

Reflecting on competence-based curriculum as a tool for improving pre-primary education in Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to investigate the implementation of competence-based curriculum as a means of improving pre-primary education in Tanzania. Specifically, the paper highlights the introduction of competence-based curriculum across the globe and its implementation in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania. The paper is based on literature review focusing on paradigm shift from traditional content-based to competence-based curriculum. In particular, the paper examines ideal practices in the implementation of competence-based curriculum and depicts the actual situation of the same in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania. Methodologically, the researchers read different publications on competence-based curriculum as a tool for improving pre-primary education and synthesized the reviewed information to developed thematic areas for this paper which include the concept of competence-based curriculum and its history and implementation of competence-based curriculum in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania. Empirical studies have revealed that the majority of pre-primary school teachers in Tanzania employ teacher-centered teaching and learning and assessment approaches. This is despite the fact that a competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the use of competence-based teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods. Based on these observations, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) should strengthen pre-service training for teachers, conduct regular in-service training for pre-primary school teachers, and provide supportive infrastructure and other resources for effective implementation of competence-based curriculum.

Keywords: competencies, competency-based curriculum, content-based curriculum, competence-based teaching and learning

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1. Introduction

Global market demand and the challenges of the 21st century have led many countries to adopt competence-based curriculum, shifting away from content-based curricula. The content-based teaching and learning is based on the rote memorization of factual knowledge while competence-based teaching and learning focuses on understanding of concepts, skills and competencies which in turn calls for changes in teaching, learning and assessment approaches (Posner, 1995). Competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the paradigm shift from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered approaches. Based on the competence-based curriculum objectives, one should think of mastery of competency, instead of content and more emphasis should be on the outcome while employing formative assessment instead of summative. Competence-based curriculum is an education system in which learners learn at their own pace and demonstrate mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary for their chosen field of study (Gruber, 2018). Furthermore, in competence-based curricula, learners are meant to construct their knowledge while actively involved in the learning process which results from learners' ownership of the learning process. The role of the teacher in the teaching and learning is to be a coach, facilitator, and guider of the learners. Competence-based curriculum focusses on the development of the entire individual competences different from the content-based curriculum and it is designed based on what students can do in performing tasks rather than what they know about the functions. According to Jallow (2011), when a learner demonstrates a mastery of competence, they are showing their ability to do something. Mosha (2012) pointed out that a competency-based curriculum contains specific outcomes of statements that show the competencies to be attained. As a result, many countries have carried out reforms in curricula in connection with the concepts of key competences and learning outcomes. This paper, therefore, analyses the paradigm shift from content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum as a way of providing quality education in Tanzania. Specifically, the paper dwells on the concept competence-based curriculum and its origin, implementation of competence-based curriculum in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania, and recommendations on the best ways to implement competence-based curriculum.

2. Methodological approach

Considering that this is a review paper, two stages were adopted during its writing. First, researchers read different publications, including books, book chapters, policy documents, and journal articles. These documents were reviewed in order to have a broader understanding of issues on competence-based curriculum as a tool for improving pre-primary education. The review focused on the origin of competence-based curriculum, the paradigm shift from content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum adopted by different countries across the globe, extent to which competence-based curriculum has changed teaching and learning practices in schools, and challenges of competence-based curriculum implementation in schools, including preprimary schools. Secondly, the authors synthesized the reviewed information and developed thematic areas for this paper which include the concept of competence-based curriculum and its history and implementation of competence-based curriculum in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania.

