Learner Centred Education (LCE) amidst Corona Virus in Selected Secondary Schools in Zambia: Challenges, New Trends and Way Forward

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Abstract: **The study focussed on establishing how teachers were using learner centred methods in their teaching amidst the Corona Virus protocols. In doing so, the study investigated the challenges and new trends that have emerged in teaching. A descriptive survey research design was employed. The sample included 40 participants drawn from five selected secondary schools in Kabwe district, Central Province, Zambia, through a non-probability sampling technique. Data was collected through interviews. The key findings were that the pandemic had changed the normal approach to teaching and this had affected the use of learner centred techniques in lessons. Teachers were now using lecture method. Furthermore, the protocols have prompted some teachers to using social media platforms such as WhatsApp groups to give notes and homework in day schools. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others that teachers should find other ways of using learner centred methods in their teaching and at the same time, they should do all it takes to reduce the spread of the pandemic. Furthermore, online teaching should be supported by embracing e-learning platforms that were interactive such as Zoom.**

Key Words: **Challenges; New Trends; Corona Virus; Learner Centred Methods**

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Learner Centred Education (LCE) has been on top of the agenda in most educational policies throughout the world. According to Schilling and Koetting (2010) (in Hessein, Mtitu and Ogondiek, 2019), it is believed that the concept of LCE originated in developed countries, appearing first in the USA in 1970s as a result of public debates that criticised the quality of education which necessitated the formation of performance – based teacher education movements. LCE was introduced in German by 1970s and in the United Kingdom and Australia by 1990s (Marzano, 2010).

There seems to be consensus among scholars such as Kelly (1996); Magasu (2021); Roberts (1998) that LCE was first coined by Dewey in 1933. Dewey's seminal work '*How We Think'* (1910) set the ground for learner centred models by characterising teaching as a vessel which contributes to intellectual and moral development of a person. As the originator of LCE, Dewey (1910) rejected rote learning and emphasised that teachers should become lifelong learners of teaching, thoughtful about educational theory and how it translates into everyday practice. Furthermore, Dewey (1962) criticised teacher education for developing teachers as

technicians, trained to perform routine tasks rather than really think about what they would do and how they can improve their performance. This means that LCE focusses on helping the learners acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and disposition for personal and national development through methods such as group discussions, field trips, debates and other active methods.

In Zambia, the Revised Curriculum Framework of 2013 authenticates the importance of LCE through the adoption of the Outcome Based Education (OBE). This call is made very clear in this framework. Teachers should as much as possible use methods which encourage learners to think, reflect and do rather than reproduce from rote learning (MoGE, 2013). According to Magasu (2021), LCE seeks to link education to real life experiences as it gives learners skills to assess, criticise, analyse and practically apply knowledge to address societal challenges. The authentication of OBE by the Ministry of General Education clearly shows that there was a gap between theory and practice in the education system.

Hessein, Mtitu and Ogondiek (2019) contends that LCE rests on the constructivist theory which conceptualises that knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment, dialogue with others and reflection – all within culture and language. This means LCE encourages collaboration, face to face interaction between pupils and a teacher in the classroom. According to Machemer and Crowdford (2007), LCE prepares learners better as they are exposed to the thinking approaches of classmates foreshadowing the interdisciplinary teams of a real world situation. But the question is: How can teachers use learner centred approaches amidst corona protocols?

Duraku and Hoxha (2020) observe that globally there has been a huge and sudden change in the field of academia and education due to the spread of the deadly Corona Virus. As the Corona Virus pandemic runs its course, the education system in many African states are putting measures to limit the number of people congregating in public places and schools are among these public places. These measures have disrupted the normal delivery of lessons. Studies by researchers such as Magasu, Mileji and Lubbungu (2021) have also shown that learners especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa have received more in terms of effects of

COVID-19 (Corona Virus) on teaching and learning. As an end result, the Corona Virus has negatively affected schooling, causing challenges such as restrictions in learner contact globally. However, in Zambia, schools reopened with strict guideline to follow which were provided by the Ministry of Health. These guidelines include regular handwashing, social distancing and wearing of masks. But the question is: 'How can lessons be conducted effectively amid the Corona Virus?'

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) schools have an important role to play in raising healthy children by fostering not only their cognitive development but also their social and emotional development. Education is not isolated; instead, it is completed reciprocally, learners typically do not learn alone, but rather in collaboration with their teachers and their peers. However, in January 2020, a global pandemic stopped the current practices of education with limited warning. This means that implementing LCE becomes a challenge.

