

Perceptions and factors Influencing Teaching and Learning in Kyela Secondary Schools in Tanzania

ABSTRACT

This paper is a report on the findings of a study conducted in 2016. Specifically, the study sought to; (1) assessed teachers' perceptions on quality students learning environments and (2) examine the extent to which teaching and learning contexts influences student learning. The study adopted a mixed approach to research using a concurrent- triangulation design with a sample of 148 participants selected through purposive and simple random sampling procedures. The data collection involved the use of questionnaires, semi-structured interview schedules and focus group discussion. The analysis of data involved the use SPSS to generate frequencies and percentages for quantitative data, and the use of content analysis for qualitative data. The findings revealed that teachers had varying perceptions on quality learning environment and factors that influences student learning including committed teachers, availability of teaching and learning materials and good leadership. Similarly, the findings suggested that factors such as limited Inservice-training to teachers lead to ineffective students learning as most of the teachers remain conservative to teacher-centered approaches. It is concluded that students' learning can be affected by many contexts, including teachers' content knowledge, teaching and learning methods. The study recommended that there is a need for ongoing Inservice-training among teachers in order to update their pedagogical skills, content knowledge as well as understanding curricular changes.

Key words: Content knowledge, learning methods, ongoing professional training, pedagogic skills, and curricular changes.

1.1 Background of the study

Improved learning is one of the key factors to the survival and development of individuals and communities (Creemers 2008). Effective student learning, is a function of motivating school environments that support active students' learning. To make an impact, learning has to connect what student learn to what happens in a real world to help one to develop skills, strategies and courage they will need to survive in an uncertain future (James & Pollard 2006, Hofkins 2007). Effective student learning therefore occurs within conducive learning environments allowing students' interaction with contents and knowledge (Singh 2014).

The above arguments on improving learning suggest the importance of quality school learning environment on effective students learning. UNESCO (2014) considers quality learning environment to be one of the central themes for the post-2015 global development agenda. Similarly, governments worldwide put much effort on improving the quality of teaching and learning environment for higher learning outcomes. World Bank (2006) for instance suggests that the improvement of student learning environments can occur by ensuring the availability of resource such as textbooks. Meanwhile, in other developed countries such as Australia efforts to improve student learning have been associated with efforts to boost the quality of teachers and updating their pedagogical and content knowledge (OECD 2001). In Wales for example according to Ysgolion (2012) suggests that improvement of student learning should start with efforts on improving the quality of teachers. Similarly, efforts focus on transforming learning environments and ensuring a good teacher- student ratio, as well as ensuring enough classes and conducive classrooms (OECD 2014).

Within the Tanzanian context, various efforts and reforms have been introduced over years to ensure quality education. For example, the introduction of Education for Self-Reliance in 1967 and Education for All initiative in 2000, aimed at providing quality education that would enable people to fight against ignorance, diseases and poverty (Nyerere 1967 & URT 2001). Similarly in 2000's the government of Tanzania introduced Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) which aimed at quantitative and qualitative improvement of student learning by improving school infrastructure such as libraries and teaching and learning materials for effective student learning (URT 2000, 2004). The plan in addition, emphasized on necessity for well-equipped schools with adequate teaching and learning materials such as textbooks and teachers' guides for effective student learning.

Furthermore, efforts to improve student learning in Tanzania can be evidenced via efforts to ensure the content and develop of students' abilities such as independent learning, critical thinking and analytical skills and focus on time-on-task management as well as the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for teaching and learning (URT 2010). The indicators of successes of some of these efforts have been through the increased number of schools, trained teachers and student enrolments (URT 2010). Researchers like Ehrenbeg, Brewer, Gamoran and Williams (2001) have identified factors such as the capacities of teachers, teachers' academic aptitude, knowledge of subject matter, and an ability to motivate students to learn as well as their instructional methods and coverage content and their classroom management as crucial factors affecting student learning critics.

USAID (2008), however, suggest that despite efforts to invest in education in many developing countries and attempts to improve areas such as teacher training, instructional resources, curriculum and infrastructures, student learning; the outcomes have consistently been low in many schools, and the learning environments have not provided desirable effective student learning. Similarly, a study conducted by TWaweza (2012) indicates that despite of such efforts to improve learning, an overall student learning performance across East African countries have remained extremely low. The study furthermore, points out weaknesses indicating that regardless of government efforts to improve the quality of learning environments, students have been still entering secondary and tertiary education institutions while generally they are woeful and ill prepared, such that even though they are awarded certificates in various levels they often tend to graduate with inadequate and sometimes irrelevant knowledge and skills. On the same issue, Sumra and Rajan (2006) illustrates that the poor learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools are associated with government's failure to set clear policy targets on improving student learning outcomes.

