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Challenges Facing the Implementation of Competence Based Curriculum in Tanzania

1 Introduction

In recent years, a greater attention has focused on the assessment of education quality based on the ability of students to demonstrate the competencies they have acquired in schools. To ensure the attainment of competencies, the Ministry responsible for education in Tanzania reviewed the school curriculum. The aim was to ensure high-quality education and to accelerate the socio-economic development. The implementation of a competence based curriculum in Tanzanian secondary schools started in 2005. However, the implementation process has not been impressive as evidenced by the low performance of students in their examinations. This article is an attempt to demonstrate some of the challenges facing the implementation of competence based curriculum and to provide some suggestions for improvement.

2 Theoretical background and current tasks

A curriculum is a plan or program of all experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of a school (Tanner & Tanner, 1995:158), generally, it is the sum total of the experiences of children for which school is responsible (Gatawa, 1990:8). It stipulates all activities that guide the provision of education in schools. It also comprises aspects of socio-economic environment in order to prepare students to merge into society and to enable them to compete in the global economic development (TIE, 2005). Likewise, it specifies the knowledge, skills and attitudes which can be expected of a student who has completed the educational program. In order to ensure that students gain essential knowledge, skills and attitudes, the ministry of education in Tanzania reviewed the curriculum and adopted the competence based curriculum in secondary schools in 2005 (TIE, 2005).
The revised curriculum refers to competencies enabling students to participate effectively and cope with changes occurring in society. It includes competencies that may enable students to make advancements in science and technology and to contribute to a well-functioning society (Kimaryo, 2011; TIE, 2005). Furthermore, educators explained that the education provided was intended to equip

school leavers with adequate knowledge and skills that could help them survive academically and socially in the modern world. In addition, the adoption of the competence based curriculum was prompted by the need of the education system to produce graduates with employable knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective performance of a real world task or activity (Paulo, 2014; TIE, 2005; 2009). It provides criteria to describe what one is able to do, how one approaches the practices, and how one adapts a professional attitude (Kimaryo, 2011). In order to acquire appropriate competencies, the curriculum determined six key general competences that secondary school students have to develop in the course of teaching and learning. They focus on the areas of communication, numeracy, technological literacy, personal and social values, independent learning, and critical and creative thinking (TIE, 2005; 2009).

Experiences from the former curriculum (content based) showed that it failed to produce school leavers with knowledge and skills that address successfully the local, national and international economic development and market demands (TIE, 2009). Under these circumstances, it was hoped that by adopting a competence based curriculum in Tanzania, the education thus provided could produce school leavers who can lead the country to its desired development vision. This aspect focuses on what a student is expected to achieve due to their education. Specifically, it focuses on the knowledge and skills students gained as a result of engaging in the teaching and learning process (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014). Moreover, the competence based curriculum is used as a guide to competence based teaching, learning and assessment in secondary schools as it involves pedagogical changes and teaching practices in order to accommodate outcome based learning (Kafyulilo et al., 2012). The curriculum paradigm emphasizes the use of participatory teaching methods and it stipulates that teaching should be learner centered (Meena, 2009; World Bank, 2011).

Therefore, the adoption of the competence based curriculum in secondary school has resulted changes in teacher training programs. This is facilitated by the fact that teachers act as the main implementers of the new curriculum. Consequently they must possess specific knowledge in compliance with the new curriculum. In this perspective, the teacher education curriculum was reviewed with the aim to support teachers with skills they might need to implement the new curriculum successfully (Kafyulilo et al., 2012).

The implementation of the revised curriculum is essentially hinged on the employment of learner centered practices emphasized by several educational agencies e.g. the World Education Forums held in Jomtien (Inter-agency Commission, 1990) and in Dakar (UNESCO, 2000). Learner centered practices are believed to foster active student engagement and motivate students to become more interactive during the teaching and learning processes (Doyle, 2008; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). In Tanzania, the programs such as Development Vision 2025, Education

and Training Policy (ETP), Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) and Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) are important for supporting the provision of quality education and in view of this, the use of learner centered practices has been underlined for guiding classroom interactions, to support an active learning process by a deep understanding of the subject matter (TIE, 2005), and to improve the quality of education (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010).

