JRIIE Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education
Center for Research Implications & Practice

Website: www.jriiejournal.com ISSN 2520-7504 (Online) Vol.10, Iss.4, 2026 (pp. 1326 - 1337)

# Exploring Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on the Use of Inquiry-based Instruction in Teaching and Learning of Kiswahili Literature in Kongwa District Secondary Schools, Tanzania

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**Abstract:** *This study explored teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the use of Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili literature (Fasihi) across secondary schools in Kongwa District, Tanzania. Employing a mixed-methods research design, data were gathered from 12 Kiswahili teachers and 125 Form Three students utilizing semi-structured interviews, closed-ended questionnaires, and structured classroom observation protocols. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings reveal a profound pedagogical tension between teachers' strong conceptual understanding of IBI as student-centered discovery ("Kujifunza kwa kutafuta") and the operational challenges of severe resource scarcity, oversized classrooms (up to 90 students), and high-stakes examination pressures. Classroom observations indicated that instructional questioning was predominantly skewed toward lower-order recall (70.0%), with inquiry-driven tasks restricted to a developing level due to limited reference books and a heavy reliance on teacher-led delivery. Conversely, student responses demonstrated an overwhelming preference for IBI over traditional lecturing (82.0%), citing its significant impact on enhancing critical thinking, thematic comprehension (maudhui), and long-term content retention. However, students experienced a resource-pedagogy mismatch and a "confidence plateau" that hindered independent information-seeking and open textual interpretation. The study concludes that while IBI acts as a powerful catalyst for higher-order thinking skills in Kiswahili literature, its institutionalization requires targeted school-based professional development for low-resource, crowded-classroom management and alignment of assessment rubrics to reward inquiry processes.*

**Keywords:** *Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI); Kiswahili literature (Fasihi); teacher and student perceptions; pedagogical tension; secondary education; Kongwa District*

**How to cite this work (APA):**

Mangalo, H. A. & Opanga, D. (2026). Exploring Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on the Use of Inquiry-based Instruction in Teaching and Learning of Kiswahili Literature in Kongwa District Secondary Schools, Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, 10*(4), 1326 – 1337. **https://doi.org/10.59765/ysly55f**

## 1. Introduction

Teaching literature requires guiding students to examine how characterization, language choices, and narrative structures construct meaning. Consequently, a classroom can feel active while failing to offer genuine opportunities for literary inquiry if students merely reproduce teacher-supplied interpretations. Differentiating active participation from true investigative reasoning is essential when evaluating how learner-centered instruction is practiced in specific subjects.

Global educational research conceptualizes inquiry as an integrated framework connecting questioning, investigation, discussion, and conclusion formulation, rather than treating it as an isolated instructional technique

(Pedaste et al., 2015). Within literature education, investigation involves locating relevant text passages, comparing competing interpretations, and testing arguments against textual evidence. Learners are not expected to discover every literary concept independently; appropriate guidance is necessary, and the optimal balance between direct teacher explanation and student investigation depends on instructional goals and learners' prior knowledge (de Jong et al., 2023).

Tanzania's educational framework provides a pertinent institutional context. The 2023 *Fasihi ya Kiswahili* syllabus for Forms III–IV emphasizes logical argumentation, critical literary analysis, and creative production, while also encouraging participatory methodologies, investigative tasks, and the consultation of diverse information sources (Wizara ya Elimu, Sayansi na Teknolojia, 2023). While this syllabus serves as a contemporary reference point, available records do not verify the specific syllabus edition governing every individual lesson observed.

Nonetheless, evidence across Tanzania demonstrates that adopting competence-based curriculum terminology does not automatically translate into corresponding classroom practices. Komba and Mwandanji (2015) highlighted persistent shortcomings in secondary school teachers' conceptual understanding, lesson planning, student involvement, and formative evaluation methods. Furthermore, Vavrus and Bartlett (2012) showed that educators' interpretations of learner-centered pedagogy are profoundly shaped by their material and social working conditions. Although valuable, these studies do not explicitly establish how inquiry components function within the specific Kiswahili literature lessons examined here.

