

How competence-based curriculum promote self-reliance and industrial economy

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Abstract

Competence-based curriculum is a new paradigm in education. Many countries are transforming their education delivery approach from the traditional content-based teaching and learning to competence-based teaching and learning. This new approach brings hope of improving the quality of education. This paper explores the way competence-based curriculum can promote self-reliance and the move towards industrial economy in Tanzania. The paper is written based on existing literature and personal experience of the writer as a long service teacher.

Key terms

Competence, curriculum, self-reliance, industrial economy

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed many countries especially in the developing world aspiring to transform their economies from agrarian to industrial and middle income economies. Tanzania is one of the countries with such aspirations. The present government is working hard to ensure that by 2025 Tanzania becomes an industrial nation with middle income economy. The ultimate goal of all these efforts is to make Tanzania a self-reliant country, free from dependence on donor funding and aids from developed countries. This paper analyses how the adoption of competence-based curriculum can fuel the establishment of industrial economy and self-reliance. Specifically, the paper begins with description of the concepts of competence-based curriculum, self-reliance and industrial economy. It also analyses the origin of education for self-reliance and principles underpinning its implementation. Finally, the paper describes how competence-based curriculum is linked to self-reliance and industrial economy, the challenges that are encountered in its implementation and the recommendations for future success.

The concept of competency-based curriculum, self-reliance and industrial economy

The terms competence and curriculum need to be defined before the concept of competence-based curriculum. Many people have found it difficult to define the term competence. According to Online Oxford English Dictionary the word competence (also competency) is defined as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. In educational settings, as noted by O'sullivan and Burce (2014), competence is defined based on three interrelated components:

- a. A knowledge component (the understanding part)
- b. A behavioural components (the overt behavioural repertoire)
- c. A value component (including values, beliefs and attitudes).

Like the term competence, scholars have defined the word curriculum differently. According to Eisner (2002), a curriculum of a school, or a course, or a classroom can be conceived of as a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students. Caswell and Campbell (1935) viewed curriculum as "all experiences children have under the guidance of teachers". This definition is shared by Smith, Stanley and Shores (1950) when they defined "curriculum as a sequence of potential experiences set up in the schools for the purpose of disciplining children and youth in group ways of thinking and acting". Therefore, curriculum can be summed up as all activities teachers and students engage in in a school or college.

The origin of Education for self-reliance and its theoretical underpinnings

At independence in 1961, Tanzania was very poor. People lived in small tribal communities and their sense of Tanzania as a nation was still pre-mature. The economy was poor, predominantly agrarian. And due to poor and limited health services, diseases were wide spread and mortality rate was very high. Business and industry were dominated by foreigners. Majority of the people were illiterate with few of them having elementary education. The colonial education system, as noted by Nyerere (1967) was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state. For this reason, there was high shortage of skilled workers at the time of independence. Therefore, soon after independence, Mwalimu J.K.Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, started efforts to build Tanzania as a new independent government by preparing people to build their nation and get rid of dependence on the colonizers.

Nyerere believed that in order for people to contribute in building their nation and improve their personal and community lives they needed knowledge and skills. He believed that education is a tool for liberation from poverty, ignorance and diseases – the three main barriers

to development. He further, believed that in order to develop, Tanzania needed four things: people (of course knowledgeable and skilled), land, clean politics and good leadership. All these needed to be developed by the independence government.

Various policies were formulated by the government in order to achieve development goals. Since the sense of belonging to one independent nation was not very much developed among communities, Nyerere adopted Ujamaa policy. Ujamaa was grounded on values such as respect, cooperation, and common property, which ensured that everyone could benefit from the natural resources and meet an obligation to work for the community, hence building a classless society through a spirit of self-reliance (Nyerere, 1967). This policy was meant to instill the sense of respect, oneness and dignity among the citizens. It also aimed eliminating all forms of discriminations and breaking classes created in the society by the colonial legacy, particularly the education system. The so called elite class (educated or working class) had to live and work together with their fellow Tanzanians to develop the country. Therefore, education had to be treated as a tool for creating harmony instead of segregation.

Nyerere believed that reform in education will perpetuate Ujamaa policy. Thus, Education for Self-reliance (ESR) which was proclaimed through the Arusha Declaration of 1967 was one of the strategies to reform the education system from that of the colonialists. ESR was a sequel to the Arusha Declaration, a framework for operationalising a sociopolitical and economic policy called Ujamaa. ESR aimed at providing learners with abilities in appropriate vocations and with self-employment skills (Nyerere, 1967). According to Nyerere, (1967) acquired skills and abilities are meant to be useful in performing community tasks and for solving personal and community problems. In this way, education becomes a tool for emancipation. Following this intention, Nyerere insisted that:

Education provided must encourage development in each citizen of three things; an enquiring mind; an ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt to their own needs; and a basic confidence in their own positions as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains. (Nyerere, 1968)

According to Nyerere (1967) the purpose of education is to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people

for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development.

The idea of self-reliance means that educational efforts should provide spaces for meaningful learning in relevant contexts for developing appropriate knowledge, skills and emotions, while at the same time instilling ideal values such as love, respect, morals, and cooperation (Nyerere, 1967). In rural contexts, education for education becomes meaningful and useful when learners, as community members, acquire the basic principles of modern agriculture and adapt knowledge and skills to solve local problems such as malnutrition and soil degradation. Boosting self-confidence, a sense of equality, and responsibility among learners for achieving collective goals, is also important.

