

## **Proposal for Aligning the National Examinations Council of Tanzania's Roles with Principles of Education for Self-Reliance**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The paradigm shift from content to competence-based curriculum in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had brought with it the inevitability of transforming the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) towards competence-based assessment (CBA). Although the council has a success story of fulfilling its mission of providing fair, efficient, and effective educational assessment, it does not seem to have fully shifted its attention to those educational reforms made. This study was undertaken to highlight the need for transforming NECTA so that its operations are in line with the principles of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) and CBA. It employed the bibliometric strategy; the study retrieved information using the Google Scholar tool using keywords such as education for self-reliance, national curriculum framework, NECTA guidelines and education policy, CBC, and NECTA Act. Although a total of 63 were retrieved, only 8 documents met the inclusion criteria. content analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that although NECTA claims to have shifted its attention towards competence-based assessment procedures, it has not fully integrated those CBA procedures to grasp the principles of ESR. It concludes that NECTA's current operations are not aligned with the objective for which it was formed. The study recommends a need for transformation of NECTA's assessment procedures to be able to match with the 21<sup>st</sup> century situation.*

**Keywords:** Assessment for learning, competence-based assessment, continuous assessment, education for self-reliance

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) celebrates its golden jubilee, there are several achievements worthy of noting. However, some occasions require a critical reflection. While public examinations are perceived as a tool for curriculum evaluation (Njabili, 1999), the rule of thumb requires that those public examinations closely align with the educational philosophy. As it might be recalled, the foremost function of the NECTA, according to the Parliament Act No. 21 that established it, as well as the revised version of 2019, is to formulate examinations policy following the principles of Education for Self-Reliance and the Education and Training Policy (URT, 1973; URT, 2019). This suggests that the establishment of the council was a strategy to ensure that the educational processes – the intended, implemented and attained curriculum – are well coordinated in line with both the philosophy and policy of education.

Freire (1970) argues that education can never be neutral but serves the purpose of either exploiting or liberating the masses. Thus, it can be argued that education under the ESR had the goal of rescuing the Tanzanian society from the ills of colonial education as well as building a new society, focusing on local conditions. As such, the philosophy was formulated to guide the nation's firm goal of building socialism (Nyerere, 1968) through education (Nyerere, 1967). For that matter, the intended curriculum, implemented curriculum, and attained curriculum (Akker, 2003) – all were expected to follow the tunes of ESR. This study was designed to assess the extent to which the National Examinations Council of Tanzania has been fulfilling its function of setting and implementing the examinations policy in line with the principles of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR). Specifically, the objective was to establish the congruence of the ESR and CBA ideals with the NECTA assessment guidelines and procedures (URT, 2021) as

a way to make a case for transforming the NECTA's assessment procedures.

### **Methodology**

The study relied on review of documents through bibliometric strategy, which is a technological tool for retrieving documents that are related with the study a researcher undertakes (Koseoglu et al., 2015). This involved four considerations – authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning – as a framework for selection of documents adopted from Morgan (2022). In the context of the present study, authenticity was thought imperative as it is used to indicate the extent to which the accessed documents genuinely provide the link between principles of ESR and NECTA operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The documents were searched from Google scholar; key words related to the study, such as education for self-reliance, competence-based curriculum, NECTA assessment guidelines, education and training policy, national curriculum framework, and NECTA Act were used. Although Google scholar search yielded 63 documents, only eight (8) documents met the criteria. These documents had direct link with the research topic. Table 1 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to include the documents.

**Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

S/N	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Originality of the documents for which the study builds its case	Documents on the topic under the study that made reference to the original documents
2.	Directives towards the topic studied from the government sources	Documents that referred to the directives
3.	Guidelines of the examinations practices	Documents referring to the guidelines provided
4.	Guidelines on principles for attaining the set objective	Documents providing related studies on the principles

As a result, documents related with ESR, the NECTA examinations guidelines, the NECTA Act of 1973 and its 2019 revision are some of the documents included in the study. Others include the national curriculum framework for basic education and teacher education, Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 and 2014, and the guidelines on competence-based curriculum. The documents were then subjected to content analysis where their interpretation was made and results provided.

## Results

A review of *education for self-reliance* (Nyerere, 1967) provides several descriptions with a bearing on the examination procedures. Box 1 presents the ESR ideals related to the Act No. 21 of 1973.

**Box 1:** ESR ideals expected to guide the NECTA operations (Adopted from Nyerere, 1967 pp. 7-8)

- i. At present time, our curriculum and syllabus are geared to the examinations set; only to a very limited extent does the reverse situation apply.
- ii. ... it is easy to say that our primary and secondary schools must prepare young people for the realities and needs of Tanzania; to do so, it requires a radical change.
- iii. The importance of examinations should be downgraded because they only assess a person's ability to learn facts and present them on demand within a limited time period. This approach excludes assessing other qualities such as the ability to reason and a willingness to serve others.
- iv. A teacher who is trying to help his (or her) pupils often studies the examination papers for past years and judges what questions are most likely to be asked next time; he/she then concentrates his/her teaching on those matters, knowing that by doing so he/she is giving his/her children the best chance of getting through to secondary school or university. And the examinations our children at present sit are themselves geared to an international standard and practice which has developed regardless of our particular problems and needs.
- v. What we need to do now is think first about the education we want to provide, and when that thinking is completed think about whether some form of examination is an appropriate way of closing an education phase. Then such an examination should be designed to fit the education which has been provided.
- vi. The purpose is to provide a different education – one realistically designed to fulfil the common purpose of education in the particular society of Tanzania.