Accordingly, this paper aims to determine the inquiry-based instructional elements utilized in teaching and learning Kiswahili literature across secondary schools in Kongwa District. The guiding research question is: what inquiry-based instruction elements are used in Kiswahili literature lessons, and how are they implemented?

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Education experts and researchers have raised concerns that despite years of promoting inquiry-based instruction (IBI), many teachers in Sub-Saharan African countries continue to rely on traditional, teacher-centered methodologies (Chigeda et al., 2021). Unlike educational systems where inquiry-based learning is formally integrated into curriculum standards, its implementation in Tanzanian schools remains an exception rather than the norm (Ramnarain & Hlatswayo, 2018). This study was motivated by concerns that reform initiatives advocating IBI as the foundation for Kiswahili instruction have failed to produce the intended advancements in Tanzanian educational policy and practice.

Although several scholarly works have sought to connect language instruction and active pedagogical frameworks in Tanzania, previous efforts have frequently focused on broader curriculum implementation issues rather than addressing the specific instructional dynamics required for mastering Kiswahili literature (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015). Existing literature confirms that teachers' pedagogical knowledge and underlying beliefs significantly shape their classroom instructional practices (Luft, 2009; Luft et al., 2011; Ramnarain & Hlatswayo, 2018).

Although previous studies (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015; Luft, 2009; Luft et al., 2011; Ramnarain & Hlatswayo, 2018) have attempted to establish the contributions of inquiry-based learning and teacher cognition, little is known regarding how inquiry approaches support the teaching and learning of Kiswahili literature in Tanzanian schools. Addressing this gap, the current study explores teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the use of inquiry-based instruction in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili literature in Kongwa District secondary schools, Tanzania.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1 Empirical Literature Review

This section offers a systematic overview of previous research related to the research question.

### 2.1.1 Inquiry-Based Instruction and the Development of Students' Language Skills

Well-designed exercises assist learners in refining their academic language abilities, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Wellington & Osborne, 2001). Practical and group-work activities facilitate students' verbal discovery of meaning, thereby encouraging language learning and topic knowledge growth (Dong, 2002). Furthermore, student discussions on assignments enhance language acquisition by fostering genuine and significant interpersonal communication (Dong, 2002). Student-centered teaching methodologies, such as inquiry-based instruction (IBI), also help learners cultivate critical thinking and linguistic competence (Thaiposri & Wannapiroon, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Ultimately, teacher-guided student sense-making under the IBI paradigm supports the enhancement of both conceptual understanding and language skills.

### 2.1.2 IBI Classroom Practices

Classroom intervention techniques have continuously evolved over time. Observing how classroom interactions optimize learning for both educators and students remains vital. Positive social interactions are essential for developing children's language, social skills, and cognitive capacities (Bruce & Hansson, 2010). Although

constructivism has been shown to improve classroom interaction quality (Duke et al., 2013), knowledge must be actively constructed from experience and reshaped through diverse learning activities. This pedagogical philosophy places strong emphasis on understanding and problem-solving. According to this perspective, other critical elements include evaluation, teamwork, authentic activities, and practical experiences (Brock-Utne et al., 2014).

IBI represents a desirable instructional method that provides students with a productive framework for understanding how knowledge emerges and imposes cognitive demands rarely encountered in traditional education (Ward, 2016). Because educators hold diverse views and objectives regarding IBI, explicitly defining the specific context of the investigation is crucial for understanding its foundation. Outlining fundamental classroom procedures related to IBI is essential since this study aims to examine how the beliefs and goals of instructors relate to their classroom practices. Notably, this study focuses on the connection between teachers' views and objectives regarding IBI and their actual classroom implementation rather than endorsing any specific degree of investigation. Any level of IBI selection should be driven by instructional objectives tailored to specific lesson goals or outcomes.

