

Skill the Facilitators: Challenges Affecting the Rollout of the Competency-Based Education Framework in South Sudan

By

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Abstract

The study set out to examine the challenges faced by students, teachers, and administrators in the implementation of a competency-based curriculum framework in South Sudan. The researcher used qualitative methods, a case study design, and a constructivist perspective to guide the study. A total of 30 respondents were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Face-to-face interview, focus group discussion, observation and documentary analysis schedules were employed to collect data. Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. Data obtained were coded and put into themes to draw meaning. Thick descriptions and direct quotes were used for discussion and presentation of the report. The results show that: students and teachers have limited access to print and digital content indicating a lack of comprehensive understanding of the competency-based education content; skill gaps in the delivery of learner-centered approach to teaching, and skill mismatches among the teaching and educational managers, and; consequences of recurring conflict on leadership ability to fast-track monitoring, evaluation and strengthen the global partnership. The study recommended that there is a need for government and stakeholders to devise cost-effective ways to widen access to print and digital content, upgrade and reskill the current and future teaching workforce and education managers to reduce or close skill gap/mismatch, provide leadership to fast-track monitoring and evaluation and strengthen global partnership to address the technical and financial issues associated with the implementation of competency-based education.

Keywords: Competency-based education, skill gap, skill mismatch, and stakeholder cooperation

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Introduction

Competency-based education (CBE) framework has become ubiquitous as more and more countries embrace this mode of education. Competency-based curriculum, as the name suggests, is a shift from the traditional mode of education that focuses on the teacher, time-based learning/test-grade assessment to a student's ability to demonstrate mastery of competencies, specific skills, or knowledge areas (Paek, Um, and Kim, 2021).

In a CBE framework, learners progress through mastering a series of competencies, each representing a well-defined, measurable skill or knowledge area relevant to their field of study. The pace of learning is flexible and personalized, allowing students to move on to the next competency only after demonstrating mastery of the current one. This enables students to gain a deep, practical understanding of their field, hands-on knowledge, self-direction, problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills (Shinda, & Banda, 2024).

While the benefits of CBE are multiple, implementing CBE can be a complex task for institutions since it requires significant changes in curriculum design, traditional teaching methods, and assessment. It depends on cultural nuances, educational infrastructure, and national policy priorities. China adopted the CBE model in 2016 for elementary middle and high schools in a phased manner (Deng, Wu, Lisha, and Peng, 2024). Guatemala approved CBE reforms from preschool to secondary education while promoting the democratization of learning conditions and opportunities (Casey & Sturgis, 2018).

African countries that incorporated the CBE model in their primary and secondary education system include; South Africa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Lesotho, Kenya, Egypt, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. We will discuss a few of them in this study. The Government of Zimbabwe introduced CBE in 2017 in primary and secondary schools to transition from rote learning with no tangible employable skills to skill-based learning with labor mark skills. Later research has shown that the Zimbabwean CBE system has left out learners with disabilities (Manokore, 2022).

The Ministry of Education and Sport in Uganda introduced the CBE in 2007 to promote learner-centered education, reduce education disparities, and produce students who can compete globally. There were several challenges facing the implementation of the CBE model. This includes; inadequate training of teachers, lack of teaching and learning resources, and resistance from some stakeholders (Olema, Nabitula, Manyiraho, Deborah, and Atibuni (2021). Furthermore, Kikomeko, et al. (2020) added that the implementation of the CBC in Uganda has been hampered by the lack of a clear framework for its implementation, inadequate funding, and the need for significant changes in teaching.

Kenya has shifted from a 8-4-4- to 2-6-3-3-3 education cycle. This means eight years of primary school, four years of secondary, and finally four years at university. Kenya introduced the CBE approach in 2017. A study conducted by Ngeno, Mwoma, and Mweru (2021) in primary schools in Kericho County Kenya observed that teachers' preparedness and attitudes can

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influence the implementation of the CBE. Another study by Evans, Landi, and Thompson (2020) observed that success in CBE reforms depends on teachers' competences (Knowledge, skills and attitudes or behavior).

