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# Beyond Cognitive Testing: Teachers' Assessment Practices for Noncognitive Skills in Primary Schools

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# Abstract

The assessment of noncognitive skills has become increasingly important in modern education as they are essential for learners' academic success. This study examined teachers' assessment practices for noncognitive skills in public primary schools in Tanzania, focusing on the tools, techniques, and reporting methods used in classroom practice. Guided by a pragmatic philosophy and a mixed methods approach, the study involved 260 primary school teachers, together with other education stakeholders. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, documentary review. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive through SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed thematically using MAXQDA software. The findings revealed that most teachers (68.85%) acknowledged the importance of assessing noncognitive skills. Observation checklists (52.31%) emerged as the most assessment technique used to assess teamwork, cooperation, and self-discipline. However, the findings highlighted that, assessment practices remained largely informal, subjective, and unsupported by standardized national guidelines. The study concludes that although teachers recognize the importance of noncognitive skills, there is a critical need for standardized assessment frameworks and teacher training to ensure consistent and reliable assessment practices.


# 1. Introduction

Recently, global educational research and policy discourse have underscored the need for education to extend beyond cognitive skills. Attention to noncognitive skills must be established, since they are essential and critical predictors of cognitive skills. They include a broad spectrum of behaviours, as well as social and emotional abilities (Borghans et al., 2008). Typically, educational systems in many countries have relied heavily on standardized tests and written examinations to evaluate student success. The primary aim of this cognitive assessment is to evaluate students' proficiency in mastering content knowledge within the subject area. However, educational research and policymakers are increasingly asserting that cognitive assessment should be evaluated alongside noncognitive skills.

Noncognitive skills have been characterized by several yet interconnected terminologies. For example, the term life skills have been referred as noncognitive skills as advocated by UNESCO (2018). Likewise, other use competencies, referring to noncognitive skills and other generic competencies (Ferreras & Wagenaar, 2023). Other researchers have used the term transferable skills, transversal skills, and 21st-century skills referring to noncognitive skills (WEF, 2016). Although the terminology for noncognitive skills varies, it often refers to analogous socio-emotional, interpersonal, and behavioural competences, and is therefore frequently used interchangeably with the notion of noncognitive skills (Duckworth et al., 2019).

The importance of noncognitive skills is evident in worldwide educational policy dialogues. International organization including The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and UNESCO recognized the role of noncognitive skills and suggested that education should extend beyond literacy and numeracy to include noncognitive skills (OECD, 2024). Likewise, the UNESCO

Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 emphasizes the evaluation of both cognitive and noncognitive skills as integral components of equitable and quality education (UNESCO, 2018). Different studies have shown that some categories of non-cognitive skills significantly enhance cognitive abilities, academic performance, and educational frameworks (Gabrieli et al., 2015; Gamazo & Martínez-Abad, 2020; Heckman et al., 2006; OECD, 2015).

In response, the worldwide assessment projects have now started including a wider student competency assessment. For instance, the OECD vigorously advocates for Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as a tool for assessments (OECD, 2013). In the United States, high school dropouts may undertake a 7.5-hour assessment known as the General Educational Development (GED) exam to validate their equivalence to high school graduates (Heckman & Kautz, 2013). Although this assessment method may facilitate the acquisition of information on students' understanding of the intended topic, researchers contend that cognitive skills alone cannot comprehensively inform about students, since other noncognitive elements may influence their learning (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Nevertheless, regional evidence indicates that the value of life skills practices in evaluating life skills has not been adequately documented. The ALiVE (Action for Life Skills and Values in East Africa) initiative was developed to commence the evaluation of these skills (Care et al., 2024). The context-specific assessment instruments were applied in developing ALiVE and it is designed to evaluate noncognitive skills such as self-awareness, collaboration, problem-solving, and regard for others in adolescents in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This evidence from East African countries shows that noncognitive skills are more than just descriptive labels; they can be measured and quantified in ways that have substantial meaning in the region.

In Tanzania, the 2023 revised curriculum acknowledge the role of noncognitive skills and categorize them as the 21st century skills (URT, 2023). Despite being included in the curriculum, however, it is unclear how teachers assess them and what instruments or methods they use in their daily classroom practices. The existing research highlighted the significance of these skills and their integration into curriculum. However, Cahyadi et al. (2022) noticed that there is no reliable technique for assessing non-cognitive abilities, particularly for high school students. The questions remain, do teachers practically assess and document these skills? If they do, how? It is from this remaining question where the present study derives aiming to bridge the gap between the theoretical aspect of noncognitive skills and its practical implication.

