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A Study Of Management Of Competency-Based Education System In Lusaka And Chongwe Districts In Zambia

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Abstract:
Background*: The Government of Zambia introduced Competency-Based Education (CBE) as part of curriculum reforms aimed at shifting teaching and learning from rote memorization to skills acquisition, practical application, and learner-centered instruction. Despite progressive policy intentions, implementation of CBE in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts continues to face significant management and operational challenges. These include inadequate teacher preparedness, limited access to instructional resources, weak institutional support systems, and assessment practices that remain largely examination driven. This study assessed the management of CBE with specific focus on teacher preparedness and its influence on student learning outcomes.*
Materials and Methods*: A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining structured questionnaires administered to teachers and students with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving school administrators, policymakers, and teacher trainers. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo.*
Results*: Findings reveal uneven levels of teacher preparedness, stronger institutional support in urban schools than rural ones, continued reliance on summative assessment methods, and mixed student outcomes. The study recommends sustained professional development, strengthened institutional support mechanisms, equitable resource distribution, and alignment of assessment systems with CBE principles to enhance effective implementation.*
Key Word: *Competency-Based Education; Teacher Preparedness; Institutional Support; Assessment Practices; Zambia*

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I. Introduction

Education in Zambia has evolved considerably since independence in 1964, transitioning from a colonial system designed to serve administrative interests to a national framework aimed at addressing illiteracy and supporting socio-economic development [1]. Successive reforms have sought to improve the relevance and quality of education, culminating in the introduction of Competency-Based Education (CBE). This reform aligns Zambia with global education trends that emphasize practical skills, learner-centered pedagogy, and measurable competencies rather than rote memorization and examination-driven instruction [2]. Through the Ministry of Education, CBE principles have been progressively integrated into the national curriculum to equip learners with competencies relevant to contemporary social and economic demands [3].

Despite these policy advances, the effective implementation of CBE remains constrained. Evidence indicates that many teachers lack adequate training to deliver competency-based pedagogy, while limited access to instructional resources continues to undermine classroom practice[4]. Empirical studies further reveal inconsistencies between intended competencies and actual learner outcomes, pointing to weaknesses in management practices at school and district levels[5]. Successful CBE implementation depends on sustained teacher development, alignment of curriculum and assessment, and strong institutional support; however, persistent challenges such as inconsistent professional development, resistance to pedagogical change, and marked urban-rural disparities in resources remain evident [6,7].

Although interest in CBE has increased globally and locally, significant gaps persist in the literature. Much of the existing research focuses on learner outcomes, with limited attention to the management and administrative processes that underpin effective implementation [8,9]. While urban-rural disparities in education are well documented [10,11], few studies have directly compared management practices across contrasting districts such as Lusaka and Chongwe. Furthermore, although teacher preparedness is widely associated with student performance [12], its role within the management of CBE systems remains underexplored. Theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior [13] and Constructivist Learning Theory [14,15] have been applied to

understand teaching and learning processes, yet their application to the analysis of managerial practices in CBE implementation remains limited [16].

This study addresses these gaps by examining the management of Competency-Based Education in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts, with particular focus on teacher preparedness and institutional support. By situating CBE implementation within its management context, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how educational reforms are operationalized and how management practices influence their effectiveness in diverse school environments in Zambia.

II. Material And Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods cross-sectional design to examine the management of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts of Zambia, with specific focus on teacher preparedness, institutional support, assessment practices, and student outcomes [17].

Study Design: A descriptive cross-sectional approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both measurable indicators and stakeholder perspectives on CBE implementation.

Study Location: The study was conducted in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts. Lusaka represents an urban educational context with relatively better institutional support, while Chongwe represents a predominantly rural setting. The inclusion of both districts enabled comparison of urban–rural differences in CBE management.

Study Duration: Data collection and analysis were conducted over a five-month period covering one academic cycle (January 2025 to May 2025).

Sample size: A total of 133 respondents participated in the study, including 30 teachers and school administrators, 83 students, and 20 policymakers and teacher trainers.

Sample size calculation: The sample size for this study was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations, with a 95% confidence level**,** 10% margin of error, and an assumed population proportion of 0.5 to maximize variability [18]. The initial estimated sample size was 96 respondents. Given that the study populations for teachers, students, and policymakers were finite, the finite population correction (FPC) was applied to adjust the sample sizes for each subgroup. Following this adjustment, the final sample comprised 30 teachers and school administrators**,** 83 students**,** and 20 policymakers and teacher trainers, yielding a total sample of 133 respondents. This approach ensured that the sample was statistically adequate, representative of the study population, and manageable within the scope of the research

Subjects & selection method: Stratified sampling was used to select eight schools (four per district), while purposive sampling was applied to select administrators, policymakers, and teacher trainers based on their direct involvement in CBE implementation. Teachers and students were selected based on active participation in competency-based teaching and learning. School administrators and policymakers were selected based on their oversight and implementation roles. Only participants directly engaged in CBE during the study period were included.