Similarly a study by Wagner, Murphy and Korne (2012) contends that most often the investments in education which focus on quantitative increase of secondary schools and student's enrollment rate, such improvements come with some downside because the growth of enrollments and class size in secondary schools tend to increase teacher's difficulties in improving learning because of overcrowded classrooms which in turn lead into a dominant use of teacher-centered methods (Kafumu, 2010; TenMet, 2011; & Mosha 2012).

The arguments above on improving learning suggests that, even though the effective student learning demands the availability of motivating classroom environments that support active students' learning, there seem to be a missing link between the efforts directed towards improved student learning and what happens on the development of individual and communities. While the number of schools and student's enrollment keep on increasing, the students learning outcomes seem to keep on deteriorating. For example, in the year 2011, 46.4% of form four students failed National Examinations. A similar trend was observed in subsequent years of 2012 and 2013 where the percentage was 56.9% and 57.1% respectively (Sumra & Katabaro, 2014). The missing link has created a gap that led to increased criticisms on secondary schools' effectiveness because of the increasing numbers of graduates with poor learning outcomes. The above situation necessitates a study of this nature to examine the contexts that influence teaching and learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Tanzanian government has put most of efforts in an attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning for both primary and secondary schools. However, there seem to be a mismatch between the efforts and the quality of student learning. Most of these efforts introduced so far seem to be more focused on quantitative improvements. The fundamental gap appears to exist in many facets including failure to produce candidates who are confident and who can cope with global challenges and survive in a complex world (TWaweza, 2012; Sumra and Katabaro, 2014). Examining the perceptions and factors influence teaching and learning in secondary schools appear to be important in order to understand some of the critical factors that could influence student learning. This study intended to seek the evidence of such facets that influence teaching and learning in Tanzania secondary schools.

2.0 Related Literature

2.1 The Concept of Learning

Understanding the way learning is defined, studied, and perceived, is key to the understanding much of the curricular and instructional issues and debates in education (Fosnot, 1996). It seemed essential therefore for the present study to conceptualize learning at the outset. Traditionally, learning has been defined as a relative permanent change in behavior including both observable activities and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions (Burns, 1995). Within this perspective schooling is viewed as a process that helps an individual to gain knowledge towards achieving observable learning outcomes. More recently however, learning has been viewed as a reflective activity which an individual gain or improves by undergoing various experience (Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner and Whalley, 2002). Meanwhile Ellis (2007) defines learning as a process of gaining knowledge and developing competencies in a variety of contexts.

Illeris, (2007) defines learning as a result of the interaction processes between individuals' inner processes, materials and social environment. The other view of learning is presented by Taylor and MacKenny, (2008) who considers it as a process that does not only include acquisition of knowledge on the subject matter, but also the acquisition of habits, attitudes, perceptions, interests and social skills to learners suggesting learning involves a variety of unpredictable learning outcomes. A recent study done by Mwaikokesya, (2014, p. 21) adopts a definition by Perry, (1970) and Stanford, (1969) which considers learning as a transformation process that occurs as an individual advance in education or other life contexts.

From the above contradictive definitions by different authors, it seems that defining the concept of learning is not a straightforward task. Learning however, can generally be viewed as a transformational process through which an individual acquires knowledge, competence skills and attitudes or values.

2.2 Theories of Learning

The complexities associated with understanding and defining the concept of learning have given a rise to competing perspectives and theories describing how individual undergoes learning and processes and complexities associated with learning (Taylor and MacKenny 2008). Different perspectives exist on explaining how individual gain knowledge, acquire the needed skills and sustain the knowledge acquired. Some of the common theories include the behaviorist' perspective, cognitive and constructivism theories discussed below.

2.2.1 Behaviorist perspective to learning

As stated earlier, traditionally, learning has been viewed from a behaviorist perspective, which considers learning as a relatively permanent transformation of behavior with an emphasis upon measurable changes or outcomes (Pritchard, 2009). This perspective considers learning also as a conditioning process based on a stimulus-response. The stimulus is deemed to be a cause of learning which acts upon the individual, evoking a response or increasing the chances of a response (Pritchard, 2009 & Stones, 2003). In the absence of this reinforcement the behavior is less likely to occur. Learning is therefore interpreted in terms of the strengths of the stimulus–response connection. This view of learning however has been criticized by many scholars, for example Beers, (2006) who argues that it tends to discount the activities of the brain; that is; it fails to explain how behavior changes and in explaining new forms of learning that occur in the absence of rewards and punishments.

