

Implementation of competence-based teaching and learning in pre-primary schools in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigated about the implementation of competence-based curriculum in pre-primary schools in Tanzania. Specifically, the study examined Pre-primary school teachers' understanding of competence-based instructional strategies, Instructional strategies used in the teaching and learning in pre-primary schools, pre-primary school teachers' ability to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies. A sample of 45 pre-primary school teachers participated in the study. The data were collected using interviews, observation schedules, and documentary reviews which were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers were aware of competence-based teaching and learning strategies recommended in CBC because they managed to mention or define some attributes that are embedded in it. In addition, most of the pre-primary school teachers used some competence-based teaching and learning strategies. Lastly, findings revealed that pre-primary school teachers had limited abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies. Most of them relied on the use of only some strategies such as demonstration and question-and-answer methods. Based on these findings it is recommended that Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should conduct regular training on competence-based teaching and learning to enable teachers understand what CBC entails and how it can be effectively implemented. Also, it is recommended that, the Ministries of Education, Science, and Technology in collaboration with President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government should enhance Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructures in all teacher training colleges to enable both tutors and student-teachers learn about CBC through ICT tools. It is further recommended that teacher training universities should adopt competence-based teaching and learning styles during the preparations of teachers who will then work in schools and colleges as teachers and tutors.

Keywords: curriculum, competence-based curriculum, content-based curriculum, competence-based teaching and learning, pre-primary education

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1. Introduction

Scholars have conceived differently the idea of Competence Based Teaching and Learning (CBTL). For example, Mosha (2012) notes that competence-based teaching and learning is an approach that seeks to develop in the learners the ability to know, to learn and learn how to learn, to do things and to learn to work with other people. In the same light, Komba and Mwandaji (2015) view competence-based teaching and learning as a set of instruction, assessment, grading and academic reporting which enable learners to acquire skills and competences required in real life situations. Thus, there may be many ways of defining CBTL according to different contexts, however, in whichever the case, the ultimate goal of CBTL is to enable learners to function effectively and efficiently in a given society.

For CBTL to be implemented effectively, there should be a Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC). This is a form of curriculum with contents meant to enable learners to acquire practical skills and competences needed in real life settings. Generally, a curriculum can either be content or competent based. A content-based curriculum focuses on the rote memorization of subject matter while competence-based curriculum focuses on understanding concepts and mastering skills and competences (Posner, 1995). Many countries, including Tanzania, have changed their curricula from content based to competence-based teaching and learning approaches to meet the demands of globalization of labour market and the 21st century skills (UNESCO, 2015). The paradigm shifts from content based to competence based requires changes in pedagogical instructions from using content based to learner-centered teaching and learning approaches. Competence-based teaching and learning require teachers' attention to the learners' needs and interests, providing time needed for learners to acquire and demonstrate the expected competencies. It is an approach that seeks to develop in the learners the ability to know, to learn and to do things and to learn to work with other people (Mosha, 2012). As far as teaching approaches are concerned, competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the use of learner-centered, participatory and collaborative teaching methods. These approaches provide learners with an opportunity to actively engage in learning experiences and construct meaningful knowledge. However, various studies had revealed that learners who complete studies at different levels of education did not exhibit the intended competences despite the adoption of competence-based curriculum and competence-based teaching and learning strategies. Considering that preprimary education is the foundation of all other levels of education, the author was interested to establish pre-primary school teachers' abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning approaches during teaching and learning process.

