Teachers' and Pupils' Understanding of Competency-Based Assessment for Tanzania Primary School Pupils' Learning in Mpwapwa District

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Authors' contributions

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored primary school teachers' and pupils' views on competency-based assessment. The study focused on teachers' understanding of the conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment, views on competency-based assessment methods for pupils' effective learning, and pupils' opinions on pertinent competency-based assessment methods for effective learning. The study employed a qualitative approach, and it was conducted in Mpwapwa District. 40 participants; 10 classroom teachers, 5 Head teachers and 25 Standard IV pupils were involved in the study. Interviews and focus group discussion methods were used for data collection. Data were thematically analyzed. The findings showed that 80% of classroom teachers were not sure of the exact conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment. The findings revealed two scenarios of competency-based assessments for pupils' learning. It included the use of more practical-based assessments than theoretical paper-based assessments. It was also found that pupils prefer

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formative competency-based assessments to summative. The study concluded that practical-based assessment methods included projects, portfolios, demonstrations, dialogues, interviews, dramatization, and discovery seemed more relevant for pupils' effective learning than theoretical paper-based assessments. The study recommends that since leaning especially for the 21st century focuses on developing pupils' competencies/skills, it is convenient to employ more practical-based assessments than theoretical paper-based. Similarly, it is recommended that summative assessments, specifically those carried out at the end of the course, should be used for pupils' placement in accordance with their developed and demonstrated competencies/skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

In teaching and learning process, assessment is among the crucial aspects. This is because an assessment provides a milestone to understand what both teachers and students/pupils have achieved, what has not been achieved, and the way forward. Subkhan[1] has revealed that teaching and learning especially, for the 21st century should focus on learners' developing and demonstrating various competencies. It includes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication.

In this regard, assessing/evaluating individuals' capabilities and skills using a competency-based assessment is no longer an option but necessary. This is because the assessment is viewed a strategic approach used to measure/evaluate an individual's real ability to perform specific tasks, master daily life challenges, and compete in the world labour market [2,3].

This study explored Tanzanian primary school teachers' views on competency-based assessment for pupils' effective learning. It centred on teachers' understanding of conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment, assessment methods, and pupils' opinions towards competency-based assessments for effective learning. The researcher was motivated by two factors; first Mosha's study (2012), and second Mpwapwa District Educational Report of 2021 & 2022.

Mosha (2012) for example, investigated the implementation of competence-based curriculum in Tanzanian primary schools, focused on Standard IV and VII. The study found among others National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) is responsible for standard IV and VII final national assessments. According to Mosha (2012), the assessments/examinations carried out by NECTA do not follow competency-based methods rather are standardized summative which maintained judging pupils pass or fail. It is further explained by Mosha that the final assessment/examinations provided by NECTA for standard IV and VII pupils sometimes, are set without much regard to what pupils have learned in classrooms resulting into pupils' unexpected failure.

As noted above, the researcher was also motivated by Mpwapwa District Education report of 2021 and 2022 that showed a number of primary school pupils failed standard IV and VII final national examination. The report for example, revealed that 758 pupils out of 9744 who sat for standard VII final national examinations in 2022 failed. Likewise in 2021, 1009 out of 6688 pupils failed standard VII final national examinations. On the other hand 788 out of 9774 pupils who sat for standard IV final national examinations in 2021 failed. Similarly, 611 pupils out 9034 failed standard IV final national examinations in 2022 [4].

In this regard, it was assumed by the researcher that competency-based assessment methods used by NECTA to assess pupils at the end of the course, standard IV and VII were not effective for pupils learning. Thus, this study was planned to explore both teachers' and pupils' views on competency-based assessments for primary school pupils' effective learning as they are important stake-holders in the whole process of teaching and learning [5,6].

Literature [7] has viewed competency-based assessment as an approach used to measure an individual's skills, knowledge, and ability related to a specific role or objective. The assessment mainly focuses on the actual performance of an individual rather than mere theoretical knowledge.

In the learning process for example, competency-based assessment is referred to as

an ongoing procedure of gathering evidence of what each student knows, understands, and can do [2].With competency-based assessment, it is asserted that learners' mastery is realized through their abilities to apply the learned competencies [8].

