

Teachers' Knowledge, Understanding, Ability and Implementation of Competency-Based Approach in the Teaching of Geography in Secondary Grammar Schools in the South West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This paper was designed to assess whether the adoption of Competence-Based Approach (CBA) to improve the quality of secondary education in Cameroon is a dream or reality. Resistance to change and reluctance to implement national curriculum have been identified as one of the reasons for falling standard in education. The researcher sought to find out if geography teachers are aware or equipped with knowledge understanding and the ability to effectively implement the CBA in the teaching learning process.

The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. Questionnaires were used for data collection from teachers and from form four students only. Interviews was administered to the Regional and Divisional Pedagogic inspectors as well as the principals of schools. A non-participating observation was carried out by the author. The samples consisting of 320 geography teachers as well as 120 students were drawn from the six divisions of the South west region of Cameroon. The data collected was analysed using frequency counts and percentage.

The findings revealed that geography teachers were not trained or sensitized enough prior to the adoption of Competence-Based Approach. Consequently, they do not have the knowledge and understanding of the concept of Competence-Based Approach. This has led to their inability to implement it effectively. They are seriously lacking in using those teaching methods that are apt with the implementation of the CBA as expected of them.

The author concludes that geography teachers often show resistance and lack of commitment in the implementation of curriculum reforms because of ignorance. The author recommends the adoption of grass root approach to curriculum development and implementation involving all stakeholders including teachers who would implement the curriculum in future. Frequent and regular service trainings are also recommended.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge, Understanding, Ability, Implementation, Competency-Based, Approach, Dream and Reality.

1. INTRODUCTION

knowledge and understanding of geography teachers comprise a significant aspect in the implementation of Competency-Based Approach (CBA) during the teaching and learning process. Truly, the effectiveness and efficiency of CBA depends on teacher's ability to carry out teaching and learning activities responsibly and effectively. Tambo (2012) points out that qualified teachers with sufficient and appropriate knowledge and skills are one of the pre-conditions for a successful implementation of CBA. Consequently, the need for changes in the instructional approaches calls for the need to equip teachers (both in-service and pre-service) with the necessary competencies for handling new teaching paradigm (Tchombe, 2014). Teachers are filter through which the mandated curriculum passes. In other words, teachers are key players in mediating the mandated curriculum for the student's benefit. They should first acquire ample knowledge of the desired concept, understand it and then use this experiential knowledge or

skill to evolve a workable curriculum (Flinders and Thornton, 1997).

The implementation of CBA requires the use of new assessment strategies aligned with the new paradigm. To implement these changes, it is necessary that all teachers become knowledgeable and equipped with new alternative approaches to assessment (Maclellan, 2004).

The shift from Content-Based Approach to CBA forces teachers to change their way of thinking and working. They are forced to think holistically in terms of the whole authentic task that competent professionals perform (Hoogveld, 2003). In line with this, Sudsomboon (2010) points out that the successful realization of CBA heavily relies on the teachers who are expected to give up their role as "knowledge transmitters" and adopt the new role of "Coach" and instructional designers. Teachers are agents for

change because of the role they play in implementing any curriculum reform. Studies have shown that curriculum reforms impact the school less, but they do influence teacher's practices (Ntoh, 2015). The competency Based Approach requires teachers who are professionals, knowledgeable and competent in their work particularly in implementing school curricula. If teachers are knowledgeable and comprehensible, they will be competent in implementing the CBA. and this will lead to improving the quality of education.

2. The Purpose of the Study:

The general objective of this study paper is to assess whether adopting Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to improve quality of secondary education in Cameroon is a dream or reality.

The specific objective was to determine teachers' knowledge in implementing Competency-Based approach (CBA) in the teaching and learning process of secondary Grammar schools in the South west Region in Cameroon.

This specific objective was guided by the following sub-questions:

- A. What do teachers know about Competency-Based Approach (CBA)?
- B. Do the teachers' have understanding in the implementation of Competency-Based Approach (CBA)?
- C. Do the teachers' have the ability to effectively apply the Competency-Based Approach in the teaching and learning process?

