

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COMPETENCE BASED EDUCATION IN TANZANIA: EXPERIENCES, INSIGHTS AND POSSIBILITIES

Introduction

From independence, Tanzania has been working hard towards quality education as a response to societal needs and consciousness, new ways of thinking , practice, and methods of enquiry in education.

Some of the initiatives taken include:

- Education for self reliance in 1967. This aimed at providing individuals with education that would make them self reliant and play an active role in the community.
- Shift from teacher centred to learner centred approaches to teaching. A shift from teaching to learning to enhance thinking and reflection among learners and to use learners prior knowledge and experiences.
- Shift from content based curriculum to competence based curriculum. Response to societal needs, advances in technology and globalization.

Some of the questions arising from competence based curriculum

- What is competence?

Experience has shown that some teachers define it as “ujuzi” meaning knowledge and others define it as “uwezo” meaning ability. You will often find the two words being used interchangeably by the teachers and curriculum developers. The question is, are these two words the same? If not, which one defines competence?

- How is the competence based curriculum structured?
- How are competencies taught/developed/acquired?
- Does the subject content determine the competence or does the competence to be developed determine the content to be taught?
- To what extent are the teachers competent in implementing the competence based curriculum?

The concept of competence

The concept of competence in education has been used in various countries like South Africa and Denmark from the 1980s and now it is a curriculum ideal in Tanzania.

Initial use of the concept:

Initially competence was used to describe the need for relevant knowledge, will, skills, critical reflection including value clarification in performing a given job while in education, qualification was used to refer to the knowledge, and skills necessary for the workplace to be able to do a good job.

The use of the concept of competence has expanded from the description of workplace demands to educational ideals.

So, in education, competence can be defined as a complex set of behaviours built on the components of knowledge, skills, attitudes and competence as personal ability to take action.

Contemporary Use of the Word Competence .

Contemporary use of the notion concept includes :

1. Subject related Competence

This refers to a deeper understanding of the subject and finding an answer to the question “What does it mean to master a given subject (e.g. biology, mathematics or geography) knowledge?” instead of gaining mere knowledge and skills. The answers point to the competencies that are characteristic for the subject. For example, some of the competencies developed in learning mathematics is for example to pose and solve mathematical problems.

The value of a subject oriented notion of competence is that it points to a shift in curriculum thinking, from enumeration of isolated knowledge and skills to handling or mastering of knowledge, reflection and action that meet the challenges of a given situation

2. General use of the concept Competence

The use focuses on key competencies as used in the workplace.

Therefore it is functional, demand oriented and contextualized.

This general use of the concept of competence is holistic and dynamic as it combines complex demands, psychological prerequisites (cognitive, motivational , ethical, volitional and social components) and context into a complex system that makes competent performance or effective action possible.

With reference to the curriculum in our schools, the question is what kind of competence are we focusing on in our schools? Subject related competence or general competence?

Elements of competence in an individual

When we want to consider an individual to be competent, we consider three elements which are:

- What the individual is able to do.

These are the technical skills that the individual possesses. For a teacher some of these skills include teaching skills, subject matter knowledge, classroom management and organization, assessment skills etc.

- How the individual approaches his/her practice.

This element includes attitudes, ethical issues, responsibilities, decision making skills etc. These build on what the individual can do.

- The individual as a professional

This element is built from the two previous elements to yield an individual who is a professional. For a teacher, this includes his/her role in the education system and personal development, knowledgebase, self autonomy, reflective practice etc.

Competence based Curriculum

The new competence based education which defines specific competencies to be developed by learners through education is the direct outcome of democratization and concerted struggle to address the issue of meaningful education in Tanzania.

Therefore the primary emphases of competence based curriculum is on the powers of becoming i.e. powers which can transform and be transformed and powers which can generate other powers infinitely.

The main components of a competence based curriculum include:

- Description of the competencies to be developed.
- Specific objectives describing the outcomes which are expected at the end of the unit.
- Content for developing the competence
- Teaching and learning methods and strategies
- Assessment criteria. Competence based assessment involves the assessment of the abilities (which include knowledge, skills and attitudes) which an individual demonstrates in his/her immediate environment and in other contexts.

Experience has shown that teachers find it difficult to differentiate competence from objectives and goals.

Goals are very general and global statements which are supposed to an overall frame of reference.

Objectives are precise statements which begin with an action verb and characterises observable behaviour pertaining to intended direct outcomes which are realistic and at an appropriate level of generality.

Therefore what distinguishes a competence from a goal and objective is that it focuses on the end product of the instructional process rather than on the instructional process itself or it can be said that it embraces the larger picture rather than the content of a single course. Competencies are used to set performance standards that must be met.

Teaching and learning for competence development

The action competence approach points to democratic participatory and action oriented teaching and learning that can help students develop their abilities, motivation and desire to play an active role in finding democratic solutions to problems and issues in the society.

Teaching for competencies requires critical teaching where teachers help learners find out alternative ways of solving problems and looking at issues from different perspectives. Teachers therefore have to expose learners to contradictions, encourage them to ask critical questions and also to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge.

This suggests that the design of learning tasks is at the heart of competence based learning. Therefore, learning tasks should involve a combination of learning activities like analysis of case studies, working on given problems, doing experiments and various hands on activities which will enhance thinking among the learners.

Teachers Competence

- Teacher's competence is determined by the knowledgebase which he/she needs to have. Shulman (1987) referred to the knowledgebase that the teacher needs to have as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). In general it is defined as the knowledge which is developed by teachers to enable learners learn. The teachers pedagogical content knowledge is influenced by three other knowledge bases which are:
 - Subject matter knowledge (SMK),
 - Pedagogical knowledge (PK) and
 - Knowledge of context (KofC) (Shulman, 1987, Abell, 2007).

Assessment and evaluation of competence based learning

Competence based assessment should help learners develop the capacity of being able to act, now and in the future, and to assume responsibility for their actions. Such competency is referred to as Applied Competence, which is a combination of Practical competence, Foundational Competence and Reflexive competence. ***Practical competence*** is when learners can demonstrate that they ***can do*** something. ***Foundational competence*** is when the learners show that ***they know what and why they are doing it in that particular way and not otherwise***. ***Reflexive competence*** is referred to when the learners show that they can reflect in-and-on their actions and are able to apply their practice and knowledge to new situations.

For learners, the assessment should find out how much knowledge, skills and attitudes students have acquired in learning, and how well they can use the knowledge and skills for better life. Doll (1993) points out that in assessing competence based curriculum we need to conceive the curriculum as a conversation between “from” and “towards” and not as a deficit from towards.

Concluding Remarks

Just like education for self reliance, where emphasis was put on education that would produce people who are self reliant, self confident, have a sense of responsibility, self motivated, cooperation and dedicated to service competence based education aims at developing people who have various abilities who can take action to address issues both at individual and societal levels. This approach to education is not very much different from the aspirations of education for self reliance.

Therefore as we seek to set strategies for enhancing competence based learning in our schools we should think and rethink about the nature of curriculum which guides learning in our schools, the teaching and learning process, the assessment procedures and how we can develop the academic and professional capacities of our teachers to enable them help learners develop various competencies.

Thank you for Listening