Brouse[3] has established various roles and profits of competency-based assessment for pupils' learning. It included ensuring an individual learner's possession of the necessary competencies to succeed in a given role or academic programme. Learners' application of the learned competencies inside and outside classroom, and learners' motivation for life-long learning are other profits. Brouse [3] has also informed that learners' placement on various learning areas in accordance with their mastery of the developed and demonstrated competencies as another profit of competency-based assessment.

On the other hand, World literature [9,10] has proposed several competency-based assessment methods to be used for students/pupils' effective learning. The methods included self-assessment, portfolio, assignment, project, expert operative, and multi-rater and 360-degree. Other methods such as diagnostic, tests and examinations executed within the course are also proposed.

However, Chandwani[11] discourages the use of standardized examinations specifically those carried out at the end of the course or programme. According to Chandwani, the standardized examinations carried out at the end of the course cause students/pupils' overwhelming pressure which resulted into unexpected failures.

Nevertheless, it is argued that the applicability of competency-based assessment methods for students/pupils' effective learning vary depending on the context [8].It is asserted that in the context where infrastructures such as classrooms, human resources, and teaching and learning facilities are well established, the applicability of competency-based assessment methods for students/pupils' effective learning can be realized [12,8].

The world is transforming with a high need for skilled people for the 21st century, to master the emerging life challenges. Using competency-based assessment as a strategic approach to measure/evaluate individuals' abilities to perform

specific roles or tasks is crucial for this course [2,3].

Different countries have adopted competency-based assessment for teaching and learning to measure learners' skills and abilities. Evidence shows that the most successful countries on competency-based assessment include the developed and rapidly developing countries such as North Korea and China [13]; (Yang, 2014), with limited evidence in the non-developed countries including Tanzania.

Tanzania like other world countries adopted competency-based assessments for primary school pupils learning since 2005 [14,5]. The reasons for adopting competency-based assessment was to achieve its profits among otherslearners' motivation for life-long learning, learners' application of the learned competencies inside and outside classroom, and learners' placement on various learning areas in accordance with their mastery of the developed and demonstrated competencies[6,3].

However, the report by Mosha (2012) indicates that Tanzania has been mostly using summative assessments at the end of the course/programme to measure or evaluate pupils' competencies. According to Mosha, the assessments carried out at the end of the course specifically, at the end of Standard IV and VII do not follow competency-based hence, resulting into some pupils' failure.

Aligned with Mosha's report (2012), Mpwapwa District Education report for example, indicated that 758 pupils out of 9744 who sat for standard VII national examinations in 2022 failed. Likewise in 2021, 1009 out of 6688 pupils failed standard VII national examinations. On the other hand 788 out of 9774 pupils who sat for standard IV national examinations in 2021 failed. Similarly, 611 pupils out 9034 failed standard IV national examinations in 2022 [4].

This situation raised the researchers' doubt that if at all Tanzania practices competency-based assessments [5], how comes pupils' failure. Likewise, this failure of pupils contradicts the applicability and profits of competency-based assessment for pupils' learning included motivation for life-long learning, and placement of pupils in other learning areas in accordance with their developed and demonstrated mastery [3,15].

However, Nzima [8] argues that applicability of competency-based assessment for effective learning varies depending on the context. This study therefore, explored teachers' and pupils' views on competency-based assessment for pupils' effective learning in the Tanzanian context specifically, Mpwapwa District. To address this, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine teachers' understanding of the conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment.
2. To explore relevant competency-based assessment methods for primary school pupils' effective learning.
3. To explore pupils' opinions towards pertinentcompetency-based assessment methods for effective learning.

1.1 Competency-Based Assessment

It was thought important to understand about competency prior to competency-based assessment. Literature has provided meaning of competency as a person's skills or abilities to perform or complete a particular task successfully [2]. Competency has also been defined as a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed by an individual to perform a specific task [16].

Various scholars have informed meaning of competency-based assessment. Idrissi [17] for example, has viewed competency-based assessment as an approach used to measure individuals' skills, knowledge, and abilities related to a specific role or learning objective. Brouse [3] expounds meaning of competency-based assessment as a method commonly used in educational and professional settings to evaluate individuals' readiness for a particular task or to measure their progress towards specific learning objectives. The assessment is used in conjunction with competency-based education of training programmes, which aim to develop and improve specific competencies required for a role or profession.