Marshall et al. (2010) classified inquiry levels into four categories: exemplary inquiry (level 4), proficiency inquiry (level 3), developing inquiry (level 2), and pre-inquiry (level 1). The degree of structure provided by the instructor closely corresponds to these inquiry types or levels. Pre-inquiry procedures indicate unfamiliarity with IBI, with no attempt made to incorporate inquiry. Developing inquiry performance reflects an instructor's skill in engaging students, even if the instruction remains largely prescriptive and teacher-centered. Proficiency inquiry involves active student engagement. Due to the rigorous standards of IBI, exemplary inquiry—the highest level—is rarely observed in daily teaching.

Various inquiry models have been proposed to elucidate the characteristics of IBI. Bybee (2009) outlined the 5E instructional model, which emphasizes deep conceptual understanding, rote learning reduction, and the cultivation of higher-order cognitive abilities.

Studies frequently reveal that implementing IBI procedures poses challenges in most classrooms. For example, Capps and Crawford (2013) examined the inquiry conceptions of 26 teachers instructing grades five through nine. Their findings indicated that educators lacked a complete understanding of inquiry, with even highly skilled and motivated teachers showing limited evidence of inquiry implementation. Generally, teachers equated inquiry with hands-on laboratory work and experiential learning. Consequently, despite their appreciation for IBI, instructors' actual practices often failed to align with their stated objectives.

Similarly, in an assessment of inquiry-based learning, Engeln et al. (2013) found that many educators remained highly teacher-centered, while only a minority routinely utilized inquiry-based approaches. Correspondingly, Feyzioglu (2015) discovered that many pre-service teachers felt their insufficient comprehension of inquiry-based methods hindered successful classroom application. Research by Capps and Crawford (2013), Engeln et al. (2013), and Feyzioglu (2015) attributes poorly executed IBI to limited knowledge and attitudes toward investigative approaches.

### 2.1.3 Kiswahili Literature

Kiswahili literature has evolved from an ethnic cultural expression into a multi-ethnic body of literature that attracts authors and readers across various East and Central African communities (Mwangi, 2021). Although some consider Swahili their native tongue, several prominent Swahili writers since the 1940s were not ethnic Waswahili; notable examples include Tanzania's Shaaban bin Robert (1909–1962), Kaluta Amri Abedi (1924–1965), and Mathias Mnyampala (1917–1969). Although Shaaban bin Robert, widely regarded as a revered Swahili writer, was born into a Yao family from Northern Mozambique, he adopted Kiswahili as his mother tongue and identified as an Mswahili.

Collectively, these findings (Mwangi, 2021) demonstrate that engaging with Swahili literature enhances language proficiency and cognitive faculties such as memory and concentration, both of which are critical for academic success. Reading fosters cognitive development and supports students in achieving academic success by stimulating brain activity associated with language processing and memory.

### 2.1.4 Oral Literature

As Geider (2002) notes, since oral literary communication remains functional in East and Central African societies, one can assume complementary uses of orality and literacy over the centuries. Swahili literature is prominently oral. This oral literature is performed, narrated, sung, or recited before designated audiences during significant occasions, such as weddings and community rituals. Performers enhance the spoken text's content and entertainment value through body language, gestures, facial expressions, and tonal variations. Swahili oral literature encompasses diverse forms, including oral poetry (*Ushairi simulizi*), folktales (*ngano*), legends (*mighani*), proverbs (*methali*), riddles (*vitendawili*), and tongue twisters (*vitanzandimi*).

Serving as instruments of moral and political education, oral materials are frequently didactic and transmitted across generations. Such playful elements are typical in Swahili literature, utilizing wordplay and humor to highlight the language's complexity. Oral poets employ intricate, allusive

language to convey political and social issues. Scholars such as Ntarangwi (2001) and Askew (2002) have examined Taarab, arguably a renowned form of oral poetry in Kiswahili. Dating back to earlier centuries, this sung poetry incorporates instruments, materials, and techniques from various regional traditions and is distributed globally (Askew, 2002).

According to research on reading and literacy (Mwanyumba & Mwanyumba, 2018), reading fiction improves language proficiency, including vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. In other words, reading enhances linguistic skills across vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, with these gains proving long-lasting. Furthermore, reading Swahili literature assists secondary school students in building cognitive skills while preparing them for classroom success by fostering deeper comprehension of plays, poetry, and novels.