2.2.2 Cognitive perspective to learning

Learning can also be viewed from a cognitive perspective. Unlike behaviorist’s perspective which considers learning as a passive process, the cognitive theoretical perspective considers learning as the acquisition of knowledge is an active process (Daniel, 2001, Weiner, 2003 & Pritchard, 2009). It suggests that individuals construct knowledge by connecting the incoming facts to previously acquired knowledge in which individual can make meaning.

Cognitive theoretical perspective typically place action and problem-solving at the Centre of learning (Beers, 2006). Learning is viewed as a process of gaining or changing insights, views or outlooks as individuals make meaning of previously learned facts (Pritchard, 2009 & Stones, 2003). In this perspective, students need to monitor their own learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding. Similar to the behaviorist perspective however, cognitivists’ theoretical perspective is challenged because of its emphasis on memorization of facts or procedures from textbooks or lectures rather emphasizing learning for understanding. It should be noted however, that in order for learners to understanding, frequent feedback is critical.

2.2.3 Constructivism perspective to learning

The other view to learning is constructivist perspective, which differs from behaviorists’ and cognitivists’ perspectives in that it does not view learners as passive recipients of transmitted knowledge. Instead, it emphasizes the active role played by students in the process of acquiring knowledge personally and socially through engagement with meaningful tasks situated within their immediate environment (Pritchard, 2009). This perspective also encourages learners to find their own way of developing and creating their own knowledge (Daniel, 2001; Beers, 2006; Taylor & MacKneey, 2008). Learner autonomy and initiatives are encouraged in this theoretical perspective, and it is believed that knowledge is created by doing, researching and experiencing real-life situations. This perspective also, assumes that learners construct individual meanings based upon what they currently understand and know (Pritchard, 2009). Constructivists assume that all learners have experiences, and therefore individual understanding cannot be the same between people. For learning to take place students must understand the new materials in terms of their existing knowledge (Beers, 2006). Within the constructive perspective, learning activities are characterized by qualities such as active engagement, problem solving and collaboration which are the learner-centred approach. The present study is construed within a constructivist

perspective from which students are considered to be co-creators of knowledge and active participants in the learning process.

2.3 Debates on Poor Students' Learning

Contrasting views exist on causes of poor student learning. On one hand scholars consider poor learning to be caused by inadequate inputs (Mosha & TAMASHA, 2010). The major argument in this camp is that poor student learning is the consequences of poor teaching and learning resources such as shortage of teachers, teaching and learning materials and poor school physical infrastructure (Mosha, 2000; Kafumu, 2010; Mosha, 2012; TAMASHA, 2010; UWEZO, 2012; UNESCO, 2008; & World Bank, 2001). Mosha, (2000), wonders how education institutions manage to produce first class students despite the terrible conditions of libraries, laboratories and classrooms. This view therefore suggests that effective student learning is a function of conducive teaching and learning environment that support positive interaction between teachers, students and the teaching and learning materials.

On contrary, other scholars (for example, Glewwe, Holla and Kremer, (2008); Kremer and Holla, (2009) consider poor learning to be mainly caused by factors such as lack of incentives among teachers and failure to put efforts into genuine teaching. It is argued further that teachers without sufficient incentives are unlikely to utilize inputs into effective student learning. According to this view therefore, teachers' incentives have an impact to effective students learning. This view suggests further that increasing teaching and learning inputs may have no effect if the required actions in the classroom are inconsistent with what children needs. Exemplifying further about issue, Glewwe *et al.* (2008) maintains that, having inputs such as additional teachers and textbooks often has limited impact on student learning.

Kremer and Holla, (2004) argue that, reducing pupil-teacher ratio and increasing existing-non teacher inputs like textbooks will have no significant impact on student learning, if teachers are not motivated. According to this view, to understand actual students' learning, we should go beyond the examination of inputs and resources needed, and look more closely on other factors such as classroom practices and organization. Studies also show that, in many developing countries, even in schools with better infrastructure student seem to learn remarkably little and with little learning outcomes (UWEZO, 2012; & Murkeji, 2013). The focus of most of these studies however, is not in Tanzania, such that little is known on the effect of those factors in the Tanzanian context.