1.2 Competency-Based Assessment for the 21st Century Teaching and Learning

Competency-based assessment is a crucial aspect for the 21st century for teaching and learning. This is because the assessment mainly focuses on the actual performance or practical application of an individual's knowledge and skills rather than mere theoretical knowledge. The assessment is characterized by an ongoing procedure of gathering evidence of what each student knows, understands, and can do [2]. It is claimed that with competency-based assessment, learners' mastery is realized through their abilities to apply the learned competencies [8]. This suggests that the assessment enhances application of competencies rather than theoretical knowledge. The assessment shifts the focus from rote learning to the development and application of skills, knowledge, and values.

Suvin [2] has informed various profits of competency-based assessment for pupils' learning. It included ensuring an individual learner's possession of the necessary competencies to succeed in a given role or academic programme, and learners' application of the learned competencies inside and outside classroom. Learners' motivation for life-long learning and learners' placement on various learning areas in accordance with their mastery of the demonstrated competencies are other profits of competency-based assessment [3].

It is argued that learning and assessment specifically, for the 21st century is more individualized. This means that both learning and assessment focuses more on an individual learner's ability to apply the learned competencies/skills rather than theorizing knowledge in chorus [8]. It is also argued that if competency-based assessment methods are well informed and effectively implemented, individuals can realize several learning benefits. The benefits include among others clear expectations, fairness and equality, preparation for the real world, and transparent learning path to other levels of education. Each person is unique in his/her strengths, weaknesses, and learning pace. Through competency-based assessments, individuals can focus on improving their weaknesses while continuing to hone their strengths.

Since teaching and learning for the 21st century focuses on learners' developing and demonstrating various competencies included critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication [1], it is proposed that the use of appropriate competency-based assessment methods to preside the aforementioned competencies is inevitable [1].

1.3 Competency-Based Assessment Methods/Techniques

The process of competency-based assessment is dynamic. The assessment is not a one-off event but rather a cycle. In this regard, literature discusses several methods/techniques involved in competency-based assessment process. Some of the common assessment methods/techniques/strategies include:

1.3.1 Self-Assessment

Self assessment is a method through which individuals evaluate their abilities and skills concerning their roles or learning objectives themselves. It provides students with an opportunity to self-evaluate, and make judgments about their learning process and products of learning based on criteria agreed on withtheir instructors. The purpose of a self-assessment is to help individuals know the extent of their abilities and improve upon them[18].

1.3.2 Peer-Assessment

Tighe-Mooney [19] views peer-assessment as a process in which students provide feedback to other students. According to Tighe-Mooney, the purpose of this feedback is to help classmates improve their learning. It is said that feedback is a learning activity. Students benefit from this learning activity when they receive feedback from, and give feedback to their peers.

1.3.3 Formative assessment

Formative assessment is considered a powerful tool to enhance students' learning. The goal of formative assessment is to monitor students learning. It is also used to improve ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching, and students to improve their learning. More specifically, formative assessments help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and target areas that need work [20].

1.3.4 Supervisor and teacher assessment

Supervisors in the case of teaching and learning processes are teachers who evaluate student/pupil's performance based on their observations and interactions in the classroom tasks/activities. Teachers assess students/pupils' task/activity quality, ability to manage time in relation to the given tasks, and students/pupils' collaboration, and communication.Such assessments provide an external perspective on the individual's performance and current capabilities [21].

1.3.5 Expert operative assessment

This kind of assessment involves experts or experienced assessors in the area that they review the competencies developed by students/pupils. The experts/experienced assessors can be within the school or outside provided they have in-depth understanding of the role and the goal of competency-based assessment. It is believed that their assessments often offer valuable insights based on their extensive experience and deep understanding of the competency domain [22].

1.3.6 Multi-rater and 360-Degree feedback

Literature informs that multi-rater and 360-degree feedback is a more comprehensive assessment method. The method involves collecting performance feedback from an individual using various sources. The sources include educational administrators or officers, subordinates, peers and sometimes even clients themselves (students/pupils). The multi-rater and 360-degree feedback provides a holistic view of an individual's skills, competencies, and performance. This method is useful for individuals' assessment because it mitigates or reduces hello effects [23].

1.3.7 Assessment Centres and Education Agencies (AEA)

Assessment centres and authorized education agencies are professional agencies responsible for conducting competency-based assessments. In Tanzania for example, the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) is an authorized agency responsible for conducting assessments at different education levels. It included primary and secondary education assessments. Their assessments usually employ methods such as psychometric tests to measure and evaluate individuals' competencies [24].