## 2. Literature Review

# 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research used the Social Constructivism theory established by Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1986). The theory posits that; children's understanding is influenced not just by adaptive experiences but also by interpersonal interactions with the world. Social Constructivism acknowledges the social aspect of

learning, highlighting the significance of dialogue, interpersonal contact, and the application of knowledge as fundamental elements in attaining educational goals. This theory is relevant in this study as it creates a theoretical prediction about NCS that could be examined using interactive and classroom-contexts assessment methods. With this Vygotsky's view in mind, NCS are thus cultivated via social interactions and active participation in learning activities. The theory establishes the basis for assessment procedures that teachers can use in their constructive environment. Furthermore, Vygotsky introduced the idea of Zone of Proximal Development which suggest that students can grow and learn more quickly with the help of more knowledgeable people, like teachers. This suggests that, by assessing noncognitive skills teachers can help students reach their full potential by giving them the right support and advice.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Assessment is a fundamental element that inform the learning process, and it is used to evaluate the degree to which students have mastered the intended competencies. According to Wiliam (2011) and Lambert and Lines (2013), assessment serves as a method to quantify the learner's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. In educational settings, the assessment conducted aims to provide feedback and facilitate learners' advancement. The increasing focus on NCS indicates that these skills must also be assessed to improve learning. Likewise, the assessment of NCS should not be considered as an extra activity, but as a fundamental component and can fulfills the same essential function as cognitive assessment.

Several studies have emphasized the necessity of nurturing and measuring NCS equally with cognitive skills. Duckworth and Yeager (2015) in their study argued that NCS are measurable and quantifiable hence they may be examined systematically to inform learning. The same notion is affirmed by the OECD (2015) that, social and emotional abilities may be measured and have an influence on both academic and life outcomes for students. Likewise, the World Bank report emphasizes the need of evaluating the social-emotional abilities of students, as they correspond with the actual circumstances faced by learners (Delavallade et al., 2025). This worldwide acknowledgement instils that assessing and documenting NCS as cognitive skills should be more emphasized and be integrated into school curriculum.

While there is acknowledgment of quantifying these skills, the very important question remains: how can teachers measure them practically? How do they record them? What tools they use? Despite teachers' acknowledgement on the role of noncognitive skills and their influence in academic performance, studies have shown that they lack sufficient knowledge on how to assess and report them effectively (Cahyadi et al., 2022; Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Petway et al., 2016). Furthermore, Shriver (2022) suggests that measurement and assessment act as a bridge between knowledge about noncognitive skills and classroom practice, so an essential element regarding the research tools used for measuring should be in alignment with educational practice. This is because the measurement and assessment technique needs to relate to practical, evidence-based strategies and practices that institutions and teachers can use in their modern classroom.

Evidence from developed countries shows that assessing NCS has become an integral component of a holistic education system. Taking the case of Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba they all provide teachers with standardized assessment criteria, reporting formats, behavioural indicators for skills like collaboration, responsibility self-regulation and communication (Merchant et al., 2018). This indicates that education systems in these countries officially acknowledge the importance of NCS and have encompassed them into their framework of teaching, learning and assessment. Furthermore, they give teachers explicit assessment rubrics, uniformity in reporting, indicators of student behaviour and specific tools they can use in assessing NCS in a standardized way.

Many other developed countries, besides Canada, have set up explicit frameworks and guidelines for measuring NCS in their education systems. One example is the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES), developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that provides participating countries with assessment frameworks, contextual questionnaires, behavioural indicators and standardised approaches for assessing social and emotional competencies including empathy, collaboration, responsibility, self-control and emotional regulation (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019).

The review of literature undertaken in Sub-Saharan African nations on the evaluation of methods and instruments for measuring noncognitive abilities identified five regularly used approaches. They include scenario-based assessments, questionnaires, video recordings, direct observations, portfolios, and technology-based methods (Nansubuga et al., 2024). On the other hands, Hilger (2018) states that the first technique for testing non-cognitive skills is based on self-assessments while the second approach is observed behaviours, and finally teacher and parent assessments, including rating scales. These approaches have been widely used in educational literature.

