



Short Commentary

Proposition of Issues in Curriculum Studies Concerning Spread of Competency-Based Educational Reforms in African Countries

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Abstract

Due to the rapid progress of globalization in recent years, the knowledge-based society is progressing not only in developed countries but also throughout the world, and the wave is spreading to African countries. Kusaka (2020) gave specific examples of competency-based educational reforms in African countries and analysed facing issues. In this article, we discuss the challenges in developing and implementing competency-based curricula in African countries and propose the role of future curriculum research to address these issues.

Keywords: Mathematics curriculum, competency-based, curriculum reform, Curriculum research, Comparative studies, African countries

Introduction

Kusaka clarified the characteristic of competencies being discussed in African countries by comparing them with competencies being discussed in developed countries. He also gave specific examples of competency-based educational reforms in African countries and analyzed facing issues. Based on the discussion of Kusaka, in this article, firstly, we will point out two challenges in the spread of competency-based educational reforms in African countries: [1] Risks of undervaluing basic knowledge and skills; and [2] Lack of local nature of competency. Secondly, we will propose three curriculum research issues to solve those problems: [1] Curriculum for acquiring basic literacy and numeracy; [2] Local competencies specifically in African countries; and [3] Comparative analysis of competencies in African countries.

Challenges In competency-based curriculum reform In African countries Risk of undervaluing basic knowledge and skills

Lersch interpreted competency as a combination of knowledge and ability, and emphasized that the acquisition and utilization of knowledge is important for the

development of competency [3]. In addition, he sees the development of competency from the viewpoint of "transfer of learning", and demonstrates it by two pivots; "transfer of vertical learning" which relates to knowledge and "transfer of horizontal learning" which relates to ability. From the viewpoint of the importance of basic knowledge and skills, if these skills (vertical learning) are not sufficient, the ability to utilize them (horizontal ability) will be limited, and consequently, the development of competency cannot be expected. In other words, it is supposed that in order to acquire competency, there must be basic ability such as knowledge and skills which serves as its foundation. As a specific example, many countries consider information literacy as a basic literacy and critical thinking skills as higher-order cognitive skills. However, when critically assessing a given piece of information, if there is no basic literacy, such as how to read graphs and the basic knowledge about contents in the graphs; one cannot critically evaluate the information, nor even understand its content.

Many African countries, where the scale of education is expanding, are facing challenges regarding the quality of education. There is a risk of being caught up in the superficial meaning of the word "competency base", so

the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills will be neglected, and the emphasis of learning will be shifted to general competency. Further, if the teacher does not have enough skills and competency, they may interpret general competency in their own ways. The lessons would be in the danger of lapsing into simply activity based (Figure 1).

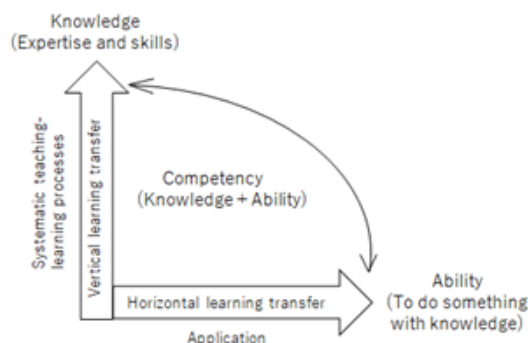


Figure 1. Acquisition of competency [3].

Lack of local nature of competency

Competency has been often analyzed from a global perspective, but it is also extremely important to understand competency from a local perspective. Kusaka mentioned that the competencies cited by international organizations and different countries are global competencies necessary to live a better life in the present and future society, regardless of countries or regions, in the world of globalization. Social and cultural differences are rarely considered [1]. However, the places where education is actually conducted to foster those competencies are local institutions such as the schools in each region. Moreover, children live their daily lives in a particular locality. In other words, it is necessary to foster global competency in the local environment of each country and region. If we remain obsessed with the idea of global competency and the global trends of recent years, while ignoring the local places where we live and trying to foster these competencies from only global perspectives and trends, there is a risk that children will be disconnected from their daily lives, and they will not have a sense of reality.