However, it is argued that the methods of competency-based assessment can vary based on the context, the nature of the role, and the specific competencies being assessed [12].It is also said that the choice of methods shouldalign with the overall goal of the assessment.

1.4 Students' Perception of Competency-Based Assessment

Despite the fact that competency-based assessment plays a significant role for an individual learner's evaluation of competencies, students/pupils view it differently. Harland (2020) for example, informed that some students consider competency-based assessments especially those carried out at the end of the course (summative assessments) aim to fail them.

Friska [25] investigated students' perception towards the Final National Examinations (summative assessment). The study established that majority of students doubted and questioned about the effectiveness and importance of the final National Examination (summative assessment) in creating students' better competency-based teaching and learning.

Further, Stark [26] explored students' perception on competency-based assessments. It was found that 64% of students had negative attitudes towards competency-based assessments particularly, the assessments administered at the end of the course. According to Stark the assessments carried out at the end of the course do not provide students with chance to acclimatize rather, their results alternatively judged pass or fail.

Furthermore, the study by Wang [27] about 73% of students' perspective towards competency-based education assessments showed that students considered formative assessments useful. According to Wang, most students claimed that if formative assessments administered properly, they help students to accustom learning objectives and improve their study strategies compared to summative assessments.

On the other hand, Roberts (2018) investigated students' perceptionof the impact of teaching and learning assessment.The study found that cultural differences and emotions affect students'

perceptions of assessment in teaching and learning process. The study considered a combination of formative and summative or alternative assessment based on learning objectives as a band-aid solution. However, it is suggested that the combination should take into consideration students' cultural background, values and the implemented education system.

Robert (2018) notified that alternative assessments differ from conventional/standardized examinations/tests. The difference is that alternative assessments are designed to capture diversity, complex, and uniqueness of students learning while convectional/standardized assessments often used to measure student achievement. It is also informed that alternative assessments involve the use of projects, and authentic tasks such as pair works, group works, and any assigned presentation on any topic.

As observed from the discussed studies, students differ on opinions/perceptions towards competency-based assessment. However, most studies established that students prefer undertake formative assessments to summative for the reason that formative assessments focus on learning objective and improvement but summative assessments alternatively judge students' pass or fail.

The researcher's experience as teacher and teacher educator is in connection with the reviewed studies. Summative assessments, specifically those carried at the end of the course provide students with only two alternatives; pass or fail. According to the researcher's experience, this is not convincing especially for the countries which practice competency-based learning as well as competency-based assessment including Tanzania [5].

In the Tanzanian context for example, summative assessments carried at the end of the course (standard VII and IV) often their results evident pupils' pass or fail. The table below highlights the situation.

Table 1. Standard VI and IV Pupils' Examinations Results

Year	Standard VII who sat for exams	Pass	Percentage	Fail	Percentage
2022	9744	8986	92.2	758	7.8
2921	6688	5679	84.9	1009	15.1
	Standard IV sat for exams				
2022	9034	8423	93.2	611	6.8
2021	9774	8986	91.9	788	8.1

Source: Mpwapwa District Education Report 2021-2022

The researcher's perception is that if at all a country practices competency-based assessments appropriately then, there is no need to depend on summative assessment especially those carried out at the end of the course/programme whose results alternatively judge students/pupils pass or fail.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The reason for using a qualitative approach was to help the researcher explore participants' views within Mpwapwa District on competency-based assessment [28]. Further, McCombes (2019) informs that a qualitative approach helps a researcher in the exploration of a phenomenon within some particular context through various data sources.

The study involved 40 participants from 5 primary schools. 10 were classroom teachers, 5 Head-teachers, and 25 were pupils. However, the real names of participants and schools were avoided for anonymity purposes. Therefore, classroom teachers were identified by the use of pseudonyms; teacher "A" to "J." Head-teachers were identified as HD "A" to HD "E", and schools were named as School "A" to School "E". Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain 10 classroom teachers whereas 5 Head-teachers were selected purposefully by the virtual of their administrative position. The reason for using simple random technique to select 10 classroom teachers was to avoid biasness of the representation [29,28]. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the examination class (standard IV). The reason for involving 5 primary schools was the reach of saturation point. Saturation point is used in qualitative research as a criterion for discontinuing data collection when the researcher realizes that there is the repetition of the same data(Abreu, 2023; Mpofu, 2020).

