

Challenges Facing Teachers in Implementing Competence-Based Curriculum in Tanzania: The Case of Community Secondary Schools in Morogoro Municipality

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Abstract

This paper investigated the challenges facing teachers in implementing competence based curriculum in secondary schools in Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach which utilized a case study research design. The sample of the study included 102 teachers who were randomly selected, six heads of schools and six academic masters/mistresses who were purposefully selected from six public secondary schools found in Morogoro Municipality. Questionnaires and interview were used to collect the required information. The collected data were analysed using content analysis. The findings established that teachers faced a variety of challenges which impeded the effective implementation of competence based curriculum in teaching and learning. In the light of these findings it was recommended that teachers should be given opportunities for their participation in formulation and/or review of curriculum. Also the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training should devise ways of providing quality and relevant teaching and learning resources that are consistent with the competence based curriculum.

Keywords: Challenges, implementing, competence-based curriculum, community, secondary schools, Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

1. Introduction

It has been acknowledged by different scholars that, the Competence based curriculum approach is instrumental in helping students to increase the mastery of skills, knowledge and developing of self confidence in problem solving. Therefore it is seen as an approach which improves students' academic achievement (Harris, Guthrie, Hobart and Lundberg, 1995; Weddel, 2006). Considering that, the government through Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) revised the secondary school curricular into the competence based curriculum. This aimed at equipping school graduates with sufficient knowledge and life skills for them to survive academically and socially in the modern world (Kitta & Tilya, 2010). Whereas CBC represents a positive step in raising education standards, challenges in Tanzania has to do with effective implementation since the adoption. The necessary improvements in education quality especially student's achievement require effective implementation of CBC. However, Kimaryo (2011) argues that the implementation of competence based curriculum in schools had been complex since its introduction because teachers still focused on developing content with the hope that the learners would develop the intended competences automatically. Tilya and Mafumiko (2010) contend that some teachers were not implementing the new curriculum because there is lack of clarity among potential implementers as even some curriculum developers and book writers have yet to grasp the meaning of CBC and of the student-centred approach. For effective CBC implementation to occur, there should be teachers' orientation and training, appropriate teaching and learning resources and adequate classrooms.

Despite the fact that the competence based curriculum has been implemented for eleven years in Tanzania it appears that challenges related to CBC implementation have not been studied adequately. This is made evident by the scarcity of local scholarly literature on the subject.

Studies which have been conducted focus more on how the competence based curriculum has been implemented in different subjects in secondary schools (see for example Domician, 2008; Shemwelekwa, 2008; Nara, 2011; Timothy, 2011; Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015). In this regard, it was necessary to conduct a study on the challenges which teachers face in implementing the competence based curriculum in community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality.

Specifically, this study sought to attain the following objectives: to explore the challenges which teachers face in implementing the competence based curriculum in community secondary schools; to establish teacher's suggestions on how to overcome those challenges.

2. Literature review

Competence is a set of skills, knowledge and behaviours someone needs to have achieved in order to perform tasks or activities at school and in the world of work (Sullivan, 2005 cited in Mosha, 2012). Kouwenhoven, (2003) defines competence as the capability to choose and apply an integrated combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes with the intention to realize a task in a certain context. In this study, competence is defined as the ability of students to do a particular activity or task to a prescribed standard emphasising what they can do rather than what they know. In this regard, Competence-based curriculum is a kind of education that seeks to develop in learners the ability to learn and perform activities to a prescribed standard. A curriculum that is competence-based therefore, contains specific outcome statements that show the competencies to be attained (Mosha, 2012)

Competence-based curriculum is not a new concept in education systems of the world. The demand for greater accountability in education towards community involvement in decision-making gave great impetus to the concept (Brundrett, 2000). The Competence-Based Education (CBE) as CBC is widely known elsewhere movement originated from teacher education curricula in the United States in the 1970s (Schilling & Koetting, 2010; Mulder, 2004; Fletcher, 2000). This CBE movement arose out of the need to have a curriculum that resulting directly from the problems, issues and characteristics of the changing society (Kliebard, 2004). In the 1960s CBE was labelled as performance-based teacher education, which was characterised by its detailed analysis of behavioural aspects of professional tasks (Olesen, 1979 in Wesselink, Lans, Mulder & Biemans, 2003). The need for improved efficiency and increased production in the industries also led to a thinking about best ways to fulfil a task (Goodman, Henderson & Stenzel, 2006; Kouwenhoven, 2003). Mulder (2004) asserts that competence-based education became primarily associated with behaviourism, mastery learning and modular teaching. Generally, the competence-based education movement grew out of dissatisfaction with programmes in the post-secondary education because many colleges and universities offered programmes that had no clear objectives with respect to what the students were actually being trained to do or be (Mulder, 2004).

