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

ABSTRACT

Understanding teachers' and students' perceptions are very crucial in exploring the factors that influence teaching and learning in secondary schools. This study was conducted in Kyela and specifically, it intended to (1) assessed teachers' perceptions of quality student learning environments and (2) examine the extent to which teaching and learning contexts influence 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 discussions. The analysis of data involved the use of 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 influence student learning including committed teachers, availability of teaching and learning materials, and good leadership. The findings showed further than 83.2% and 58% of students and teachers respectively, had a belief that the main purpose of teaching and learning is to help a student to pass examinations, thus teachers should complete the contents stipulated in the syllabus before examinations. Similarly, the findings suggested that factors such as limited Inservice-training to teachers lead to ineffective student learning as most of the teachers remain conservative to teacher-centered approaches. It is concluded that students' learning can be affected by the contexts in which an idea is taught as well as by students' and teachers' perceptions and attitudes on teaching and learning processes.

Keywords: Perceptions, Factors, Teaching and Learning, Secondary Schools, Kyela.

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 students learn to what happens in the 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; Usman & Madudili, 2019; & Malik and Rizvi, 2018).

The above arguments on improving learning suggest the importance of a quality school learning environment on effective student learning. UNESCO, (2014) considers a quality learning environment to be one of the central themes for the post-2015 global development agenda. Similarly, governments worldwide put much effort into 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 resources 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 update their pedagogical and content knowledge (OECD, 2001). In Wales for example 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 the 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 the 2000"s the government of Tanzania introduced the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) which aimed at quantitative and qualitative improvement of student learning by improving school infrastructures such as libraries and teaching and learning materials for effective student learning (URT, 2000 & 2004). The plan, in addition, emphasized the 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 development of student's 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, teacher's academic aptitude, knowledge of the 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, suggests 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 such efforts to improve learning, overall student learning performance across East African countries has 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) illustrate that the poor learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools are associated with the 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 the 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 suggest that, even though effective student learning demands the availability of motivating classroom environments that support active students' learning, there seems 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 enrollment keeps on increasing, 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 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 that influence teaching and learning in secondary schools appears to be important to understand some of the critical factors that could influence student learning.

2.0 Related Literature

2.1 The Concept of Learning

Understanding the way learning is defined, studied, and perceived, is key to 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 relatively 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 in which individual gains or improves by undergoing various experiences (Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner and Whalley, 2002).

Illeris, (2016) defines learning as a result of the interaction processes between individuals" inner processes, materials, and social environment. Learning is about a change: the change brought about by developing a new skill, understanding a scientific law, changing an attitude. The change is not merely incidental or natural in the way that our appearance changes as we get older (Sequeira, 2012). A recent study was 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 advances 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 MacKnney 2008). Different perspectives exist on explaining how individuals 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 the 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 individuals can make meaning.

The cognitive theoretical perspective typically places 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 learning and actively evaluate their strategies and their current levels of understanding. Similar to the behaviorist perspective, however, cognitivism" theoretical perspective is challenged because of its emphasis on memorization of facts or procedures from textbooks or lectures rather emphasizing learning for understanding. However, it should be noted that for learners to understand, frequent feedback is critical.

2.2.3 Constructivism perspective to learning

The other view to learning is the constructivist perspective, which differs from behaviorists and cognitivist 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 & MacKnney, 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, & Bada and Olusegun, 2015). The theory suggests that humans construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Constructivists assume that all learners have experienced, 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; & Bada and Olusegun, 2015). Within the constructive perspective, learning activities are characterized by qualities such as active engagement, problem-solving, and collaboration which are the learner-centered approach. Moreover, constructivists believe that learning is affected by the contexts in which an idea is taught as well as by students' beliefs and attitudes (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Therefore, 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 the 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 consequence 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 supports 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 on effective student 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 the issue, Glewwe e*t al*. (2008) maintain that, having inputs such as additional teachers and textbooks often has a limited impact on student learning.