Before data collection, the researcher asked permission from Mpwapwa District Officials to undertake the study in the district. Further, participants' informed consent was sought before data collection.

Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) methods were employed for data collection. The researcher used the semi-structured interviews because of its flexibility to allow the discovery and elaboration of participants' in-depth information. Similarly, the method provides a researcher with a wide chance of engaging follow-up questions that expand participants' original information [30].

Semi-structure interviews were used to collect data from classroom teachers, and Head-teachers. The Focus group discussion method was used by the researcher to collect data from pupils. The researcher considered focus group discussions useful because pupils neither fear nor feel shy to give factual information as they are children (Silverman, 2004).Data from both interviews and the focus group discussions were analyzed thematically to obtain the emerging themes, accompanied by verbatim quotes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are presented based on the specific objectives. This study was guided by three specific objectives: to examine teachers' understanding of conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment, explore relevant competency-based assessment methods for pupils' effective learning, and to explore pupils' opinions toward pertinent competency-based assessment methods for effective learning.

3.1 Teachers' Understanding of Conceptual Meaning of Competency-Based Assessment

The first objective of this examined teachers' understanding of conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment. To obtain information about this theme interviews were used. The findings revealed that about 80% of classroom teachers were not sure of the exact conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment. For example, classroom teacher "A" from school "A" noted that:

I do not know exactly what it means by competency-based assessment but, I think it is the assessment used to assess learners' competencies.

Similar quote from classroom teacher "C" school "F" That:

I am not sure of conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment. This is a new thing for me.

When the researcher wanted to know from the classroom teachers why they were not sure of the conceptual meaning of competency-based

assessment, the majority of classroom teachers explained that they lacked formal training not only about competency-based assessment but also on competency-based education in general. It was claimed that:

> *………. you know! Not only competency-based assessment but also competency-based education in general has not been clearly understood to the majority of teachers. This is because only few teachers were given training during the introduction of competency-based curriculum, (classroom teacher "H" from school "D").*

It was also confessed that:

> *I do not understand properly about competency-based assessment. This is becausenot all teachers were given trainings during the introduction of competency-based curriculum. I think it was only two teachers from every school in the district who attended the training, (classroom teacher "J" from school "E").*

3.2 Teachers' Views on Relevant Competency-Based Assessment Methods

The second objective of the study sought to explore classroom teachers' and Head-teachers' views on relevant competency-based assessment methods for pupils' effective learning. The findings showed various views about relevant competency-based assessment methods for pupils' effective learning. However, the views are condensed into two directions; practical competency-based and theoretical paper-based assessments.

3.2.1 Practical competency-based assessments

It was revealed that majority of classroom teachers view practical or application-based assessments suit especially for this 21st century for primary school pupils' effective learning. The participants explained that since teaching and learning for the 21st century emphasize on developing learners' skills/competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication etc, the assessment of such skills should be practically conducted to every individual pupil. The participants elaborated that methods included portfolios, projects, demonstrations, dialogues, interviews, dramatizations, discovery, and presentations can be practically used for pupils' effective learning. The quotes below exemplify that:

> *………assessing pupils' skills practically through methods like portfolios, projects, interviews, and presentations could be useful for pupils' effective learning, (classroom teacher "A" from school "A").*

> *…..for the 21st century learning where the focus is to develop pupils' skills, I think it is convenient to assess pupils practically through methods such as demonstrations, projects, dialogues, dramatization, discovery etc, (Classroom teacher "C" from school "B").*

However, the researcher was ambitious to know why the participants viewed practical competency-based assessment methods relevant. Responses from the participants revealed that currently, teaching and learning focuses on developing pupils' skills rather than theoretical knowledge. In this situation, the participants elaborated that the use of practical-based assessments seemed relevant since it can indicate real picture of pupils' mastery of the learned competencies.

The responses by the participants are in connection with Subkhan[1]. Subkhan informed that teaching and learning in the 21st century should focus on learners' developing and demonstrating various competencies. It includes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.Nzima[8] noted that learners' mastery is realized through competency-based assessment methods including demonstration, dramatization, project and portfolios. It is explained that competency-based assessment for the 21st century is more individualized. It focuses more on an individual learner's ability to apply the learned competencies/skills rather than theorizing knowledge in chorus. In this regard, alternative formative assessments viewed more relevant for students' effective learning than summative assessments [31].

