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CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM IN TANZANIA: A NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) is one of the largest education reform movements sweeping across the globe. Many countries, including Tanzania, have made concerted efforts to implement this innovative approach to curriculum and instruction. This narrative literature review, therefore, aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing CBC implementation in Tanzania. The review analyzed 27 relevant studies published between 2012 and 2024, which revealed that, the implementation of CBC in Tanzania faces a myriad of challenges, including inadequate teacher preparation and training, limited resources and infrastructure constraints, language barriers and systemic as well as motivational issues. These multifaceted challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address the obstacles and ensure the successful implementation of the CBC. The review acknowledges the need for future studies so as to expand the geographical scope, incorporate quantitative data, explore long-term impacts, investigate stakeholders' perspectives and evaluate innovative approaches.

Keywords: Competency-Based Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation, Educational Reform, Tanzania, Teacher Training

INTRODUCTION

The global educational landscape is currently experiencing a fundamental curriculum shift as quite a good number of countries are in transition from traditional knowledge-based approaches to competency-based curriculum (CBC) (Micheni, 2021; Muthuri, 2023; Ndimbo, 2023; Mlenge et al., 2025). This transformation, represents one of the most significant educational reforms in the 21st

century, driven by an urgent need to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical skills demanded by the evolving global economy. The CBC approach being adopted by many countries, emphasizes the development of practical skills, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities rather than mere knowledge acquisition (Shedrack, 2023; Bizimana, 2024). Tanzania, having adopted CBC in 2005 (Komba & Mwandanji,

2015; Hipolite, 2019; Nkya et al., 2021), exemplifies this worldwide movement towards educational reforms. However, the implementation process has revealed significant challenges that require systematic investigation and analysis particularly in the context of limited resources and existing educational infrastructure.

Recent studies have extensively documented CBC implementation across various contexts, providing valuable insights into both successful strategies and common challenges. For instance, studies from India's 2005 on National Curriculum Framework (Anderson-Levitt, 2017), Zambia's 2013 on CBC initiative (Kabomb & Mulenga, 2019; Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019) and Zimbabwe's 2015 on reforms (Muzvondiwa & Gudyanga, 2024). In the same vein in Kenya (Sifuna & Obonyo, 2019; Gichuru et al., 2021; Waruingi et al., 2022) have highlighted the CBC adoption and implementation on both successes and challenges. These studies collectively emphasize the importance of proper planning, resource allocation and teacher preparation for successful CBC implementation. In Tanzania specifically, fragmented studies have identified various implementation challenges as pointed out by (Mokoro, 2020; Nkya et al., 2021; Assey, 2022; Nyoni, 2023), while broader research has examined the transition from knowledge-based to competency-oriented approaches (Godfrey, 2018; Hipolite, 2019). Contemporary investigations by Andrew (2021), Murithi & Yoo (2021) and Anderson-Levitt & Gardinier (2023) have further emphasized the complexities of CBC

implementation in developing nations, particularly highlighting the need for contextual adaptation and sustainable support systems.

Despite the growing body of research on CBC implementation globally, there remains a critical gap in the comprehensive understanding specific challenges in the Tanzanian context. While existing studies have identified isolated issues, little systematic analysis has holistically examined the interconnected challenges of infrastructure, teacher preparedness, assessment methods and resource allocation. Notable studies by Komba and Mwandanji (2015), Muneja (2015), Mohamed and Karuku (2017); Assey (2022) and Nombo (2022) have focused on various aspects of CBC implementation in Tanzania. However, these studies, while valuable, are neither narrative nor systematic reviews, thus leaving a significant gap in the comprehensive understanding of implementational challenges. The absence of a holistic review hampers the development of effective solutions and evidence-based policies for successful CBC implementation in Tanzania.

