support during the initial stages of CoPs, gradually transitioning them to be member-led. It also emphasized the need for a clear value proposition to encourage teachers to join and stay engaged. However, several barriers to participation were identified, including heavy workloads resulting from high student-teacher ratios. Many teachers reported that large class sizes left them little time for CoP activities as they were preoccupied with lesson preparation and student assessments.

To address these challenges, KPLAY introduced strategies such as group work, outdoor learning, and the use of PlayLabs and their materials during lessons. These approaches have made teaching and learning more interactive, ensuring that all learners are actively engaged. Another challenge was low motivation among teachers and school leaders, with many teachers failing to see the value of CoPs and lacking encouragement from leadership. In response, KPLAY recognized and celebrated proactive teacher champions by awarding certificates, gifts, and highlighting their achievements. Some active participants were also invited to IREX meetings, further motivating others. These efforts have enhanced teacher focus on improving learner outcomes, increased adherence to work plans, and strengthened collaboration between the KPLAY team and CoPs through virtual and in-person school visits.

Description of the KPLAY CoP Model

The KPLAY CoP model begins with the first training academy, where schools select an "Ambassador" to lead KPLAY activities. The Ambassador serves as the main liaison between the school and the KPLAY team, ensuring smooth implementation, addressing challenges, and documenting best practices to share with the Head of Institution (HOI). After this initial setup, schools create a schedule of CoP activities for the term, focusing on reinforcing skills gained during the training.

KPLAY employs a blended approach to CoPs, combining in-person meetings with digital platforms like WhatsApp and Google Classroom for sharing information and resources. The KPLAY team closely monitors these platforms to ensure their effectiveness and support teachers as needed.

The Role of CoPs in Teacher Professional Development

Communities of Practice provide a structured and collaborative environment for teachers to continuously develop their skills beyond initial training sessions. After attending the training academy, teachers create work plans outlining CoP activities for the term, which include opportunities to reflect on best practices and address challenges faced during implementation. CoPs have proven to be one of the most effective ways to sustain teacher learning and improve student outcomes.

In the context of KPLAY, CoPs encourage knowledge-sharing, peer support, and ongoing professional development. They foster a sense of collective responsibility for integrating Learning through Play and Technology (LTPT) into classrooms, ensuring that learning is sustained and enriched through collaboration among participants.

How KPLAY CoPs Support Teacher Collaboration

KPLAY's CoPs are designed to facilitate shared learning and reflection among teachers. Following their training, teachers convene in small groups to revisit and deepen their understanding of LTPT methodologies, share innovative classroom strategies, and develop a sense of ownership over the learning process. These sessions allow teachers to collectively brainstorm solutions to challenges and refine their approaches to lesson delivery.

A key feature of the CoP model is peer support and mentoring. Teachers are encouraged to engage in peer observations and co-teaching, which were introduced and supported by IREX. Experienced teachers, particularly those trained

as Trainers of Trainers (ToT), mentor less experienced colleagues, helping them navigate challenges in LTPT implementation. This mentoring approach not only builds confidence, especially among teachers with lower levels of digital literacy, but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

Collaborative problem-solving is another critical aspect of KPLAY's CoPs. Teachers work together to address common challenges, such as integrating technology or engaging students in creative learning. Weekly meetings and digital platforms, like Google Classroom, provide a safe space for teachers to share resources and seek support. One standout practice among KPLAY CoPs is the organization of "material/resource development days," during which teachers collaborate to create instructional materials aligned with curriculum goals. These resources support learner-centered and playful instructional activities, improving both student engagement and learning outcomes.

In 2023, the active participation of 309 schools across Kwale and Kilifi counties demonstrated the scalability and impact of KPLAY's CoP model. By fostering collaboration, innovation, and professional growth, the CoPs have played a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education in these regions.

"The KPLAY COP has provided a collaborative environment that I have used effectively in writing my lesson plans and resource and learning aids development. Through regular meetings and sharing, I have gained skills that I can directly apply in my work," said a teacher from Kijiwetanga Primary School in Kilifi County.

KPLAY has developed a strategy to foster professional growth by organizing regular Communities of Practice (CoP) meetings, typically aligned with school terms. These gatherings provide teachers with consistent opportunities to reconnect, share their progress, and identify areas for improvement. More than just forums for discussion, these meetings serve as a form of accountability, encouraging teachers to implement creative teaching techniques, particularly LTPT methodologies, in their

classrooms. This ensures they can bring meaningful insights and experiences to the table.

A key highlights this year was the recognition of the best-performing CoPs in Kwale and Kilifi counties, where 11 schools were celebrated—six from Kwale County and five from Kilifi County.



Image 2: Teachers from Waa Primary School preparing a CoP work plan.

Why Communities of Practice Work for KPLAY Teachers

Weekly Prompts

To bridge the gap between training sessions and practical application, KPLAY employs weekly prompts shared in teacher WhatsApp groups. These prompts keep educators accountable and promote shared learning at the school level. The KPLAY team has established norms for group interactions, such as using a thumbs-up emoji to confirm receipt of prompts. These are followed by moderated discussions led by KPLAY ambassadors, ensuring active participation and knowledge exchange.

These prompts, which address diverse topics like integrating technology and play-based learning into specific strands, have proven effective. Teachers share CoP work plans, discuss classroom challenges, and even engage with podcasts featuring insights from creative learning experts. This system not only keeps face-to-face meetings dynamic but also engages schools, zonal, and county-wide teacher communities. By mentoring and addressing challenges raised in discussions, the KPLAY team

encourages problem-solving and feedback loops, enhancing visibility into school-level conversations.