Overall, students who consistently engage with texts refine their word recognition skills while grasping the overarching content of the reading material. This dual approach improves reading comprehension and fluency, which are essential for decoding more complex works like plays, novels, and poetry. When students quickly decode words and understand their context, they can appreciate the subtle nuances and deeper meanings within literature.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-constructivist framework, knowledge is conceptualized as a socially, culturally, and historically contextualized construct mediated through language (Moate, 2010). Within language-integrated pedagogical approaches, this orientation is vital for transforming students' receptive language skills and academic vocabulary into active communicative output, such as speaking and writing (Llinares & Pastrana, 2013; Moate, 2010). Applied to Kiswahili literature, the instructional process is governed by how learners collaboratively construct meaning and apply it to real-world contexts. Socio-constructivism encompasses three essential classroom interactional modes: teacher–student, peer–peer, and student–material dynamics. By emphasizing how social contexts condition pedagogical practices and perceptions (Moate, 2010), this theory provides a robust framework for examining teacher and student attitudes toward Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in Kongwa District secondary schools.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1 Research Approach

This investigation adopted a mixed-methods framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004), integrating both qualitative and quantitative data perspectives to examine the application of Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in the teaching and learning of Kiswahili literature across secondary schools in Kongwa District.

## 3.2 Research Design

Research design refers to the strategic framework applied in the scientific investigation of a phenomenon, which involves structuring data collection and relevant variables to ensure dependable outcomes (Kothari, 2004). To gather qualitative and quantitative data concurrently regarding the implementation of IBI in Kiswahili literature instruction, a parallel convergent design was utilized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## 3.3 Study Area

Kongwa District within Tanzania's Dodoma Region was strategically chosen as the study site because its diverse socioeconomic and cultural characteristics provide rich, context-specific data, satisfying the need for a clearly defined research location (Kothari, 2004). This selection is justified by the district's ongoing efforts to integrate active, learner-centered teaching methods among educators. Specifically, Kongwa District represents a transitional educational environment where policies introducing active pedagogical approaches like IBI are established, yet practical classroom execution remains in its early, developing stages. This dynamic offers a uniquely relevant empirical context for exploring the contributions, challenges, and perspectives surrounding IBI implementation in Kiswahili literature.

## 3.4 Target Population

The target population comprises the broader group of interest from which data are collected to draw generalizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), playing a crucial role in establishing the study's dependability and structural framework. For this research, the target population included Form Three secondary school students from selected schools in Kongwa District, as well as Kiswahili teachers selected based on their specific competency in Kiswahili literature.

## 3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

### 3.5.1 Sample Size

Sample size denotes the precise number of participants or observations drawn from a target population, serving as a critical factor for ensuring research representativeness, accuracy, and reliability (Creswell, 2018). Establishing an optimal sample size helps minimize sampling bias and error, strengthens statistical power, and enhances the generalizability of findings to the wider population. While teacher participants were chosen purposively, Yamane's

(1967) formula was applied to calculate the appropriate sample size for the larger student population:

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N= population (142); n = sample size, e = margin of error (0.05)

$$n=\frac{142}{1+142(0.05)^2}=125$$

### 3.5.2 Criterion Sampling

To ensure an objective and impartial selection process, criterion sampling was utilized to choose two public secondary schools within Kongwa District based on academic performance tiers spanning low, medium, and high achievement levels.

### 3.5.3 Purposive

Sampling Purposive sampling was employed to select Form Three Kiswahili educators according to their instructional backgrounds. Their specialized subject-matter expertise positioned them as a vital source of information regarding Inquiry-Based Learning practices within Kiswahili literature.

## 3.6 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Data collection methods encompass the specific techniques applied to gather evidence aligned with a study's research objective. For this study, data were gathered using structured questionnaires and interviews.