3. Methodology:

3.1. Research approach and Design

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. It was important to adopt this approach so as to capture a wide spectrum of participants both quantitatively and qualitatively whereas the quantitative approach was necessitated by the need to collect data from participants in large number as possible, the qualitative approach was necessary to complement quantitative data by exploring participants' feelings and meanings associated with teachers' knowledge in implementing Competency-Based Approach in the teaching and learning process.

3.2. Population, Sample and Sampling techniques

This study involved principals of Secondary grammar schools, pedagogic inspectors, teachers and students from 12 public secondary schools in the South West Region, which was randomly chosen to represent the other nine regions of Cameroon. As a result, the sample of this study was made up of twelve principals of secondary grammar schools, 12 pedagogic inspectors from the regional and divisional delegations of education, 120 teachers (10 from each school) and 96 students making a total number of 240 participants. The principals of secondary Grammar schools and the pedagogic inspectors were selected purposefully by virtue of their strategic position as education administrators and supervisors of daily and learning activities. They were supposed to be highly informed on policy issues pertaining to the implementation of the CBA.

The choice of teachers was based on their being the principal classroom implementers of the Competency-Based Approach. Hence, simple random sampling technique was used to select teachers as the technique gives all teachers an

equal chance of being included in the sample. On the other hand, students were chosen by simple random sampling technique from form Three and form Four. Students were involved in the study because they are major recipients and beneficiaries of the CBA in the teaching and bearing process.

3.3. Instrumentation:

The researcher acknowledges that there is no single method that is self-sufficient or adequate in itself in collecting valid and reliable data (Creswell, 2005). Moreover, Cohen et al (2007) contend that each method checks and reinforces the others. Hence, this study employed three techniques in data collection, the interview, questionnaire and observation.

The interview method was used in this study due to its ability to yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings about the research problem (Nana, 2014). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were administered with principals of secondary Grammar schools and Regional as well as Divisional Pedagogic Inspectors in the Delegations of education. A semi-structured interviews was preferred because it aided the researcher to probe deeper for information and clarification of the answers provided. It also allowed each respondent to express his/her views, opinions, experiences and feelings in his or her own words about CBA to detailed information (Nana Celestin 2014).

Questionnaires were directly administered to the teachers to determine their knowledge about Competency-Based Approach. The open ended, closed ended and Likert types of questions were used to generate frequencies of responses and percentages. Amin (20050000) argues that closed-ended can be answered more easily and quickly whereas open ended questions help to identify possible alternative responses to the questions under themes related to the research objectives.

Non-participatory observations were employed to observe teachers during the teaching and learning process. The observations were made to obtain information on the teachers' pedagogical knowledge in using different instructional methods and materials which reflect CBA. Observations also helped the researcher to determine the ability of teachers to apply Competency-Bases Approaches and assessment activities provided to students in an actual classroom environment.

3.4. Data analysis:

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0 was used to analyze data obtained through questionnaire in which descriptive statistics were used to determine teachers' knowledge in implementing Competency-Based Curriculum. On the other hand, data obtained through interviews schedules and classroom observation were analyzed using the thematic content analysis.

4. Findings and discussions:

4.1. Teachers' understanding of the concept of Competency Based Approach.

The first research question was to examine whether teachers understand the implementation of Competency-Based Approach. To obtain this, teachers were asked two questions: to indicate yes or no in the questionnaire whether they understand the concept: and to explain what

Competency-Based Approach is for those who indicated yes. The findings are summed up in table 1 below:

Table1: Teachers' responses on their understanding of the CBA (No.120)

| Responses | Frequencies | % |
|-----------|-------------|------|
| Yes | 50 | 41.6 |
| No | 70 | 58.4 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

Table 1. reveals that although Competency-Based Approach has been in place for about five years, there are still teachers who are not familiar with and do not understand the concept at all.

In this case, it can be argued that Competency-Based Approach is being implemented not only by teachers who had an idea about the concept but also teachers who are not familiar with and do not understand the concept.

