

THE ROLE OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN UGANDA'S COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION TRANSITION

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges and strategies for implementing a shift from knowledge-based to competency-based education among secondary school teachers in Uganda. The shift is aimed at equipping teachers with skills, attitudes, and values necessary for learners to be successful in their future careers. However, the implementation of the shift is faced with challenges such as inadequate resources, negative attitudes of teachers, rigorous teacher training requirements, and inadequate preparation on the side of stakeholders. To ensure a successful implementation, critical strategies are identified, including embedding structures and policies for professional development, providing formal collaborative professional development activities, identifying technology-based platforms that support the transformation, and fostering a bottom-up approach to curriculum implementation. The paper concludes that the gains to be made in student learning, efficiency, and affordability make it worth the effort required to shift to competency-based education.

Introduction:

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Uganda made a decision in 2008 to reform the Lower Secondary Education Curriculum to become more inclusive and better satisfy the needs of different abilities. One major aim of this reform is to shift from a knowledge-based to a competency-based education system, where emphasis is placed on what learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to know. To implement this shift, continuous professional development (CPD) workshops are needed to equip secondary school teachers with the skills, attitudes, and values necessary for successful implementation. However, the implementation of the shift faces challenges such as inadequate preparation on the side of stakeholders, negative attitude of teachers, inadequate resources, and rigorous requirements for teacher training. This paper analyzes these challenges and proposes strategies for successful implementation, including embedding structures and policies for professional development, providing formal collaborative professional development activities, identifying technology-based

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platforms that support the transformation, and fostering a bottom-up approach to curriculum implementation. The paper concludes that despite the challenges, the shift to competency-based education is worth the effort for improved student learning, efficiency, and affordability.

The Current State of Secondary School Teacher Professional Development in Uganda

Several policy trends have impacted on secondary school education in Uganda for instance in 2005, science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics in addition to mathematics) were made non optional at ordinary level (Nakabugo, Bisaso, & Masembe, 2011). However, the performance of students in these subjects as reflected by Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) was poor. The Ministry of Education and Sports in conjunction with Japan International Cooperation Agency introduced CPD workshops under the SESEMAT program for science teachers. However, the performance trend in the science subjects has persisted to date (UNEB, 2020). Besides, the knowledge based curriculum has continued to bring out school graduates who are not creative and competitive in the job market. The nature of the graduates coupled with advancement in technology and change in the global economy has compelled Ministry of Education and Sports to rethink about the education system. Hence, a shift from the traditional knowledge based education to competency based education. The current trends in education require competency based education to equip learners with new tools and standards. It has been observed that learners are increasingly gaining access to new online and blended learning opportunities that have the potential to enable them develop deeper learning competencies (Cator, Schneider, Vander Ark, 2014). Hence, we argue that for the competency based curriculum to be delivered consistently, effectively, and efficiently teachers need to be retooled with skills, values, and attitudes in blended learning approaches. However, the current implementation of the teacher professional development program for a shift from knowledge based education to competence based education in Uganda is faced with a number of challenges.

Challenges Facing the Shift from Knowledge Based Education to Competency Based Education in Uganda

The successful implementation of a teacher professional development program for a shift from knowledge based education to competency based education hinges on the clear understanding of competence based teaching and learning. Casey (2018) suggests five key elements in defining competency based education:

- a. students advance upon demonstrated mastery,
- b. competencies that empower students,
- c. meaningful assessment that serves as a positive learning experience for students,
- d. timely and differentiated support to students as feedback on their individual learning needs, and learning outcomes that emphasize competencies including application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

According to Sajan (2017), competency-based learning is not new to the education industry. However, a shift from knowledge based to competence based education comes with relatively new approaches to learning design which in turn comes with many challenges. This section presents a discourse on some of the key challenges facing the shift.

Stakeholders in education generally perceive a competency-based education as a time-consuming and a highly demanding activity (Chrappan, 2015). Although the content of teaching in the competency based curriculum may not differ from the knowledge based curriculum, the applied methods and forms of classroom work differ. The competency based teaching emphasizes group work and cooperative techniques which demand a lot of input in terms of resources (personnel, materials and time). Therefore, a shift from the current knowledge based education to a competency based education requires a lot of preparation and inputs from all stakeholders.