Akinrinola, Ogegbo, Adewusi, and Nzabairwa (2021) conducted research in three African countries (South Africa, Rwanda, and Nigeria). Their findings revealed that although each country had a positive perception of the CBE framework, the lack of professional training or retraining, lack of government support, curriculum overload, limited instructional time, crowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, poor learner characteristics, and language skills militated against the implementation of the CBE transformation.

The introduction of personal computers in the 1970s and 1980s has revolutionized education. The opening up the use of Internet in educational institutions during the 1990s has made it easier to integrate virtual learning or online courses into schools and colleges. Sewang, Jiyoung, Soyeong, Yeosol, and Hayeon (2022) noted that the benefit of ICT integration in the CBE reforms includes; widening access to digital textbooks, multimedia presentations, distance/interactive learning, simulations, reducing distance, time and issues of space.

Malhotra, Massoud, and Jinda, (2023) recognize that the absence and ignorance of the use of computers represent a new barrier to the CBE restructuring the education industry. They observed that teachers and administrators may experience significant challenges in choosing the right platform due to rapid improvements in technology. Sewang et al (2022) added that there are debates about how AI-based technologies, such as chat-bots, automatic speech recognition, Tik Tok, and image synthesis design to simulate human conversation will enhance students' mastery or create more dependency.

Monitoring and evaluation help education managers establish whether the program is on course or diverting from the original target. A study by Deng et al. (2024) provides two yardsticks the Chinese government used: first, there must be a roadmap to implement every aspect of CBE. Second, there must be clear indicators to measure each milestone before moving on to the next. When conducting program evaluation. It should be noted that the CBE assessment is unique and comprehensive. Its central objective is to determine whether a student has acquire the mastery of competency or the project is on course.

On 8th September 2015, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) launched the first comprehensive national education curriculum for South Sudan. The new curriculum indicates a transition from teacher-centered approach to learner-centered approach to education. The four key aims of the CBE framework are to create good citizenship, successful life-long learners, creative and productive individuals, and environmentally responsible members of society (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2015).

In 2021, South Sudan marked the tenth anniversary of becoming Africa's 54th member following its secession in 2011 from Sudan. It is difficult to understanding this reforms in education without indulging in the history of education in Sudan. More specifically the policy of Arabization and Islamization, which culminated in the imposition of Islamic curricula in 1990 in disregard of cultural diversity. Achieving a theocratic state was the goal of successful government in Sudan. But this curriculum was less popular in Southern Sudan because it exclusionary favor Northerners, Arabs and Muslims. It has no regards or respect for racial diversity identity (Bentrovato & Skårås, 2023).

South Sudan CBE was highly celebrated because (a)- a shift in focus from the teacher-centered to learner-centered approach, promoting independent learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence; (b) - founded on the principles and values of human rights such as respect for gender equity, tolerance, compassion, social justice, democracy national pride, cultural identity, and heritage which are pre-requirements for countries return from civil war to peace; (c)- built on a culture of excellence that supports innovation, creativity, continuous improvement, and effectiveness; (d)- brought to an end to the dependencies on hybrid foreign curricula from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and DRC to support education (MoEST, 2015).

Despite the apparent advantages of the CBE programs in South Sudan, there are still real barriers impeding the implementation of this framework at both the strategic and operational levels. It is expected that a comprehensive education management system offering a robust transformation agenda also has its implementation framework to measure with the Ministry of Education is on track or on diversion trajectory. There are no reports and research written against this targets to track CBE's working progress. This study intends to take stock of the progress and challenges affecting the implementation of the CBE framework in South Sudan (2015-2024).

Statement of the Problem

South Sudan inherited a one-size-fits-all and examination-ridden curriculum from Sudan. The labor market blamed the lack of employable skills among graduates on the quality of education and curriculum. In 2015, South Sudan adopted a new competency-based curriculum framework designed to be learner-centered, offering students with competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitude) required by the labor market. Unlike traditional education, which focuses on the teacher, time, and content, CBE focuses on the mastery of specific competencies. Students progress at their own pace, demonstrating proficiency in key areas before advancing

The success in the implementation of the competency-based education framework depends on several factors; access to content by students and teachers, teachers' competencies and attitudes in the delivery of a learner-centered approach to learning, and stakeholders' cooperation or global partnership in mobilizing education resources. Although the launch of CBE was politically celebrated, it is not clear how other intervening factors such as insecurity and flood have affected operationalization at the strategic and operational levels in the last ten years. Surprisingly, previous and current studies have focused on the grandeur of the launch (MoEST, 2015). There is a need to take stock of factors affecting the implementation of CBE in South Sudan.