1.1 History of competence-based teaching and learning

The history of competence-based curriculum can be traced back to the early 1970s when it emerged for the first time in the United States of America following public arguments on the quality of education provided to learners (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). One of the responses taken by the US government towards the raised issues was to change traditional curriculum by adopting competence-based teaching and learning (Richard & Rogers, 2001). Thereafter, the world experienced a paradigm shift from traditional content based to competency-based curriculum which also meant the adoption of CBTL (Gardner, 2017). For example, United Kingdom adopted Competence Based Teaching and Learning in the 1980s (Wolf, 2001). Germany and Australia adopted the same during the early 1990s. In German and Australia, Competence-Based Teaching and Learning was used in the vocational training to enable learners perform effectively at their work places (Marzano, 2010). Other countries across the world were also motivated to implement competence-based teaching and learning due to the global market demand and technological changes. In Africa, competence-based teaching and learning was adopted for

the first time in South Africa, in 1998, following the critical shortage of professional workers in industries like engineers, technicians and artisans. The adoption of CBC was meant to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to cope with the challenging issues of the 21st century like economic development, employment for the youth, environmental protection and technological changes (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015).

Like other countries, Tanzania adopted a competency-based curriculum in 2005 to replace the traditional content-based curriculum. In competence-based teaching and learning, learners were expected to develop competences necessary for solving problems in real-life settings (URT, 2005). In particular, teachers had to change approaches from teacher-centered to learner-centered which create a room for learners to be creative and active participants in the teaching and learning process (Bataineh & Tasnimi, 2014). The adoption of competence-based curriculum was gravitated by various factors, including graduates' poor work performance which was attributed to the use of ineffective traditional curriculum as most of the graduates failed to meet the demands of the local and international markets (Komba & Kira, 2013). Also, teachers and educators emphasized more on objectives of education rather than the outcomes of the learning (Woods, 2008) and learners were performing poorly in national examinations which was mainly because of teachers' limited knowledge of competence-based teaching and learning (HakiElimu, 2012). In addition, majority of teachers continued using traditional teaching and assessment approaches (Komba & Kumbi, 2008; Mgalla & Mbulanya, 2008). Thus, it would seem that the adoption of competence-based teaching and learning in Tanzania was necessitated by shortfalls of the traditional content-based curriculum which focused on objectives of subject matters rather than outcomes of learning.

1.2 Education reforms in Tanzania

In Tanzania many education reforms have taken place in the education system since independence. The review was basically meant to reflect demands of the paradigm shift from content-based to competence-based curriculum. For example, from 2000s Tanzania reviewed its education curricula at different levels of education. The purpose of the review was to improve the quality of education provided in the country in order to cope with the changing educational demands as well as equipping learners with necessary skills and knowledge relevant for coping with challenging issues of the 21st century (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015). Also, the review focused on enabling learners to develop the required skills and competences needed in the global labour market. The review call for paradigm shifts from the traditional content to competence-based curriculum. The paradigm shift was followed by the development of competence-based curriculum which in turn require the use of competence-based teaching and learning approaches in all levels of education (Kafyulilo et al., 2012).

Like other levels of education, in 2005 the pre-primary education curriculum was revised with the aim of shifting from the knowledge-based to competence-based curriculum. The reviewed pre-primary curriculum emphasized on changes in teaching and learning process from content-based teaching and learning strategies to competence-based teaching and learning strategies which focus on the acquisition of skills and knowledge for solving real life problems (World bank, 2011; Woods, 2008). The curriculum also stressed on teaching and learning process should focus on enabling children to develop and demonstrating knowledge and skills in solving real life problems. CBC emphasizes on the use of learner-centered teaching approaches which provide learners with an opportunity to active engaging learning experiences. Therefore, pre-primary school teachers are supposed to use learner-centered teaching and learning strategies for effective implementation of competence-based teaching and learning.

Despite the revision made on the pre-primary school curriculum, concerns from various stakeholders indicate that that the implementation of revised curriculum insists on mastery of subject contents instead of competences (TET, 2016). In view of this, in 2016, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), reviewed the pre-primary curriculum again to improve quality of education provided to pre-primary school children. The review was carried out along with organizing in-service training for teachers and it also implied changes in initial teacher training programmes (Wangeleja, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

However, studies conducted to assess the implementation of competence-based teaching and learning have confirmed that there is minimal use of this teaching approach as majority of teachers continue to use traditional teaching and learning methods (Ndayambaje, 2018; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Mosha, 2012; Tilya & Mafumiko, 2010). Considering that most of these studies had focused at post primary school level, there was a need to assess the situation at pre-primary school level which is the foundation of all other education levels. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to examine pre-primary school teachers' knowledge of competence-based teaching and learning strategies; teaching and learning strategies used in the teaching and learning process; and teachers' abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies during teaching and learning process.

