

Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Competence-based English Curriculum in Public Ordinary Secondary Schools in Tanzania: A Case of Njombe Region

Said Venance
University of Iringa
sizovenance@gmail.com

Abstract

This study identified challenges encountered in the implementation of competence-based English curriculum in public ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania. The study employed a case study design under a qualitative approach. The qualitative data obtained through interviews, focus group discussion and observation were analysed by using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that teachers and students encountered a variety of challenges, which hindered the effective implementation of competence-based English curriculum such as unwillingness of the students, nature of the students, lack of exposure, language of instruction problems, large class sizes, limited time for curriculum implementation, nature of English teaching syllabus, lack of library, lack of appropriate teaching and learning facilities, shortage of teaching and learning materials, lack of teachers' in-service training on the new curriculum, and lack of commitment among teachers. Therefore, the study recommends that English teachers should be creative to solve English teaching problems in their schools, English teachers should get frequent in-service training from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Keywords: English, Competence-based English Curriculum, Public Ordinary Secondary Schools

1.0 Introduction

A curriculum is an engine that defines the scope of content to be mastered in a subject and the expected learning outcomes guided by the language of instruction (LOI), which must be understood by both

teachers and students (Mkonongwa, 2012). English is used as LOI in Tanzanian secondary schools, so it is a crucial component among numerous important components of high-quality education. Qualified teachers, proper teaching and learning facilities, effective educational policy, and an adequate educational budget are other components of great education (Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), 2009).

As English is the language of teaching in secondary schools, the Tanzanian government has been making several attempts to improve the English subject curriculum since 1997. Such efforts were not limited to reforms but also included a variety of in-service training programmes over several years (Brock-Utne, 2002). The main goal is to improve the quality of English language instruction in Tanzanian secondary schools, particularly at the ordinary level. This is merely a continuation of the government's efforts to improve the quality of education provided in our country, which began in 1961.

Tanzania launched a competence-based curriculum (CBC) in secondary schools in 2005 (Kafyulilo, Rugambuka & Ikupa, 2012). In short, the CBC replaced the content-based curriculum. It is worth noting that the adoption of CBC was the country's second significant educational transformation, following the introduction of Education for Self-reliance in 1967. Since 2005, when the CBC was launched in secondary schools, there have been significant financial and individual commitments to retrain and support teachers, heads of schools, and other education professionals to develop the necessary competencies and assurance to successfully implement the CBC (Woods, 2008). Currently, Tanzania is following the CBC to generate graduates, who are practical with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

It is now almost two decades since Tanzania launched CBC. In teaching and learning English, it is expected that secondary education students will be able to express themselves by using the English language in their examinations and communication even after completing ordinary-level secondary education. However, many students and graduates fail to demonstrate their capability of using the English language fluently (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014). Evidence indicates that students' academic performance even in English subjects is poor. The majority of students exhibit substantial problems with spelling, punctuation, tenses and other forms of language structure (Komba, Kafanabo & Njabili, 2012).

In this case, there is a problem concerning the implementation of the new curriculum. Many studies on the implementation of the CBC have been conducted; however, challenges encountered in the implementation of CBC, specifically on English subjects have not been well-articulated. In this regard, it was necessary to conduct a study to identify the challenges encountered in the implementation of a Competence-based English Curriculum (CBEC) in public ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania. Specifically, this study sought to identify the challenges encountered by teachers and students in the implementation of CBEC in public ordinary secondary schools; and to establish recommendations on how to overcome those challenges.

1.1 Literature Review

There are certain obstacles to the implementation of CBEC in secondary schools. Sahiruddin (2013) noted the following challenges in teaching and learning English in Indonesia: overcrowding, teachers' low English proficiency, lack of adequate preparation to teach the new curriculum, cultural barriers for teachers to relinquish the role of a teacher and accepting the role of facilitator, less authentic materials and lack of

opportunities to socialize English language outside the classroom. Nkwetisama (2012) noted the following challenges in teaching and learning English: insufficient teacher training, huge classes, lack of teaching and learning resources, inadequacies in blackboards and desks, and excessive enrolment of students.

Makunja (2016) noted that lack of teachers' in-service training on the CBC, exclusion of teachers when reviewing the curriculum, insufficient teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, low ability of the students joining secondary education and the unwillingness of the students to accept the learner-centred approach as the challenges encountered in the implementation of CBC. Tillya and Mafumiko (2018) identified the following challenges in the implementation of CBC: lack of knowledge of CBC from among the teachers and even some curriculum developers, fear of teachers losing control in the classroom or fearing that some students will not be able to take responsibility for their learning if Competence-based Approach (CBA) is applied, lack of a supporting teaching and learning environment in schools, large number of unprepared teachers from pre-service training to practising teachers and lack of well-established in-service programme.