In the same vein Blazar and Kraft (2015) noted that teachers may employ self-reported behaviour in class, self-efficacy in arithmetic, and satisfaction in class as methods of evaluating noncognitive skills. However, a primary concern is that the only practical method of evaluating these skills is by eliciting students' ideas or beliefs through self-reported questionnaires (Kautz et al., 2014). However, significant concerns have been expressed regarding the appropriateness of existing measures of non-cognitive abilities, particularly when employing self-reported questionnaires. The potential for misleading information because of reference bias in students' self-reports and the possibility that students may exaggerate their self-ratings to enhance their school's reputation after stakes have been affixed are among the primary concerns.

Despite the variety of skills and methods of measurement, the literature has demonstrated that certain skills and methods are more frequently used than others. Care et al. (2024) have identified the direct observation assessment method as the most used method for measuring practical or socio-emotional skills. This method is particularly advantageous because it provides a wealth of information, as the teacher can directly observe the student's behaviour. Additionally, portfolio assessment has also emerged as a favoured method for evaluating certain noncognitive skills. In terms of which skills are

most often assessed, the study by Merchant et al. (2018) revealed that, teamwork or collaboration and responsibility are the noncognitive skills that are mentioned and assessed in Canada.

On the other hands, the use of report card in reporting noncognitive skills is globally recognized. For example, the Canadian educational jurisdictions require all teachers to use written comments on the student report card in assessing NCS for elementary students and give a single “work habits” grade to secondary students using a 4-point scale (Merchant et al., 2018). The report card is used as a tool for recording the assessed noncognitive skills after they have been captured through different assessment methods. Note this in mind, the report card does not generate the grade, nor does not assess the student itself, rather it is used to record information collected from multiple assessment methods like observation and are synthesized using a defined criterion.

The table below lists some of the most frequent techniques and approaches for assessing noncognitive skills that have been discovered in the literature.

Table 1
*Methods for Assessing Noncognitive Skills*

| **Methods or Technique** | **Skills Assessed** | **Sources** |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher observation | Self regulation, collaboration and interaction | (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Hilger, 2018; Shriver, 2022) |
| Rating scale | It assesses motivation, engagement and responsibility | (OECD, 2015; Ojating, n.d) |
| Self – report questionnaires | Mostly used to assess emotional control | (Marsh et al., 2006; Petway et al., 2016) |
| Peer assessment | Used to assess communication skills, teamwork and cooperation | (Li et al., 2021) |
| Performance tasks | It assesses collaboration skills | (Petway et al., 2016, p. 20) |
| Portfolios | Used to assesses goal setting skills | (Care, 2024, p. 103; Nansubuga et al., 2024) |
| Behavioural checklists | Used to assesses participation, collaboration and social interaction skills | (Care, 2024) |
| Interview | It is used to assess motivation and attitudes | (Lemay et al., 2007) |
| Situational judgement Tests (SJTs) | It assesses social awareness | (Fahim et al., 2023) |
| Assessment of Life Skill and Values in East Africa (ALiVE) | Problem solving, self-awareness, collaboration, and respect | (Nansubuga et al., 2024) |
| Tanzania Life Skills Assessment | Academic grit, self-control, and problem solving | (Nansubuga et al., 2024) |

As Table 1 shows, NCS are assessed through multiple approaches depending on the nature of the skill being evaluated as indicated with different scholars above. Consequently, combining multiple assessment approaches is most appropriate to capture a more complete picture of students' strengths and overall development with respect to NCS.

## 3. Material and Methods

# 3.1 Research Design and Participants

This study employed mixed method research approach guided by pragmatic research philosophy, allowing for the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study was conducted in Mkuranga District, Coast Region (Pwani), Tanzania. The study involved 260 public primary school teachers in Mkuranga district for the quantitative data, school quality assurers, ward education officers (WEO), officers from the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), officers from the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA), and district education officers (DEO). The use of multiple participant groups enabled a broader understanding of teachers' awareness and conceptualization of noncognitive skills.