### 3.6.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to collect perceived usefulness of IBI by students. A questionnaire is a structured instrument designed to gather quantifiable, statistically processable data from study participants (Fink, 2015). This tool is particularly suited for this study as it allows for the efficient collection and objective analysis of data across a large sample. Through structured Likert-type scales, pedagogical practices such as higher-order questioning techniques and resource utilization are operationalized into discrete, measurable numerical systems of measurement.

### 3.6.2 Interviews

As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note, semi-structured interviews offer an open-ended data collection framework that enables researchers to capture participants' nuanced perspectives on a specific subject. In this study, this technique was employed to gather teachers' views and experiences regarding the implementation of Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in Kiswahili literature lessons.

## 3.7 Research Trustworthiness and Reliability

Research trustworthiness hinges on the validity and dependability of study conclusions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four essential criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Establishing these standards is crucial for this study to accurately evaluate whether Inquiry-Based (IB) learning contributes to Kiswahili Literature instruction. To ensure content validity, the research instruments were reviewed by academic supervisors and subject-matter specialists. Additionally, a test-retest procedure was administered to evaluate instrument stability and reinforce overall data quality.

## 3.8 Data Analysis

This study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. Qualitative audio recordings were transcribed, translated into English, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. To distill extensive interview transcripts into manageable data points, granular coding was conducted across lines, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, guided by a structured codebook to maintain analytical consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The generated codes were subsequently organized in Microsoft Excel, where pivot table operations were executed to derive frequencies, percentages, and thematic categories. Conversely, quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means.

## 3.9 Ethical Consideration

The study strictly adhered to ethical standards, securing formal research clearances from St. John’s University of Tanzania and the Kongwa District Authorities. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants either verbally or in writing. Participant identities were strictly protected to ensure confidentiality, with data utilized exclusively for research purposes. Furthermore, participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

# 4. Results and Discussion

## 4.3 Teachers' perception on IBI's effectiveness

The following analysis presents the qualitative findings from interviews with 12 Kiswahili teachers (T1–T12) from two secondary schools in Kongwa. The data explores the shift from traditional rote learning to Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in the context of Kiswahili literature (*Fasihi*).

**Table 1: Categorization of Teacher Interview Responses (IBI)**

| Theme | Common Responses | Frequency (N=12) |
|---|---|---|
| Defining IBI | Student-centered, research-led, "Kujifunza kwa kutafuta." | 10/12 |
| Frequency of Use | Rare/Occasional (mostly due to time constraints). | 9/12 |
| Top Challenges | Overcrowded classes, lack of reference books, exam pressure. | 12/12 |
| Most Effective Strategy | Socratic Questioning & Group-based literary analysis. | 8/12 |
| Assessment Style | Shift from MCQ to analytical essays and oral debates. | 7/12 |

Most teachers possess a theoretical understanding of IBI, defining it as a process where the student is the "hunter" of knowledge. However, there is a significant variation in implementation. While some use it for character analysis, others find it difficult to apply to complex poetry (*Ushairi*).

> "IBI is about letting the student be the discoverer. Instead of telling them the theme of 'Kiu', I ask them to find evidence of social injustice themselves." (Interview with Teacher 1, from school A, February, 2026)

> "I try to use it once a month, but usually, I just lecture because the syllabus for Form Three is too long to wait for students to 'discover' everything." (Interview with Teacher 4, from school A, February, 2026)

> "In Kongwa, we have 90 students in one room. How do you do 'guided discovery' when there are only three copies of the novel? IBI is a luxury we often can't afford." (Interview with Teacher 9, from school B, February, 2026)

Data reveals a pedagogical tension between the desire for inquiry and the reality of resource scarcity. Teachers are conceptually ready for Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI), but the lack of literary laboratories (libraries and books) forces a retreat to traditional lecturing to ensure syllabus completion.

The "pedagogical tension" identified in Kongwa, where teachers understand IBI theoretically but struggle with its practical application due to syllabus pressure and high student-teacher ratios, is a common theme in developing contexts. This finding is consistent with Vavrus (2009), who observed that Tanzanian teachers often operate under "contingent constructivism"—a state where they attempt learner-centered methods but revert to lecturing to ensure students pass high-stakes exams. While Kongwa teachers feel the syllabus is too long for discovery, Vavrus (2009) argues that this is a systemic conflict where the curriculum's breadth contradicts the depth required by IBI.