Inclusion criteria:

1. **Teachers** actively involved in implementing Competency-Based Education (CBE) in selected primary and secondary schools.
2. **Students** enrolled in schools where Competency-Based Education is being implemented, particularly those directly affected by the CBE curriculum.
3. **School administrators**, specifically headteachers and deputy headteachers, responsible for overseeing the implementation of CBE at school level.
4. **Officials from the Ministry of Education**, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), and other relevant education bodies involved in the formulation and implementation of CBE policies.
5. **Teacher trainers** from colleges of education and universities who are directly involved in preparing teachers for competency-based teaching and learning.

Exclusion criteria:

1. **Teachers** who had not undergone any form of training or exposure to Competency-Based Education methodologies.
2. **Students** in grades or levels not directly impacted by the implementation of Competency-Based Education.
3. **School administrators and policymakers** who were not directly involved in decision-making processes related to CBE implementation.

4. **Retired teachers and education officers** who were no longer actively engaged in service at the time of the study.

Procedure methodology

A mixed-methods research design was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the management of Competency-Based Education (CBE), allowing for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. The study population comprised teachers, students, school administrators, policymakers, and teacher trainers from selected primary and secondary schools in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation of both urban and rural schools [18].

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to teachers and students, while qualitative data were obtained through *semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions* with school administrators, policymakers, and teacher trainers [19]. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in **SPSS** [20]. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using **NVivo software**, following established thematic analysis procedures [21]. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants in accordance with accepted ethical standards in social research [22].

Statistical analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize the data, while **chi-square tests and regression analysis** were applied to examine relationships between teacher preparedness, institutional support, and student outcomes [20]. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically using NVivo, and findings were **triangulated** with quantitative results to enhance the validity of the study [23].

III. Result

This section presents results on the management and implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts, focusing on teacher preparedness, institutional support, assessment practices, and student outcomes.

Teacher Preparedness for CBE Implementation

Teacher preparedness for CBE was generally low, with clear differences between the two districts. Although most teachers were aware of CBE principles, fewer than half had received formal training. Teachers in Lusaka reported higher training exposure and confidence in delivering CBE lessons than those in Chongwe. Limited refresher training and weak mentorship were more pronounced in rural schools.

Table 1: Teacher Preparedness Indicators by District

Indicator	Lusaka (%)	Chongwe (%)	Total (%)
Received formal CBE training	52	26	41.7
Confidence in delivering CBE lessons	48	22	37.5
Access to CBE instructional materials	61	39	51.7
Received refresher training	43	20	33.3
Ability to assess learners by competencies	38	16	29.2

Institutional Support

Institutional support for CBE implementation was uneven across schools. While some teachers reported support from school leadership, access to instructional materials, policy guidelines, and regular curriculum supervision was limited. Lusaka schools reported relatively better access to Ministry of Education materials than Chongwe schools. Mentorship and peer-support mechanisms were weak in both districts.

Table 2: Institutional Support Indicators

Indicator	Lusaka (%)	Chongwe (%)	Total (%)
School leadership support for CBE	60	46	54.2
Access to MoE instructional materials	49	31	41.7
Clarity of CBE policy guidelines	42	28	36.7
Frequency of curriculum monitoring	45	30	38.3
Availability of mentorship programs	32	19	26.7

Assessment Practices

Traditional summative assessments continued to dominate classroom practice despite the adoption of CBE. Only a small proportion of teachers consistently used competency-based assessment tools such as projects, portfolios, and performance tasks. Key constraints included limited training, large class sizes, and absence of standardized assessment tools.

Student Learning Outcomes

Student outcomes under CBE were mixed. Improved learner engagement and practical skill demonstration were reported in schools with higher levels of teacher preparedness and institutional support. However, gains in higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving remained limited, particularly in Chongwe District.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the results show that:

- Teacher preparedness for CBE is inadequate, with marked urban-rural differences.
- Institutional support mechanisms remain weak and inconsistent.
- Assessment practices are largely misaligned with CBE principles.
- Positive student outcomes are associated with higher teacher preparedness and institutional support.

IV. Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that teacher preparedness is a critical determinant of successful CBE implementation. Consistent with Constructivist Learning Theory, teachers who are adequately trained and supported are better positioned to facilitate learner-centered instruction and authentic assessment. The Theory of Planned Behavior further explains how limited training opportunities and weak institutional support reduce teachers perceived behavioral control, negatively affecting their confidence and willingness to adopt competency-based practices.

The observed urban-rural disparities mirror findings from regional and global literature, underscoring systemic inequities in resource distribution and professional development. Continued reliance on summative assessment reflects misalignment between curriculum reform and examination systems, limiting the transformative potential of CBE. These findings highlight the importance of coordinated management strategies, sustained teacher development, and institutional accountability mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

The study concludes that the management of Competency-Based Education in Lusaka and Chongwe Districts is constrained by inadequate teacher preparedness, inconsistent institutional support, and weak alignment between curriculum and assessment. To strengthen CBE implementation, the study recommends sustained and structured professional development for teachers, strengthened leadership and supervision at school and district levels, equitable distribution of instructional resources, development of standardized competency-based assessment tools, and alignment of national examinations with CBE principles.

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