In addition, Robert (2018) informed that alternative assessments which involve the use of projects, and authentic tasks such as pair/group works, and any assigned presentation on any topic seemed more admissible for students' assessment learning through competency-based than standardized examinations/tests. The reason is that alternative assessments are designed to capture diversity, complex, and

uniqueness of students learning while standardized assessments especially, those admitted at the end of the course often used to measure student achievement.

On the other hand the researcher's experience as teacher and teacher educator concurs with the findings that if at all teaching and learning currently focuses on developing pupils' skills/competencies then, the use of application, performance/practical-based assessments is of more advantaged. Application, performance/practical based assessments will enable individual pupils to reveal their real skills/abilities that they have developed in the course of study.

Nevertheless, the findings under this sub theme also showed that few classroom teachers were not sure of which competency-based assessment methods are relevant to be used for pupils' effective learning. It was asserted that:

> I hear from my fellow teachers that there are relevant competency-based assessment methods which we should use to assess pupils in current teaching and learning process. For me, I do not know exactly what these methods are, (classroom teacher "G" from school "D").

> ……..I am not sure whether the methods we are using to assess our pupils are among the competency-based assessments or not. Currently, we mostly use classroom exercises, terminal tests, and annual examinations, (classroom teacher "I" from school "E").

From the findings it can be said that primary school teachers in Mpwapwa Districtdo assess their pupils using various methods as explained above. However, some teachers were in the position to air out relevant competency-based assessment methods (practical methods) for pupils' effective learning while other teachers were not. The findings under the sub-theme also revealed that there teachers who were not sure whether the methods they used to assess pupils were competency-based or not.

This implies that in the same District (Mpwapwa District), there were teachers who proposed relevant competency-based assessment methods for pupils' effective learning while other did not. According to the participants the reason for this disparity was that not all primary school

teachers in the District involved in competency-based trainings during its introduction.

3.2.2 Theoretical paper-based assessments

Under this sub theme, the findings showed that most classroom teachers do not support the use of theoretical paper-based assessments as the only way to measure pupils' competencies. The participants explained that the assessments especially those carried out at the end of the course (standard IV and VII) do not give real picture of pupils' competencies or mastery. The reason given by the participants was that the assessments mainly measure pupils' theoretical knowledge rather than application of skills. According to the participants, this contradicts the teaching and learning specifically for the 21st century where the focus is on learners' developing and applying the skills. It was disclosed that:

> ……for the 21st century teaching and learning, the focus is on developing pupils' skills, why then using theoretical paper-based assessments which normally do not show real picture of pupils' skills or competences, (Classroom teacher "H" from school "D")

> I think the methods which we use now days including paper-based examinations do not provide real picture of pupils' application of the developed knowledge and skills. This is because the methods are too theoretical to reveal learners' real ability in applying the learned competencies, (Classroom teacher "F" from school "C").

The interviews with Head-teachers also depicted discouragement of the use of summative assessments. It was explained by the Head-teachers that it is unfair to continue using summative assessments especially, those administered at the end of the course (standard IV and VII) as the criteria to judge pupils' pass or fail. The Head-teachers clarified that by practicing the assessments, the country has been wasting a number of potential pupils through failures. However, the participants considered summative assessments important for the 21st century learning if they are used for pupils' placement in various learning areas/institutions. It included technical/vocational training institutions based on their mastery of the developed and demonstrated competencies in

the course of study. The quote below accords that:

> *……for the 21st century learning, it is believed that every learner has an opportunity to develop and demonstrate some skills. So, it is not good to depend on assessments carried out at the end of the course to judge learners' pass or fail. I think that our country has been wasting a number of potential pupils through these assessments. Such assessments could be used for learners' placement in various learning areas such as secondary education, technical/vocational education, (Head-teacher "B" from school "B").*

Similar quote was given by the Head-teacher "E" from school "E") that:

> *…for the 21st century learning whereby every learner develops some competencies, it is unfair to depend on theoretical paper-based summative assessments especially, those executed at the end of the course. These assessments alternatively judge pupils' pass or fail.*

The findings are supported by Brouse [3] who expounded that it is convincing to use summative assessment specifically those carried out at the end of the course/programme for students' placement in accordance with their mastery of the developed and demonstrated competencies. Similarly, Gulker [32] discusses that assessments specifically those carried out at the end of students' programme create anxiety for students. According to Gulker, students face examination anxiety specifically when the examinations used as tools for judging students' pass or fail. It is claimed that this situation sometimes leads to students' unexpected failure.

