

## **Analysis of the Shift from Knowledge Based to Competency Based Education among Secondary School Teachers in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes the context of secondary school teachers' continuous professional development as a key requirement of shifting from knowledge based to competency based education in Uganda. The shift is aimed at equipping teachers with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed both at school and in the various fields of work. However, the shift from a knowledge based to a competency based education has challenges including but not limited to inadequate preparation on the side of stakeholders, negative attitude of teachers, inadequate resources, and rigorous requirements for teacher training. For efficient and effective implementation of the shift from knowledge based to competency based education, there is need for implementation of critical strategies as suggested in the article.*

**Key words:** Teachers professional development, knowledge based education, competence based education, curriculum reform.

### **Introduction**

The role of education is changing world over and so is what is expected of teachers. Education in general and secondary education in particular is supposed to equip individuals with knowledge, understanding, skills and values that are needed for many areas of work (Nakabugo, Bisaso, & Masembe, 2011). However, in many countries, Uganda inclusive, the mode of secondary school teaching has been knowledge based – content-centered and examination-oriented, as opposed to competency based – entailing acquisition of skills, values and attitudes. The knowledge based education in a way has compelled secondary school teachers to specialize in specific subject fields. Hence,

teacher training has been characterized by emphasis on teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Kleickmann et al., 2013). However, this traditional way of education has been blamed for bringing out individuals who are not productive to the economy as they cannot compete favorably in the job market. The teachers are noted to be neither innovative nor creative and rarely use learner centered methods in the classrooms (CURASSE, 2007 cited in Malunda, 2018).

Beginning 2008, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) made a decision to undertake a reform of the Lower Secondary Education Curriculum. The major aim was to make a shift from the old tried and trusted model of Secondary Education to a broader and more inclusive curriculum that can satisfy needs of different abilities (National Curriculum Development Centre [NCDC], 2020). This reform comes with a series of changes at different levels to enhance the quality of instruction. Key among the changes is the training of secondary school teachers towards competency based education. The training of the secondary school teachers takes the form of continuous professional development (CPD) workshops defined as the means of updating, developing, and broadening the knowledge acquired by teachers during their initial training and/or providing them with new skills and professional understanding (OECD, 2005 as cited in Nakabugo, Bisaso, & Masembe, 2011). Serdenciuc (2013) stresses that in order to deal with a new perspective of knowledge management in a global economy, education systems must evolve. By this, stakeholders in education must focus on rethinking the teaching-learning process in order to prepare better graduates who will meet the changing social and economic demands. Teachers are expected to deliver a competence based education, placing greater emphasis on integrating skills that can help learners to be ushered in the competitive world. This delivery requires effective use of information and communication technologies for teaching and to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks (Pena-Lopez, 2009). The education system consequently needs to strengthen teacher professional development program to prepare teachers for all the challenges they will face throughout the implementation of the competence based curriculum.

A competency-based curriculum, therefore, emphasizes what learners are expected to do rather than what they are expected to know. A shift from the knowledge based to a competency based curriculum is a major reform that calls for teachers' professional development as an integral component (Nakabugo, Bisaso, Masembe, 2011). Nakabugo and colleagues further suggest that effective professional development

includes training, practice, and feedback with provision of adequate time and follow-up support. Therefore, it can be argued that professional development program encourage teachers to involve students in learning activities which enable both teachers and students to share their expertise and experience more systematically. It is upon this background that the government of Uganda came up with the continuous professional development program to update teachers' skills, attitudes and approaches.

The stakeholders of teacher education and development in Uganda require critical information to advance educational decisions including curriculum reforms. This paper analyzes the context of continuous professional development trainings of secondary school teachers as a key requirement of shifting from knowledge based to competency based education.

### **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

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 panny 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 the

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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