Since education is key to development of any nation, securing the continued provision of education during the COVID-19 pandemic is not only important but a necessity to control the spread of the virus and facilitate the rebuilding process (UNESCO, 2020). However, the COVID-19 school and university closures have a negative impact on learners' knowledge and skills development in around the world. Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) argue that going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness, from an economic point of view the primary point of being in school is that it increases a child's ability. However, it remains to be established whether skills development can be enhanced with restrictions on teaching and learning amidst Corona Virus pandemic.

Research on school learning by Carlsson, Dahl, Öckert and Roothet (2015) indicates that even a short period of missed school will have negative consequences for skill development. For instance, a situation in which young men in Sweden had differing number of days to prepare for important tests. The authors, Carlsson et al., 2015: 533), highlight that "an extra ten days of school instruction raises scores on crystallized intelligence tests by approximately 1% of a standard deviation, whereas extra non-school days have almost no effect." This entails that more days learners spend learning the higher the chances of getting better grades in the tests of the use of knowledge. Similarly, Lavy (2015) indicates that face to face instructional time has a positive and significant impact on learners' test scores. It thus, gives a call to undertake this study to establish how learner centered methods can be used on teaching and learning in selected secondary schools in Central Province, Zambia.

The Corona Virus Pandemic has and will continue to impact on education system throughout the world. According to

Kylee (2021), schools have struggled to move away from the lecture-based instruction in classrooms into technology focused delivery models. Erickson (2020) declared, as schools adopt virtual learning the digital access gap must be closed. Romero-Ivanova, Shaughnessy, Otto, Taylor, Watson (2020) acknowledged the main tasks or chores that faculty were forced to transition to include: learning new software, teaching learners to use new software, providing captions and interpreters, navigating copyrights, helping learners cope with isolation, balancing our new family life and work, and feeling disconnected from learners. It is also important to note that this is not the case in Zambia because secondary schools have not adopted online teaching but schools have opened to strict health guidelines to stop the spread of the pandemic. Although COVID-19 is not the first pandemic, it has offered a unique opportunity for all educators to prepare for major disruptions that may occur in the future.

Personalized learning has been used for the primary purpose in the education setting to create a tailored education to address the individual, strengths, weaknesses, and personal interests of learners, it requires flexibility from teachers and encourages learner independence (UN, 2020). As schools have moved through a variety of learning situations including in person, remote, and hybrid learning model both teachers and learners have begun to develop skills different than previously imagined. For instance, learners need skills of research. Will (2020) revealed, teachers found out that learners need extra guidance to manage executive functioning skills like, schedules, assignment completion, and goal setting, the development of teacher coaching small groups of learners with the goal of oversight and relationship building has made a difference for learners. Instructional strategies that educators have used to encourage collaboration with learners have not disappeared rather they have been restricted. This means that it is possible to offer LCE even with Corona Virus protocols.

COVID-19 pandemic required flexibility in terms of how lessons should be delivered without departing from LCE. Feldman and Reeves (2020) pointed out, educators will need to focus on essential content, explicitly state what it takes to earn specific grades, be more responsive and strategic with supports, and expand how and when learners demonstrate what they know. The disruption of COVID-19 drew attention to the disparities of equity for learners regarding access and support. However, with schools opening to strict Corona virus restrictions, this may not be the case in Zambia but what is clear is LCE would be compromised unless certain measures are put in place such as e-learning facilities.

With the sudden closure of schools due to Corona pandemic, the whole approach to education through classroom teaching became unviable, with little planned to replace it. This problem faced governments worldwide but has been particularly severe in most African countries where there is a wide difference in provision for the elite and for less advantaged people, mostly in rural areas. While educational programmes on television and radio were quickly launched by

many governments, they were only accessible to those with access to a television or a radio set. Similarly, online learning was only accessible to those with internet access. However, in Zambia, this was not the case as schools had to open to strict Corona Virus pandemic guidelines from the Ministry of Health.

A study by Pandit (2020), indicated that in Nepal learners are affected differently by the pandemic. For instance, a few schools and colleges in urban areas have started to run online classes to mitigate the impact on learning. However, running online classes does not seem to be feasible for most rural schools in Nepal. It is estimated that only 56% people in Nepal have access to internet. According to Pandit, only 13 % schools might be able to run online classes (though 35% schools have access to internet). In other words, the current ICT infrastructure and the distribution of access in the urban and rural areas have created two-tier of inequalities in the Nepalese citizenry, i.e., between learners who live in urban area and those from rural area, and between the rich and poor who can barely afford to access the internet. Considering such divide, the Human Right Commission in Nepal has requested the Ministry of Education Nepal and private schools not to pressurize children in the name of online education. In Zambia, schools had to open with restricted regular hand wash, wearing of face masks and social distancing.