Figure 1: Sample KPLAY weekly prompt on peer observation.

Peer Observations and Co-teaching

Peer observations and co-teaching have been instrumental in fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among teachers. These strategies encourage educators to learn from one another by observing effective instructional practices and reflecting on their own. By working together, teachers have built a collaborative culture at the school level, enabling open discussions about classroom challenges and experimentation with new ideas.

School-based CoPs provide a supportive environment where teachers feel confident integrating creative learning into their routines. Iterative learning is a key component of this approach; teachers test new methodologies, gather evidence of their effectiveness, and refine their techniques to better meet learner needs. The CoP meetings serve as a platform to review and improve these activities collaboratively.

Enhancing collaborative professional Development.

CoPs facilitate continuous professional development at the school level, turning learning into an ongoing process. Teachers actively participate in a cycle of application, feedback, and iteration, which positions them as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. This collaborative approach

empowers educators to lead discussions on best practices, fostering a sense of initiative and ownership over their professional growth.

Ownership of Learning and Classroom Success

When teachers engage with CoPs, they develop a sense of ownership over the learning process. Collaborative efforts ensure they are not isolated in their challenges or successes. By sharing strategies and outcomes, they collectively strive to improve student engagement and learning outcomes, reinforcing their commitment to LTPT methodologies.

Although challenges such as low digital literacy and limited access to technology persist, KPLAY has mitigated these issues by leveraging WhatsApp for formal CoP meetings. This approach has enabled real-time sharing of best practices and challenges while also facilitating weekly prompt discussions. By fostering engagement through accessible platforms, KPLAY has supported teachers in integrating creative teaching and learning into their classrooms

Outcomes

One notable outcome of the CoP initiative is the establishment of Scratch Clubs in schools across Kilifi and Kwale counties. These clubs have enhanced coding skills for both teachers and learners.



Image 3: Teachers and learners from Mwanjama Primary School in Kilifi receiving their trophy at the KPLAY Scratch Competition 2024.

Fifteen schools collaborated to provide Scratch skills to learners, culminating in the Scratch Competition 2024, held at St. Joseph's Academy

in Kwale and Mtondia Primary School in Kilifi on August 5, 2024. The event brought together 12 KPLAY schools and four from the Girls Learning Through Technology (GLTT) project.

The competition aimed at boosting coding skills and fostering creativity through collaborative projects. Students addressed themes such as foundational literacy, numeracy, social-emotional learning, and climate change. These projects emphasized critical thinking, teamwork, and public speaking. Each school presented teams of 15 students, who showcased their projects independently in front of a panel of judges, demonstrating their creativity and problem-solving abilities.



Image 4: Mr. Joel Kahindi on the far right posing with learners from Kasidi Primary School and colleagues during the Scratch Competition 2024.

Meet Joel Kahindi: Success story...

Joel is a teacher at Kasidi primary school. He is also a digital content online curator at KICD. He is passionate about digital literacy and alongside Derrick of Deri Primary school organized a Scratch community of practice. This was an offshoot of IREX's COP. For this COP, they requested teachers to voluntarily join and form scratch clubs in their school. Joel used the clubs to have their learners practice their digital literacy skills. He also enjoyed being in the COP to consult with others and share his experiences. Mr. Joel says: the learners in his club have increased "Confidence in the use of Tech tools, improved communication skills, problem solving and collaboration, self-efficacy and they are eager to learn more"

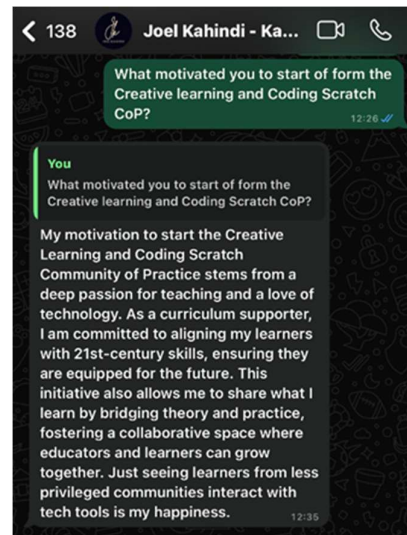


Figure 2: Joel Kahindi's quote on his motivation to Scratch CoP.

Conclusion

Communities of Practice are fundamental to KPLAY's strategy of embedding creative learning in schools. By fostering shared learning, peer observations, mentorship, and collaborative problem-solving, CoPs enable teachers to continuously improve their skills and make meaningful changes in their classrooms. As KPLAY closes out, CoPs will remain the driving force behind sustainable educational transformation.

A Community of Practice (CoP) is like a cozy intellectual campfire where passionate individuals gather to share knowledge, experiences, and insights. In the case of the TSC, it's a collaborative and interactive network that brings together organizations and individuals involved in the social protection space in Kenya. Imagine it as a virtual coffee shop where teachers, administrators, and education enthusiasts pull up chairs to chat about their craft.

While significant strides have been made over the past four years, there is more to be done to ensure the sustainability of creative learning. Teachers embracing shared learning is a crucial step toward improving learning outcomes for their learners.



In summary, KPLAY's Communities of Practice have generated the following key learnings that will inform future initiatives:

- Enhanced teacher collaboration through structured prompts and mentorship.
- Increased confidence and skills in integrating creative learning into classrooms.
- Development of Scratch Clubs, fostering innovation and coding skills among learners.
- Strengthened professional development through iterative learning and feedback.

More information on KPLAY CoPs can be found in the [CoP Report](#).