Likewise, in Tanzania CBC was adopted in secondary education since 2005. The adoption of CBC in secondary education was preceded by a rapid survey carried out by the Institute of Education (TIE) in 2004 to review the secondary education curriculum. This survey found that the traditional curriculum did not specify competencies required to be attained by students by the end of the course of study, which resulted into change from content-based curriculum to a competence-based curriculum (URT, 2004).

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative study which employed a case study research design. The research design was useful as the study sought to explore a single unit to represent the entire population of a certain region (Gall et al., 1996 cited in Komba & Mwandaji, 2015). Case study design also facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter, & Jack, 2008). The sample for the study comprised 102 class teachers who were randomly selected from 6 community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality, 6 heads of school and 6 academic masters/mistresses who were purposively selected by their virtue of their positions. The researcher acknowledges that no single method is self-sufficient or adequate in itself in collecting valid and reliable data (Creswell, 2005). Thus, in this study two methods were used as a means of offsetting the weaknesses or biases which can be found in one method. Therefore this study employed questionnaires and interview. Questionnaires were directly administered with teachers while heads of secondary schools and academic masters/mistresses were interviewed.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Challenges Teachers Face in implementing CBC in Teaching and Learning

Through interviews and questionnaires, the heads of secondary school, academic masters/mistresses, and teachers were asked to indicate challenges which teachers face in implementing CBC in teaching and learning process. The findings underscore several different challenges:

4.1.1. Lack of In-service Training to Teachers on CBC

The responses compiled from teachers' questionnaire and interviews from heads of secondary school and academic masters/mistresses confirmed that lack of in-service training for teachers after the introduction of competence-based curriculum was one of the major challenges which affected the successful implementation of competence-based curriculum. Responding, 28 teachers (27.45%) indicated that lack of in-service training limited the teachers' pedagogical knowledge to apply competence-based approaches during the teaching and learning process. Although teachers were eager to implement CBC, the biggest challenge they faced was lack of knowledge and understanding about competence-based curriculum. As one of the heads of school interviewed explained:

Teachers are eager to implement CBC, but the big challenge which the majority of teachers face is lack of knowledge...most of them do not understand clearly the competence-based approaches because they did not get any training. I am sure if teachers get orientation on CBC they would successfully implement it with confidence (Head of School, E)

An academic mistress of one of the participating schools had similar views and observed that lack of in-service training affected the implementation of competence-based curriculum in the teaching and learning process:

[...] teachers have not received any in-service training or seminar to keep them up-to-date with the new curriculum. This is the biggest challenge which almost all the teachers in this school face. That is why CBC has not been effectively implemented in most of the secondary schools in Tanzania (Academic mistress, School A).

The statements of the interviewees show that lack of in-service training for teachers hindered the effective implementation of competence-based curriculum in secondary schools. As a result, the teachers faced a dilemma when it came to implementing CBC because they lacked current knowledge and skills to deal with students' complex learning problems which, unfortunately, affect the quality of education in the country as well.

4.1.2 Insufficient Teaching and Learning Resources

Insufficient teaching and learning resources were indicated by respondents as one of the challenges the teachers face in implementing competence-based curriculum with variations from one school to another. In numerical terms, 19 teachers (18.63%) mentioned the unavailability of appropriate teaching and learning materials which could help students actively participate in the teaching and learning process. For example, the number of textbooks and reference books available at some schools was not satisfactory. In fact, the book-student ratio in most of the schools surveyed ranged from 1:7, 1:10, 1:12 or even higher. When interviewed one of academic masters had this to say:

The textbooks are not enough to satisfy the increased number of students. In our school, book-student ratio ranges from 1:7 to 1:10. But in other schools the situation is even worse so you can imagine how challenging the situation can be (Academic Master, School E).