Kremer and Holla, (2004) argue that reducing the 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 at other factors such as classroom practices and organization. Studies also show that, in many developing countries, even in schools with better infrastructure students 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.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Kyela district in the Mbeya region including teachers and students from four public secondary schools. The selected study area was particularly useful because the region is one of the areas with many secondary schools in Tanzania. Such it allowed the study to examine various factors influencing teaching and learning in secondary schools. The selected secondary schools met the requirements of data gathering for this study.

3.2 Participants

A total of 148 participants were involved in the study from four (04) public secondary schools. The study involved four (04) heads of schools, four (04) academic heads of school,

20 teachers (five from each school), and one hundred and twenty (120) from four students (thirty students from each school). Head of schools, academic teachers, and teachers was purposively included in the sample due to the day-to-day activities they play in teaching and learning processes. The study also used a simple random sampling procedure in selecting students to be included in a sample. The students were involved in the study because are the ones who are directly affected by teaching and learning processes.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through questionnaires from students (n=120) and teachers (n=20) to give comparisons of the findings. Whereas a semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from heads of schools (n= 04), academic teachers (n= 04), and teachers (n= 20) in an attempt to complement and supplement data collected using other instruments. Moreover, the study employed focus group discussion schedules to collect data from students (n=120). The use of these instruments in the present study seemed to be crucial because they could allow the triangulation of data obtained from other sources.

3.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20 to generate frequencies and percentages. Meanwhile, 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 Findings and discussion

4.1 Teachers Views on Quality Teaching and Learning Environment

The study examined teachers' views on teaching and learning environments, using data obtained from an interview with teachers (*n*= 19). From the analysis of the findings, different themes 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 the 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 delivering 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 the interview session commented further that: *"For me I consider quality learning environment as teacher's ability and commitment to student's success in learning that can make learners feel included and valued when teaching…and use teaching and learning materials that motivate students learning and intellectual development".*

The findings above suggest that one of the aspects of a 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 the necessary means to make students learn and succeed. However, when interviewing further with teachers, the majority of them (90%) lamented that they were working in a non-friendly environment. The participants gave an example that the 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 the 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 the teacher commented; *"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 no 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 the role of instructional resources in promoting independent student learning. However, scholars such as Glewwe *et al.* (2008) have argued that a quality learning environment does not entirely depend on teaching and learning materials, but on other factors like teacher's motivation.

4.1.2 Quality learning environment as good leadership

The analysis of the findings suggested further that good leadership could be associated with a quality learning environment. During the interview, 90% of teachers cited good leadership to be a crucial component if a school had to achieve the goal of teaching and learning, 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 a quality learning environment with good school leadership. It appears from the interview comments above that good school leadership was cited because it could create a good school climate and togetherness amongst teachers and students to facilitate efficiency in teaching and effectiveness in students learning. The findings above are inconsistent with those of Mueller (2012) which suggest that good school leadership could influence teachers to work collaboratively and create shared vision, goals, and standards 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 and laboratories for effective students learning. These cannot be done by an individual teacher".*

Another teacher reported that: "Most of the problems facing our school 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 the learning environment in schools for effective teaching and learning. Also, they suggest further that teachers had no role to play in improving the learning environment as they considered it as the government role, hence was likely to hinder effective student 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 cooperative learning for meaningful student learning and learning environments that can guarantee maximum students' participation. Similarly, the quality of education in secondary schools can be affected by different factors. It partly rests on the learning environment created by teachers and the learning approach students are employing during their learning (Belaineh, 2017).

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 student's 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 the 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 incompetency and had no 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 and 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 were likely to affect further illustrations and elaborations of the lesson taught.

Moreover, one of the headteachers lamented that some of the teachers have poor mastery of content in subjects they teach as if they did not attend those subjects in their secondary schools and teachers' colleges or universities. This has contributed to poor performance in my secondary schools.