Similarly, UNESCO (2020) has expressed the concern that the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, which the signatory countries are obliged to achieve by 2030 will now be difficult to do so. This could be attributed to the effects of the pandemic on learning and teaching.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative approach to elicit in-depth and illustrative information from participants to comprehend the various dimensions of the problem. According to Cresswell (2009), qualitative approach allows researcher to make interpretations of the data by developing descriptions of the events and processes, analysing data for category and theme development , that ultimately lead to a conclusion that are based on trustworthiness and credibility about theoretical and individual's meaning, stating the lessons learned and offering questions for further research. The research design was descriptive survey and the population included all teachers at secondary school level in central province, Zambia. In this study, purposive sampling technique was utilized to sample the teachers. The researcher conducted interviews with teachers in the school environment after seeking permission from the Provincial Education Officer, Central Province. The study sample was forty (40) participants from five selected secondary schools in Central Province, Zambia. Eight teachers from each of the five secondary were interviewed. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

IV. FINDINGS

The study was exclusively focussed on establishing how teachers were using learner centred methods in their teaching amidst the Corona Virus protocols. In doing so, the study investigated the challenges and new trends that have emerged in teaching.

a. Challenges

When the participants were asked to state the challenges they were facing in implementing LCE, the following themes emerged; social distancing, wearing of masks when teaching and less group activities.

i. Social Distancing

It was very clear from the results that teachers had challenges in implementing LCE in their lessons because of the Corona Virus protocols. LCE means that learners should interact with their peers and teachers during lessons but because of the Corona Virus protocols, teachers and pupils were required to observe a social distance of about 1.5m to 2m, as a way of preventing the spread of the pandemic. This situation compromised the interaction required in the process of learning. This is what one teacher (**T 1**) had to say;

> *It is very difficult to implement LCE because learners have to mingle in the process of learning. Because of social distance, we are failing*

Another teacher (**T 2**) had this to say;

> *It is practically impossible to have learners discuss while observing social distance. My class has fifty pupils and the room is too small to accommodate even three groups when they observe social distance.*

Another teacher (**T 4**) had this to say;

> *A meter apart! How do they discuss?*

In the same vein, another teacher (**T 20**) had this to say;

> *It is very difficult to use learner centred approaches this time around. For example, if you want to take pupils for a field trip, you will be denied permission by the school administration or the host because of the Corona Virus*

Another teacher (**T 10**) had this to say;

> *Imagine if you are using textbook study for your lesson, it is not possible to find a textbook for each pupil. All this problem is because of social distancing*

ii. Wearing of Masks during lessons

The participants indicated that it was stressful to teach while wearing a face mask. This is what one participant said;

> *When you are teaching while wearing a mask, you need to speak louder so that you*

are audible enough. This stresses me because I have to use extra-energy to teach

Another teacher (**T 11**) added;

Because of the stress that comes with wearing of a mask while teaching, some teachers teach without masks and putting the lives of the learners in danger

iii. Less Group Activities

The participants also indicated that the Corona Virus protocols had reduced contact with individual learners. Furthermore, it was established that as a result of the reduced contact, slow learners were left unattended to. This is what one participant (**T 12**) said;

When pupils know that you are not going to be in contact with them, their commitment towards school reduces. For example, if pupils know that the teacher will not touch their books, the pupils will relax and may not do their tasks

b. New Trends Emerging

As a result of schools adhering to Corona Virus protocols, the following trends have emerged; use of social media platforms to give notes and Homework in day schools, use of lecture method and streaming of classes.

i. Use of Lecture Method

As a result of Corona Virus, teachers have dumped learner centred methods and have resorted to the traditional method, lecturing. This is what one teacher (**T 9**) said;

Because of Corona Virus we as teachers have no option but to use lecture method. There is no social interaction among pupils and between teachers and pupils, and mostly we use question and answer. Really it is very difficult in this situation to use learner centred methods. There is more classroom discussion than group work

Another teacher (**T 15**) said;

With the advent of Corona Virus, learner centred methods are not being used because of social distance. For me I try to do out-door activities

ii. Use of Social Media Platforms

It was also established that some teachers in day schools had resorted to using social media platforms such as WhatsApp to give notes and homework. This is what one teacher (**T 3**) said;

For me I have created a group Facebook account where I send tasks for them to do while at home

iii. Streaming of Classes

As a result of Corona Virus, big classes have been split into smaller classes to enhance LCE. This is what one teachers (**T 5**) said;

I had 58 pupils before Coronal Virus but after the pandemic, my class was split into two. One in the morning and the other, in the afternoon. This means more work for us teachers

c. Way Forward

Participants indicated that as a way forward, the government should step in and provide the necessary equipment and services that support LCE in the Corona Virus era such as internet services. This was because teachers indicated the LCE was best when it comes to developing critical minds.