Feruzi and Li (2019) identified the following challenges in the implementation of CBC: lack of awareness among the teachers on CBC, teachers have no personal skills in teaching by using CBA, failure of the government and authorities responsible for education and vocational training on providing the teaching and learning materials correlating with the CBC, overcrowdings in classrooms and lack of knowledge from among the teachers on preparing lesson plans.

From the reviewed literature, most studies have looked at the challenges encountered in the implementation of CBC in general and very few were

specific to the English language. Therefore, because of the usefulness of the English language in Tanzania secondary education, studies conducted on the challenges encountered in the implementation of CBC in teaching and learning English subjects are not enough. Apart from that, none of the reviewed studies was conducted in Njombe Region. Hence, this study desired to bridge that gap by identifying challenges encountered in the implementation of competence-based English curriculum in public ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania with specific case of Njombe Region.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This is a qualitative study which employed a case study design. The study was conducted in Njombe Region, whereby, two districts with different environments were chosen such as Njombe Township and Wanging'ombe. Njombe Township was purposely selected to be a representative of an urban setting, while Wanging'ombe District was randomly selected to be a representative of rural setting. The two districts were randomly assigned letters A and B. The studied public ordinary secondary schools were randomly selected, and they were also assigned symbols A₁ and A₂ for the case of schools in District A; and B₁ and B₂ for the case of schools in District B. The target population involved District Secondary Education Officers (DSEOs), heads of schools, academic teachers, English teachers, and students.

A sample of 82 respondents (2 DSEOs, 4 heads of schools, 4 academic teachers, 8 English teachers, and 64 students) were involved by using a simple random sampling technique for selecting students and a purposive sampling technique for English teachers, academic teachers, heads of schools, and DSEOs. The study collected primary data via interviews, focus group discussions and observation.

In focus group discussion, four groups of eight students in each group in the four selected public ordinary secondary schools were made for discussion by the researcher, and each discussion took half an hour to 40 minutes. In observation, the researcher used a classroom observation checklist in each selected school, in which one class whether form three or form four was purposely observed as the teaching and learning of an English subject lesson of 40 minutes was going on. Teachers and students outside the classroom setting; and the school environments were randomly observed in relation to English teaching and learning. Data were analysed through thematic analysis.

3.0 Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of CBEC

Through interviews, focus group discussion and observation, the findings indicated the following challenges:

3.1 Unwillingness and Nature of the Students

This was the frequently mentioned challenge encountered in the implementation of CBEC. It was the first challenge to be mentioned by one of the educational officers in an interview when she said: *“Students are not willing to be involved in teaching and learning because they are already being used to being spoon-fed”* (Interview with District Secondary Education Officer, District A, May 17/2022). Moreover, in an interview with one of the English teachers in School A₂, she said:

The competence-based approach to teaching and learning is a new thing to the students as they are already used to being lectured; therefore, it becomes a challenge when a teacher tries to involve students in teaching and learning. Teachers do not have any other option apart from using participatory methods because national examinations

nowadays are competence-based oriented (Interview with English Teacher₂, School A₂, May 19/2022).

Additionally, through focus group discussions with students, most of them said that their unwillingness to learn English subjects using CBA is because they are not used to it. However, one of the English teachers in School A₂ said *“Apart from the CBA being new to the students, it is their responsibility as teachers to build their students’ willingness”* (Interview with English Teacher₁, School A₂, May 19/2022).

Through an interview held with English teachers, it was discovered that most students in secondary schools nowadays receive poor English education in primary education, in turn, they join secondary schools when they do not know how to read and write. One of the English teachers in School A₁ reported *“There are some students who have a very low reading level. Such students cannot even write their names. Hence, it becomes difficult for these students to be willing to participate in teaching and learning”* (Interview with English Teacher₂, School A₁, May 19/2022).

3.2 Lack of Exposure to English Language and Instruction Problem

The findings indicate that most students in public ordinary secondary schools come from the same area. This has been evident with one interviewee who claimed that this problem is bigger in rural secondary schools where children who speak the same vernacular languages as their native tongue spend time together acquiring both their primary and secondary education, thus they lack exposure to speaking English. Therefore, in primary schools, teachers fight to keep children from speaking vernacular languages, and in secondary schools, the fight

continues to keep them from speaking Swahili and their vernacular languages. In addition to that, an English teacher in School B₂ said:

We are in a remote area, so our students lack exposure to many things, including role models. The English language is spoken only during the lessons; after that, students speak their vernacular languages and Swahili language (Interview with English Teacher₁, School B₂, May 19/2022).