3. The concept of competence-based curriculum and its history

The change of global market demand has generated the need for the change in the whole educational system, and with it the need to review the pedagogical instruction and evaluative practices. The competence-based curriculum arose as a response to the global market demands which required education goals labor market demands. Thus, many countries, including Tanzania adopted competence-based curriculum to cope with the demands of the

21st century and global market demands. The adoption of competence-based curriculum was followed by educational reforms which called for paradigm shift from content based-curriculum to competence-based curriculum (Kouwenhoven, 2013). The change of paradigm from content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum necessitated changes in teaching and assessment strategies. This is based on the fact that the shift from knowledge-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum has changed the role of assessment to that of assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning. The change of assessment methods from traditional assessment to authentic assessment has resulted in shifting from focusing on the evaluation of the amount of knowledge learnt to focusing on the mastery of learned skills. Contemporary perceptions on assessment and principles for assessment has informed classroom practices in a way that a child is directly involved in the process and it is possible to monitor what they are learning and use feedback to improve their understandings (Earl, 2003).

Before the concept of competence-based curriculum is defined, it is worth understanding what the term competence entails. Competence has been defined from several viewpoints by various researchers. According to Sulvan, (2005) as cited in Mosha, (2012), competence is a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes an individual needs in order to perform tasks or activities at school and in the field of work. In the same light, Kouwenhoven (2003) contends that competency is the capability to apply an integrated combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to perform a task in a given context. Thus, it could be deduced that competence is the ability of a learner to integrate learned knowledge, skills and attitudes to perform a particular task to a prescribed standard in a real context.

With regard to competence-based curriculum, it is viewed as systems of pedagogical instruction, assessment, grading and academic reporting that are based on learners' demonstration of learned knowledge and skills they learned as they progress through their education lane. It is a functional approach to education as it emphasizes life skills and assessment of mastery of competence-based curriculum focuses on observable and measurable behaviours which can be demonstrated through a person's basic motivations, personality, attitude, values, or self-concept (Weddel, 2006; Thinktwice, 2007). Therefore, competence -based curriculum is an outcome-oriented education and is adaptive to the changing of the global market demands and society needs.

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 (Richard & Rogers, 2001). In the USA, competence-based curriculum was introduced due to public concerns about poor students' performance and poor quality of teacher training. The adoption of competence-based curriculum was meant to improve the effectiveness of schools, teachers, teacher educators, and serve to address society's concerns about unsatisfactory students' performance. Since then, competence-based curriculum spread to European countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany. In the United Kingdom, for instance, competence-based curriculum was adopted due to the economic depression caused by the widespread unemployment among the youth (Komba & Mwandanji, 2016). Since then, other countries have been motivated to implement the competence-based curriculum to meet the demands of the global labour market and challenging issues of the 21st century. In Africa, competence-based curriculum was adopted for the first time in South Africa in 1998, following the serious shortage of professionals like engineers, technicians, and artisans. The adoption was meant to equip learners with employable skills to cope with challenging issues of the 21st century. Like other countries in Africa, Tanzania introduced competence-based curriculum in 2005 which resulted in the development of competence -based learning and competence -based assessment in secondary education (World Bank, 2011). The review of the curricula was prompted by economic, political, and cultural changes as the traditional curriculum was ineffective to enable the learners acquire relevant skills and competences required to meet national and global market demands (Komba & Kira, 2013).

4. Implementation of competence-based curriculum in the context of pre-primary schools in Tanzania

In Tanzania competence-based curriculum implementation at pre-primary school level started in 2005. This came about following the curriculum review for the purpose of improving the quality, access, equity and capacity

building among the learners (MoEVT, 2007). The pre-primary education curriculum was revised with a view of shifting from the traditional content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum was reviewed for the purpose of enabling learners to develop the required competences relevant in different spheres of life (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015). The changes of the curricula from content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum were followed by the changes of teaching and learning approaches and assessment tools and procedures at all levels of education. In particular, teachers had to change approaches from teacher's autonomy to learner's autonomy which create a room for learners to be creative and active participants in the teaching and learning process (Bataineh & Tasnimi, 2014).