Furthermore, there are many ethnic groups in Africa, and each ethnic group is rooted in traditional society and culture. In order to live in such a society, and maintain and pass down these attributes, there may be local competencies that apply only in that particular society. In order to cultivate them, the global competencies specified by international organizations and at the national level must be grasped from a local perspective and consciously addressed in education. In other words, it is very important to consider the relationship between the global nature and local nature of competencies, to interpret global competencies from a local perspective, and to include them in school education. An example will be shown. The subjects of “cultural awareness” and “inter-cultural understanding” are specified as competencies in major

organizations and countries. These words convey the importance of knowing and understanding other cultures, but what should we do to know and understand other cultures? The first step is to know your own culture. Knowing your own culture will make you respect it, which will give you the ability to understand and respect other cultures. The converse is also true. Understanding other cultures may lead to an understanding of one's own culture. As many countries and organizations also list “problem-solving” as a social skill, thinking about solving international problems can be applied to solve regional problems, and vice versa. It goes without saying that, as can be seen from the new word “glocal”, this is an era in which, even if we all live in our own regions, we must connect with societies outside our region. Under the umbrella term of global competency, competency from a global perspective is emphasized, but in order to understand competency from a global perspective, it is necessary not to forget its local nature.

Issues for future curriculum research in African countries

As future issues and the role of curriculum research in African countries, the following three contents are proposed: measures for basic literacy and numeracy

Local competencies in African countries.

Comparative analysis of competencies specified by each of those African countries.

Curriculum for acquiring basic literacy and numeracy

The quality of education in African countries is still not sufficient level, and it is an urgent matter for children to acquire basic literacy and numeracy at the beginning of primary education. As mentioned above, basic knowledge and skills are required to develop general competencies, and more theoretical and empirical research on curricula is required to ensure that these qualities are nurtured. In addition to children's learning environment, teachers' knowledge of subjects and their teaching ability vary greatly by country and region, so strategies for acquiring basic literacy and numeracy will also differ from those in developed countries. In African countries, theoretical and empirical research needs to be implemented on what kind of curriculum should be used to improve children basic literacy and numeracy, and what strategies should be used to teach it.

Local competencies specifically in African countries

As mentioned in the previous section, “Lack of local nature of competency”, global competency must be interpreted from a local perspective, and introduced into school education in that way. Regarding this, we propose to conduct research from two perspectives.

The first is how to foster global competency defined by each institution and country within the local environment of each region of Africa. Institutions and countries have established the competencies necessary to live a better life in 21st century society as global competencies, but the places where they are cultivated are local places called schools that exist in each region. Empirical research is required to recapture global competencies from the local perspective of the societies, in which children live, and to develop and implement a curriculum tailored to each social environment.

The second is what are the specific competencies that are applied locally in each region of Africa. For example, a Brazilian scholar in mathematics education, D'Ambrosio pointed out that school education teaches mathematics independently of mathematical activities in the daily life in their own societies, and this should be critically reconsidered [1]. The field of "ethnomathematics" that he created is still a major research area today. At a time when rapid globalization is transforming traditional cultures and societies which are strongly rooted in African countries, are there any unique competencies specific to each region which is required to live there? If so, what would they be? It is extremely important to consider these issues in order to rebuild societies and cultures which became traditionally rooted in each region of Africa down through ages, and to maintain and pass them on in the modern society.

Comparative analysis of competencies specified by African countries

It is important to discuss the features of each country's curriculum through cross-sectional comparative analysis of the competencies stipulated in African curricula, and

finding their similarities and disparities. By doing so, problems in the curriculum of one's own country can be identified, and suggestions for improvements can be made. Many developing countries, as well as African countries, are trying to apply suggestions obtained through comparison with curricula of developed countries to revise their own curricula. However, it is clear from previous studies that the curricula of developed countries are not applicable to African countries because there are big differences not only with regard to physical factors such as the school environment, but also in terms of 'soft' aspects such as the nature of teachers and children. While it is not intended to completely deny all reference to developed countries as a model to aim for, we believe that, by performing a comparative analysis of African countries, especially neighboring countries with similar cultures and similar educational situations, many suggestions for improvement can be obtained.

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