This narrative literature review aims at providing a comprehensive analysis with regard to the challenges facing CBC implementation in Tanzania. The study's primary objective is to critically explore the existing body of research so as to develop a holistic understanding of CBC implementation barriers, with particular focus on infrastructure development, teacher training, assessment strategies and resource management. The novelty of this research lies on its systematic approach to

analyzing the complex interplay of challenges specifically to the Tanzanian context, offering valuable insights to policymakers, educators and researchers on how the challenges can be addressed. Furthermore, the findings will serve as a crucial reference point for other developing nations undertaking similar curriculum reforms, contributing to the broader discourse on educational transformation. This review is particularly timely as more African nations consider or implement CBC reforms, making the lessons learned from Tanzania's experience invaluable for regional educational development.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a narrative synthesis approach, to systematically review and integrate existing literature on the challenges of CBC implementation in Tanzania. Data were collected from secondary sources, including 27 peer-reviewed articles, theses and dissertations published between 2012 and 2025.

For this narrative literature review, a comprehensive search of academic databases, including Google Scholar, the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC) and the Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE) were conducted. The search strategy utilized keywords such as "Competence-Based Curriculum in Tanzania," "CBC implementation Tanzania," "Challenges of CBC in Tanzania," "Curriculum implementation barriers," "Curriculum implementation constraints in Tanzania," and "CBC challenges Tanzania." Only open-access studies written in English

and specifically addressing CBC implementation challenges in Tanzania were included.

The search covered publications from 2012 to 2025, as the researchers aimed at providing the most up-to-date understanding of the subject matter. In total, 27 relevant studies were reviewed, with 25 published between 2015 and 2024, and 2 studies published in 2025.

The inclusion of the 2025 studies was made so as to provide the most up-to-date understanding of the issue under study, which allowed the incorporation of the latest developments in the field.

The studies were critically analyzed and synthesized to identify the key themes, findings and implications relevant to the research question. Thematic analysis was carried out using the narrative synthesis method, which involved categorizing challenges into common themes, exploring their inter-connections to develop a holistic understanding and synthesizing findings in order to propose actionable solutions based on emerging patterns in the literature. Ethical considerations were also observed, including the appropriate citation of all sources and the use of publicly available documents.

This approach was apt for the study since it ensures the literature review provides a thorough and contemporary understanding of the topic, drawing upon both established research and the most recent advancements in the field. The narrative structure of the review allows a comprehensive and coherent presentation of the current state of knowledge, enabling readers and reviewers to gain a clear and well-informed

perspective on the challenges with regard to CBC implementation in Tanzania.

Results and Discussion

The systematic analysis of the existing literature, revealed four major challenges

hindering CBC implementation in Tanzania of which were organized by significance based on prevalence in the reviewed literature as summarized in Table 1 and being analyzed in details below.

Table 1: Challenges of Implementing Competency-Based Curriculum in Tanzania

Challenges	Article reviewed
Teachers' Limited Understanding and Training	Kavindi, 2014; Kopweh, 2014; Paulo, 2014; Makunja, 2015; Ndunguru, 2016; Hipolite, 2019; Mkonongwa, 2018; Mokoro, 2020; Kinyunyu, 2020; Mathias et al., 2023; Shiboko and Mrema, 2024; Komba and Mwandani, 2025
Resource and Infrastructure Constraints	Muneja, 2015; Lukindo, 2016; Ndunguru, 2016; Mkonongwa, 2018; Nyoni, 2018; Hipolite, 2019; Kangalawe et al., 2019; Mgaya, 2023; Ndibo, 2023; Issa et al., 2024; Mpate, 2023; Mlenge et al., 2025
Language and Communication Barriers	Nkingwa, 2013; Godfrey, 2018; Nyoni, 2018; Saware, 2021; Nkya et al., 2021; Venance, 2022; Issa et al., 2024
Systemic and Motivational Issues	Kafyulilo et al., 2012; Muneja, 2015; Mkonongwa, 2018; Hipolite, 2019; Mokoro, 2020; Saware, 2021; Msamba et al., 2023; Mlenge et al., 2025

Teachers' Limited Understanding and Training

Insufficient understanding and preparation among teachers were the most significant challenge in implementing the CBC in Tanzania as a knowledge gap regarding competency-based teaching approaches being indicated consistently with the studies by (Mkonongwa, 2018; Makunja, 2015). In a recent study by Komba and Mwandani (2025), 86% of teachers studied, did not fully grasp the objectives of CBC. Furthermore, the review of lesson plans showed that, 78% lacked the essential qualities of competency-based planning. Classroom observations further demonstrated minimal

student's engagement in activities, with formative assessments occurring in less than half of the observed sessions.