Moreover, the reviewed pre-primary curriculum stressed on enabling children to develop and demonstrate the acquired competences in a real-life context. However, despite the revision made, still pre-primary teachers continue to use traditional teaching strategies and assessment procedures (TET, 2016). In 2016, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), reviewed the pre-primary curriculum to improve quality of education provided to children. The implementation of competence-based curriculum in pre-primary school level, also involved changes in teaching strategies and assessment procedures (Woods, 2008). Furthermore, the revised curriculum insisted on the use of learner centered strategies which recognizes learners' ability, knowledge and interests to participate in the teaching and learning process (MoEVT, 2007 in Ndomondo 2022). The changes of the instructional and assessment approaches, calls for changes in the teacher training programme to equip both in-service and pre-service teachers with necessary competences for effective implementation of competence-based curriculum (Woods, 2008). Certainly, the effective implementation of competence-based curriculum depends on teacher's ability to carry out teaching and learning activities reliably and effectively. To implement these changes, it is necessary that all teachers become knowledgeable and equipped with new alternative approaches to teaching and assessment (Maclellan, 2004).

Ideally, Competence-based curriculum implementation is supposed to focus on developing practical skills among the learners. According to TET (2016), pre-primary school teachers are required to employ teaching methods that provide the child with an opportunity to actively participate in the learning process and teachers are responsible in guiding or demonstrating how various activities are performed. Furthermore, TET (2016) recommended methods to be used in teaching in pre-primary schools as demonstration, observation, project, role play, songs, plays, storytelling, poems, gallery walk, question- and- answer, brainstorming and discussion. With regard to the teaching and learning methods, competence-based curriculum emphasizes learner-centered approaches in which children practice learning with rich, realistic, and collaborative tasks (Zineb, Souma, Soud & Karim, 2017 as quoted in Ndomondo, 2022). Savich (2009) stresses that learners ought to be engaged in a variety of activities such as simulation, debates, role playing, project-based activities, group discussions and other types of open-ended problems which require critical or creative thinking. On the hand teachers should act as facilitators, motivators and promoters of learning through classroom interactions (MoEVT, 2007). Also, the teacher is supposed to design learning activities which motivate children to question, think critically and formulate new ideas (MoEVT, 2010). Therefore, learners should become responsible for their own learning through direct exploration and experiences. Furthermore, the teacher should facilitate children learning through stimulating children's previous knowledge because prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge they will construct from new learning experiences (Phillips, 1995). Therefore, in this case, a teacher is required to provide real-world examples, demonstrations and use of various media to stimulate children learning (Zineb, Souma, Soud & Karim, 2017).

With regard to assessment issues, the ideal method of assessing children is through authentic, naturalistic observations which are done on an ongoing basis. The observation should be done daily while children involved various activities, teaching and care routines to describe the development and learning of children (TIE, 2016). Therefore, the assessment is not a one-time event, because it is difficult to gather valid and reliable data on child development and learning progress through the use of other methods. Teachers are required to assess children frequently using authentic assessment methods which include portfolio, classroom observation while children engaged in activities, oral presentations and interview. authentic assessment methods are more useful for

competence-based curriculum than other forms of assessment. Also requires integrating assessment during teaching and learning practices instead of isolated assessment. As competence-based curriculum emphasizes the change of traditional assessment methods such as true and false, fill in blanks, matching items and multiple choices are less effective because they assess only students' knowledge of the subject (Boadu, 2015).

Sturgis and Casey (2018) stress that teachers are required to assess children on a daily basis using authentic and naturalistic observations assessment methods such as portfolios, classroom activities, field observations, projects, oral presentations, cumulative forms, checklists and interviews while children engaged in various activities. Authentic assessment provides meaningful feedback on children mastery of skills at the end of a given task. Competence-based teaching and learning encouraged teacher use authentic assessment methods such as portfolios, classroom activities, field observations, projects, oral presentations, self-assessment, interviews (Kitta & Tillya, 2010). Furthermore, authentic assessments enabled teachers to capture children's competencies and incremental developments in their skills (Baldwin et al., 2009). Glazzard and Colleagues (2010) agreed that assessing children based on observations in their environment through independent learning and adult directed learning is an effective assessment process for developing a comprehensive picture of the child's capabilities.