During the interview a principal revealed that: truly speaking I do not even know exactly what the Competency-Based Approach is all about.

Fokong(2015), also found out that there were teachers who did not understand clearly the Competency-Based Approach and hence faced difficulties in implementing it during teaching and learning.

Table2: Indicators of teachers' understanding of Competency-Based Approach (N=120)

| | | NO | % |
|-------|---|-----|------|
| 1 | I do have some amount of awareness of CBA. | 17 | 14.1 |
| 2 | I do not know the difference between the CBA and the OBA. | 17 | 14.1 |
| 3 | I know how to prepare lesson plans using the CBA format before teaching . | 17 | 14.1 |
| 4 | I know the different methods appropriate to the CBA. | 17 | 14.1 |
| 5 | I know how to discuss using the CBA . | 17 | 14.1 |
| 6 | I have understood the CBA concept and I am effectively implementing it . | 17 | 14.1 |
| 7 | I have developed the ability to teach geography in the CBA effectively | 18 | 15 |
| Total | | 120 | 99.6 |

It is evident in the data collected from table 2, that there are some inconsistencies in understanding the concept of Competency-Based Approach among teachers as there was some variations in the responses. As a result, varied understanding of the concept among teachers was likely to bring about different ways in implementing the Competency-Based Approach. In any case, some answers reflected CBA for instance the responses "the teacher do have some amount of awareness of CBA", "the teacher knows the different methods appropriate to the CBA".

During interviews one of the regional pedagogic inspectors said the following about the contextualization of the CBA concept. Competency -Bases Approach is not well known among teachers. Teachers understand it differently and the right manner of implementing it is not clear. This has brought confusion to many especially when preparing lesson plans. I think that only a few teachers have the right concept of CBA. For me, CBA is a curriculum which enables students to demonstrate ability to perform a particular activity, it focuses more on what students can do rather on what they know.

The wrong or limited conception of the Competency-Based Approach tended to narrow or undermine their CBA practice. For instance, the wrong conception of CBA is reflected in 5 out of 7 responses in the table above. If teachers cannot know the difference between CBA and OBA, do not know how to prepare lesson plans using the CBA format before teaching, cannot engage in a discussion concerning the CBA, cannot effectively implement the CBA because he has not understood it, it means that they have not developed the ability and skills to be able to effectively teach the geography students in the CBA. The important role of the teachers in improving the quality of secondary education was compromised and largely ineffectual. Consequently, students would subsequently not be able to develop skills and competencies in solving daily life problems as expected under the CBA process.

4.2. Teachers training or exposure prior to Competency-Based-Approach implementation.

This question sought to determine whether teachers received any training in the form of seminar or workshop prior to getting involved in the implementation of CBA. The underlying assumption was in line with Ambei M.C (2016), who asserts that teachers need to be trained and retrained wherever there is curriculum innovation so that they can successfully carry out innovations. Through questionnaires teachers were asked to indicate whether they got any form of training prior to the implementation of CBA. Findings are summed up in figure 1.