3 The implementation of the competence based curriculum

Numerous efforts have been made in the provision of education in order to facilitate the improvement of the learner centered practices as instructed in the competence based curriculum. However, the experiences from the implementation of the competence based curriculum in Tanzania showed poor implementation of the curriculum (Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Kimaryo, 2011; World Bank, 2008). In this regard, studies on the learner centered practices revealed that teachers have been trained to conduct teaching and learning by the use of these practices (Wangeleja, 2003, Msonde, 2011). However, the actual interactions in the classrooms showed that teachers still prefer teacher centered practices (Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Paulo, 2014). Likewise the studies by World Bank (2008) and Kimaryo (2011) commented on the practices conducted in the classrooms, stating that they did not differ from the practices used during the implementation of the content based curriculum. This confirmed that teachers continued to implement the curriculum based on the transmission of content and at the same time they expected students to gain knowledge and skills and demonstrate the stipulated competences. Students in such classes were found to learn the content in a passive way and it was difficult for them to develop a good understanding of the subject matter. This is to say that the teaching methods were dominated by rote and transmission of facts (Hardman et al., 2009). These observable facts were viewed to act as critical obstacles to the effective implementation of the new curriculum and the learner centered practices (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010; World Bank, 2008).

Further challenges have been reported by HakiElimu (2012, 2013) and revealed that the majority of teachers lack a proper understanding of what exactly is required by the competence based curriculum. Sumra and Katabaro (2014) showed that teachers lack motivation, competencies, and an understanding of the policy requirements. Along the same lines, Komba and Mwandanji (2015) found that a majority of teachers were not aware of the matters accompanied with the competence based curriculum. Their practices in the classroom did not show that they implement effectively the operating curriculum. The study by Komba and Nkumbi (2008) reported a serious shortage of qualified teachers with the competencies required to guide students' learning through the learner centered practices.

In connection to the foregoing ideas, teachers were reported to lack a good understanding of the curriculum requirements because they were not fully involved in the development of the new curriculum. Teachers just received decisions and directives made by experts to be implemented by them. In order to deal with this challenge, HakiElimu (2013) wanted teachers to be involved in developing the competence based curriculum. In addition, Schweisfurth (2013) found that teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa were not improving their teaching skills. This deficiency was caused by the lack of chances teachers obtain to attend professional development training programs. These programs are crucial for informing and educating teachers on the requirements of the new curriculum and thus implement it effectively.

Lack of teaching and learning materials is another problem affecting the successful implementation of the competence based curriculum and the provision of quality education. In these cases, the curriculum change towards competence based was estimated as not conforming with the changes in teaching and learning materials. In some schools, teachers lacked materials for facilitating learner centered practices and even worse, teachers did not use creative skills to improvise these materials (Jidamva, 2012). As a consequence, some schools were discovered to operate without books and science laboratory equipment (HakiElimu, 2013). These challenges were in line with what was initially stated by Sifuna and Sawamura that "the scarcity of teaching and learning materials in the classroom hinder educational effectivity in most African countries" (Sifuna &Sawamura, 2010, p. 8).

Moreover, there are problems observed in some schools caused by subject teachers trying to rush in their classroom practices in order to cover the topics in the syllabus without considering the students' mastery of scientific knowledge, skills and procedures (Mbunda, 2006). In the same light, many teachers face problems of using learner centered practices because they are pushed by authority to cover the planned content on time (Ginsburg, 2009) while these practices are time consuming. Likewise, the pre-service teachers failed to implement learner centered practices as stated in the competence based teaching and assessment. They continued with the teacher centered practices and the paper pencil assessments regardless of the demands for changes (Paulo, 2014).

Furthermore, the scholars in Tanzania reported problems occurring in the classrooms in terms of the language of instruction. The observation showed that these challenges are linked to the use of English as the language of instruction (HakiElimu, 2013). Secondary school students were found to lack fluency in communicating in English language (Sumra & Rajani, 2006) and this caused many secondary school students' to have low educational success. Therefore, it could be said that the use of Kiswahili at primary schools and the sudden change to English at secondary schools caused many students to complete secondary school education without having the required knowledge and skills. The students join

secondary schools without a sufficient mastery of the English language and this leads to poor learning and performance (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014).