According to TIE (2016), types of assessment to be used in the assessment of a child development and learning include placement, diagnostic assessment, formative assessment and summative assessment. In addition, (TIE, 2016) identified assessment tools that can be used by pre-primary schools' teachers to assess child development and learning as portfolio, observation schedule, anecdotal notes, checklists, questionnaires, interview schedule, cumulative forms of assessment of children progress, clinic card and rating scales. On the other hand, Brown and Rolfe (2005) noted that assessment practice can be both formal and informal. Formal assessments typically include interviews with children and work sampling, and observation techniques such as running records, anecdotal records, checklists, rating scales and event and time sampling (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; NAEYC, 2009). on the other hand, informal assessment is non-standardized testing and the performance on these assessments is not compared with other children (Brown & Rolfe, 2005). Therefore, teachers are supposed to use these assessment tools to gather information about children's progress, learning and development (Mindes, 2003). Therefore, the assessment of child's learning and development needs to take place continually, in more than one activity or setting, in order to generate a more accurate picture of each child's abilities. Moreover, competence-based curriculum emphasizes integration of assessment in the teaching and learning process and makes it as a part and parcel of teaching than an end process. In order for effective competence-based assessment to take place, assessment tasks should be in line with specified learning objectives (Kitta & Tillya, 2010).

With regard to assessment feedback, feedback should provide information relating to child's learning progress and development. Saddler (1990) argue that feedback can fill the gaps through a number of ways like increased efforts, motivation or engagement. Therefore, feedback practice should provide useful information for teachers that can be used to improve subsequent activities as well as means of motivating learner and reduction of unwanted behaviors. Learner's feedback can be delivered in many ways, which include reviewing and writing comments on children's written work, oral feedback and talking with children is usually the best way because it allows conversation with children (Saddler,1990). However, a teacher with a big number of learners in class they are advised to use written feedback for comments that children can be able to save and look over, use of oral feedback for children who don't know to read well. In addition, Reed (1985) contend that a teacher can also use demonstration to help a child know how to do something or what something. Feedback can be in form of praise or criticism. Raimes (1983) argues that praising whatever a pupil does will motivate a child to participate more in learning activities hence develop a positive attitude towards participation in class and become receptive to suggestions and even seek advice on how to improve their participation in class. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive classroom environment which makes learners feel free and confident to participate in discussion and expressing their idea and feelings without fear. Competence-based curriculum emphasizes that feedback should be provided on time in order to have positive effects to learners because teacher feedback's timing is an important aspect in implementing competence-based curriculum.

In terms of learning environment and involvement of learners, competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the collaborative learning whereby learners construct their knowledge through active participation in the learning process. Competence-based curriculum also insists on the classroom context such as number of children, teaching and learning materials which influence the nature of interaction. Competence-based curriculum required learners be provided with learning experiences that give them opportunities to apply acquired skills and knowledge into a real-life context, this will be possible through involving involvement of children in the teaching and learning activities which enable them to gain hands-on experiences which have impact on learners understanding and mastery of the learned competences (Wangeleja, 2010). Further, competence-based curriculum emphasizes a learning environment which is flexible which allows free learner's movement and interaction themselves and with learning materials. Competence-based curriculum also emphasizes teacher to create learning environment which allows learners to work independently inside and outside the classroom to search and use materials on their own (Sturgis & Casey, 2018). In addition, competence-based curriculum emphasizes the learning environment which stimulates learners' active participation in learning and construction their knowledge and demonstrate the acquired skills in the real-world. As Houtz (1990) argues that learned skills such as creativity, and critical thinking require a democratic and open interaction environment where learners are free to experiment, initiate and cooperate with others. For effective participation in learning, the teacher should create environment that makes every child feel free to participate in learning activities and their contributions are audible. Also, a teacher should come up with activities that motivate learners' participation in learning like discussion-based activities, role playing and jig saws which encourage children to communicate and interact with one another, with learning materials and with the teacher (Hollander, 2002). In addition, teaching and learning environment becomes conducive when a classroom has an appropriate number of learners because there is great relationship between physical environment and children understanding of the learning activities. In overcrowded classroom learners develop more negative attitude and poor social relationship.