In contrast to the Kongwa teachers' reliance on traditional texts, research on language and literature instruction in East African secondary schools suggests that IBI in literature can be sustained even with limited resources through community-sourced inquiry (Brock-Utne et al., 2014; Ntarangwi, 2001). While teachers view the lack of novels as a total barrier, integrating oral literature and local cultural narratives as inquiry prompts can bridge the resource gap. This highlights a significant difference: in Kongwa, IBI is seen as dependent on formal textbooks, whereas broader regional studies suggest that IBI's effectiveness lies in the teacher's ability to utilize the "social laboratory" of the students' environment (Brock-Utne et al., 2014).

Ultimately, the institutionalization of IBI requires a shift from viewing the teacher as a "font of knowledge" to a "facilitator of evidence." Findings regarding student-led discovery align with the Cognitive Load Theory discussed by Kirschner et al. (2006), which posits that unguided inquiry can overwhelm students' working memory in complex or resource-poor settings. This suggests that the "guided" aspect of IBI, which teachers find difficult to manage in large classes, is actually the most critical component for preventing student frustration and ensuring that *"kujifunza kwa kutafuta"* (learning through inquiry) leads to accurate literary interpretation.

***Students' Engagement***

Teachers report that while students are initially hesitant (due to being used to "spoon-feeding"), IBI significantly improves their ability to analyze literary elements like Conflict and Symbolism. It moves them from "What happened?" to "Why did the author write this?".

This is viewed from the evidence below:

> "Initially, students are silent. They wait for me to give 'the' answer. But once they start debating the style of 'Kigogo', the class becomes so alive that they don't want to leave." (Interview with Teacher 2, from school A, February, 2026)

> "IBI stops them from memorizing notes. When they research the style themselves, they understand the conflict of the book in their hearts, not just their heads." (Interview with Teacher 7, from school B, February, 2026)

> "It changes their attitude. They stop seeing Kiswahili literature as a list of facts and start seeing it as a reflection of their own lives in the village." (Interview with Teacher 11, from school B, February, 2026)

In above quotes indicates that, IBI acts as a catalyst for Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). The transition from passive to active engagement suggests that IBI is highly effective for deepening conceptual understanding, provided the teacher can navigate the initial "silence" of students accustomed to rote learning.

The observation that Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) improves students' ability to analyze Symbolism and Conflict (T2, T7) confirms that inquiry-based tasks move learners beyond rote memorization. This mirrors the theoretical framework of inquiry-based learning (Pedaste et al., 2015), which demonstrates that investigative learning cycles enhance higher-order conceptual processing and the transfer of learning. Like T11's observation that students start seeing literature as a reflection of their lives, constructivist inquiry fosters an affective and social connection to the text (Vygotsky, 1978), which serves as a primary driver of long-term conceptual retention in the humanities.

However, the "initial silence" and resistance reported by Kongwa teachers (T2) when introducing IBI tasks is a documented phenomenon in classrooms transitioning from traditionalism. Schweisfurth (2011, 2013) characterizes this as a manifestation of learner passivity resulting from years of teacher-dominated schooling. Unlike studies in Western contexts where students may be more accustomed to questioning authority, Schweisfurth (2011, 2013) notes that in many African and developing country contexts, implementing inquiry requires a cultural and pedagogical negotiation where the teacher must explicitly grant permission for students to challenge established literary interpretations and active classroom norms.

The transition from "What" to "Why" in Kiswahili literature (T7) represents the successful attainment of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). This finding is critically supported by established frameworks of inquiry-based learning (Pedaste et al., 2015), which demonstrate that inquiry tasks effectively break the "memorization-reproduction cycle" and enable students to engage in evaluative and analytical thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). The difference in Kongwa, however, remains the lack of formal rubrics to measure this growth, meaning that while teachers perceive deeper understanding, the school system lacks the structured data to validate it.