3.1 Methodology

This study was drawn on the mixed research approach which employed a concurrent-triangulation design of data collection. The study was conducted in Kyela district in Mbeya region in 2016 including teachers and students from four public secondary schools. The selected study area was particularly useful because the region is one among the areas with many secondary schools in Tanzania (Mbeya education report 2014). Such that it allowed the study to examines various contexts influencing teaching and learning. The selected secondary schools met the requirements of data gathering for this study. A total of 148 participants (teachers and students) were involved in the study. Head of schools, academic teachers and teachers were purposively chosen by virtue of their roles on supervising teaching and learning processes, their

professional, knowledge and experiences in teaching professional. Therefore, they could provide rich information concerning the contextual factors that influence students learning in their schools. Whereas schools and the students were randomly selected. Categories of participants are as illustrated in Chart 1

Chart 1: Participants S/N	Respondents' categories	No of Respondents (n)
1	Heads of schools	04
2	Academic teachers	04
3	Teachers	20
4	Students	120
Total	148	

The required data were collected through interview, focus group discussion and questionnaires. Head of schools, academic teacher and teachers were interviewed to get their insight on contexts influencing teaching and learning and focus group discussion was conducted to the selected students. Similarly, both teachers and students were supplied with questionnaire just to respond for the list of items about teacher's beliefs on students learning, the aim of teaching and learning, teaching and learning methods as well as classroom management. The analysis of data involved the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20 to generate frequencies and percentages for quantitative data. The analysis of qualitative data involved subjecting data to content analysis procedures and giving descriptions with accompanying quotes. The data were then organized according to themes and sub-themes.

4.0 Data Presentation and Discussion

4.1 Teachers Views on Quality Teaching and Learning Environment

The study examined teacher's views on teaching and learning environment, using data obtained from interview with teachers ($n= 19$). From the analysis of the findings, different themes were emerged as reported below:

4.1.1 Quality of teaching and learning environment and school resources

The analysis of the findings indicated that one of the major themes with regard to perceptions of teachers on quality of learning environment was that of associating quality learning environment with competent and committed teachers. During interview sessions, some of the participants reported that quality was associated with teachers because competent teachers could be committed to deliver the teaching and learning effectively as reported that-: *"For me, quality learning environment comprises first with competent teachers who are committed to deliver effectively what they know so as to have effective students learning. If teachers are committed and motivated enough, will employ whatever necessary means to make sure that students learn"*.

Likewise, another teacher during interview session commented further that: *"For me I consider quality learning environment as teacher's ability to demonstrate a commitment to every student success in learning that can make learners feel included and valued when teaching...and use teaching and learning that reflect the materials to be learned and make creative use of the learning opportunities available within and outside the school context for student's success"*.

The findings above suggest that one of aspects of quality learning environment could be competent teachers who are committed and motivated. From the findings it seems that teachers are quite important because competent, committed and motivated teachers can employ necessary means to make student learn and success. However, when interviewing further with teachers, majority of them (90%) lamented that they were working in a non-friendly environment. The participants gave an example that lack of teachers' houses, incentives and low salaries had demoralized their commitment and motivation to their work.

The findings on the centrality of teachers are similar to those of Kanu (1996) who argued that competent teachers are crucial because they are able to deliver to the maximum level and facilitate learning for all students. Similarly, other teachers viewed quality environment as the presence of teaching and learning materials. 95% of teachers interviewed cited the availability of teaching and learning materials as a crucial element of quality learning environment, as of the teacher commented that; *"To me, quality learning environment encompasses the availability of teaching and learning materials including textbooks, teaching and learning aids which facilitate effective teaching and learning process, without them, there is quality learning environment"*.

The findings suggest that some teachers viewed quality teaching and learning environment could also be associated with the availability of teaching and learning materials in schools that could promote good teaching and learning. One of the possible reasons for participants' emphasis on teaching and learning materials could be because of role of instructional resources in promoting independent student learning. However, scholars such as Glewwe *et al.* (2008) have argued that quality learning environment does not entirely depend on teaching and learning materials, but on other factors like teachers' motivation.