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 to a mismatch between the curricular changes that were introduced and the actual teaching as one of the headteachers reported: *"Most of teachers are faced with lack of in-service training. For example, since the shift from content-knowledge to competency-based curriculum, new approach of writing scheme of works and lesson plans were introduced without involving teachers from my school and no training was given to equip us. Such change has affected negatively the effectiveness of teachers in teaching hence poor student learning".*

Similarly, one of the teachers during the interview reported: *"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 necessity 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 development 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 the 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' perceptions on student learning

This was another theme that 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 hoping 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 the teachers had a belief that teaching and learning are 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 understand and developing a day to day 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 student learning as in most cases teachers were teaching through following the format of the examination to familiarise students with skills of passing examinations.

The findings on teachers' emphasis on passing examinations were also confirmed during a focus group discussion with students, in which the majority of students (99%) reported that the focus of their learning was to pass final examinations. For example, one of the students reported: *"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 teaches me by solving various past papers to familiarise me with questions that appear in the final examinations"*. The interview quotes confirm the findings that most participants believed teaching and learning are 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 of teachers believed that their main duty in teaching is to complete the content as described in the syllabus (Table 1).

Table 1: Teachers' perception of 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 the 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 the examination. It appears from the findings that teachers' role in teaching was to teach students how to pass the examination and there was little attention on improving student competencies.

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

Table 2: Students' perception of 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 the 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 the teacher's emphasis on content during teaching because most of the 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 teaching that does not only include the acquisition of content knowledge, but also the acquisition of habits, attitudes, perceptions, interests, and social skills which help learners interact.

4.2.4 The dominant uses of teacher-centered methods

The dominant use of teacher-centered methods was another theme that emerged during the analysis of the findings. Through an interview with the heads of schools, academic teachers, and teachers it was revealed that most teachers preferred the use of the lecture method. For example, some teachers reported that; *"I would prefer to use participatory method but due to overcrowded classrooms, it is forcing me to use lecture method. The class has no space for organizing students for group discussion"*.

Another comment was given by an academic teacher during the interview who reported that: *"most of the teachers in our school prefer the use of lecture methods due to a large number of students we have in classrooms…. otherwise, they cannot complete the syllabus"*. The interview quotes suggest that the lecture method was mostly used in the schools visited due to overcrowded classes as well as the need for teachers to cover the syllabus.

Teacher's use of lecture method to cover the contents outlined in the syllabus was confirmed further by all (100%) academic teachers who reported that they still remember the poor 2014 form four examinations result 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 an interview with heads of schools who reported that: *"Though we encourage teachers to use participatory methods, it is very difficult for them to use it. In this school, for example, we have five streams of form four students and each stream has not less than 70 students".*

However, regardless of 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 this school when I was in form two, I have never seen any teacher using the participatory method even if we are twenty in the class will use the lecture method.* The findings suggest that there were different reasons for the dominance of the use of lecture methods, including a large number of students in a single class and teachers' unwillingness to use participatory methods. This is why, the teaching and learning were less focused on ensuring student mastering of competencies, instead, the majority of teachers seemed to be busy with the completion of the content as described in the syllabus as opposed to building competencies required as illustrated in the syllabus.

The above qualitative findings of 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 dominant use of teacher-centered methods (*n*=19).

Table 3: The dominant 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 questions and answers in the teaching and learning process.	6(31.6))	13(68.4)

Source: Field research work 2016

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

However, few teachers were using the participatory method as they reported that they were using the question and answers technique along with lectures so as to get feedback after teaching. Scholars such as Jarvis (2006) discourage the dominance of one teaching method in facilitating learning objectives because it may pose difficulties to individual students' learning. Similarly, other previous studies such as that of Mwaikokesya (2014) consider quality learning environment to include elements such as learner-centeredness, maximization of student interaction, and the use of information resources that support student learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on investigating perceptions and factors 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, teachers' and students' perceptions and beliefs on teaching and learning, and dominant use of teacher-centered approach as hindrances for effective student learning. Therefore, there is a call for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to put efforts into 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 the 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 competencies that fit in day-to-day life. Therefore, teaching was meant to cover all the content as described in the syllabus 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 regular professional training to all teachers to promote their pedagogical skills and awareness to the competence-based curriculum.

ii) Based on the research findings that there was a 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.

Consent

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

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