Regarding to teaching and learning resources, teaching and learning materials play several roles in teaching and learning process, one of them it simplifies teaching and learning process hence achievement of lesson objectives (Bušljeta, 2013). Teaching and learning resources are most important tools that simply teaching and learning process as well as child to easily understand learning activities as the child uses more than one sensory organ (TET, 2016). Competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the use of modern teaching and learning materials for teaching in pre-primary classes instead of depending on teachers' verbal presentation (Bušljeta, 2013). TIE (2016) describes some of the teaching and learning materials that can be used for teaching in pre-primary schools include puzzle, board game, playing cards, abacus, domino, snake play, draft, counters and toys, other materials. Other materials are flash cards, number cards, picture cards, wood pieces, video tapes, television, radio, telephone, and outdoor learning activities like sand, see-saws, slides, balls, tires and ropes. TIE (2016) insists also the availability of learning corners in pre-primary class with various learning aids which children can be used during class learning or at their own time. Among of the recommended corners are numeracy corner, science corner, home corner, art corner, shop corner, language corner Play corner and sand and water area which should be outside the classroom. As recommend by competence-based curriculum, the use of a variety of materials is necessary for effective teaching and learning in pre-primary classroom (De Sousa & van Eeden, 2009). Furthermore, it has been stated that pre-primary classrooms should be large, well-ventilated and equipped with relevant infrastructure to accommodate pre-primary children (MoEVT, 2010). Apart from that, pre-primary class should be big enough to accommodate 25 children with all facilities according to children age as well as the class should allow free movement (TIE 2016).

As pointed out above, competence-based curriculum implementation requires teachers use of competence-based teaching and learning approaches, specifically learner-centered approach, competence-based assessment strategies as well as providing feedback in order to improve teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, effective implementation of competence-based curriculum requires teachers use of teaching and learning materials, conducive learning environment and proper classroom management. Nevertheless, the actual situation on the ground is quite different from what is considered to be ideal.

In the first place, research findings indicate that although the paradigm shifted from content-based curriculum to competence-based curriculum majority of the teachers continue using traditional teacher content approaches. Studies by Esongo (2017), Paulo (2014), and Yessoufou (2014) found out that teachers are still using the lecture method instead of learner centered methods as emphasized in competence-based curriculum. Reasons for not using CBTL methods include overcrowded classes due to shortage of classrooms, shortage of teaching and learning materials, and untrained teachers. Moreover, a study by Ondimu (2018), revealed poor implementation of competence-based curriculum in schools due to the minimal use of competence-based curriculum teaching-learning approaches. In other studies, the findings have revealed that there is very minimal use of competence-based teaching and assessment approaches as the majority of teachers continued to use traditional knowledge-based teaching and learning methods (Komba & Mwandanji, 2015; Makunja, 2015; Kafyulilo et al, 2012; Moshia, 2012; Tilya & Mafumiko, 2010). In addition, a study by Nzima (2016), revealed that tutors' instructional practices contradicted their understanding of competence-based curriculum as they were more teacher-centered, theoretical, and authoritarian. The findings concur with the observations by authors of this paper in various pre-primary schools in Tanzania where most of the teachers were found to use teacher-centered instead of learner-centered approaches.

Moreover, teachers have been found to use traditional assessment strategies and procedures in assessing children learning progress and development. This is supported by various studies which indicated that majority of teachers still employed pen and paper methods for assessing learners. For example, studies by Hamis (2017), Komba and Mwandanji (2016), Masukira, (2014), and Makunja (2016) revealed that assessment practices have generally remained traditional as majority of secondary school teachers in Tanzania have continued to use tests and examinations contrary to using competence-based curriculum assessment strategies such as peer assessment, portfolios, and projects. As an experienced pre-primary school teacher, the authors have observed that many teachers use traditional assessment strategies and they do not integrate assessment with teaching and learning practices. The inability of teachers to use CB assessment strategies is attributed to, among others, lack of training during initial teacher training. It should be noted that while the pre-primary school curriculum is competence-based, the majority of teachers were prepared using content-based teaching approaches.