4.1.2 Quality learning environment as good leadership

The analysis of the findings suggested further that good leadership could be associated with quality learning environment. During interview, 90% of teachers cited good leadership to be a crucial component if a school had to achieve, as reported that: *"quality learning environment has much to do with good school leadership because it creates conducive school climate which creates togetherness amongst teachers and between teachers and students to enhance effective student learning"*. Likewise, another teacher was quoted that: *"It is a good school leadership that creates quality teaching and learning environment for effective students learning"*.

The interview quotes above illustrate that some teachers associated quality learning environment with good school leadership. It appears from the interview comments above that good school leadership was cited because it could create good school climate and togetherness amongst teachers and students to facilitate efficiency in teaching and effectiveness in students learning. The findings above are in consistent with those of Mueller (2012) which suggest that good school leadership could influence teachers to work collaboratively and create shared vision, goals and standard to achieve its educational objectives.

4.1.3 The role of government in improving teaching and learning environment

This was another theme which emerged from the analysis of the findings in which participants felt that without government support little could be achieved as evidenced by one of the participants reported that; *“The government is responsible for improving teaching and learning environment through employing teachers, constructing classes, libraries, laboratories etc for effective students learning. These cannot be done by an individual teacher”*. Another teacher reported that: *“Most of the problems we encounter here are associated with big class size and lack of teaching and learning materials which cannot be addressed with an individual teacher....it is challenging for me to prepare quality learning environment in a such classrooms...so I request the government to intervene the situations so that we can improve our teaching”*.

The interview quotes suggest the government should cooperate with teachers in improving learning environment in schools for effective teaching and learning. Also, they suggest further that teacher had no role to play in improving learning environment as they considered it as the government role, hence was likely to hinder effective students learning. Some of the previous studies such as the one by Beers (2006) however, have indicated that teachers are crucial in ensuring learning environments that can enhance students learning through inquiry, peer teaching and co-operative learning for meaningful student learning and learning environments that can guarantee maximum students' participation.

4.2 The factors that Influencing Student Learning

The other research objective addressed in this study was the examination of teaching and learning contexts influencing learning. The analysis of the findings suggested that different contexts could influence students' learning as indicated below:

4.2.1 The influence of teacher's content knowledge

The analysis of the findings suggested that one of the contexts that could influence student learning could be teacher's content knowledge and the extent one could clearly explain the subject-matter. During the focus group discussion for instance, some students reported that: *“Some of the teachers in our school are incompetence on the mastery of the subjects they teach. This is observed during the classroom teaching when a teacher fails to give a clear clarification to some concepts some of them fail to respond to the questions when asked”*. Similarly, it was observed further that some of the teachers were incompetent in using maps and diagrams to illustrate their subjects and lacked drawing skills which was likely to affect further illustrations and elaborations of the lesson taught. Moreover, one of the head teachers lamented that, some of the teachers have poor masterly of content in subjects they teach as if they did not attend those subjects in their secondary levels, teachers' training colleges or universities. This has basically contributed to poor performance in my school.

4.2.2 Inadequate professional teachers' development

The analysis of the findings suggested that effective teaching would also be affected by the inadequate teacher's professional development. The findings for example, revealed that the lack of in-service professional development could lead into a mismatch between the curricular changes that were introduced and the actual teaching as one of the head teachers reported: *"Most of teachers are faced with lack of in-service training. For example, since the shift from content-knowledge to competence-based curriculum, new way of writing scheme of works and lesson plans were introduced without involving teachers from my school and no training or seminar was given to equip them. Such change has affected negatively the effectiveness of teachers in teaching hence poor student learning"*. Similarly, one of the teachers during interview reported that: *"I have been teaching here for five years now. I have never attended any in-service training or seminars for the subjects I teach despite the importance of in-service training in improving teaching practices"*. Another teacher in reported that: *"I am a degree holder. I have not attended to any professional training since I have been employed here. Rarely, seminars are conducted for science and mathematics subjects but there are no seminars at all for other subjects. How can I improve my teaching practices?"* This suggests that lack of Inservice training to majority of teacher seem to be one of the factors for ineffective teaching and learning; hence, it was likely to influence poor students learning as teachers would lack proper pedagogical skills on preparing their lessons for effective teaching and learning. The findings on the effect of lack of training for teachers are also similar to the findings by Sandra (2003) which indicate that teachers without training are likely to do the same thing as they did a generation ago.