In addition, Dawood [33] discussed the effects of summative assessment (carried out at the end of the course) that the assessment leads to students' examination anxiety finally student fail. According to Dawood, assessment/examination anxiety mostly affects students when doing summative assessments at the end of the course. Dawwod [33] explained the reason for students' anxiety that summative assessments/examinations carried out at the end of the course, their results alternatively lead to students pass or fail.

The researcher's experience as teacher and teacher educator concurs with the findings that

examination anxiety commonly affects not only primary school candidates but also other candidates including student-teachers. However, the researcher's experience is that this situation not only happens when students undertake assessments carried out at the end of the course but also the assessments executed within the course/programme. The reason according to researcher's experience could be as noted above (alternatively students pass or fail), and candidates' inadequate/insufficient preparations for the assessment/examinations.

3.3 Pupils' Opinions towards Pertinent Competency-Based Assessment Methods for Effective Learning

The third objective of the study planned to explore pupils' opinions toward pertinent competency-based assessment methods for effective learning. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was employed to obtain information. Two scenarios of opinions were found under the theme:

3.3.1 Formative assessment

It was found that pupils prefer doing competency-based assessments carried out within the course to those carried out at the end of the course. The participants said that they prefer assessments which are administered within the course (formative assessments) because the assessment results motivate and provide pupils with opportunity to adjust. The quotes below postulate that:

> *……the assessments which we do within the course like school examinations, Ward, District, and Region examinations motivate us to study hard because we get the results while we continue learning. They also help us to adjust/improve after getting the results, (FGD from school "A").*

> *We prefer doing assessments conducted within the course such weekly tests, monthly, terminal, and even annual tests/examinations. These assessments do not fail us rather they help us to improve our learning, (FGD from school "C").*

The findings are aligned by a number of literatures. Ganajavo (2021) for example, informed that the goal of formative assessment is to monitor students learning to improve ongoing feedback. The assessment is also used by

instructors to improve their teaching, and students improve their learning. Further, Wiyaka [34] pointed out that for the 21st century teaching and learning, it relevant to use alternative assessments such as portfolios, projects, demonstrations etc which carried out within the course. According to Wiyaka, these assessments depict students' strength and weakness, and more importantly their immediate feedback provides students with opportunity to acclimatize.

3.3.2 Summative assessment

Under this sub-theme, it was revealed that pupils were not comfortable with summative assessments specifically, those administered by the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) at the end of the course (standard IV and VII). The participants explained that the assessments fail a number of pupils. Some of them noted that:

> We do not like the national examinations carried out at the end of the course (standard IV and VII) by the NECTA. This is because the examinations fail some pupils, (FGD from school "C").

> We are doing many assessments; school-based assessments, Ward, District, and Regional-based assessments. If a pupil has shown good performance in all these assessments why then, taking national assessments as the final to judge pupils' pass or fail, (FGD from school "E").

The findings aligned with Stark [26] who explored students' perception on competency-based assessments. The study revealed that students had negative attitudes towards competency-based assessments particularly, the assessments administered at the end of the course. According to Stark [26] the assessments carried out at the end of the course do not provide students with chance to acclimatize rather, their results alternatively judge pass or fail.

The researcher's perception of the findings as teacher and teacher educator is that if at all pupils do school-based competency assessments, ward, district, and regional-based competency assessments, and more importantly, the pupils demonstrate mastery of the learned competencies, we think that there is no need of final national assessments specifically, for judging pupils pass or fail. Unless the final

national examinations are administered for other purposes, they won't be considered relevant.

The findings further showed that pupils who fail standard IV assessments/national examinations are told to repeat the same class (standard IV). The participants explained that this is another reason that makes them dislike the assessments/examinations carried out at the end of standard IV course. They clarified that:

> ……among the reasons we hate standard IV national assessments/examinations is that pupils who fail such assessments are told to repeat the same class. We think every pupil wants to go for further level of study but not to repeat the same class, (FGD from School "B").