V. DISCUSSION

i. Challenges and Emerging Trends

Results in this study gave a clear insight of the extent to which LCE is implemented in this Corona Virus era. These results conform to what other researchers revealed about how the pandemic has disrupted the normal delivery of lessons. For instance, Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (2020) observes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new reality that necessitates a rethinking of education delivery, with technology coming into sharp focus as an enabler to such a delivery. However, this has posed a challenge on how LCE should be delivered especially in Africa. Studies by researchers such as Magasu et al (2021) have also shown that learners especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa have received more in terms of effects of COVID-19 on teaching and learning. This could be attributed to challenges such as lack of access to the internet, lack of personal computer systems, TVs and radios.

Since this study has established that some teachers have resorted to using lecture method in this Corona Virus era means that they were experiencing challenges in implementing LCE. Lecture method has a number of limitations. It does not promote interaction and communication is one way. Therefore, the use of lecture methods by teachers entails denying the learners an opportunity to become critical thinkers which is at variance with the demands of the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework of 2013 where teachers have been encouraged to as much as possible to use methods that encourage learners to think, reflect and do rather than from rote learning (MoE, 2013), which is LCE. This means that if learners are to be engaged by teachers in the process of learning, learner centered methods should be practiced. The finding could also mean that some teachers were not adequately trained to implement LCE. One would argue that it is possible to use learner centered methods even with Corona Virus protocols. Active learning techniques that involve small groups have revolutionized the physical classroom and seem to be effective even with Corona Virus protocols. Furthermore, the

finding calls for urgent intervention by stakeholders to address the situation because there is a danger of producing learners who were detached from their social, political, cultural and economic life. Grounding teachers to e-learning tools which were interactive in nature in situations where it seemed impossible for face-to- face learning would be one of such intervention. However, according to Prosser and Trigwell (1999), embracing technology in teaching and learning would depend on whether the teachers consider the learning process:

    a. as a process of information transfer, or use the teacher-centered approach, within which the teacher communicates information to learners and uses various assessment techniques to assess the memorization of data;

    b. as a process through which conceptual change is achieved (e.g. change of attitude knowledge, way of thinking) and/or see learning

    c. as a process that facilitates conceptual change, and therefore use the learner-centered approach, where independence in learning is driven through discussions, debates, and questions among students, and by the forms of assessment through which conceptual change is assessed.

Therefore, the same factors related to teachers' perspectives on teaching pedagogy, which have proven to influence the level of technology integration in the classroom, are also expected to have an impact on the successful implementation of online learning, since the shift from physical learning to online format incorporates the concept of "flexible learning." According to this concept, regardless of whether they are online, the applied teaching methodologies should aim to stimulate learning and independence among the learners, and the courses should be designed with the aim of supporting their individual needs (Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang and Wang, 2020). This view is supported by Magasu (2021) who argued that learners need to be provided with relevant learning experiences and opportunities in order to observe the world from a variety of angles and to analyse, categorise and really dwell into the problems they encounter in learning as well as in lives.

ii. Way Forward

There is need, however, to make e-learning compulsory and learner centered. This could be done by allowing learners to engage with the material application, problem-solving and discussion. According to Knight and Wood (2014), learners might be asked to solve problems during class, and this has shown to improve learning outcomes by inducing learners to engage in lessons and giving both learners and teachers feedback on understanding. Furthermore, learners may be asked to work in small groups to solve and to engage in peer instruction (Crouch and Mazur, 2001). However, Xu and Jaggars (2014) observe that the findings that online and physical learning yield similar learning outcomes have mostly been from studies conducted at elite institutions and seem not to generalize to community institutions. In Government

schools in Zambia, however, funds are limited to purchase computers and other equipment to support e-learning, particularly in rural areas (World Vision, 2020). Furthermore, there are no systems in Zambia to monitor the effectiveness of lessons delivered online. Despite these challenges, teachers need to be resourceful and ensure that LCE is implemented effectively.

VI.   CONCLUSION

The Corona Virus pandemic has posed many challenges for learners and teachers, and unsurprisingly, LCE has suffered in response through the use of lecture method by some teachers. In practice, LCE is not being practiced by the majority of teachers during classroom teaching and learning because of some challenges they face as a result of Corona Virus protocols such as social distance. As a result of this situation, learners were denied an opportunity to meaningful education. Since, the pandemic seems not to end soon, there is need to embrace technology that will enhance LCE.

VII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results this study recommends the following;

    a. The education policy should be reviewed to include Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the curricular

    b. In order to achieve the desired quality education, the government through the Ministry of Education should organize in-service training on LCE so that it is implemented effectively amidst Corona Virus protocols

    c. Teachers should find other ways of using learner centred methods in their teaching and at the same time, they should do all it takes to reduce the spread of the pandemic.

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