4.2.3 The teachers' and students' peceptions on student learning

This was another theme which emerged from the analysis of the findings where some participants reported that their teaching was mainly focused on helping students to pass their final examinations, as one of the teachers was quoted: *"the focus of my teaching is to help students to pass their final examinations. This is why we have a rule here that each student should score above 50% per each test hopping that it will help them to do well in their final examinations"*. Another quote was given by academic teacher who reported that: *"I insist teachers to cover all the content as described in the syllabus before the final examinations. This helps students to cover all the necessary content in order to do well in their National Examinations"*. The interview quotes suggest that most of teachers had a belief that teaching and learning is all about covering the content as described in the syllabus and helping students to pass the final examinations. It appears therefore that in most cases students were taught to memorize the content instead of teaching students to understanding and developing a day today life skills.

One of the possible reasons for teachers' focus on passing examinations could be because a teacher was only regarded to be a good teacher and rewarded if large numbers of students have passed examinations. This was explained further by participants that it influenced ineffective teaching and students learning as in most cases teachers were teaching through following the examination format to familiarize students with skills for passing examinations.

The findings on teachers' emphasis on passing exams were also confirmed during a focus group discussion with students, in which the majority of students (99%) reported that the focus of teaching and learning was to pass final examinations. For example, one of the students reported that: *"a good teacher to me is the one who can help me to pass my final examinations. This is why Sir; I like a teacher who teach me by solving various past papers to familiarize me with questions that appear in the final examinations"*. The interview quotes confirm the findings that most participants believed that teaching and learning is mainly about passing examinations. Consequently, it affected students' improvement in learning as they only cram and memorize little content that would appear in their final examinations.

The findings above were also supported by quantitative data from teachers which suggested that the majority teachers believed that their main duty in teaching is to complete the content as described in the syllabus (Table 1).

Table 1: Teachers' perception on teaching and learning (n=19)

Statement	Frequency and percentage (%)	
	Disagree	Agree
For me the major purpose when I teach is to help students understand everything described in the syllabus	6(31)	13(69)
The major aim of teaching is to help students to pass examination	8(42)	11(58)
The use of participatory methods in teaching is challenging	6(31)	13(69)
When I teach, I always consider the theory of teaching and learning	8(42)	11(58)
Managing big classes is challenging	1(5)	18(95)

Source: Field research work 2016

The data in Table 1 suggests that the majority of teachers (69%) agreed that teaching had to help students to understand the contents, implying that teachers were teaching just to complete what was outlined in the syllabus. Furthermore, about 58% of the teachers considered that the main objective of teaching is to help students to pass examination. It appears from the findings that teachers' roles in teaching was to teach students how to pass examination and there was little attention on improving student competences.

Furthermore, with regard to students' perception of learning the analysis of the findings suggested that the majority of them had similar perception to those of teachers as depicted in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students' perception on teaching and learning (n=119)

Statement	Frequency and percentage (%)	
	Disagree	Agree
For me the major purpose when I teach is to help students understand everything described in the syllabus	22(18.5)	97(81.5)
The major aim of teaching is to help students to pass examination	20(16.8)	99(83.2)

The use of participatory methods in teaching is challenging	42(35.3)	77(64.7)
When I teach, I always consider the theory of teaching and learning	43(36.1)	76(63.9)
Managing big classes is challenging	54(45.4)	65(54.6)

Source: Field research work 2016

Data in table 2 suggest that nearly 81.5% of students considered that the major purpose of teaching is to help them to master the content, and 83.2% of them had a view that the aim for learning was to pass examinations. One of the possible explanations for students' focus on mastery of content could be teachers' emphasis on content during teaching, because most of teaching practices focus on completion of syllabus and make students memorize significant volumes of information for the purpose of passing tests and examinations. Scholars such as MacClenny (2008) recommend a teaching that does not only include acquisition of content knowledge, but also the acquisition of habits, attitudes, perceptions, interests and social skills which help learners interact.

4.2.4 The dominance uses of teacher-centered methods

The dominant use of teacher-centered methods was another theme emerged during the analysis of the findings. Through interview with the heads of schools, academic teachers and teachers it was revealed that most teachers preferred the use of lecture method. For example, some teachers reported that; *"I would prefer to use participatory method but due to overcrowded classrooms, forces me to use lecture method. The class has no space for organizing students for group discussion"*. Another comment was given by academic teacher during interview who reported that: *"most of the teachers in our school prefer the use of lecture methods due to large number of students we have in classrooms.... otherwise, they cannot complete the syllabus"*. The interview quotes, suggest that lecture method was mostly used to the schools visited due to overcrowded classes as well as the need of teachers to cover the syllabus.