The root cause of this problem can be traced back to the inadequate training opportunities as asserted by Hipolite (2019) that, in-service training programs are often limited and primarily focus on science teachers, leaving many arts subject teachers without the necessary pedagogical skills for effective CBC implementation. In Rukwa region, many teachers are from colleges where their training sessions do not adequately prepare them for the roles required under the CBC framework (Nombo,

2022). This shortage of professional development opportunities is further illustrated in Arumeru District, whereby only 34% of teachers have received CBC training, leaving 66% untrained (Mokoro, 2020). Besides, Ndunguru (2016) reported that, teachers' understanding of the Competence-Based Curriculum was somewhat inadequate and while Paulo (2014) observed the persistence of traditional, teacher-centered teaching methods and paper-and-pencil forms of assessment.

Moreover, Makunja (2015) emphasized that, lack of formal training complicates teachers' abilities in lesson planning and in identifying competencies to be assessed. In that regard, the situation is exacerbated by funding constraints that further limit training opportunities. In light of these challenges, Shiboko and Mrema (2024) recommended targeted training for teachers to address the critical gaps identified. Likewise, the study by Kinyunyu (2020) in Mufindi District, Tanzania, also recommended improving teacher training to enhance teachers' competencies in competency-based curriculum implementation.

Notably, these findings resonate with those in Peru, where teachers hold favorable perceptions on CBC but demonstrate superficial knowledge regarding its implementation, indicating a pressing need for further training (Ramos Solis, 2020). Similarly, research from Kenya corroborates these challenges, with Gichuru (2024) reporting that, teachers are not adequately prepared to implement the curriculum due to insufficient training (Isaboke et al., 2021).

Consequently, the overarching theme across these contexts, reveals a critical deficiency in the pedagogical content knowledge required to effectively implement the CBC which underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and sustained teacher training programs; that equip educators with the necessary skills and understanding to successfully implement the CBC in Tanzania and similar educational contexts.

Resource and Infrastructure Constraints

On the other hand, the implementation of CBC faces challenges related to insufficient teaching and learning materials across various regions in East Africa. Multiple studies reviewed in Tanzania have highlighted inadequate teaching and learning facilities as a major obstacle towards its implementation (Kopweh, 2014; Muneja, 2015; Msuya, 2016; Ndunguru, 2016; Mkonongwa, 2018; Hipolite, 2019; Mgaya, 2023; Mpate, 2023; Issa et al., 2024).

One of the best examples can be cited in Iringa municipality, Tanzania, in which the study by Nyoni (2018, p. 209) documented severe shortages of essential materials, noting that: "*Teaching materials in our school are not enough. Teachers' books, textbooks, pictures, diagrams and students' reference books are not enough*". For that reason, the shortage of essential resources unquestionably undermine the effective implementation of the CBC in the country. Similarly, Lukindo (2016) found that, lack of teaching resources such as textbooks was seen as a reason hindering the implementation process of CBC. Besides,

Kangalawe et al. (2019) in Temeke, Dar es Salaam, found that, the mode of assessment used in schools was predominantly pen and paper and the availability of resources was poor apart from depicting an acute shortage of teachers in science subjects.

Overcrowded classrooms presented another significant infrastructure challenge that hindering effective CBC implementation. This has been recently observed in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, where Mlenge et al. (2025, p. 10) found that, *"The number of pupils are too large compared to the number of teachers and classrooms. STD I, II and III have 120 pupils in one classroom, respectively."* This issue has been reported across different regions in the country, including Ilala Municipality and Morogoro Municipality in Tanzania. As Hipolite (2019, p. 33) observed that, *"It is hard to conduct discussion in a class because students are more overcrowded in a single room so it is hard to have teacher-student interactions and students-to-students interaction"*. The same problem was observed by Ndibo (2023) in Mwapwa district in Dodoma city in Tanzania, as well as Ndunguru (2016) in Nachingwea District in Tanzania. Definitely, the overcrowded conditions in the classes significantly impair the interactive learning environment that CBC requires.