Purpose

This study investigates challenges affecting students, teachers, and administrators in the rollout of Competency-based curricula in South Sudan primary and secondary schools.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. Identify challenges affecting the rollout of the CBE program in South Sudan
- ii. Explore strategies to address the challenges affecting the implementation of CBE in South Sudan

Main Perspectives

This study is guided by constructivism theory, a framework attributed to Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky although Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Constructivism is an important learning theory employed to help students use their prior knowledge as a foundation to build upon new information. The teacher acts as a guide or facilitator in the learning process (Satish, 2024).

The supporters of this epistemology argue that the benefits of CBE include; personalized learning pace, mastery of relevant skills, increased satisfaction, flexibility in learning environments, time and cost savings, and better preparation for the workplace is based on constructivist educational theories (Sewang, et al, 2022). On the other hand, those who critique the framework contend that it does not suit subject areas where it is difficult to prescribe specific skills, does not succeed where teachers are untrained, inadequate financial resources or go on global partnership, assessment not based credit hours but on demonstration of skill mastery and where students, teachers and administrators are resistant to change (Nyakito, et al. 2021; Ruggie, 1998).

This perspective is adopted because it enables learners to acquire competencies that address both individual mastery and the needs of the labor market. The overall aim is to address the criticism of labor market the quality of education in South Sudan was not only wanting because it is a new country but also because the traditional education methods will not address the challenges of the 21st Century. This work does not merely focus on the learner because it is a learner-centered approach but also because the role of the teacher has change to a “facilitator”.

Research Methods

The study employed a case study design. This design is a qualitative method in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2015). It was chosen because it is the most appropriate method to learn more about complex situations and how to evaluate various participants' views in those circumstances according to according to Patton (2002). As such, it allows the researchers to investigate challenges affecting the implementation of CBE in South Sudan from 2015 to 2024.

A total of 30 participants were sampled: 15 were chosen from in-service teachers in Cohort 2022/23 and Cohort 2023/24, respectively. Only teachers and administrators who indicated in their application form that they were seeking an upgrade to roll out the CBE program were chosen in the study. “Unless teachers were up-skilled or re-skilled to implement” P24/12 continued “the CBE is doomed to fail” (24.08.20240). They were sampled as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampled population and interview date

SAMPLED GROUPS	COHORT 2022/23		COHORT 2023/24	
	Sample 1	Dates	Sample II	Dates
Teachers (16)	P23/A-H	03/06-29/07	P24/1-8	08/06-27/07
Head-Teachers (8)	P23/I-L	05/08-26/08	P24/9-12	03/08-24/08
Partners Organization (6)	P23/ M-O	28/08-30/08	P24/13-15	26/08-28/08
Focus Group Discussion	P23/Y	31/08	P24/Z	30/08

Source: Field Data 2024

A purposive sampling technique was used to select specific groups or individuals with key information on the rollout of the CBE initiatives. A total of teachers (16) most of them were in-service teachers, head teachers (8), and partner organization officials (6) were sampled in the study. Twelve members from each Cohort were also sampled (code P23/Y, (day and month), and P24/Z) for a focus group discussion. Columns 3 and 5 indicate the date of the interviews taking into consideration the day and month (e.g. P23, 03/06/23). Priority was given to regional representation, gender variables, level of studies (MA/MSc) and at least five years of teaching experience.

Face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and literature review schedules were employed to collect data. All interviews were scheduled on Saturday except for the last weeks of August 2023/2024 while focus group discussions was conducted at the end of August each year. Observation were conducted in four critical states. The term “critical states” is used in this work to designate states that have recorded the highest numbers of untrained teachers according to Education Management Information Statistics data (2018). Department of Partner Relations and Research in the Directorate of Planning and Budgeting availed all the relevant literature required for analysis.

Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. Data was collected in two phases: June-August 2023 (Cohort 2022/2023) *Sample I*, and June-August 2024 (Cohort 2023/2024) *Sample II*. Individual interviews and group discussions were held at the campus on Saturdays from 10:00 am to 12 noon, and from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Interviews for state government officials, and educational partners were either held in their place of work or online for those outside Juba.

Data from face-to-face, focus group discussions, observation, and literature review were coded into themes to draw meaning and enhance triangulation. The researcher used credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability to establish rigor, as a common practice in the qualitative tradition (Boeiji, 2003). By prolonged engagement by two years, I wanted to confirm that the information obtained was appropriate. I also used thick descriptions and quotes to describe and interpret the report and what the researcher observed in the context.

Understanding the importance of ethical consideration in qualitative research, the researcher also gave considerable time to it. The involves; approval of all gatekeepers, principles of informed consent and voluntary participation, protection of participants from harm, confidentiality, and privacy (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2011). In Table 1, I have provided evidence of

how ethical issues were meticulously followed from the beginning, during data collection and analysis, and at the exit from the field.

Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate challenges affecting students, teachers, and administrators in the rollout of the CBE framework in South Sudan's primary and secondary schools (2015-2024). Participants were asked to identify the challenges affecting the implementation of the CBE framework in South Sudan and suggest strategies to resolve them.

The participants unanimously agreed that the challenges facing the rollout of CBE in South Sudan were a lack of comprehensive understanding of the CBE content, narrowing or closing skill gaps/mismatches among the teaching and educational managers, and managing stakeholders' collaboration in recurring conflict (FGD/Y, 31.08.2023; FGD/Z, 30.08.2024).

Teaching and Learning Resource

Teaching and learning resources include; syllabi, textbooks, film/television, plays, radio programs, podcasts, multimedia, software, platforms, games, and social media. Digital learning resources include video, audio, text, websites, animations, and images. Implementing the CBE model involves planning and structuring content on which learners are skilled and assessed.

Interviews with head teachers and several implementing partners show that the government completed content design for all levels of learning from grades 1 to 12, in the formal stream and grades 1 to 8 in the non-formal stream (P23/M, 28.08.2023; P24/13, 26.08.2024). The researcher also observed a large consignment of undistributed teaching and learning resources in two states.

Respondents were asked to identify the reasons for the low distribution of textbooks and teacher guides. "There is a series of challenges to transport the books from one point to the next" said P23/K, 19.08.2023). P24/10 (10.08.2024) maintained that this was the work of the education partners. Whether these were blame games or not, does not matter. What matters is that many rural schools reported that they were still waiting for the books.

From the two reactions, it is evident that both respondents were referring to the print copies. There are also the digital version of textbooks in circulation. From the focus group discussion, it was clear that there was limited access to both print and digital versions of the curricular. The online version was also affected by system barriers including inadequate infrastructure, high costs of internet bundles due to inflation, and low digital literacy (P23/Y, 31.08.2023; P23/B, 10.06.2023; P23/G, 22.07.2023). This means students and teachers have limited access to print and digital content indicating a lack of comprehensive understanding of the competency-based education content.

However, most of the participants were excited that the country now have its own examinable curriculum, referred to in official documents as the first comprehensive competency-based curriculum for South Sudan in 2015 (MoEST, 2015, UNICEF, 2015). This has effectively brought to an end the multiple curricular from neighboring countries such as Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, DRC, and Kenya (P23/A, 03.06.2023; P24/5, 06.07.2024).

Another issue that was frequently raised by participants with regards to the teaching and learning resources is the existence of a new curriculum against all odds. This was found across board. "South Sudan's independence would have been void without curricula reforms" suggested

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(P23/C, 17.06.2023; P24/8, 27.07.2024). There was a growing body of literature on the history of curricular reforms in South Sudan. A study by Bentreovato and Skårås (2023) pointed out the South Sudan curriculum cannot be discussed without indulging in the protracted clash of culture and identity between North and South Sudan.

Other authors such as Kuyok (2019) and Johnson (2012) observed that successive governments in Khartoum attempted to impose Arabization and Islamization on whole country without regard for cultural diversity ostensibly to foster cohesive and cultural assimilation through education circulars. A participant in a face-to-face interview alluded to this phenomenon as a form of cultural imperialism resisted by Anyanya 1 and SPLA/M (P24/3, 22.06.2024) and another participant said “Any attempt to make us second-class citizens in our country was a violation of our basic human rights (P23/B (17.06.2023). According to Wawa (2021), this new curriculum embodied South Sudan’s “civic” awareness.