# 3.2 Sampling Techniques

Convenience sampling technique was utilized to select 260 teachers who were available and willing to participate at the time of data collection. Key informants were sampled purposively to obtain in-depth information regarding the assessment of NCS. They included District Education Officers, School Quality Assurers, officers from the Tanzania Institute of Education and National Examinations Council of Tanzania. Participants were intentionally recruited due to their roles, knowledge, and direct experiences related to curriculum design/assessment and quality assurance of education.

# 3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Analysis

Data were collected between November 2025 to February 2026 using questionnaires for quantitative data, and interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) for qualitative data among primary school teachers and education stakeholders in Mkuranga District. Through the questionnaire, teachers were required to indicate the tools and techniques they use, how often they use, and their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of those tools. The assessment tools indicated by teachers included observation checklists, peer assessment, self-assessment, group activities and projects, teacher-made rubrics, and standardized tools provided by educational authorities.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and FGDs to complement the survey data and provide deeper insights. The use of multiple methods facilitated methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics and inferential tests, including t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using MAXQDA Software where key themes were identified and interpreted in relation to the study objectives.

## 3.4 Logistical Issues and Ethical Considerations Concerns

Ethical clearance for this study was granted through an official research permit issued by the open university, endorsed by the Vice Chancellor, on behalf of the Government of Tanzania and in line with the requirements of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology. This clearance authorized the conduct of the study and ensured that it complied with national research regulations and ethical standards. Ethical issues such as participant anonymity, verbal and written informed consent, and sensitive data confidentiality were adhered to. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation prior to data collection. The consent was obtained before administering questionnaires, conducting interviews, and facilitating focus group discussions. The consent process was not audio-recorded to maintain participants' comfort and confidentiality. All data were handled with strict confidentiality, and identifying information was removed during analysis and reporting. Careful steps were taken to reduce potential harm, such as assigning unique IDs to maintain secrecy by eliminating personal identifiers during data analysis and reporting. Responses from private interviews were safely kept in password-protected folders that only the researcher can access.

## 3.5 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was ensured through reviewing and scrutinizing the questionnaires and interview guides for specificity. Two public primary schools not in the sample were used to pilot the instruments further. Pilot study results were used to streamline ambiguous items and adapt the instruments for use in data collection. The entire Cronbach's Alpha was 0.43. Although this number is lower than the usually suggested criterion for highly standardized scales, it might be explained by the multidimensional and exploratory character of the construct being studied. The reliability findings were therefore interpreted alongside the pilot testing, and qualitative data triangulation to confirm the instruments' eligibility for study.

# 4. Results and Discussion

## 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved a total of 260 teachers from public primary schools, and their demographic characteristics were analysed to provide a clear understanding of the composition of respondents included in the study.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Teachers Included in the Study*

| | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | 123 | 47 |
| Male | 137 | 53 |
| Female | | |

From Table 2 above, among the 260 respondents involved in the study, female teachers constituted the majority, with 137 respondents (53%), while 123 respondents (47%) were male. This near parity enhances the generalizability of the results and decreases the probability of gender bias in the findings. Further, the slightly higher proportion of female teachers is indicative of broader trends in the primary education workforce, where female participation is frequently the norm.

Table 3

*Agreement of Teacher to Assess Noncognitive Skills (N = 260)*

| **Status** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
|---|---|---|
| Agree | 179 | 68.85 |
| Disagree | 81 | 31.15 |
| **Total** | **260** | **100** |
| **Source**: *Researcher's Field Data (2025)* | | |

The data in Table 3 indicates that most teachers (68.85%, n = 179) believed they are supposed to assess noncognitive skills, while some minority (31.15%, n = 81) disagreed. As shown by this level of agreement, teachers acknowledge the importance of noncognitive skills, and they are willing to assess them. This trend is consistent with the study of Duckworth and Yeager (2015) who found that teachers have positive perception and they are ready to assess noncognitive skills.

In reviewing the curriculum document for Tanzanian primary school, the integration of noncognitive skills marked as 21st century skills and life skills have clearly stated. It state *"the Primary Education Curriculum is focused on developing the 21st Century skills (*URT, 2016*)."* Likewise, the Education and Training Policy of 2014 (2023 Edition) highlight the need of integrating noncognitive skills. It states that "*curricula at all levels should focus on the 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, ethics, and patriotism (*URT, 2023, p. *49)."* This suggests that the results from teachers on the assessment of noncognitive abilities are not just coincidental; rather, they fit with educational policy that emphasizes the inclusion and evaluation of these skills.