- vii. The object of teaching must be provision of knowledge, skills and attitudes which will serve the student when he or she lives and works in a developing and changing socialist state; it must not be (merely) aimed at university entrance.

As discussed shortly, the extent to which the NECTA's operations have responded to the principles of ESR on the ground is subject to debate. This is in consideration that the examinations that are provided each year since its inception to date, despite the introduction of CBA in 2005, is still the same. One would have expected that the education reforms in the name of paradigm shift from content to competence-based education would involve change towards CBA, only to note a slow or rather an insignificant shift in both teaching and learning as well as assessment procedures.

### **NECTA Assessment Guidelines: A Critical Analysis**

A review of the NECTA guidelines on assessment procedures for secondary schools and professional levels (URT, 2021) suggests that the council guides the assessment procedures based on the cognitive processes approach. Nowhere does the council guide assessment of competences as the competence-based assessment requires. The assessment guidelines cover aspects such as moderation, administration, scoring and recording of test results, assessment of learners with special needs, monitoring and evaluation of tests and examinations, all related to cognitive processes. A few statements are presented to indicate that the council's assessment procedures do not match with the education reforms requiring application of CBA as Box 2 provides.

**Box 2:** NECTA guidelines on assessment procedures (Adopted from URT, 2021)

- i. NECTA is responsible for the collection of school Continuous Assessment (CA) records which contribute 30% to Form Four, Form Six and Professional final examination (p. v).
- ii. Competence-based assessment focuses on the understanding of concepts and the acquisition of skills and competences, as it emphasizes on higher-order thinking skills (p. 13).
- iii. Though NECTA conducts only formative and summative assessments, it ensures that other types of assessments, such as diagnostic assessments, are well conducted to meet the requirements of competency-based assessment and the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (p. 18).
- iv. CA involves test, terminal and annual examination as they will contribute to the final national examination results (p. 74).
- v. NECTA, being the body mandated to conduct formative and summative assessment at the national level in Tanzania, is responsible for making follow up on CA to ensure its standard. Specifically, the role of NECTA in monitoring and evaluation is to analyse the quality of the assessment tools used to generate CA. The tools will include question papers, marking schemes and score sheets (p. 78).
- vi. For summative evaluation, NECTA will be analysing each item that has been done. The analysis will indicate the factors that enabled the students to respond to the items correctly and those that hindered them from responding correctly (p. 78).
- vii. The NECTA, school quality assurance, Ward Education Officers, Heads of schools and College principals will be responsible for monitoring and evaluation of assessment to have quality Continuous Assessment (CA) (p. 78).
- viii. Although NECTA conducts assessment at national level, teachers and tutors are key players in the assessment process at school and college level. This is because they can largely assess not only the cognitive domain but also the affective and psychomotor domains (79).

Considering the aforementioned NECTA guidelines, it seems that the NECTA guidelines do not effectively respond to ESR ideals. Nowhere in Box 2 can one see the link with principles of ESR presented in Box 1. Such inconsistencies amount to the need to transforming the NECTA so as to ensure its roles are in line with the objective for which it was established.

### **Discussion**

Considering the aspects reviewed from NECTA guidelines in Box 2, it can be realized that those guidelines do not show a close link with the ideals of ESR as presented in Box 1. This suggests that there is unclear connection between the principles of the ESR and the NECTA's operations in relation to the National Examinations Council Act of 1973 (URT, 1973) and its revision of 2019 (URT, 2019). Although the educational reforms made at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century call for competence-based assessment, there is little carried out to transform the council's assessment procedures.

Even after the national curriculum framework for basic education and teacher education (URT, 2019) which insists about a link between the educational processes with the education philosophy in place, the NECTA assessment guidelines (URT, 2021) does not reflect the principles of ESR. One might surmise that perhaps educational reforms made were unclear when it comes to their application (Komba & Mwandangi, 2015; Losioki, 2018; Mkimbili & Kitta, 2020; Nkya, Huang & Mwakabungu, 2021; Paulo, 2014; Tarmo, 2022) by the NECTA. There seem to be misconceptions regarding the flow of education activities that affect NECTA's assessment procedures. The flow of education process commences with the definition of the philosophy of education relevant to a given context (Nyerere, 1967; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018), followed by the formulation of education policy which spells out the



aims and objectives of education for which curriculum development and evaluation procedures have to embrace. In the context of Tanzania, the education and training policy reiterates that education processes are geared towards attainment of self-reliance (URT, 1995; 2014). To implement the education philosophy and policy in the context of Tanzania, two institutions of the government were formed; one for developing curricula in line with the philosophy and policy espoused, that is, Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) (URT, 1975); the other for evaluation of those curricula, that is, NECTA (URT, 1973, 2019). The processes of curriculum development and evaluation as undertaken by TIE and NECTA respectively necessitate the choice of the conceptual orientation or paradigm relevant to the education philosophy in place - out of several paradigms that exist (Eisner, 1985; Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Volante & Earl, 2002).