It was also found that *“Even secondary school teachers lack exposure to speaking English because their fellow teachers and students do not cooperate, forcing them to rely on Swahili”* (Interview with Head of School B₁, May 19/2022). These findings indicate that apart from the unwillingness of students, also there is the unwillingness of teachers to communicate by using the English language.

LOI was seen as a challenge to both teachers and students. Most English teachers as well as their students were seen striving to use the English language. At first sight, it was found that English teachers strive to use English when teaching. Moreover, English teachers were seen as lacking a thorough comprehension of the subject matter from their students because they were unfamiliar with the language used to instruct them. It was observed that most of the time, students converse in Swahili while receiving instruction in English. When their teachers asked them questions, very few students dared to speak English when answering oral questions, but whenever their teachers used Swahili, most students responded to whatever asked.

3.3 Large Class Sizes and Limited Time for Curriculum Implementation

The study identified this challenge as distinct from overcrowding. It was discovered that the establishment of fee-free education in both primary and secondary education and the establishment of community secondary schools has resulted in a larger number of children who enrol to secondary schools. Therefore, English teachers find it difficult to execute the so-called CBEC due to the large number of students they have in their respective schools. In an interview with the head of School B₁, it was discovered that in her school there are six streams for form one only with more than 300 students. In School B₂, it was discovered there are seven streams for form one only with nearly 500 students, whereas School B₁ has eight streams for form one only with more than 350 students. With regard to this, one of the English teachers in School A₁ said the following in an interview with her:

Even though we have a large number of classrooms, one of the problems in implementing the CBEC in our school is the student-teacher ratio. Only form one students are roughly more than three hundred at our school. Forms two, three, and four have gone unmentioned, and in our school, there are only two English teachers who teach English subjects to all these classes because other English teachers are teaching other subjects. It becomes difficult to properly teach all these classes using CBA since we become really tired (Interview with English Teacher₁, School B₁, May 18/2022).

Through an interview held with the heads of Schools A₁ and B₁, and English teachers in School A₁; it was found that limited time is one of the challenges English teachers face in adopting the CBEC. This is because gaining all the competencies stipulated in the current English syllabus needs much time, and the time English teachers have is

insufficient because teachers are expected to teach all the English topics before the major examinations. As a result, most English teachers use the time they have only to cover English topics to prepare students for exams rather than make them competent. The reason is that students' achievement in our education is judged by their performance in exams. In this, the head of School A₁ said:

The time English teachers have for teaching and learning English subjects is insufficient due to the requirements of CBC. Therefore, most schools, including my own, place greater emphasis on the examination results rather than meeting the syllabus' objectives, which are to acquire competencies. And, as you know, our national examinations include all of the topics stipulated in the syllabi; therefore, if you concentrate on the students in getting competences, you will not be able to cover all of the topics in the syllabus (Interview with Head of School, School A₁, May 18/2022).

3.4 Nature of English Teaching Syllabus and Lack of Appropriate Teaching and Learning Facilities

Through an interview held with English teachers, it was discovered that the number of English periods an English teacher is supposed to teach in a day or a week, as well as the content that is supposed to be taught in English subject as stipulated by the English syllabus, is a challenge in the implementation of Competence-based English Curriculum. According to the current English syllabus, Forms One and Two have seven periods per stream in a week, whereas Form Three and Four have six periods per stream in a week. English teachers said that this poses a big teaching load to them as nowadays there are a lot of streams.

Moreover, in an interview with an academic teacher in School B₂, it was discovered that the English syllabus demands teachers who are specialists in both structure and literature. Most English teachers are only structurally competent. Hence, the literary section is taught by the same teachers. As a result, having a large number of periods and a heavy load of teaching both English structure and literature for a single teacher contributes to the ineffective implementation of CBEC in secondary schools (Interview with Academic Teacher₂, School B₂, May 19/2022).

For the CBEC to be implemented effectively, English teachers must have teaching and learning facilities that are appropriate for the competencies that are expected to be attained by students, rather than insisting on using participatory approaches. Through interviews, teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that the CBC is implemented without having the teaching and learning resources that interpret the new curriculum. Teachers proposed that before adopting the new curriculum, teaching and learning materials aligned with the new curriculum should be produced first. In this, the head of School B₁ said:

When endorsing the law of the new curriculum, materials were supposed to be already being prepared as you know that, you cannot prepare the fire while you have not hunted an antelope. But in our country, they want us first to adopt the new curriculum which they have not consulted us when designing it, and they do not give us the materials which correlate with the new curriculum. We have to abolish this kind of top-down curriculum design (Interview with Head of School B₁, May 19/2022).