From this analysis, there is a strong indication that the Government of South Sudan has achieved significant mileage by adopting a vision of education by developing both print and digital learning content. Recurring conflicts, inadequate infrastructure, high costs, and low digital literacy has prevented teaching and learning resources from arriving remotes parts of South Sudan (P24/14, 27.08.2024; P23/G, 22.07.2024; P23/M, 28.08.2024). Some teachers observed also that the CBE framework does not suit subject areas where it is difficult to prescribe specific competencies or new skills like history (P23/E, 08.07.2024; P24/6, 13.07.2024).

It can be summed up that many schools, students, teachers, and administrators have had inadequate access to both hard and digital copies of the curriculum. Limited access to teaching and learning resources means a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the CBE content. This affects the achievement of learning outcomes and represents one of the major drawbacks in the rollout of the CBE framework (P24/1, 08.06. 2024; P23/6, 13.07.2024; P24/15, 28.08.2024; P23/J, 12.08.2023). Integrating technological solutions as a strategy for disseminating the CBE content was the most suitable strategy if government and stakeholders could make it cost effective and efficient (FGD, P24, 30.08.2024).

Narrow Or Closing Skill Gap And Skill Mismatch

Implementing the CBE model involves improving the teachers' training and motivation. To understand the human-resource-related concerns fueling resistance to change and drawbacks in the achievement of the CBE objectives in South Sudan, participants were asked what are the key challenges affecting the effectiveness of teachers in implementing the CBE framework?, and how can these factors be addressed?

There answers varied. This includes the percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards by education level and type, pupil-to-teacher ratio, average teacher salary compared to other profession, teachers’ attrition rate, percentage of teachers who received in-service training in the last 12 months by type of training and teachers’ attitude towards change (FGD P23/Y, 31.08.2024 and FGD P24/Z, 30.08.2024).

Documentary analysis displayed progress in quality of teachers. The Annual Census released by the Ministry of General Education in 2018, 2021, and 2023 revealed that the number of trained teachers steadily risen at all levels of education from pre-primary, primary to secondary schools.