Furthermore, Msuya (2016) in Tanzania, reported insufficient teaching and learning resources, including inadequate library space, that hinder the implementation of CBC. Similarly, Mpate (2023) in Tanzania reported inadequate laboratory space for equipment storage as one of the challenges for teachers to implement CBC. Thus, the

challenges are both in terms of human, financial and infrastructure resources (Kangalawe et al., 2019). Ndunguru (2016) suggested that, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and other educational officials should send enough teaching and learning materials to schools so as to address the challenge.

Similarly, resources and infrastructure constraints have been observed in other East African countries. For instance, in Kenya, Cheruiyot (2024) found that, limited resources, including shortages of textbooks, digital tools and adequate infrastructure, as well as infrastructural deficits such as inadequate classroom space and unreliable internet connectivity, complicate the delivery of CBC-aligned education. Likewise, in Uganda, Najjuma (2024) found that, the large class sizes hinder the implementation of the CBC in the country. The study recommended that, the government should recruit more teachers to manage the big class sizes. Moreover, the study conducted in Kabale Municipality, in Uganda, recommended provision of support and resources so as to ensure the effective implementation of the CBC. Unquestionably, instructional materials are considered essential in order to enable interaction between teachers and learners (Najjuma, 2024).

The findings across Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, underscore the critical need for policymakers and education authorities to address the resources and infrastructural constraints that impede the effective implementation of the CBC in East African countries. Providing sufficient teaching and learning materials, as well as ensuring

appropriate classroom sizes and infrastructure, are essential in creating a conducive environment for the successful adoption and implementation of CBC which is a transformative educational approach worldwide.

Language and Communication Barriers

Furthermore, the implementation of CBC faces challenges related to language and communication skills across various regions in East Africa. Language has emerged as a crucial challenge in the implementation of CBC in Tanzania. Studies have revealed that, the use of English as the medium of instruction poses significant barriers for both teachers and students (Nyoni, 2018; Nkya et al., 2021; Venance, 2022). In Iringa municipality, Nyoni (2018, p. 211) found that, "Language of instruction is a serious problem in schools. Despite the fact that, English is the language of instruction, but most of the students are not familiar with this language, which makes it difficult for students to participate and effectively grasp the lessons taught". Similar language barriers were reported in Ilala municipality, where both teachers and students struggle with English proficiency, hampering the effective implementation of the CBC (Saware, 2021).

Previous studies in Tanzania have also highlighted the issue of English proficiency as a barrier to many students (Nkingwa, 2013; Nyoni, 2018). In recognizing this challenge, the revised Education and Training Policy of 2023 in Tanzania has placed a greater emphasis on English language learning, mandating that, learners in public schools should learn English as a compulsory subject from Standard One (Issa

et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the problem of language seems to persist in other countries as well, as pointed out in studies carried out in Indonesia (Zaifuddin, 2015) and Kenya (Mandillah, 2019; Okal, 2022; Akhwesa, 2023) which recommended strategies such as strengthening English proficiency, promoting vernacular languages and enhancing teacher's training to address the language barriers in implementing CBC effectively.

The language of instruction and communication skills barriers, particularly the dominance of English as the medium of instruction, have emerged as a significant hurdle in the successful implementation of the CBC in Tanzania and other East African countries. There is a prerequisite of addressing these language-related challenges through comprehensive interventions, such as improving English language proficiency, leveraging vernacular languages and providing targeted teacher training, will be crucial for ensuring the effective and inclusive adoption of this transformative educational approach as recommended by other scholars.