Teacher's use of lecture method to finish the syllabus was confirmed further by all (100%) academic teachers who reported that, they still remember the poor 2014 form four examination results to their schools, therefore, they thought that, to insist teachers to finish the syllabus before examinations could help students to be well prepared to pass the final examinations. The findings on the dominant use of lecture method were also confirmed during interview with heads of schools who reported that: *"Though we encourage teachers to use participatory methods, it is very difficult for them to do it. In this school, for example, we have five streams of form four students and each stream has not less than 70 students"*.

Regardless the students understanding of the importance of participatory methods in strengthening their learning, teachers were reluctant to use participatory methods in their teaching as one of the students was quoted that; “*participatory methods help us to share our knowledge through discussion as what I know I explain to my colleagues and they explain to me too what they know. But since I joined to this school when I was in form two, I have never seen any teacher using participatory method even if we are twenty in the class will use lecture method*” The findings suggest that there were different reasons for the dominance of the use of lecture method, including large number of students in a single class and teachers’ unwillingness to use participatory methods. This is why, the teaching and learning was less focused on ensuring student mastering of competence, instead, majority of teachers seemed to be busy with completion of the content as described in the syllabus as opposed to building competences required as illustrated in the syllabus.

The above qualitative findings about teachers’ failure to use participatory methods were also confirmed by the quantitative data which suggested that most teachers could not use participatory methods due to different reasons (see Table 3: the dominance use of teacher-centered methods ($n=19$)).

Table 3: The dominance uses of teacher-centered methods ($n=19$)

Statement	Frequency and percentage (%)	
	Disagree	Agree
Given the size of the class, I rarely use participatory method such as discussion and role play	3(15.8)	16(82.2)
I provide students with helpful learning activities in the classroom.	2(10.5)	17(89.5)
Given the size of the class, students do not do presentation of group learning activities during teaching and learning process.	1(5.3)	18(94.7)
I always use question and answers in teaching and learning process.	6(31.6)	13(68.4)

Source: Field research work 2016

The findings in Table 3 show the dominance use of teacher-centered methods, ($n=19$) indicate that the majority of teachers (82.2 %) were seldom using participatory methods in teaching and learning process, suggesting the dominance of teacher-centered methods in most of the teaching and learning situations and, question and answers teaching and learning technique was the most preferred approach practiced by about 68.4% of teachers. The findings in table 3 also show that most of learning activities were not given to students during the sessions. Almost 94.7% of teachers reported that student could not make presentation group assignments because of the huge class sizes.

It appears from the above findings that one of the factors that could inhibit teachers from using participatory methods could be large classes. However, few teachers were using participatory method as they reported that they were using question and answers technique along with lecture so as to get feedback after teaching. Scholars such as Jarvis (2006) discourages the dominance of one teaching method in facilitating learning objectives because it may pose difficulties to individual student's learning. Similarly, other previous studies such as that of Mwaikokesya (2014) considers quality learning environment to include elements such as learner-centeredness, maximization of student interaction and the use information resources that support student learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on investigating the school contexts influencing teaching and learning in Kyela secondary schools. The analysis of the findings of the study identified factors such as teacher's subject matter knowledge, lack of professional development for teachers, poor classroom facilities and dominance use teacher-centered approach as hindrances for effective students learning. Therefore, there is a call for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's efforts on providing opportunities for teachers to undergo in-service training so that to update them with pedagogical skills. The analysis of the findings revealed further that both teachers and students had similar perceptions on teaching and learning which seem to affect achievement of cognitive development like positive attitudes towards learning. For example, they perceived teaching and learning as helping students to pass examinations as opposed to acquiring competences that fit in a day-day life. Therefore, teaching was meant to cover all the content as described in the syllabus so that to prepare students for the final examinations. This indicates the need for extra efforts to create positive perceptions between teachers, students and other educational stakeholders about teaching and learning so as to improve students' learning in secondary schools. In the light of research findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that:

- i) Since the findings in the present study indicate that failure to use participatory approaches by most teachers was due to lack of professional development and seminars, there is a need for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to provide an ongoing professional training for all teachers to promote their pedagogical skills and awareness to competence-based curriculum.
- ii) Based on the research findings that there was big class size which led to the dominance of teacher-centered methods, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should find ways to control and monitor the teacher-student ratio so as achieve manageable classes that would improve students' learning.

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