World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Mathematical and Computational Sciences
Vol:13, No:05, 2019

Challenges for Competency-Based Learning Design in Primary School Mathematics in Mozambique

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Abstract : The term ‘competency’ is attracting considerable scholarly attention worldwide with the advance of globalization in the 21st century and with the arrival of a knowledge-based society. In the current world environment, familiarity with varied disciplines is regarded to be vital for personal success. The idea of a competency-based educational system was mooted by the ‘Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo)’ project that was conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Further, attention to this topic is not limited to developed countries; it can also be observed in developing countries. For instance, the importance of a competency-based curriculum was mentioned in the ‘2013 Harmonized Curriculum Framework for the East African Community’, which recommends key competencies that should be developed in primary schools. The introduction of such curricula and the reviews of programs are actively being executed, primarily in the East African Community but also in neighboring nations. Taking Mozambique as a case in point, the present paper examines the conception of ‘competency’ as a target of frontline education in developing countries. It also aims to discover the manner in which the syllabus, textbooks and lessons, among other things, in primary-level math education are developed and to determine the challenges faced in the process. This study employs the perspective of competency-based education design to analyze how the term ‘competency’ is defined in the primary-level math syllabus, how it is reflected in the textbooks, and how the lessons are actually developed. ‘Practical competency’ is mentioned in the syllabus, and the description of the term lays emphasis on learners' ability to interactively apply socio-cultural and technical tools, which is one of the key competencies that are advocated in OECD's ‘Definition and Selection of Competencies’ project. However, most of the content of the textbooks pertains to ‘basic academic ability’, and in actual classroom practice, teachers often impart lessons straight from the textbooks. It is clear that the aptitude of teachers and their classroom routines are greatly dependent on the cultivation of their own ‘practical competency’ as it is defined in the syllabus. In other words, there is great divergence between the ‘syllabus’, which is the intended curriculum, and the content of the ‘textbooks’. In fact, the material in the textbooks should serve as the bridge between the syllabus, which forms the guideline, and the lessons, which represent the ‘implemented curriculum’. Moreover, the results obtained from this investigation reveal that the problem can only be resolved through the cultivation of ‘practical competency’ in teachers, which is currently not sufficient.

Keywords : competency, curriculum, mathematics education, Mozambique
Conference Title : ICMSE 2019 : International Conference on Mathematics and Science Education
Conference Location : Montreal, Canada
Conference Dates : May 23-24, 2019