2. Research methodology

The study adopted a descriptive case study research design as it permits a contemporary phenomenon to be studied within its context with a view of understanding its dynamics. The use of descriptive case study was motivated by the fact that it provides the researcher with an opportunity to collect data using multiple data collection methods such as interviews, observations and documentary reviews. The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam region. This region was purposively selected to represent other regions in Tanzania which have teachers and schools with more or less the same characteristics and participants were purposefully selected based on their potential to provide in-depth information regarding the research questions. The sample comprised 45 participants, including 15 heads of schools, 15 quality assurance officers, and 15 teachers who were selected from 15 pre-primary schools found in the region. The teachers were interviewed on their understanding of competence-based teaching and learning strategies and abilities to implement competence-based teaching and learning during teaching and learning process. In addition, a total of 15 classroom observations were conducted to examine whether pre-primary school teachers have abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies during teaching and learning process. The generated data were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 General knowledge about competency-based teaching and learning strategies

In the context of competence-based curriculum, the understanding of instructional strategies is a requisite for employing such strategies in actual classroom situations. In view of this, the researcher examined the teachers' understanding of teaching and learning strategies recommended in competence-based curriculum. To achieve this, teachers were asked to express their knowledge about competence-based teaching and learning strategies. The findings revealed that pre-primary school teachers had knowledge of competence-based teaching and learning strategies recommended in competence-based curriculum. For example, when the respondents were asked to explain their understanding about teaching and learning strategies as recommended in competence-based curriculum, one of the respondents had this to say:

Competence-based curriculum is about the use of teaching methods that provide the child with an opportunity to actively participate in the learning process by doing. As a teacher my responsibility is to guide or demonstrate how various activities can be performed. Children are required to actively get engaged in the learning process and construct knowledge at their own pace.

Another respondent stated that:

Competence-based curriculum insists on the use of participatory teaching approaches like songs and group discussion which allow involvement of learners in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, children should be involved in the learning process and not having teachers

dominating class sessions.

When these teachers' voices are examined, it could be deduced that teachers were aware of competence-based teaching and learning strategies recommended in competence-based curriculum as they managed to define or mention some attributes that are embedded in it. These findings are similar to those of Nzima (2016) who found that college tutors were knowledgeable about teaching and learning approaches used in competence-based teaching. A study by Paulo (2014) showed that although teachers were aware of the teaching methods established for the implementation of the competency-based curriculum, they did not adopt the assumed methods in their classroom practices. However, the findings differ from those of Komba and Mwandanji (2015) who found that many teachers (more than 80%) lacked knowledge of competence-based teaching and learning approaches and strategies.

3.2 Teaching strategies used in the teaching and learning process

In this aspect, the researcher sought to examine the teaching and learning strategies used in the teaching and learning process. Pre-primary school teachers were interviewed to find out whether the teaching and learning strategies used by teachers were competence based or not. The findings indicated that most of pre-primary school teachers used a few of the recommended competence-based teaching and learning strategies during teaching and learning process. For instance, when the respondents were asked to explain the teaching and learning strategies used during teaching and learning process in pre-primary schools, one of the respondents had this to say:

Teaching and learning approaches used in my teaching are participatory methods such as songs, group work, demonstration and questions and answers. The use of these methods encourages children participation in the learning process because they learn by doing

Another responded added that:

I usually use participatory methods like songs, demonstration and questions and answers. I use these methods because children get more time to communicate and interact among themselves and with learning materials