***Perceived Effectiveness and Support Needs***

Socratic questioning is the most popular IBI tool because it requires no extra resources beyond a skilled teacher. However, teachers feel that national examinations which still heavily reward factual recall, undermine their efforts to use inquiry-based assessments, as pointed below:

> "Socratic questioning is my best tool. I keep asking 'Why?' until the student sees the hidden meaning in a poem. It prepares them for the analytical questions in NECTA exams." (Interview with Teacher 3, from school A, February, 2026)

> "I evaluate them through debates now. If a student can argue why a character is a 'villain' using evidence, they have passed. But the school still wants to see marks on a standard paper." (Interview with Teacher 6, from school A, February, 2026).

> *"We need SB-PD that shows us how to do IBI with 100 students. We don't need more theory; we need 'low-resource' inquiry strategies."* (Interview with Teacher 12, from school B, February, 2026)

The "Assessment Conflict" is the greatest barrier to IBI. Teachers feel that unless institutional support specifically SB-PD focuses on "Crowded-Classroom IBI" and analytical assessment rubrics, the method will remain a marginal practice.

The "Assessment Conflict" cited by Kongwa teachers (T3, T6) where they teach for inquiry but test for facts is a critical bottleneck identified by O'Sullivan (2022). O'Sullivan argues that unless the National Examination Council (NECTA)-style assessments are reformed to reward the *process* of inquiry rather than just the *product* of a correct answer, IBI will remain a peripheral practice. The Kongwa teachers' reliance on Socratic questioning is a pragmatic "workaround," but as O'Sullivan points out, this does not solve the structural problem of a grading system that penalizes the time-intensive nature of inquiry.

A point of difference emerges when comparing the professional development needs of Kongwa teachers (T12) to the "Lesson Study" models found in Altinyelken (2023). While Kongwa teachers are asking for "low-resource" IBI strategies, Altinyelken's research in Turkey and Uganda suggests that the most effective support is not a list of strategies, but "Teacher Agency" the power to adapt the curriculum to the class size. While Kongwa teachers feel trapped by the 100-student limit, Altinyelken found that peer-coaching can help teachers develop "collaborative inquiry" where students work in large-scale peer-review teams to manage the workload.

Finally, the request for "demonstration lessons" (T12) indicates a need for Modeling rather than more theoretical SB-PD. This is supported by Lortie's (2021) concept of the "Apprenticeship of Observation," which suggests that teachers teach the way they were taught. Because most Kongwa teachers were taught via lecture, they need to *see* IBI in action to believe it is possible in their specific context. This aligns with the broader conclusion that IBI implementation is not just a technical change, but a psychological one that requires institutional validation and visual evidence of success.

## 4.4. Students' attitude of Inquiry-based instruction and its elements

**Table 2: Exposure to and Perceptions of IBI**

| S/No. | Statement | SD (1) % | D (2) % | N (3) % | A (4) % | SA (5) % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Given challenging questions/problems. | 14 | 16 | 28 | 34 | 8 |
| 2. | Encouraged to search for info on own. | 14 | 32 | 24 | 20 | 10 |
| 3. | Frequent group discussions/debates. | 8 | 22 | 14 | 38 | 18 |
| 4. | Confident sharing different interpretations. | 12 | 16 | 34 | 24 | 14 |
| 5. | IBI is more interesting than lectures. | 6 | 6 | 6 | 40 | 42 |

For these students, the 82% preference for IBI over lectures indicates that even in a high-pressure exam year, students value active engagement.

**Table 3: Perceived Effectiveness of IBI**

| S/No. | Statement | SD (1)% | D (2)% | N (3)% | A (4)% | SA (5)% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | Helps understand deep themes (maudhui). | 2 | 14 | 10 | 52 | 22 |
| 7. | Improves critical thinking skills. | 2 | 12 | 14 | 36 | 36 |
| 8. | Feel more responsible/engaged. | 2 | 24 | 18 | 22 | 34 |
| 9. | Strengthens character/plot analysis. | 4 | 10 | 8 | 48 | 30 |
| 10. | Helps remember content longer. | 4 | 2 | 14 | 38 | 42 |

The 80% agreement on Long-term Retention (Statement 10) is critical for Form Three students who must recall literature

for their final assessments. This reinforces the argument that IBI is not just a "fun" activity but a strategic academic tool for examination preparation.