Systemic and Motivational Issues

The reviewed studies revealed the systemic and motivational issues being amongst the challenges in the implementation of CBC in Tanzania which emerge from both the pre-service teacher preparation and the curriculum development processes. Generally, there are serious concerns about the quality of teacher's preparation programs in teacher's colleges and other educational institutions which negatively impact the effective implementation of CBC.

The best examples can be spotted on the foundational level as revealed in the study by Kafyulilo et al. (2012, p. 346) who highlighted that, at Morogoro teacher training college. The researcher noted that, *"pre-service teachers graduating from Morogoro teacher training college have limited knowledge and skills of applying CBC approaches in their teaching"*. The mediocre preparation of teachers, creates a systemic weakness that affects the CBC implementation from the outset. As Mlenge et al. (2025) pointed out, *"the study found teacher's incompetence directly affects student performance"* and they opined that *"the government should prioritize the in-service teacher's training so as to achieve the quality education."*

Moreover, the implementation process itself has been characterized by a problematic top-down approach. Quite a good number of studies indicate that, teachers who are key stakeholders in curriculum implementation, are largely excluded from the curriculum development and implementation process (Muneja, 2015; Hipolite, 2019). As Chale (2018) reported in Mwanza, *"teachers are not involved in the curriculum review process, but rather at the implementation stage."* Instead of being active participants in the curriculum's development, teachers are merely given directions by other curriculum developers. Lack of participation in curriculum development and reviews, has created a vacuum between curriculum developers and implementers, potentially destabilizing the effectiveness of CBC implementation.

The systemic issues have had significant implications for teacher's motivation.

Multiple studies have documented that, teachers' exclusion from the curriculum designing and implementation process has negatively impacted their motivation to implement CBC effectively (Muneja, 2015; Mkonongwa, 2018; Saware, 2021). Emphasizing systemic and motivational issues in implementing CBC, Msamba et al. (2023) pointed out that *"poor teacher training, disconnects curriculum designers and implementers, and thus negatively impact on teacher motivation."* In the same vein, the study by Mokoro (2020) in Arumeru district found that, lack of teacher's training, hinders effective CBC implementation, thus, recommending the issue to be addressed in order to enhance motivation amongst teachers. The combination of inadequate pre-service preparation, limited involvement in curriculum development, and top-down implementation approaches has created a challenging environment for successful CBC implementation.

In contrast, a study from Sri Lanka by Nawastheen (2021) opined that, in any curricular reforms, *"teachers should be given greater attention as they are the main agents of implementation."* The study revealed that, while both experienced and novice language teachers generally feel optimistic about the new curriculum (Rahimi & Alavi, 2017), lack of meaningful teacher involvement in the Tanzanian context has undermined the success of CBC implementation. Likewise, in Rwanda, Biziman (2024) urged that *"there is a need of developing and implementing comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on empowering educators to*

embrace a student-centered approach." Thus, to address the systemic and motivational issues, policymakers and curriculum developers in Tanzania should focus on strengthening pre-service teacher preparation and actively involving teachers in the curriculum design and implementation process.

Conclusion and The Way Forward

This narrative literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of the key challenges facing the implementation of CBC in Tanzania. Through a systematic examination of existing literature, the review has identified four interconnected challenges that significantly impact the successful implementation of CBC namely: teachers' limited understanding and training, resources and infrastructure constraints, language barriers and systemic issues. The review reveals a gap between policy aspirations and the realities in the implementation process, particularly in the areas of teacher's preparation and resource allocation. Specifically, it highlights lack of adequate resources for infrastructure

development and teaching materials as a major obstacle, while also suggesting that, language policies need to be reviewed and revised to better support CBC implementation. Moreover, the literature review points out that, there is a need of establishing systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to address the systemic issues hindering the CBC progress. Although the review acknowledges several limitations, such as the predominance of qualitative studies and the geographic concentration of research, it offers valuable recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions and future research which include developing comprehensive teacher training programs, allocating sufficient resources, reviewing language policies and creating structured mentoring programs as well as local resources production initiatives. Ultimately, this literature review provides a robust foundation for evidence-based decision-making in Tanzania's ongoing educational reform efforts to successfully implement the CBC in the country.

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