Also, the teachers indicated that the available textbooks and reference books did not reflect the current syllabus. Moreover, the textbook content lacked clarity on how to teach students as per CBC requirements. Some of the heads of secondary school surveyed commented that some reference books were of low quality because they encouraged memorisation and cramming than understanding of the materials:

Most of the books produced by private writers are of low quality and some of them are in forms of question and answers. Unfortunately, students prefer reading books with questions and answers which make them learn by memorising and cramming. This limits their ability to learn through discovery and problem-solving. (Head of School B)

Teachers also reported the absence of laboratories and libraries in some schools as factors hindering effective learning through practical and experiments. During an interview, one academic mistress had this to say:

There is no laboratory where we can conduct practical and experiments especially for science subjects. Students just cram theories and principles...how can a student be able to understand deeply most of science concepts? Academic Mistress, School).

Those schools which happened to have laboratories, however, lacked laboratory equipments or apparatus:

Our laboratory lacks enough apparatus for practical. For example, we have only 15 apparatus for 70-80 students per class. Each student is supposed to have her own apparatus if the practical or experiments are to be done effectively but due to the shortage, 6-7 students share one apparatus. (Head of School G).

This reality prevailing in the schools underscore the need to improve the environment for practical examinations in secondary schools for the students to excel in the actual practical examinations. In other words, there is a need to provide both laboratory equipments and chemicals. Laboratory-based teaching helps students to develop scientific, practical skills, problem-solving ability, inquisitive minds and learning through investigation. The absence of laboratories in secondary schools, therefore, deprives them opportunities for becoming scientists and engineers in the future.

4.1.3 CBC and Overcrowded Classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms were reported by research participants as a challenge which hindered the implementation of CBC. In numerical terms, 22 teachers (21.57%) reported that numbers of students in their classrooms were too big for the available limited capacity of classrooms. During classroom observation, the researcher also noted that teacher-student ratio in all the schools surveyed ranged from 1:80-90 and in two schools it was 1:100 but the capacity for these classes was for only forty-five students (45). In such situations it was difficult for teachers to apply effectively competence-based approaches in the teaching and learning process. Also, the researcher noted that the teachers were overloaded as only one teacher was required to teach all the five streams of the class. After being observed in class, the teacher had this to say:

Classrooms are overcrowded in such a way that you cannot move around even if you want to help students with learning difficulties. It is very hard to implement learner-centred approaches in a situation like this...Imagine I am teaching a class of 90 students and I have 5 streams. How possible do you think I can use learner-centred approaches? Will I be able to finish the syllabus? (Teacher, school C).

Arguing in similar views, one head of secondary school said the following during interview:

Actually, our classes here were designed to accommodate 45 students only. As you can see students are congested in classrooms exceeding the number prescribed by the Ministry of Education. In the real sense, it is like we have two schools in one. Under these circumstances, I cannot blame teachers if they use teacher-centred approaches although the new curriculum suggests otherwise.(Head of School B).

From the findings, it can be concluded that overcrowded classrooms tend to affect classroom teacher-students and students-students interactions during group discussions. For example, teachers failed to attend to individual students with learning difficulties. Overcrowded classes also increased the work load of teachers. Consequently, the teachers failed to use learner-centred interactive teaching methods as the CBC demands.

4.1.4 Low Ability of Students joining Secondary Education.

Questionnaire and interview responses revealed that students joining secondary education with low ability posed a challenge to teachers in implementing CBC. Responding, 12 teachers (11.76%) indicated that students selected to join secondary schools had a low academic ability in such a way that it made difficult to use learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning. These findings were also confirmed through interviews held with the heads of secondary school and academic masters/mistresses who confirmed that many of the students did, indeed, have a low ability. They pointed out that some of them could hardly read and write properly. During an interview session, one academic mistress said:

Low quality of students is a big challenge to us. The majority of the students who are selected to join secondary schools, especially community-based secondary schools like ours do not qualify...they have low academic ability so it becomes difficult to assist them especially, when you rely on learner-centred approaches. For example, the cut-off point of the majority of the students in this school is 70 out 250. So you can imagine how difficult it is to deal with them (Academic Mistress, School E).

One head of school also provided a similar view:

I don't know what is wrong with our government...they don't take education seriously. We receive students with very low ability to the extent that some of them do not even know how to read and write properly. Last year, we gave Form Ones a simple test. To our surprise, some students hardly knew how to write their names properly. Now tell me how a teacher can use CBC approaches to assist such students to understand concepts? (Head School G).