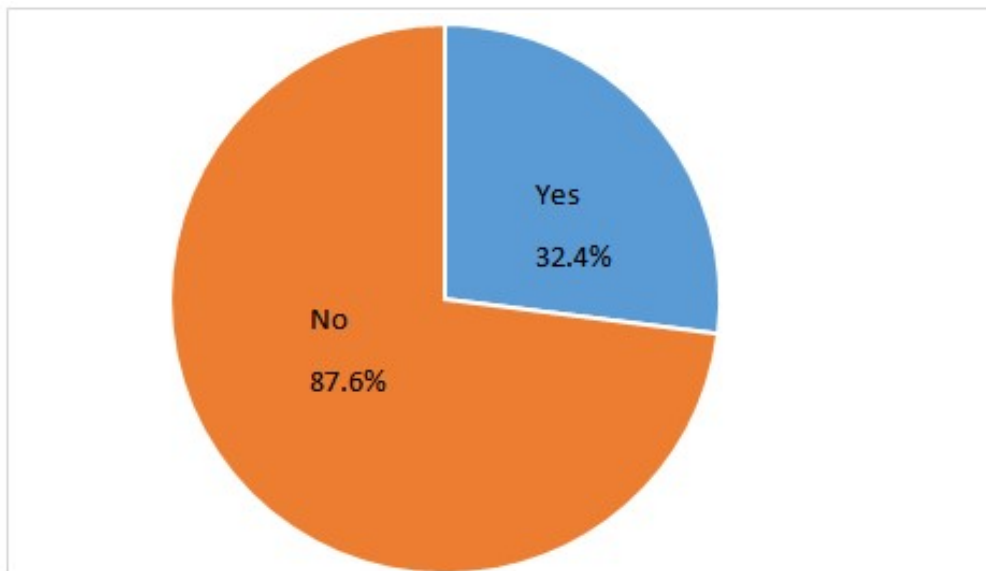


Table1. Teachers training prior to CBA implementation

Figure 1 indicates that the majority of teachers (87.6%) did not get any training before the implementation of CBA. only a few (32.4%) of the teachers had received such training. This implies that majority of teachers implemented the Competency-Based Approach without being oriented with the new approach.

One of the principal of schools interviewed also admitted the absence of training or seminar for teachers regarding Competency-Based Approach when he said.

In our school no training was done for the teachers when they introduced Competency-Based Approach but every year we are asked by the regional pedagogic inspectors to sponsor at least a teacher from each discipline. The challenge has always been the inadequacy of finances. Thus, most of the teachers used their experiences and the old traditional approaches.

On the other hand, when a regional Pedagogic inspector was interviewed, he had this say about teachers training.

I can say that only few teachers got training especially in geography. This was due to lack of fund to train all teachers. We expected that those few who attended the training could train their fellow teachers who did not attend the training.

For the few who received the training, they were asked to indicate the duration of the training. This question helped the researcher to establish the extent to which teachers benefitted from the training. The training duration is summed up in figure2.

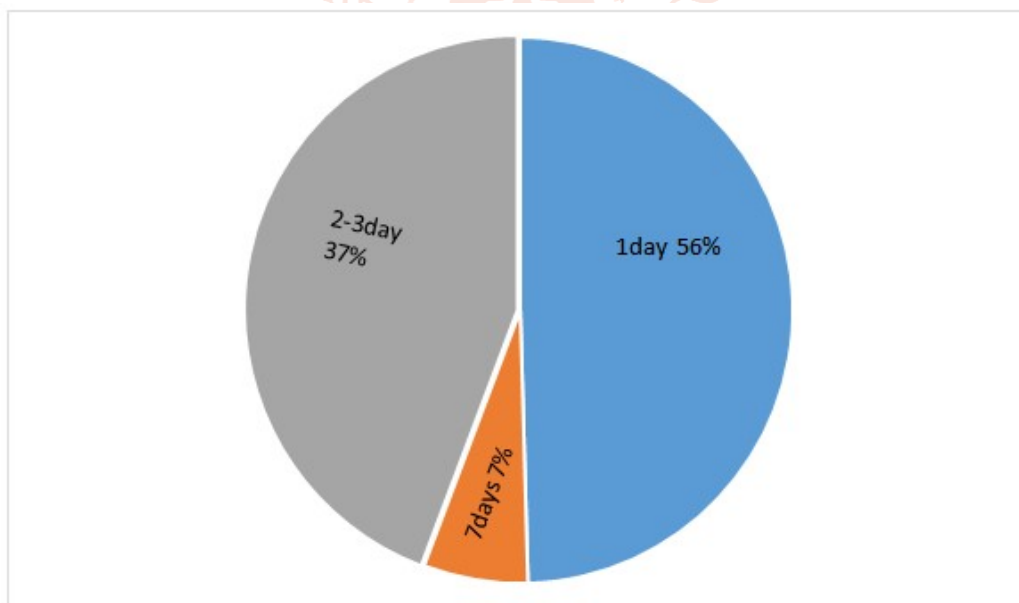


Figure2. Duration of CBA Training

This figure indicates that the duration of the CBA training was too short to equip teachers with awareness and skills about competency-Competency-Based Approach. This imply that teachers generally had limited or lacked awareness and skills for the successful implementation of CBA. Since the changes in the curriculum imply changes in instructional approaches, teachers

need enough time for in-service training for them to have considerable awareness and skills to understand Competency-Based Approach and to be able to implement it confidently, effectively and successfully. During interviews one of the school principals revealed that “for teachers to have a clear understanding of CBA they need training for at least 3 months”.