How competency-based curriculum is linked to self-reliance

The whole essence of competence-based curriculum is to enable a learner to develop mastery and abilities to apply the knowledge and skills in real life situations. In other words, learners who graduate with high level of competences are likely to become self-reliant because they are able to employ themselves and apply the learned knowledge and skills in solving their personal and community problems. The issue of self-reliance is all about changing the mindset from that of dependence to independence. According to Nyerere (1967), self-reliance means building a character needed to live both independently and freely in community for oneself, with others and for others or self-reliance means doing things for ourselves rather than having things done for us.

Box 1: Operational terms for education reforms, as envisaged in ESR (adopted from Nyerere, 1967)

- i. Education should be oriented toward rural life, because a larger part of the population lives in rural areas (95% after independence; over 80% at present).
- ii. Together, teachers and students should engage in productive activities such as animal husbandry and crop production. Students should participate in the planning and decision making process that surrounds the organization of these activities.
- iii. Productive work should become an integral part of the school curriculum and provide meaningful experience through the integration of theory and practice.
- iv. The importance of examinations should be downgraded because they only assess a person's ability to learn facts and present them on demand within a limited time period. This approach excludes assessing other qualities such as the ability to reason and a willingness to serve others.
- v. Children should begin school at the age of seven years. They would then be old enough and sufficiently mature to engage in self-reliant activities and productive work a few years after graduation. (The usual age at graduation is 15 years or older).
- vi. Primary education should be self-contained, that is, provide knowledge and skills necessary to be self-reliant, rather than merely serve as preparation for further education at the secondary level.
- vii. Education given must ensure that students can become self-reliant and cooperative (that is, develop willingness and an ability to work with others), be creative, and develop inquisitive minds.

Based on the operational terms in Box 1 one can argue that competence-based curriculum is the most appropriate approach in the development of a sense of self-reliance.

How competency-based curriculum is linked to industrial economy

The concept of competence-based curriculum (CBC) is not new. It has been used in the technical fields for many years. However, in the education field, it has recently been introduced. Traditionally, learning has been conceptualized as theory based on academic frameworks where achievement is judged by the ability to recall key points, information imparted or details and sequences memorized (O'sullivan and Burce, 2014). Competence-based curriculum as used in education today denotes the teaching approach which focuses on the knowledge, skills and competences gained by a student as result of learning. It is different from the traditional content-based curriculum which focused on knowledge acquisition and memorization.

Competence-based education programs are built from the idea that it is more important to focus on outcomes—what a student knows and can do—than on inputs like how the student learns it, where the student learns it, or how long the student takes to learn it. One of the most important characteristic of competency-based education is that it measures learning rather than time. O'sullivan and Burce (2014) noted that learners in CBC progress by demonstrating their competence, which means they prove that they have mastered the knowledge and skills (called competencies) required for a particular course, regardless of how long it takes. Once they master these skills, they are able to apply it in various life situations.

Competence-based curriculum is directly linked to the industrial economy. The term industrial economy can be defined as those activities combining factors of production (facilities, supplies, work, and knowledge) to produce material goods intended for the market. Industries by their very nature are labour intensive and require high level skills to operate them. The establishment of industrial economy is pre-determined by a number of factors which include the availability of skilled manpower, raw materials, reliable market, technology, machineries and stable socio-economic and political environment. Like in other sectors, the education system has a great role in determining the industrial development of any country. What is happening in school has a direct link with what will happen in the community. This means that, as schools produce individuals with high level knowledge, skills, and competences, so will the industries obtained skilled workers who can produce quality goods.

It is also important to note that competence-based curriculum does not only prepare competent and skilled workers directly employed in the industries but also generate skilled farmers who produce quality raw materials for the industries and potential consumers of industrial goods. In addition, competence-based curriculum itself demands schools to have

enough teaching and learning facilities which will enable teachers and learners to engage more in practical activities rather than theory. Most of these facilities such as laboratory equipment and chemicals are industrial made, and therefore more industries are needed for producing such requirements. Based on all these links, it is worth arguing that competence-based curriculum is the most important pre-condition for the development of industrial economy.

Challenges in implementing competence-based curriculum in Tanzania

The implementation of competency-based curriculum is hampered by a number of challenges in Tanzania's schools and colleges. Such challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Overcrowded classrooms
- Poor infrastructure
- Overloaded curriculum
- Lack of flexibility among teachers to adopt new paradigms
- Teachers lack knowledge about competence-based teaching
- Lack of career choices at early stages of education
- Inadequate teaching and learning facilities
- Lack of motivation among teachers
- Rigidity of the education policies and guidelines

Recommendations

The adoption of competence-based curriculum has potential to realize the philosophy of self-reliance and to develop industrial economy in Tanzania. In order to achieve this goal, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers should understand the intricacies of competence-based curriculum
- The government in collaboration with stakeholder should support schools with enough funds and facilities to enable students and teachers to implement competence-based curriculum effectively
- Teachers should be flexible to learn new teaching methods suitable for competence-based curriculum context.
- The government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology should revive education for self-reliance curriculum in schools.
- Multiple forms of assessment procedures to determine diverse learners abilities and talents should be employed in addition to pen-and-paper

Conclusion

The fact that competence-based curriculum can promote self-reliance and the industrial economy is well established. The main task for the government is to ensure that competence-

based curriculum is well implemented. Teachers and students who are the main implementers should be motivated and supported if competence-based curriculum is to be effective.

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