Looking at the above quotations, it is evident that most of the pre-primary school teachers used some competence-based teaching and learning strategies during their teaching. It was also revealed that many teachers understood competence-based curriculum as the one which focuses on the use of participatory and learner-centered methods which require involvement of learners in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, teachers were asked to point out teaching and learning strategies they used during their encounters with learners and the responses were as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Teachers' responses on teaching and learning strategies used

Teaching strategies	Number of teachers	Percentage
Demonstration	12	80
Question and answers	10	66.6
Songs	5	33.3
Group work	3	20
Plays and games	2	13.3
Role play	2	13.3
Storytelling	1	6.6
Project work	1	6.6
Pair work	1	6.6

Table 1 indicates that most of the pre-primary school teachers used demonstration, questions and answers and songs. Other teaching strategies such as group work, role play, pair work, plays and games, storytelling and

project work were mentioned to be occasionally used by a few teachers and others did not use them. Competence-based teaching and learning requires the use of a variety of teaching methods for effective classroom teaching and learning process. The findings that most of the teachers used only a few teaching and learning strategies imply that CBC implementation is ineffective. The findings concur with those of Lukindo (2016) who reported that teachers preferred questions and answers as their teaching technique. The use of some preferred teaching strategies is attributed to contextual factors such as class size, nature of learners, and availability of teaching and learning materials.

3.3 Teachers abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies

In examining teachers' abilities to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies, interviews and classroom observations were conducted. The interviews involved heads of schools and quality assurance officers. During the interviews, the researcher was interested to find out whether teachers were able to employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies during their lessons. In the first place, the respondents were asked to provide their views on the ability of teachers to use competence-based teaching and learning strategies. In responding to this question, one head teacher had this to say:

Honestly speaking, majority of pre-primary school teachers have limited abilities to use competence-based teaching and learning strategies. This is because during their initial training, they were not introduced to CBC and they have not been provided with in-service training on the use of competence-based teaching and learning strategies

In the same view, one of the quality assurance officers had this to say when she was interviewed:

To a large extent, the majority of pre-primary school teachers do not use competence-based teaching and learning strategies as required. In most cases, they use demonstration and questions and answers. If you find them teaching their classes, you will realize that most of them use content-based teaching and learning strategies

When these quotations are examined, it could be deduced that most pre-primary school teachers did not employ competence-based teaching and learning strategies recommended in CBC. This implies that CBC was ineffectively implemented in pre-primary schools.

In addition, classroom observations were also conducted to examine the actual classroom teaching and learning process. Classroom observations were made with a view of obtaining first-hand information on teaching and learning strategies used during teaching and learning situations. The findings revealed that teachers employed only question-and-answer and demonstration as teaching strategies which dominated their lessons. Other strategies such as plays and games and songs were occasionally used by the teachers. Specifically, teachers were found using teacher-centered strategies such as explaining concepts and ideas and giving instructions to children. It was also found that there was minimal teacher-learner interaction during teaching and learning process as emphasized in CBC. This implies that children had limited opportunities to construct knowledge or learn at their own pace as it is advocated in competence-based education. Based on these observations, it could be deduced that the implementation of CBC was not effective.

Moreover, a total of 15 pre-primary school classes were observed during actual teaching and learning situations. The researcher was interested to examine whether teachers used competence-based teaching and learning strategies or not as indicated in Table 2:

Table 2*Classroom teaching and learning observation findings (n=15)*

Teaching and learning strategies	Used	Not used	Partially used
The teacher uses sports and games during lessons	0 0%	12 80%	3 20%
The teacher employs demonstration by explaining concepts, facts, and ideas	13 86.7%	0 0%	2 13.3%
The teacher uses songs during teaching and learning	7 46.7%	3 20%	5 33.3%
Teacher uses role plays during teaching and learning	0 0%	15 100%	0 0%
The teacher uses questions and answers strategy during teaching and learning	12 80%	0 0%	3 20%
The teacher employs project as an instructional strategy	0 0%	15 100%	0 0%
The teacher creates conditions for learners to work in groups during lessons	2 13.3%	11 73.3%	2 13.3%
The teacher uses storytelling as a teaching strategy	3 20%	8 53.3%	4 26.7%
The teacher uses pair works as a teaching strategy	16 7%	12 80%	2 13.3%
The teacher uses observation as a teaching strategy	0 0%	15 100%	0 0%
The teacher uses gallery walks as a teaching strategy	0 0%	15 100%	0 0%

Table 2 indicates that in most of the observed classroom sessions, teacher's ability to implement competence-based teaching and learning strategies was limited since the teaching and learning process did not reflect attributes of competence-based teaching and learning. The general impression was that in most of the fifteen (15) observed sessions, the competence-based teaching and learning strategies were either partially used or not used at all.

Generally, findings from interviews and classroom observation have revealed that teachers were aware of competence-based teaching and learning strategies recommended in CBC, such as the use of learner-centered, participatory teaching, and collaborative style of teaching and learning. An interesting observation is that, although they were aware of competence-based teaching and learning strategies, the pre-primary school teachers could not use the strategies during teaching and learning. For example, most of the observed teachers (13 out of 15) used only three teaching and learning strategies namely demonstration, questions and answers, and songs. Other strategies such as role plays, simulation, storytelling, group work, games and plays and gallery work were not used despite their usefulness in promoting critical and reflective thinking, collaboration, oral and written communication, and independent learning (Andreasen, 2004). It was further revealed that even in the use of the few observed competence-based teaching and learning strategies, the pre-primary school teachers could not use them effectively. For example, in using demonstration and question and answers methods, teachers dominated the lessons by explaining concepts, ideas and providing instructions to the children. Also, questions asked to children were those for recalling learned information instead of open-ended questions which promote children higher order thinking skills. This implies that the use of a variety of teaching strategies as insisted in competence-based teaching was limited to most of the pre-primary school teachers. The inability of teachers to use a variety of competence-based teaching and learning strategies could be attributed to lack of training on appropriate teaching and learning strategies for competence-based teaching and learning.

The findings agree with those of Komba and Mwandanji (2015), Kafyulilo et al., (2012), Mosha (2012), and Tilya and Mafumiko (2010) who found that there was minimal use of competence-based teaching and learning strategies and, majority of teachers continued to use traditional knowledge-based teaching and learning methods. Also, Makunja (2015) who found that the majority of teachers did not get any training to orient them on competence-based teaching approaches. As a result, teachers' ability to apply competence-based teaching approaches was very limited. Studies by Paulo (2014), Esongo and Yessoufou (2017) revealed that teachers used

traditional methods during teaching and learning process. Similarly, Ondimu (2018) found that there is minimal use of competency-based teaching and learning approaches by the majority of the pre-primary schools in Nairobi City County. In addition, a study by Sudsomboon et al. (2007) indicated that teachers were not well oriented to the practices of competency-based teaching approaches and they manifested surface knowledge of what competence-based teaching and learning approaches entail.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is concluded that most of the pre-primary school teachers are unable to use competence-based teaching and learning strategies during class sessions. Even those who were found to use some strategies during class sessions, they did so occasionally and only a few strategies dominated their teaching. In view of this it is recommended that Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) should conduct regular training on CBC to enable teachers understand what CBC entails and how it can be effectively implemented. The training sessions could be organized through Teachers' Resource Centres (TRC) found in all Regions of Tanzania. It is also recommended that, the Ministries of Education, Science, and Technology in collaboration with President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government should enhance Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructures in all teacher training colleges to enable both tutors and student-teachers learn about CBC through ICT tools. It is further recommended that teacher training universities should adopt competence-based teaching and learning styles during the initial teacher training to enable the graduate teachers work in schools and colleges effectively.

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