Table 4

*Tools Used by Teachers to Assess Noncognitive Skills (N = 260)*

| Tools/techniques used for cognitive skills assessment | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Observation Checklists | 136 | 52.31 |
| Self-assessment by learners | 123 | 47.31 |
| Group activities/Projects | 121 | 46.54 |
| Peer assessment | 112 | 43.08 |
| Teacher-made rubrics | 110 | 42.31 |
| Standardized tools provided by authorities | 103 | 39.62 |
| Other | 95 | 36.54 |

More than half of the teachers (52.3%) reported to employ observation checklists, as can be seen from Table 4 above. This figure implies that teachers depend more on immediate and observable behaviours to assess noncognitive skills like self-discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. Moderate teachers reported to use written feedback (47.3%), while 46.5% were reported to use peer review. Few teachers were reported to use oral feedback (43.1%). The exceeding number of teachers who use observational checklist (52.3%) to assess noncognitive skills reveal that, there is an overwhelming reliance on observational in assessing noncognitive skills.

Qualitative findings offer an enriched understanding of how observation is operationalized in practice. Teachers said noncognitive skills are more informally assessed as part of everyday classroom activities instead of with formalized tools. As one teacher described

*"We identify these skills through the daily activities that students do" (TK002, FGD, Nov 26, 2025).* Another teacher added, *"There is no written test for discipline or cooperation, so we just observe how pupils behave in class and outside the class" (TD03, FGD, Nov 25, 2025).*

The use of observation checklists was supported by the TIE officer who narrated that:

*Observation is mostly used by teachers in assessing noncognitive skills, however, my doubt about this tool is whether teachers can prepare an observation checklist. Do they know what to observe? (TIE Officer, Interview, November 07, 2025).*

The TIE officer's response thus reinforces the claim that although observation makes a more contextual and individualized sense for evaluating noncognitive skills, its effectiveness depends on teachers' technical knowledge, preparation skills, and pedagogical insights about what comprises valid evidence of such skills.

The findings concur with the literature as observational was reported to be the most predominant method used to assess noncognitive skills. The argument is presented by Zhou (2017) and Kautz et al.

(2014) that, social skills like teamwork, perseverance, self-discipline and communication are best observed through everyday behaviour in the classroom rather than written tests. Hilger (2018) further support the findings by claiming that, noncognitive skills are not abstract concepts measurable through multiple choice questions; rather they are part of the lived experiences students have shown through their interactions with peers, response to correction received, persistence in hard tasks and emotional control while engaging in learning activities.

The findings are further in agreement with the study by Duckworth and Yeager (2015) who argued that teacher observation is one of the common technique used to measure noncognitive skills, especially for younger pupils in primary school settings where learning is inherently interactive and socially engrained. In this setting, students are constantly engaging in behavioural associated activities such as teamwork and they participate in class group discussion and thus, making observation a relevant assessments modality that is derived from practice. Considering this, the prevalence of observation noted in the current study should not be considered incidental, it indeed aligns with a broader global trend whereby teachers are increasingly using classroom-based observation methods to measure noncognitive skills among the pupils.

From the theoretical perspective, observation is seen as fundamentally suitable for measuring noncognitive skill acquisition as they contextualize assessment within the social environments in which learning occurs. Rooted in Vygotsky's (1986), skills like cooperation, self-regulation, responsibility and empathy are therefore not stable internal qualities; rather they are socially constructed through interactions with peers and teachers. This approach situates observation as a contextually rich and theoretically rigorous process, allowing teachers to see and record how these noncognitive skills are enacted, rehearsed and polished in real time interactions.

Table 5
*Most Assessed Noncognitive Skills (N = 260)*

| **Noncognitive skills** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
|---|---|---|
| Team/collaboration | 96 | 36.92 |
| Self-control/Discipline | 79 | 30.38 |
| Perseverance/Resilience | 40 | 15.38 |
| Communication Skills | 24 | 9.23 |
| Emotional Regulation | 21 | 8.08 |
| **Total** | **260** | **100.00** |
| **Source**: *Researcher's Field Data (2025)* | | |

On the other hands, the researcher wanted to know which noncognitive skills are mostly assessed. The findings in Table 5 show that teamwork or collaboration (36.92%, n = 96) and self-control/discipline (30.38%, n = 79) are mostly assessed. These are followed by resilience (15.38%), while communication

skills (9.23%) and emotional regulation (8.08%) are less often assessed. This distribution suggests that teachers assess collaboration and teamwork than other skills. This is because collaboration is more visible and can be seen in the classroom setting together with teamwork compared to other internal traits like emotions.