Under such circumstances, it is difficult to implement CBC in the teaching and learning process, particularly when the majority of the students have a low academic ability. For example, what does a teacher do with students who can hardly write even their names at secondary school level?. Such students tend to depend entirely on their teachers to provide knowledge, which is contrary to the spirit of competence based curriculum.

4.1.5 Students' Readiness to Accept Learner-centred Approach

Through questionnaires and interviews the respondents reported the readiness of students to accept learner-centred approaches during teaching and learning as one of the factors hindering effective CBC implementation. In numerical terms, eight teachers (7.99%) indicated that students were not ready to accept the learner-centred approach. After classroom observation, one teacher from School A was asked why she relied on the lecture method, she explained: "if you use learner-centred approaches, students think that you are not being fair to them as they like to be spoon-fed everything". Similarly, during an interview, one of the academic masters said:

Students do not like it when teachers use participatory methods. They think that you are not teaching them as they deserve. They like what we call spoon-feeding. I think the problem starts from primary school where students are taught everything without giving them an opportunity to construct their own knowledge. Even the examination questions given to Standard VII students show clearly how they have not been oriented to CBC. Can we expect miracle in secondary schools? (Academic Master School).

The implication is that students' lack of readiness to accept learner-centred approaches depends on their orientation from the primary school level. Because students were not prepared for competence-based teaching and learning from primary school it became difficult for them to make adjustments when they joined secondary schools. These findings confirm that CBC needs to be introduced to the pupils from primary school so that when they joined secondary education they were ready for such teaching and learning approaches.

4.2 Suggestions on Overcoming CBC Challenges

Through interviews and questionnaires, heads of school, academic masters/mistresses and teachers were asked to suggest or recommend what needs to be done to overcome the challenges that teachers presently face in implementing CBC. The findings have been presented under the subsections.

4.2.1 Provision of in-service training to teachers

Responding, 43 teachers (42.15%) indicated that teachers should be re-oriented towards CBC through workshops and seminars. According to the responding teachers, lack of in-service training on CBC was a big hindrance to the successful implementation of CBC. Indeed, before any implementation of the new curriculum, the government should make sure that they train all teachers to equip them with knowledge and skills:

I recommend that whenever they introduce a new curriculum, they should provide seminars and workshops for all teachers or even to few of them so as to ensure successful implementation.(Head of School A).

Another respondent had this to say:

In-service training is a right to any employee, whether there are changes in the curriculum or not. With the current curriculum, the government should reconsider providing frequent training to teachers through seminars or workshops for the sake of updating their knowledge for better CBC practice.(Head of School G).

The implication of these statements is that it is the responsibility of the government to provide in-service training to teachers not only when there are changes in the curriculum but also in-service training to employees is important because it help them develop professionally.

4.2.2 Provision of Teaching and Learning Resources

Through questionnaires and interviews, the heads of school, academic masters/mistresses, teachers and students suggested that the government should ensure that adequate teaching and learning resources were allocated and supplied to all public secondary schools. Responding, 16 teachers (15.69%) mentioned that the provision of quality education depends on the availability of quality teaching and learning materials. According to teacher respondents, it is the responsibility of the government to supply enough teaching and learning resources at all levels of the public school system. During interviews, the heads of schools also recommended that the government should increase the capitation grant to boost the financial capacity of the schools. They indicated that the current capitation grant provided do not fulfil the requirements of schools, particularly in purchasing teaching and learning resources, was severely inadequate:

The government should increase the capitation grant for secondary schools. The amount which we receive is too small to run a school like this... They do not consider the increase in the number of students. It is my appeal to the government to reconsider supply of teaching and learning materials if they really want to improve quality of secondary education (Head of School G).

It is evident that, the amount of capitation grant the government extends to public schools determines the availability of teaching and learning resources. So far this capitation grant remains too limited to help boost the provision of quality education under the CBC.

4.2.3 Involvement of Teachers in Decision-making in Curriculum Change

In the questionnaire, administered with the teachers and interviews held with heads of schools, academic masters/mistresses, the respondents recommended that teachers should be involved in decisions regarding curriculum change due to the role they play as curriculum implementers. Responding, nine teachers (8.82%) underscored the importance of involving teachers in curriculum change initiatives to make them feel part of the curriculum development process, and not mere implementers. During interview one of the heads of school explained:

We are just implementers of the curriculum in which we did not take part. They make decisions on their own and bring to us to implement of which we understand nothing. Worse still, they do not bother to educate us on how we are supposed to implement it. It is better to involve teachers in any curriculum change because changes start from classroom teachers (Head of School E).