Another challenge was reported with regard to the feasibility of Western oriented educational programs to work in other countries. According to Hughes and Urasa (1997), the process of transferring educational programs and models from one country to another was discovered to cause misunderstandings. The authors emphasized on this issue that the difficulties in many countries occur because of cultural aspects. Due to cultural differences, transferred programs failed to be implemented successfully in the receiving nations. This phenomenon is confirmed by the trends of the application of constructivist approach in science education which caused confusions and controversies in many countries (Cobern, 1996) for which Tanzania is not an exception.

In terms of quality of education in the country, it was reported to be in a low condition (HakiElimu, 2008). This was proved by focusing on the performance of students in the national examinations. Regarding this indicator, we have to admit that the quality of education in Tanzania has been dropping for some years as it is indicated by the trends of low examination results for secondary schools. Decline in results revealed the presence of challenges that hinder good performance of the students. The civil societies, educationists, activists and other stakeholders complained to the government about the challenges affecting the effective implementation of the competence based curriculum (HakiElimu, 2013).

4 Factors influencing curriculum implementation

According to Chikumbu and Makamure (2000) the curriculum implementation process requires putting into practice the prescribed courses of study, syllabus and subjects. It is a stage where the curriculum is put into practice. The trend of the implementation of competence based curriculum in secondary schools Tanzania has suffered numerous challenges. They emerge in different ways and have an effect on issues related to teaching, learning, performance as well as the quality of educational provision.

Some factors need to be taken into consideration in order to overcome the challenges and to improve the implementation processes. These factors are fundamental because they are directly connected to the practices teachers and students are adopting in the classrooms. They are interacting in different ways and levels to enable teachers to guide students acquiring the expected knowledge, skills and attitudes. They include aspects such as: teachers, students, teaching methods, societal groups, cultural or ideological outlooks, school environment and physical facilities, supervision, inspection, assessment methods, supply of resources and materials, economy, politics, technology (Chikumbu & Makamure, 2000; TIE, 2005).

5 Suggestions for improving the implementation of the competence based curriculum

In order to improve the implementation of the competence based curriculum and the learner centered teaching practices, the following recommendations need be reflected upon:

– Teachers are very valuable in curriculum implementation, so they need to be motivated in order to build their commitment towards the implementation of the competence based curriculum. This will be supported well by giving teachers appropriate support in all matters touching their profession.

– There should be special efforts made to encourage teachers to employ the learner centered practices properly. The efforts should be accompanied by the improvement of the formal teacher training programs so as to impart to pre-service teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the educational authorities have to conduct in-service training regularly to upgrade and update teachers with the contemporary knowledge and skills.

– The ministry responsible for education should provide funds to educational researchers in order to enable them to conduct research, to produce findings, and to share findings in the scientific community concerning the development and implementation of curricula.

– Teachers should be assessed frequently and provided with constructive feedback that may help them to improve their teaching practices. In connection to this, teachers have to build up the habit of respecting and accepting feedback from students and to use this to improve the learner centered practices in the classrooms.

– Schools should be instructed and assisted to develop school based training programs. These programs must be used for teachers to discuss, share, revise, and finally enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching.

6 Concluding thought

Several studies promote the use of learner centered practices for effective teaching and learning (Doyle, 2008; Ginsburg, 2009; Inter-agency Commission, 1990; Schweisfurth, 2013; Tabulawa, 2013; TIE, 2005; UNESCO, 2000; World Bank, 2008). However, in many countries all over the world the domination of traditional teacher centered practices is reported (Hardman et al., 2009; Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Kapanadze et al., 2010; Kapanadze & Eilks, 2012; Kimaryo, 2011; Msonde, 2011; Rakhkochkine, 2012). If we take into account that research findings show good results when interventions balance teacher centered and student centered practices (Zhao et al., 2014), and if we consider that integrating the

learner centered views into the teacher centered environment Schuh (2004) is possible, teachers should be encouraged and supported to reflect personal paths towards adaptive, student centered practices.

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