Consistent with the quantitative results, through the interview with NECTA officer he claimed that: *“discipline and self-control, as well as cooperation and teamwork, are mostly assessed (NECTA Officer, Interview, Dec 19, 2025).* The findings collaborate with those of Merchant et al. (2018) who reported that teamwork or collaboration are the noncognitive skills that were mentioned and assessed in Canada.

# 4.2 Use of report cards in assessing noncognitive skills

Despite that observation is used most often by (52.3%), as shown in Fig. 4.5.1, on the other handwritten feedback is reported to be used in report cards and as for written comments (47.3%) compared to peer assessment (46.5%), oral feedback (43.1%) and clearly exceeding structured tools like portfolios (39.6%) and checklists (36.5%). What is demonstrated in this pattern is that teachers prefer reporting rather than collaborative or structured assessment tools.

Qualitative findings clarify how the use of report card is employed as one of the teachers in the focus group discussion narrated

*“We have a component of the report card dedicated to "Maadili na Nidhamu." We rate students based on their performance, with grades like 'A' being Excellent and 'C' being Needs Improvement. But how can I choose? It's primarily derived from my recollection and general observation of the situation. I assess the child's capabilities in relation to others, considering whether they participate in cleaning the board, as well as their ability to remain still and quiet. No singular instrument. We don't have a list of checkpoints. It's... casual (TM03, FGD, Nov 24, 2025).*

The quoted pattern above is supported by the findings from the documentary review evidence showing that in all visited schools, the report card was used as the main formal tool to document and discuss noncognitive skills. In all the progressive or report cards reviewed, there was a section dedicated to behavioural or character attributes labelled with words such as discipline, conduct, cooperation, responsibility, respect, cleanliness or participation in co-curricular activities. This validates that educational institutions embed noncognitive skill dimensions as an official aspect of pupil documentation.

However, the documentary review also revealed that despite this inclusion, the assessment format varied amongst schools and there were no standardized forms of performance. The documents often appeared to rely on rating scales such as grading by letter like A, B or C, numbers or phrases like excellent, good or fair, but there were no specific criteria. Therefore, while report cards are broadly and uniformly used across schools for the formal reporting of noncognitive skills, documentary findings indicate that, lack of criterion and guideline on how to use them make them to remain largely as

unstandardized and potentially subjective tools. This view was affirmed by one of the teachers during the group discussion:

*For me, most teachers just guess; they don't have any standardized tool for assessing. A teacher may simply decide to give a student an A or B. (TV04, FGD, Nov 24, 2025).*

According to this narrative, teachers record students' noncognitive abilities on the report card based on their own judgment since they don't maintain any records and admit that they depend on guesswork. This was further corroborated by a teacher who said that they do not maintain documentation of pupils' noncognitive skill assessments.

*No, we don't maintain consistent records. We simply observe during the work, and at the end of the year, we just grade them. (TD05, FGD, Nov 17, 2025).*

This argument is further reflected in the reviewed school report cards, as presented in Fig. 1 below.

**Source**

*Researcher's Field Data (2025)*

As illustrated in Fig. 1 above, the report card on the section "*tabia yake*" comprises a list of several behavioral aspects related to noncognitive competencies. Based on this card with behavioral indicators, the student was graded a B in moyo wa kujituma (self-motivation), an A in utii na heshima (obedience and respect), B in ushirikiano na wenzake (cooperation with peers), B in usafi (cleanliness), B in kujali mali ya umma (care for public property) and B in michezo (participation in games). These behavioral domains are characteristic of attributes associated with NCS.

However, despite these behavioral signs, the card indicated no explicit behaviors linked to the grading system were present to illustrate how grades were derived. For example, the student was awarded A for obedience and respect, B for other attributes of behavior but the report card does not mention any specific observable behaviors associated with grade A and grade B which could delineate what each grade really means except based on teachers' subjective assessment against rather undefined attributes as a basis. This practice raises an important question of how teachers got those grades while they acknowledged not recording any of the noncognitive skills.