In addition to that, one of the English teachers in School A₁ said; *“There is no any special English textbook or reference book that functions as a guideline for us and students to use in the light of CBEC”* (Interview

with English Teacher₁, School A₁, May 18/2022). Furthermore, one of the English teachers in School A₂ said that to effectively implement the CBEC, teachers should use modern teaching and learning resources, for instance, audio-visual aids.

3.5 Lack of Library and Shortage of Teaching and Learning Materials

Most interviewed English teachers voiced their worries about the shortage of teaching and learning materials like English textbooks. It was discovered that the number of English textbooks does not correlate with the number of students in their schools. In an interview with the head of School B₁, he reported that; *“We do not have the teaching and learning materials under the new curriculum, but at least we were supposed to have enough textbooks”* (Interview with Head of School B₁, May 19/2022). This was supported by an English teacher in the same school who said that there are nearly three hundred-three students in their school; unfortunately, they have only three books in each genre of literature.

It was discovered that textbooks are kept in a designated classroom without furniture at School A₁ and in the academic office at School B₁. Through focus group discussion, students at School A₁ said *“Even if we want to do a self-study during our free time, we cannot because of not having a library”* (Focus Group Discussion with Students, School A₁, May 19/2022). Furthermore, in an interview with one of the English teachers in School B₁, he said that:

For students to participate in the teaching and learning of the English subject, they must have first a culture of self-study. However, the question is: where will students go for a comfortable self-study if their school does not have a

library? (Interview with English Teacher₂, School B₁, May 19/2022).

The foregoing excerpt indicates that the library plays a significant role in developing a culture of self-study.

3.6 Lack of Teachers' In-service Training on the New Curriculum

Heads of school and English teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of teachers' in-service training when it comes to curriculum changes. In an interview with the head of School B₁ when asked if his English teachers had ever attended any in-service training seminar about CBC, he responded:

No, implementing CBC is just an order from the top without any preparation for the teachers. In our school, we usually warm up to each other. However, this is not enough because the capacity-building seminars on CBC were supposed to be provided by the government before endorsing the new curriculum (Interview with Head of School B₁, May 19/2022).

Likewise, in an interview held with English teachers in Schools A₂ and B₂, they said that they have noticed for many years that the English syllabus that we have is not consistent. When a Minister for Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) is appointed, he or she comes with his or her own set of curriculum input without any preparation for the teachers. On the other hand, teachers are not involved in the process of making such modifications, and even after that, they are not prepared to deal with such changes in the curriculum.

Furthermore, English teachers in schools A₁, A₂, B₁, and B₂ when interviewed, said that normally when the government changes the

curriculum, there are no effective orientations after the changes. Therefore, the CBEC has been poorly implemented due to English teachers' lack of knowledge of the new curriculum. In backing this up, one of the English teachers in School B₂ said that:

You know, one of the challenges we as English teachers face in the implementation of CBEC is failure to interpret the demands of the current syllabus especially the structural patterns which go together with the main and subtopics (Interview with English Teacher₂, School B₂, May 19/2022).

3.7 Lack of Commitment among the Teachers

Through an interview held with teachers and students, it was discovered that some of the teachers, particularly teachers of other subjects apart from English subjects, are not committed to ensuring that their students master the English language, even though English is used as LOI in most subjects. An academic teacher in School B₂ said *“While programmes like debates and morning speeches are supposed to be supervised by all teachers, that task has been left only to English teachers”* (Interview with English Teacher₁, School B₂, May 19/2022). Similarly, this was discovered in School A₂ in an interview with the academic teacher who said, *“Most of the teachers who teach other subjects, especially Swahili do not cooperate when it comes to speaking English”* (Interview with Academic Teacher₁, School A₂, May 19/2022).

Additionally, in focus group discussions with the students in Schools A₁ and A₂, it was discovered that some English teachers are not serious enough about imparting the required English competencies to the students. During the focus group discussion, one focus group member was noted saying *“Most English teachers do not use teaching aids. It is*

only English teachers who use teaching aids” (Focus Group Discussion with Students, School A₂, May 19/2022). This shows that apart from the students, even English teachers are not willing enough to impart the desired English competencies to their students.

4.0 Discussion

The assumption of the study was if all of the identified challenges encountered by teachers and students in the implementation of CBEC are addressed, the schools will be able to fulfil their tasks of implementing the CBEC effectively in Tanzania. The identified challenges in the implementation of CBEC in public ordinary secondary schools were the following: unwillingness of the students, nature of the students, lack of exposure to the English language, language of instruction problem, large class sizes, limited time for curriculum implementation, nature of English teaching syllabus, lack of library, lack of appropriate teaching and learning facilities, shortage of teaching and learning materials, lack of teachers’ in-service training on the new curriculum and lack of commitment among the teachers.