The researcher was also interested in finding out how those who did not receive any training implemented CBA. The findings are summed up in figure 3.

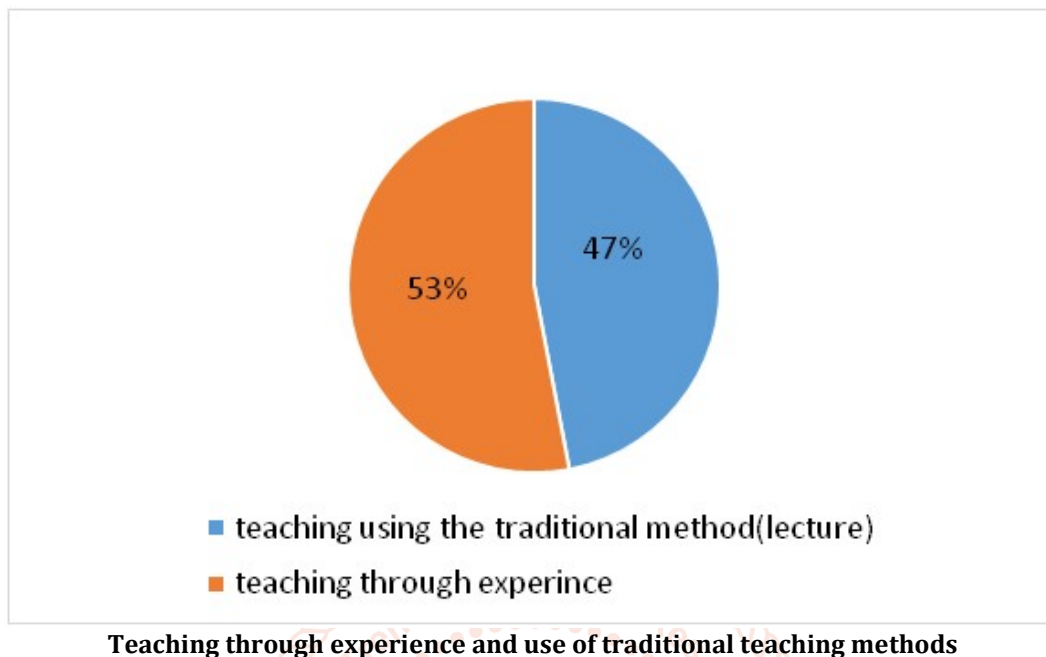


Figure 3: indicates that 53% of the teachers who did not receive any specific training on CBA depends on their teaching experience and acquired knowledge from other colleges whereas 47% used traditional teaching method (lecture).