This inconsistency points to a deeper systematic challenge of lacking a clear guideline of assessing noncognitive skills. This was acknowledged by the TIE officer who claimed that:

*"TIE has no guidelines" that guide students in assessing, whereas NECTA has them. However, TIE has provided instructions on how assessments should be conducted, for example, summative assessment or formative assessment" (TIE Officer, Interview, November 07, 2025).*

However, the NECTA officer provided a contradictory statement regarding the presence of the guideline

*“There is no clear that NECTA provides assessment guideline examination format techniques of assessment tools” (NECTA Officer, Interview, Dec 19, 2025).*

The overall findings on the use of report card deviate from the study by Merchant et al. (2018) who evidenced the systematic use of standardized tools in British Columbia and Manitoba. The provinces provide teachers with standardized tools with clear description and reporting format that can help teachers in assessing noncognitive skills and ensure consistency. This calls for the development of clear national assessment frameworks, standardized reporting guidelines, and continuous teacher training to strengthen the reliability and consistency of NCS assessment in primary schools.

# 5. Conclusion and Recommendations of the Study

Noncognitive skills are reemerging as a critical issue in the discourse surrounding education policy. This paper provides a reflection on the teachers’ practices on assessing and reporting these potential skills. Non-cognitive skills, such as cooperation, teamwork, and motivation, are strongly agreed upon by 68.85% (n = 179) of teachers for assessment and have the potential to affect student performance. The results indicated that, although teachers have exhibited knowledge and preparedness to assess these skills, their assessment techniques are informal and uneven. This is due to the lack of standardized tools that can be utilized in all schools. Both, the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that cooperation and teamwork are the most often assessed skills. This is because the skills are readily incorporated into teachers' regular teaching activities and are more visible than others.

The study therefore provides insights that can better position curriculum developers, teacher education programs, and policymakers to incorporate NCS into the assessment framework. The results may also provide guidance on creating standardized tools and training programs that would enhance the ability of teachers to measure NCS in the context of a classroom.

According to findings of the study, it can be suggested that the government should, via the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, consider providing a standardized assessment guidelines for teachers to use in assessing noncognitive skills to achieve consistency. In the same way as NECTA does when assessing the cognitive domain through summative assessment, so it should also involve noncognitive skills.

Likewise, the report card should reflect real assessment processes. Therefore, it is recommended that whatever appears on the report card can be traced through actual documents and processes. Criteria or evidence accumulations supporting grades such as an A, B and C are necessary. This can be done by providing training to teachers on how to practically assess noncognitive skills through various methods. Area for further study is recommended on examining the validity and reliability of report cards grades in noncognitive skills assessment.

# Declarations

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**Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there were no conflicting interests. This study was conducted without any commercial or financial affiliations that may be seen as a conflict of interest.

**Data Availability Statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

**Competing Interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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# Figures

# TAARIFA YA MAENDELEO YA MWANAFUNZI

DARASA VI MUHULA WA I MWAKA 2024.

| SOMO | ALAMA ALIZOPATA | DARAJA | MAONI |
|---|---|---|---|
| HISABATI | 56 | C | |
| KISWAHILI | 64 | B | |
| KIINGEREZA | 70 | B | |
| DINI | 56 | C | Pongeze |
| MAARIFA YA JAMII | 76 | B | Kwa bidii |
| SAYANSI | 52 | C | |
| URAIA NA MAADILI | 61 | C | |

Jumla ya Alama 435 kati ya Alama 700.

Nafasi yake Darasani 20 kati ya wanafunzi 39.

*Futa isiyohusika :* **AMESHINDA / AMESHINDWA**

Ana wastani wa 62 kati ya 100 Daraja B

Shule imefungwa Tarehe 28/03/2024 itafunguliwa Tarehe 08/04/2024

**TABIA YAKE:-**

1. Moyo wa kujituma B
2. Utii na heshima A
3. Ushirikiano na wenzake B
4. Usafi B
5. Kujali mali ya Umma B
6. Michezo B

**Figure 1**

*Example of a School Report Card with Noncognitive Skills*

***Source:*** *Researcher's Field Data (2025)*