In addition, teaching and learning resources are inadequate. Despite the fact that literature shows the importance of using teaching and learning materials in teaching children, majority of pre-primary school teachers do not use appropriate teaching and learning materials. Findings from various studies have indicated that the implementation of the curriculum is challenged by inadequate teaching-learning resources such as charts, cards, and real objects. Other studies (Njoroge, 2013; Makunja, 2016) have revealed inadequate physical facilities affecting curriculum implementation. It has been found that some preprimary school teachers have overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult for them to implement individualized learning as emphasized in competence-based curriculum. Other facilities which have been revealed to be inadequate in various pre-primary schools include desks, mats, play facilities, and playground, which affect teaching and learning activities.

Ideally, pre-primary classes are required to have talking classrooms and learning corners, with a variety of teaching and learning materials. When such teaching and learning materials are unavailable, the teaching and learning becomes ineffective. Moreover, learning environment competence-based curriculum emphasizes that teachers ought to create a supportive classroom environment which allow the use of collaborative learning style whereby learners actively participate in learning and construct their knowledge. Nevertheless, various literatures indicate that the majority of pre-primary classrooms are not supportive for children learning. For example, a study by Komba and Mwandanji (2015) revealed that teacher-learner interaction was inadequate as teachers were dominating the sessions. In the same light, Marks (2000) revealed that learners' engagement, which is meant to enhance children' achievement and social and cognitive development, was very low. Similarly, Fakery (2010) and Gabriel (2010) had revealed that teachers did not use interactive teaching methods such as problem-solving and discovery that enabled learners to actively participate in learning process.

Lastly, the provision of feedback to assess children learning progress and development is important for improving the process of teaching and learning. However, studies have revealed that majority of teachers do not

provide on time feedback to learners in order to motivate learners to participate in learning. This is contrary to what has been emphasized by competence-based curriculum that feedback should be provided on time in order to have positive effects to learners because teacher feedback's timing is an important aspect in implementing competence-based curriculum.

5. Implications for teaching and learning

This paper has revealed that competence-based curriculum is crucial for the improvement of quality education which is a pre-requisite for producing competent labor force. This implies that all countries which have adopted competence-based curriculum need to make investments in terms of materials, infrastructure, human resource, and financial resources to enable a smooth implementation of competence-based curriculum. In the same light, teachers who are key stakeholders in the implementation of competence-based curriculum have to change their mind sets to accommodate new teaching and learning and assessment approaches and methods which are competent based. It also implies that authorities which have an oversight role on teachers' practices need to ensure that professional development programmes are designed and effectively implemented to enable teachers update their teaching and assessment skills.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The adoption of competence-based curriculum at pre-primary school level was intended to improve quality of education by enabling learners to acquire relevant knowledge and skills required to solve real-life problems. This would be achieved through the use of competence-based teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods and procedures. However, literature has indicated that despite the fact that competence-based curriculum emphasizes on the use of competence-based teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods, the majority of pre-primary school teachers employ teacher-centered approaches which focus on mastery of subject contents instead of demonstration of competences (TET, 2016). In addition, many schools do not have adequate resources for the implementation of competence-based curriculum. In this regard the following recommendations are made: First, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should conduct regular capacity building for teachers through in-service training programmes on competence-based curriculum to enable the teachers cope with the paradigm shift. Secondly, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should improve teacher training programmes in order to produce pre-service teachers with necessary skills for effective implementation of competence-based curriculum in schools, including pre-primary schools. Lastly, the government in collaboration with other stakeholders should provide schools with supportive infrastructure and other resources for effective competence-based curriculum implementation.

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