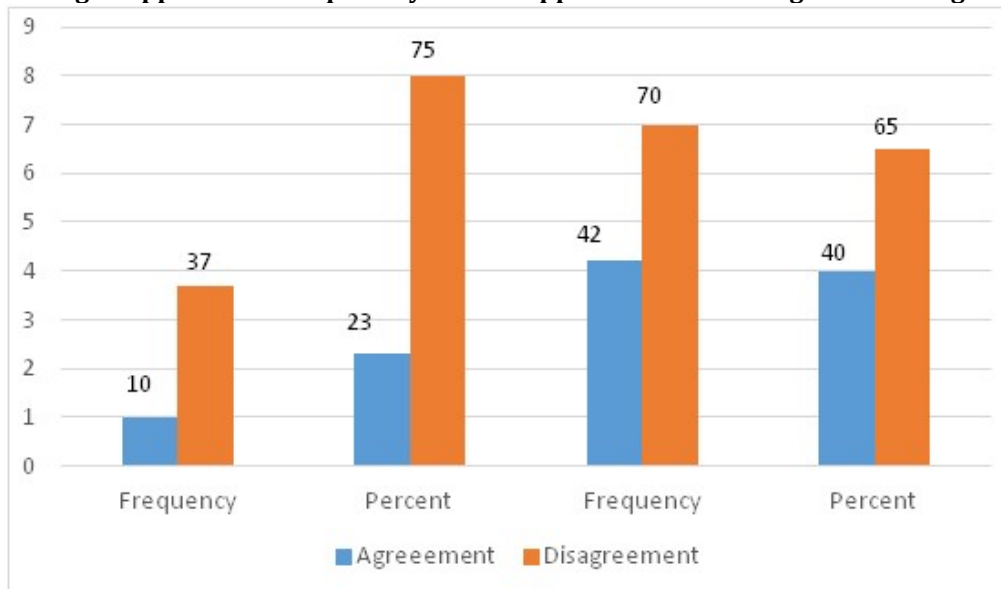
During interview, one of the school principals had this to say: Competency-Based curriculum has brought about difficulties among teachers because there was no formal training to orient them towards the new approach. Even in preparing lesson plans, it has been difficult for teachers, particularly in filling the part on competencies measured. As a result of that, the implementation of Competency-Based Approach is not effective because most of the teachers are still using traditional teaching methods.

To verify this statement, the researcher reviewed four teachers' lesson plans of different subjects in each school. The findings established that most of the teacher did not know the competencies to be acquired by the students at the end of the lesson as they were unable to specify them clearly in the lesson plans. It was expected that those few teachers who had attended the training would demonstrate an ability to prepare an acceptable CBA lesson plans. On the contrary, these teachers were equally handicapped when it came to properly demonstrating these competencies. Generally, the study established that teachers lacked knowledge of Competency-Based Approach which was reflected in their lesson plan preparation.

These findings confirm that CBA was not effectively implemented in secondary school because of the absence or lack of orientation and training among teachers. Consequently, lack of appropriate knowledge obliged several teachers to apply traditional methods of teaching or simply depending on their teaching experience. This finding concurs with Ambei Moses (2016), who found that when Competency-Based Approach was not effectively implemented there was often the danger of sliding back to traditional teaching methods. When teachers who are the principal implementers lack CBA knowledge and skills, the CBA cannot improve the quality of secondary education.

4.3. Teachers ability to apply Competency-Based Approach to teaching and learning.

The question sought to establish the ability of teachers to apply CBA approach in the teaching and learning process. Using questionnaires, teachers and students were asked to provide their views on the ability of teachers to apply CBA approaches in the teaching learning process. The findings were summed up in figure 4 where the field data were divided into two categories of agreement and disagreement for analytical clarity. Concerning this matter, the responses “strongly agree” and “agree” were considered as agreement towards a certain statement while “strongly disagree”, “disagree” and “don’t know” were considered as disagreement (Amin, 2005).

Fig 4: Application Competency –Based Approaches in training and learning

Responses: Students (N=50) Teachers (N=120)

Figure 4 indicates that the majority of the teachers (65%) do not have the ability to apply competency bases approaches in the teaching learning process while 40% of teachers indicated to have the ability of applying Competency-Based Approaches in teaching and learning. On the other hand, 75% of students' responses indicated that teachers do not have the ability to apply CBA curricula in teaching and learning process where as 23% of students indicated that teachers have the ability of applying CBA curricula in the teaching and learning process.