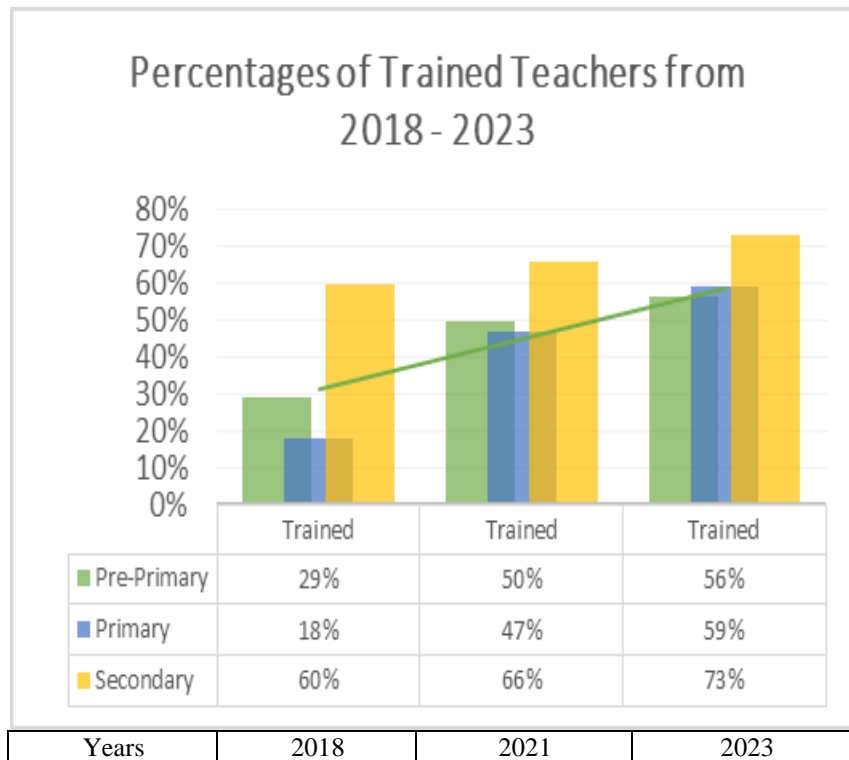


Figure 1: The 2018, 2021, and 2023 Annual Education Census

According to the latest education census conducted by Ministry of General Education and Instruction, there are over 45,953 teachers in South Sudan pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools, respectively (Annual National Census, 2023). Figure 1 shows how the percentage of trained teachers increased from 29% (in 2018) to 56% in 2023 for pre-primary, 18% in 2018 to 59% for primary, and 60% in 2018 to 73% in 2023 for secondary schools. This shows a significant improvement in the quality of the teaching workforce.

The minimum qualification required for teachers at all levels of basic education according to the General Education Act of 2012 is illustrated in Table 2

Table 2: Minimum qualification for teachers in South Sudan by school levels

Schools by Level	Teacher Minimum Qualification
Pre-primary	Possess a South Sudan Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent from a recognized teacher training institution.
Primary	Possess a South Sudan Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent or diploma and a teaching qualification from a recognized teachers' training institute.
Secondary	Possess, Bachelor's Degrees or equivalent in Education or a Bachelor's Degree in another discipline and a teaching qualification from a recognized teacher training institution

Source: General Education Act (2012)

The increase in pre-service teachers' training has been accredited to various universities (P24/3, 22.06.2024) while the increase in in-service training to educational partners such as ADRA, WINDLE TRUST, JRS, and Solidarity (P23/L, 26.08.2023). Arapi, Yei, and Rumbur Teacher Training Institutes plus County Education Centers also contributed to teacher training over the years (P23/H, 29.07.2023; P24/11, 17.08.24).

FGD P23/Y and FGD P24/Z could not agree on whether the rise in improvement made in teachers' training has narrowed or closed the skill gaps to deliver a learner-centered approach in schools at all levels (31.08.2023; 30.08.2024). “As a teacher working closely with teachers in remote areas”, continued P23/F “I see firsthand how most teachers still operate under the traditional teacher-centered approach.”

Face-to-face interviews confirmed. Respondent P24, an administrator said: “We have offered training to 6,000 staff in the last 10 years in the CBE methodology” (P24/10, 10.08.2024). Another participant, P23/B, concluded: “I notice most of our schools still use typical test grade assessments to conduct formative and summative evaluations, including the National Examination Secretariat” P23/B (17.06.2023).

Drawing from the analysis, it can be concluded that the number of trained staff has risen indicating expansion in the quality of teachers. However, there were still concerns about skill mismatch to narrow or close the literacy gap to deliver CBE for South Sudan. Although there were no figures given for education managers in any of the Annual National Census, participants observed that the skill mismatch was wider among the administrative staff compared to teachers (P24/15, 28.08.2024; P23/J, 12.08.2023). This calls for the need to train educational leaders to provide and monitor progress.

A skills gap is the difference between the skills that an employer needs and the skills that their workforce requires from every employee for an assignment. The best way to identify skill gaps in an education organization is to conduct a skill gap analysis or a performance review and then locate training opportunities or benchmark experience to equip employees with a required skill set for staff already employed in your institution. However, measuring mismatch before recruitment is the best way to be a productive organization.

Another human resource-related issue identified by the participants was staff with low morale, and those resistance to change. FGD/Y observed that the post-independent teachers were recruited from teachers who taught in Sudan, areas under the SPLA control, and returnees from other countries. All these categories have their strength and weakness. However, their weakness became more apparent during the execution of the CBE models (31.08.2023).

A face-to-face interview examined why teachers were demotivated and less welcoming to change. First, returnee teachers from Northern Sudan faced double tragedy; having been trained in the Arabic language, the pressures of learning English as a third language including pronunciation difficulties, grammatical problems, and lack of fluency have been a source of great anxiety and have made facilitating competency-based classrooms a nightmare (P24/1, 8.6.2024). This category expresses nostalgia for teaching in familiar language and traditional model (P23/A, 3.6.2023).