A study carried out by Chrappan (2015) on teachers' judgement on competency – based education also reveals that teachers at secondary schools are the least supporting and inspired about competency-based lessons. Chrappan attributes the indifferent attitude portrayed by the teachers towards the competency based education to the teachers not really believing that the new approach would be beneficial. Teachers rather prefer to use *Olema, D.K., Nabitula, A., Manyiraho, D. & Atibuni, D.Z.*

chalk and talk method of teaching like they were taught. Besides, they consider the role of teaching as being based on knowledge transfer only. With this negative attitude from teachers, the process of shifting from knowledge based to competency based education may be hampered.

Kyobe and Rugumayo (2005) observe that teacher professional development in the competency based education, a customized program, requires a lot of training, preparation and mentorship. Such rigorous requirements for teacher preparation could result in few teachers being adequately trained to take on the new curriculum. In effect, the implementation process could be inefficient and ineffective.

Further, Kasule (2015) identifies inadequate funding to finance the curriculum holistically as one of the key challenges to its implementation. According to Kasule, 80% of the recurrent education budget of Uganda caters for salaries, leaving a pittance 20% for the core teaching and learning expenditures including professional development. With such limited funding, the shift from knowledge based to competence based education remains a challenge.

In a related observation by Kyobe and Rugumayo (2005), the unique environment and resources required for implementation of a competency-based education may not be available in most secondary schools in Uganda. The shift to a competency based curriculum requires modern classrooms, smart boards, laboratories, creative centers and technologies at all levels. The inadequacy of material resources and infrastructure may impair the proper implementation of the shift.

It can be concluded that the challenges encountered in the implementation of the shift from the traditional curriculum to the competency based curriculum emanate from inadequacy of human, financial, material, and time resources. These challenges hamper the pockets of effort to create awareness among stakeholders. It is likely that the continued manifestation of these challenges is responsible for the many teachers', students' and other stakeholders' reservations towards the competency based curriculum.

Hence strategies need to be suggested and implemented to abate them

Strategies to Mitigate the Effects of the Challenges

A shift from knowledge based education to a competency based education requires a fundamental change in the education sector as a whole. However, the improvements to be gained in student learning, efficiency and affordability are worth the effort (Cator, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014). The government needs to embed some forms of structures and policies for professional development that have not been in system. These may include formal collaborative professional development activities, working with educational curriculum designers, attending workshops and short courses, as well as attending and presenting at conferences (Kasule, 2015).

Teachers implementing the competency based curriculum are responsible for designing learning tasks. However, it is important for curriculum designers to support these teachers in their struggle to do so. Most teachers do not know what to do in designing instructional tasks and quality learning materials since they are graduates of the knowledge based curriculum. At the same time these tasks cannot be left for curriculum designers and experts because it would inhibit the teachers' role and ingenuity in the competency based education (Kasule,

2015). Therefore, it is important that teachers are thoroughly trained to take up their role and be supported to master the methodology, formulating appropriate instructional designs and tasks.

Cator, Schneider, and Vander Ark (2014) suggest that the shift to a competency based curriculum would require curriculum specialists to compile a competency map of what teachers and teacher leaders need to know and be able to do with customized curriculum elements for specific needs. This should be followed by tagging existing instructional content and resources to the competency map and identifying gaps which need to be filled for efficient and effective implementation.

There is need to design, develop and identify technology based platforms such as social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tweeter, and Facebook) that support the transformation from the knowledge based to competency based education (Cator, Schneider, & Vander Ark, 2014). This would boost the face-to-face teacher professional development efforts, which alone may not be enough for an effective transformation. Such technology enhanced platforms would encourage informal collaborative professional development activities such as discussions with peers, being mentored, informal peer review, and peer feedback well beyond the formal settings.

For a successful shift to the competency based education, it is necessary to foster a bottom-up approach to the implementation of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Sports needs to take into consideration the voices of all stakeholders for inclusion. The curriculum requires a complement of pre-service education and phased comprehensive in-service program for secondary school teacher education. To adapt to the new curriculum there is need for training and a good working environment to change teachers' attitudes (Tambwe, 2015). For a sustained implementation of the competency based curriculum, certain critical structural determinants such as teachers' welfare, effective evaluation, and inspection framework need to be factored in.

Conclusion

The changing role of education exerts additional demands on education systems and hence educators. This paper analyses teacher professional development in the wake of the additional demands that require a shift from knowledge based to competency based education. The paper acknowledges that the process of shifting is cluttered with challenges that all stakeholders need to be brought on board to mitigate. Such inclusive stakeholder engagement would generate critical strategies which if implemented could enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation.

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