Responding to questionnaires items regarding the teaching methods that teachers used in the teaching and learning process, many students (50.83%) indicated that teachers used lecture methods than other teaching methods as it is indicated in table 4

Table4: Teaching Methods/Techniques Teachers used in the Teaching and Learning Process.

| Students responses | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Lecture method(where teacher talks and students listen and takes notes) | 61 | 50.83 |
| Brainstorming | 07 | 05.83 |
| Group discussion | 25 | 20.83 |
| Question and answer | 21 | 17.50 |
| Total | 114 | 95.00 |
| Not responded | 06 | 05.00 |
| Total | 120 | 100.00 |

The table above reveals the teachers use very few teaching methods during the teaching learning process depending mostly on the lecture methods. Other teaching method such as experiment, Field trip, Debates, role play, observations and problems – solving were not indicated at all the students. This makes the teaching and learning ineffective since the CBA requires the use of variety of teaching methods. These findings concur with Nana Celestin (2012) who argues that if teacher applies only one method of teaching it affects students learning potential.

Interviews that were held with school principals and the regional pedagogic inspectors disclosed that the ability of teachers to apply competency – Based Approaches to teaching and learning is limited by their small pedagogical knowledge and skills in instructional methods that relate to CBA.

It is difficult to tell whether teachers have the ability to use competency – Based approaches to teaching and learning, but I can say most of the teachers use teachers centered approaches. May be this is because they have not been oriented on how to use the new instructional methods; so, I

can say they lack pedagogical knowledge that is why they depend on the lecture methods.

During classroom observations, the researcher noted that teachers applied only a few of teaching methods. The lecture method and question – and – answers were dominantly used by almost all the teachers observed. Teacher – student interactions were very minimal. The teachers tended to dominate the lessons by explaining concepts, ideas and giving information to the students. Similarly, Fokong (2015) found that many teachers did not use constructivist approaches in the teaching and learning process. This implies that student only had a limited opportunity to construct knowledge or learn at their own pace as it is advocated under the Competency-Based-Approach. Competency-Based Approach entails the application of a variety of teaching methods. This becomes possible only if teachers have the ability to apply a range of such teaching methods.

The researcher also noted that the ability of the teachers to select learning activities which promote critical thinking, problem- solving and inquiry learning skills among students

was limited. Teachers' inability to apply Competency Based Approaches was also confirmed through their lesson plan preparation as 72% of teachers were unable to specify the Competency Based activities such as teachers' activities, student activities and assessment activities. For instance, on the student activity part, one teacher stated, "Students to mention the characteristics of colonial economy" most of assessment activities provided to the students required them to reproduce the material learnt instead of promoting critical thinking, creativity, Curiosity and discovery learning. For instance, one teacher stated in a lesson plan, "What are the characteristic of a chemical change". The teacher could have asked students to explain how chemical change takes place rather than limiting them to mention the characteristics of chemical change.

On the other hand, when students were asked to indicate if teachers provided different learning activities that develop and promote students thinking ability, 58.34% of students disagreed where as 41.66% of students agreed. This finding would appear to confirm that teachers need more CBA practices for them to be able to apply effectively such approaches in their teaching and learning processes that encourage learners thinking ability, problems- solving and self- learning habit.

5. Conclusion and recommendation:

Considering the research findings, the following conclusions are made.

The majority of teachers who are principal implementers of the competency Based Approach did not have a clear understanding of CBA. In fact, some of them had no idea at all about what CBA means. Moreover, several teachers did not get any training to orient them on Competency-Based Approaches. Consequently, teachers' ability to apply Competency-Based Teaching Approaches was very limited. Aware of knowledge deficit about Competency-Based Approach among teachers it suffices to conclude that the adoption of Competency Based Approach in Cameroon has still to translate into quality secondary education in Cameroon especially in the schools under study in the South West Region.

In this regard, the research findings have provided an understanding that teachers' knowledge is the vortex to a successful implementation of CBA. Again, without adequate provision of in-service training to teachers, the CBA implementation of the curriculum, the findings have shown

that there is a need to provide more opportunities for their participation during formation and /or review of the curriculum. By doing so, teachers may play their roles effectively in curriculum development and eventually implementation. As a result, there is a need for the government through the ministry of secondary education and her collaborators, to conduct immediate in-service training for secondary school teachers in Cameroon on CBA. Seminars' and workshops may be conducted frequently and on regular basis to raise teachers' awareness and build their confidence in applying Competency-Based Approaches in the teaching and learning process.

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