Second, the education system has expanded rapidly and enrolment rates have shot up since the signing of the CPA in 2004. “But teachers are not paid regularly for an extended period,” said (P24/8, interview, 27.08.2024). Delayed and insufficient compensation for teachers has had a ripple effect. It has demotivated the current teachers and is also a key contributor to why many states have trouble attracting and retaining professional teachers (P24/E, 08.07.2023).

Third, both Cohort 2023 and 2024 have shown concerns that the inspectorate departments in both the national and state ministries are run by fresh graduates or employees without experience. This is symptomatic of what is wrong with any employment system, where employers do not provide a breakdown of the duties and experience requirements for certain positions (P24/N, 29.08.2023). Good supervision can ensure a competitive advantage in the work or demotivating when the office bearer cannot provide the leadership required.

Teachers' motivation is critical in ensuring the successful implementation of the CBE framework. Studies have shown that motivated teachers are likely to be more engaged, perform to their highest potential, and positively affect those around them (Msamba, 2023). Similarly, not understanding inspectors' responsibility in a school setting is a drawback to achieving CBE learning outcomes. Educational administrators should ensure employees receive adequate communication and motivation to maintain a positive perception or attitude toward new ideas or be open to change.

Stakeholders' Cooperation and Global Partner in CBE

A stakeholder is a party with a vested interest in an enterprise. The participants unanimously agreed that stakeholders' cooperation is one of the challenges affecting the CBE reforms in South Sudan. They maintained that stakeholder corporation takes several forms, including; investors, employees, beneficiaries, and suppliers. FGD/23 and FGD/24 conclude that although all stakeholders influence a business, some have more influence than others, giving more power over an enterprise (31.08.2023; 30.08.2024).

Implementing CBE against a backdrop of political instability, a struggling economy, extreme poverty, food insecurity, tensions around land issues, lack of infrastructures, and over-dependent on the oil and gas economy requires stakeholders' cooperation. P23/O maintained that South Sudan has received a lot of international goodwill since independence (30.8.2023). For example, the ‘Go-to-School’ campaign in 2006 which saw enrollment up from 343,000 during wartime to a staggering over one million (P24/15, 28.08.2024), and the launch of CBE framework in 2015 (P23/K, 19.08.2024).

However, the resurgence of violence in December 2013, and the illusive implementation of the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement have reversed the progress made in delivering education. Face-to-face interviews with educational partners have shown that prioritizing education where and when everything is a priority is the leading challenge (P24/14, 27.08.2024).

This confirms the finding of Oywak, Adhiambo, and Wambiya (2019) which demonstrates that education in South Sudan appears resilient but is overwhelmed by several challenges.

Education administrators lament the loss of direct donor support when emergencies sink in. P23/K observed that recurrent political instability makes education partners reroute cash to humanitarian. Fund reduction or withdrawal has implications for long-term capacity-building projects such as the CBE program (19.08.2023), and mistrust in government and holding a parallel report system are some of the resource tensions reported (P24/9, 03.08.2024).

From the analysis, I summarize that stakeholders' collaboration is critical for the execution of the CBE initiatives. Government leadership and the strong participation of national authorities in ownership are indispensable for project sustainability. To be successful in stakeholder involvement, the government must carefully identify its key stakeholders, assess the elements that contribute to that relationship, build trust and credibility, and develop a stakeholder engagement plan, which can be monitored and evaluated during engagement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This qualitative study explored the challenges affecting the rollout of a competency-based curriculum in South Sudan. A total of 30 key informants were purposively sampled in the study. Data collection and analysis were prolonged to draw appropriate information. The finding indicated that: first, there was a lack of comprehensive understanding of the competency-based education content. Second, although the number and quality of trained teachers have risen, there is still evidence that skill gaps to man the program have not been narrowed or closed. There also growing concern that skill mismatch may be higher among the administrators than teachers. Third, stakeholders' collaboration and global partnership in CBE is dwindling in a recurring conflict as available funds are often rerouted to supporting humanitarian emergencies.

The study recommends that there is a need to upgrade and reskill the current and future students, teachers, and administrators to reduce or close the skill gap, effective leadership at all levels to fast-track monitoring and evaluation of the CBE project to inform progress and identify emerging threats to the project, and strengthen global partnerships to address the technical and financial to widen access to print and digital content.

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