These findings concur with those of Sahiruddin (2013) who noted the following challenges in teaching and learning English in Indonesia: overcrowding, teachers’ low English proficiency, lack of adequate preparation to teach the new curriculum, cultural barriers for teachers to relinquish the role of a teacher and accepting the role of facilitator, less authentic materials and lack of opportunities to socialize English language outside the classroom.

Similarly, these findings are supported by those of Nkwetisama (2012) who noted the following challenges in teaching and learning English: insufficient teacher training, huge classes, and lack of teaching and learning resources, inadequacies in blackboards and desks, and excessive enrolment of students. Furthermore, these findings concur

with those of Makunja (2016) who noted that lack of teachers' in-service training on the CBC, exclusion of teachers when reviewing the curriculum, insufficient teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, low ability of the students joining secondary education and unwillingness of the students in accepting the learner-centered approach as the challenges encountered in the implementation of CBC.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the implementation of CBEC in public ordinary secondary schools in Tanzania encounters a variety of challenges such as unwillingness of the students, nature of the students, lack of exposure to the English language, language of instruction problems, large class sizes, limited time for curriculum implementation, nature of English teaching syllabus, lack of library, lack of appropriate teaching and learning facilities, shortage of teaching and learning materials, lack of teachers' in-service training on the new curriculum, and lack of commitment among the teachers.

Based on the study findings, analysis, discussion and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are generally made. English teachers who are the key implementers of CBEC should be creative in solving English teaching problems in their schools rather than waiting for the government. Students and English teachers must cooperate closely to promote effective teaching and learning of English subjects.

English language departments, in collaboration with school administration, should ensure that effective capacity-building seminars are held in their departments, allowing English teachers with little knowledge of CBC to impart what they know to others rather than waiting for the government. In addition to that, English teachers should get frequent in-service training from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) on the required skills and knowledge for implementing CBEC. To attract students' willingness to learn English

subjects under the CBA, the government through the MoEST, needs to equip our public ordinary secondary schools with well-equipped academic libraries, Competence-based Teaching and Learning English materials, and linguistic laboratories. Lastly, the study recommends that a similar study be conducted in other parts of Tanzania in public ordinary secondary schools as well as in private ordinary secondary schools due to the usefulness of the English language in Tanzanian secondary education.

References

- Brock-Utne, B. (2002). *The most recent developments concerning the Debate on Language of Instruction in Tanzania*. A paper presented to the NETREED Conference from the 7th to the 9th of January 2002, Oslo: University of Oslo.
- Feruzi, S., & Li, Y. (2019). Teachers' position on implementing competence-based curriculum in Tanzania: Adoption of the first framework. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 3(9), 411–416.
- Kafyulilo, A., Rugambuka, I., & Ikupa, M. (2012). The implementation of competency-based approaches in Tanzania. A case of pre-service teachers at Morogoro Teacher Training College. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 311–326.
- Komba, S., Kafanabo, E., & Njabili, A. (2012). Comparison between students' academic performance and their abilities in written English language skills: A Tanzanian perspective. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 1(2), 21–28.
- Makunja, G. (2016). Challenges facing teachers in implementing competence-based curriculum in Tanzania: The case of community secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 3(5), 30–37.

- Mkonongwa, P. (2012). *Quality education in Tanzania context*. A paper presented to the African Federation of Head of schools Conference at Mlimani City. Dar es Salaam: MoEVT.
- Nkwetisama, C. (2012). The competency-based approach to English language education and the walls between the classroom and the society in Cameroon: Pulling down the Walls. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(3), 516–523.
- Sahiruddin. (2013). *The implementation of the 2013 curriculum and the issues of English language teaching and learning in Indonesia*. A paper presented at the Asian Conference on Language Learning 2013. The International Academic Forum.
- Sumra, S., & Katabaro, J. (2014). *Declining quality of education: Suggestions for arresting and reversing the trend*. Dar es Salaam: The Economic and Social Research Foundation.
- Tanzania Institute of Education [TIE], (2009). *Curriculum for ordinary level secondary education in Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: MoEVT.
- Tilya, F., & Mafumiko, F. (2018). *The compatibility between teaching methods and competence-based curriculum in Tanzania*. Papers in Education and Development, p. 29–36. Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam.
- Woods, E. (2008). *Tanzania case study: In UNESCO country profile commissioned for EFA and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.