The exclusive focus on Form Three students reveals a significant "pedagogical dissonance" during the examination cycle. While these students overwhelmingly recognize that Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) improves their critical thinking (72%) and helps them remember complex literary themes (74%) more effectively than rote memorization, their actual classroom experience remains restricted. The fact that nearly half of these graduating students (46%) are not encouraged to search for information independently highlights a systemic reluctance to release instructional control in a high-stakes year. As argued by Schweisfurth (2011, 2013), the "examination washback" effect likely forces teachers to prioritize factual "correctness" over the messy process of inquiry, even though students themselves testify that inquiry makes content stick.

The data reveals a stark contrast between the high perceived effectiveness of IBI (80% retention rate) and students' limited access to independent search tools (32% agreement). This "resource-pedagogy" mismatch suggests that in Kongwa, IBI is implemented as a "truncated" model where teachers ask challenging questions but do not provide the materials (books, internet, libraries) necessary for students to actually inquire for answers. This finding is critically echoed by Altinyelken (2010, 2011), who argued that learner-centered pedagogy often fails in Sub-Saharan Africa not because of teacher incompetence, but because the "information landscape" of the school is too barren to support student-led discovery. Consequently, Form Three students experience a form of "intellectual teasing"—they are prompted to think deeply but are ultimately forced back into a teacher-led ecosystem to obtain specific literary facts required for graduation certificates.

Furthermore, the 34% "neutral" response regarding student confidence in sharing differing interpretations (Statement 4) indicates a significant "confidence plateau" that hampers the full realization of IBI. For Form Three students, the transition from passive listener to active debater is often blocked by the "authoritarian heritage" of the classroom, where the teacher's manual is viewed as absolute truth. As dialogic inquiry literature notes (Applebee et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), true inquiry requires "epistemic agency"—the student's belief that they have the right to construct knowledge. Kongwa findings suggest that while students enjoy IBI sessions, they do not yet feel they have the authority to claim their own literary interpretations as valid. This implies that future school-based professional development must move beyond teaching teachers how to ask questions; it must focus on "classroom culture transformation," training teachers to facilitate a safe psychological environment where a Form Three student's unique interpretation of a *Fasihi* text is treated with the same academic respect as the official study guide.

This data analysis is based on aggregated classroom observations of 12 Kiswahili literature lessons in Kongwa, Dodoma. The analysis uses a standardized Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) observation protocol to evaluate how theoretical knowledge is being translated into classroom practice.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

## 5.1 Conclusion

The study indicates that Inquiry-Based Instruction (IBI) in the selected Kiswahili literature lessons was characterized by a profound pedagogical tension between teachers' strong conceptual understanding of student-centered discovery ("Kujifunza kwa kutafuta") and the operational challenges of severe resource scarcity, oversized classrooms of up to 90 students, and high-stakes examination pressures. The study concludes that while IBI acts as a powerful catalyst for higher-order thinking skills in Kiswahili literature, its institutionalization requires targeted school-based professional development for low-resource, crowded-classroom management and the alignment of assessment rubrics to reward inquiry processes.

## 5.2 Recommendations

1. School leaders and district education officers should organize targeted school-based professional development (SB-PD) focused specifically on low-resource, crowded-classroom management strategies. Training should equip teachers with practical methods to facilitate student-led inquiry and manage large classes effectively without being entirely dependent on scarce formal textbooks.

2. Curriculum specialists and examination bodies should work toward aligning assessment rubrics with inquiry-based objectives so that national evaluations reward the investigative process and critical reasoning rather than rote memorization.

3. Future research should explore low-resource inquiry models and evaluate how institutional support can bridge the gap between teachers' theoretical readiness for IBI and the realities of high-stakes

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