Involving the teachers would make them feel comfortable with the competence-based curriculum they were being asked to implement in classroom. By implication, curriculum developers need to make sure that key education stakeholders such as teachers participate fully in the curriculum change process for them to understand what they are supposed to implement. Indeed, the involvement of teachers in curriculum development is important because it makes teachers feel part of the curriculum development process; it helps them to own the process.

4.2.4 Textbooks and Reference Books Should Reflect CBC

Responding to the question on relevance of textbooks and reference books, eight teachers (7.84%) recommended that textbooks and reference books should reflect the current curriculum (CBC). They complained that some textbooks and reference books were too old and were designed for the content-based curriculum not the CBC. The teacher respondents implored the government not only to focus on introducing the CBC but also produce relevant textbooks and reference books which match with the new curriculum. Also, during an interview, one academic master, said: “there is no way you can change the curriculum without preparing relevant textbooks that reflect that curriculum.” One head of school also recommended during an interview that the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should make sure that they properly supervise the whole process of identifying textbooks that reflect CBC and disapprove the inclusion of low quality books that are not suitable for the CBC:

TIE needs to make sure that they only approve books which are relevant to the current CBC. I recommend the use of single textbook which portray the required competencies and the ones which match with the current syllabus requirements rather than having many textbooks which confuse students and teachers. Some books do not help our students to learn but encourage them to cram (Head of school A).

Such an environment would help students acquire competencies and skills, particularly when single text-book that communicate competence-based curriculum ethos are emphasised.

4.2.5 Selection of Qualified Secondary School Students

Responses from interviews and questionnaire suggested that the cut-off points for students selected to join secondary education should be high enough to ensure that only qualified students' progress to secondary schools. Responding, 10 teachers (9.80%) recommended that high performers in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) should be the ones selected to join secondary schools as the majority of teachers complained about the quality of those joining particularly community-based secondary schools. Many of these students ended up being a burden on the teachers to assist them in learning. Some teachers believed that CBC requires students with high academic ability for them to construct knowledge with minimal guidance from the teachers. During interview session, one of the heads of school said:

I think with the current curriculum, the government should reconsider raising the cut-off points for students to make sure that only the cream of the students are selected to join secondary schools. This will help the implementation of learner-centred approach because CBC can only work with students with high ability, who can construct knowledge and learn at their own pace. But with the kind of students we are receiving these days mhh...it might be impossible (Head of School E).

The findings suggest that only academically competent students should progress to secondary schools, for them to benefit meaningfully from competence-based curriculum in the teaching and learning process.

4.2.6 Students should be Oriented towards CBC

Interviews held with, heads of secondary school, academic masters/mistresses and questionnaire administered with teachers revealed that it was imperative for students to be oriented towards competence-based curriculum from the primary school level. Such early exposure to CBC can help them to get used to the learner-centred approaches early so that they would not have to struggle in secondary schools. During interview one academic master said:

In my opinion, CBC should start from the primary level so that students can readily accept and get used to the learner-centred approach. Things would be different if students had been oriented to CBC since primary. They wouldn't then experience difficulties and confusion at the secondary school level (Academic Master, School F).

Indeed, preparing pupils for the CBC from the primary level would help boost CBC prospects in the country. Presently, most of their primary school examinations require them to mention without explaining. Such orientation is not amenable for the CBC.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that teachers face a variety of challenges which impede on the successful implementation of CBC during the teaching and learning process. In the light of these challenges, it is likely that the implementation of competence based curriculum was bound to fail deliver the desired outcome. Since teachers are the major implementers of the CBC, the findings have shown that there is a need to provide more opportunities for their participation during formulation and/ or review of the curriculum. Doing so may allow teachers to play their roles effectively in curriculum development, eventually implementation. Also the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) should devise ways of providing quality and relevant teaching and learning resources that are consistent with competence based curriculum. The Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should make sure that all the relevant competence based curriculum materials, such as syllabus, teachers' guide and text books are developed as well as disseminated to all secondary schools at the right time.

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