> We do not like standard IV national assessments because sometimes the assessments do not consider what has been taught in classrooms. This leads to failures of some pupils. Bad enough, those who fail are told to repeat the same class, (FGD from school "D").

Apart from the assessments failing some pupils, the findings furthermore revealed that the national assessments executed at the end of standard IV has a contribution to the overcrowded classes, and shortage of teaching and learning facilities. When the researcher wanted to know how such assessments contribute to overcrowded classes and shortage of teaching and learning facilities, the participants explained that it is through the repeaters. They enlightened that:

> ……… pupils who fail standard IV national assessments/examinations are told to repeat the same class. This situation sometimes leads to pupils' crowded in one classroom, (FGD from school "A").

> We think that sometimes we face shortage of important facilities such as desks and text books because of the pupils who repeat the same class after they have failed national assessments/examinations. Last year for example, about 30 pupils failed national examinations but some of them are in our classroom as repeaters, (FGD from school "C").

The findings are in support of several literatures. Friska (2019) for example, investigated students'

Table 2. Results from Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Theme	Important Points from Interviews	Important Points from Focus Group Discussions
Teachers' Understanding of Conceptual Meaning of Competency-based Assessment	Most teachers in Mpwapwa District are not sure of the conceptual meaning of competency- based assessment	
Relevant Competency-based Assessment Methods for Pupils' Effective Learning	Practical-based assessment methods included projects, portfolios, demonstrations, dialogues, and interviews, viewed more relevant for pupils' effective learning than theoretical paper-based	Formative competency-based assessment viewed pertinent for pupils' effective learning
Pupils' Opinions towards Pertinent Competency-based Assessment for Effective learning		Pupils are not comfortable with summative assessments done at the end of the course

views towards the Final National Examination (UjianNasional) and its positive and negative effects to students. The study findings showed that almost all of the students had negative views on the assessments/examinations carried out at the end of the course with the reasons noted above.

Wang [27] investigated students' perspective on competency-based education assessments. The results showed that formative assessments were considered more useful by majority of the students than summative assessments. The students claimed that if formative assessments are properly administered then, there is no need to take summative assessments at the end of the course.

From these findings, it implies that students/pupils view assessments carried out at the end of the course/programme negatively. One of the major reasons portrayed by the findings is that the assessments done at the end of the course/programme provide students/pupils with only two alternatives; pass or fail [35-37].

The researcher' experience as teacher and teacher educator is that at least at every level of study; primary level, secondary and even at the University level students fear or feel uncomfortable with the assessments/examinations. According to the researcher's experience, this does not matter whether the assessments are carried out within the course/programme (formative assessments) or at the end of the course/programme (summative assessments). The researcher's

experience is that students' fear of the assessments/examinations sometimes is due to inadequate/insufficient preparations.

4. CONCLUSION

In line with the study findings and discussions, the following conclusions can be made:

Most primary school teachers in Mpwapwa District are not very much sure of the conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment.

Practical competency-based assessment methods included projects, portfolios, demonstrations, dialogues, interviews, dramatizations, discovery, and presentations viewed by the participants more relevant for pupils' effective learning than theoretical paper-based.

Summative assessments especially those carried out at the end of the course viewed by the participants relevant if they are used for pupils' placement in educational areas such as secondary education, technical, and vocational education according to the individuals' mastery of the developed and demonstrated competencies/skills.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that some primary school teachers in Mpwapwa District are not very much sure of the conceptual meaning of competency-based assessment and competency-based assessment

methods as well, it is recommended that the government of Tanzania should provide the teachers with intensive trainings concerning the aforementioned matters.

Given that teaching and learning especially for the 21st century focuses more on pupils' developing and demonstrating mastery of the learned competencies/skills, it is recommended that practical competency-based assessments included projects, portfolios, demonstrations dialogues, and interviews should be used for effective pupils' learning rather than theoretical paper-based assessments.

Since both teachers and pupils in Mpwapwa District are not comfortable with the assessments carried out at the end of the course (standard IV and VII) because of their limitations, it is recommended that the government of Tanzania should review these assessments.

Last but not least the overall well-being and development of pupils in Mpwapwa District of Tanzania will depend of four aspects those are:

1. Attitude, knowledge, skills and practice of teachers and quality of teaching practices/styles.
2. Quality of content delivered.
3. Knowledge and grasping level of pupils.
4. Government initiatives and syllabi provided for learning and assessment style.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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