In the case of Tanzania, the paradigm that dominated from 1967 to 2005 was the cognitive processes approach (Pendaeli, 1978). This paradigm engaged learners with tough and demanding cognitive tasks so as to strengthen their mental muscles as a means to promote problem-solving skills (Eisner, 1985; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Nonetheless, no matter how efficient it might have been implemented, the paradigm could not align well with the principles of ESR and CBA as it believes on cognition processes while ESR requires learners develop competences for productive work (Masudi, 2002; Temu, 1998). This mismatch of the paradigm-philosophy seemingly accounts to the NECTA's reliance on cognitive assessment procedure, which Nyerere (1967) strongly decries. A review of the NECTA assessment guidelines (URT, 2021) reveals that the council's assessment procedures are contrary to the tenets of CBA in several fronts. As Box 2 attests, the guidelines indicate that the council is responsible for the collection of school and college continuous assessment (CA) records in the form of written tests, terminal examinations, annual examinations, and final

national examinations (URT, 2021). Those assessment tools are cognitive in nature. This is contrary to the CBA, whose features, among others, include teaching and assessment being intertwined; assessment focusing more on the process rather than outcome of learning (Andrade & Heritage, 2018; Drisko, 2014; Heritage, 2010; Losioki, 2018, Mkimbili & Kitta, 2020). The recording of CA under CBA involves ascertaining how learners are able to improve through the teachers' feedback and motivation (Adalberon, 2020; Mosha, 2012). O'Sullivan and Bruce (2014) stress that in the context of CBA, learning and change go hand in hand; it is no longer about the ability to recall and memorize facts and assessment for intellectual capacity. The heart of CBA is the ability to perform a given task. This suggests that CA cannot be assessed by external authorities distant from the teaching and learning processes as assessment occurs as learners continuously interact with teachers (O'Sullivan & Bruce, 2014).

In the final analysis, one doubts the practicality of the involvement of the NECTA, school quality assurance, Ward Education Officers, Heads of schools and college principals in monitoring and evaluation of assessment so as to obtain quality CA (URT, 2021). Since CA is said to involve test, terminal and annual examinations that contribute to the final examination results (URT, 2021) and not a myriad of teaching and learning activities that could form authentic CA, the place of out-of-school/college officers does not seem to count other than extending bureaucratic complications. Rather, one would expect the NECTA officers to be largely involved, working in concert with the schools and colleges in the assessment and recording of the CA rather than taking the active role in recording and disseminating the final examinations. This would have been the opportune moment for the council to ensure that both the CA and summative examinations provide the information related to learners' progress not only in academics but rather, in development of competences. Short of this infers that not only does the

council function in contrast to the purposes for which it was established; it also works in contrast to the national curriculum framework. Considering the influence of examinations on students' lives teaching to test may continue unabated, private tuitions would continuously serve as means to passing examinations (Anangisye, 2020; Chingtham, 2015), and NECTA would serve as stumbling block for the Tanzanian educational vision.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study suggests a mismatch between what was intended regarding the object and functions of NECTA and the assessment practices the council has been employing. Thus, one can conclude that there is misunderstanding of the principles of the ESR as an education philosophy among institutions formed to develop curricula and evaluating curriculum in Tanzania as well as procedures for implementing the ESR philosophy (Hundsdofer, 1982). In such a situation, the NECTA's failure to interpret curriculum in a desired manner has negatively affected teaching, learning and assessment procedures for attaining self-reliance in Tanzania.

It is unfortunate, one can admit, NECTA has not undertaken the roles for which it was established as it has largely assumed the summative evaluation to be more important than the processes of changing and becoming self-reliant among Tanzanian young people completing their education cycles. It is argued here that NECTA cannot work in isolation from the ESR, CBA and the national curriculum framework ideals and yet claim to be responsible to the nation for handling examination matters. This study recommends that NECTA needs to adopt the assessment mode that pays attention to the process rather than outcome of education, in which formative assessment takes an overriding role. Within the formative assessment, the council needs to establish various criteria of attainment in terms of knowledge, skills

and values. Secondly, the NECTA should play an active role in the CBA process by participating in the field, that is, in schools and colleges bearing the fact that the changes that occur in learners need to be spotted as they occur. Thirdly, it is also recommended that the Tanzanian Institute of Education (TIE) designs the syllabi that clearly integrates knowledge, skills, and values competences for each of the content from which the NECTA can straightforwardly develop the competence-based assessment procedures. Fourthly, is also recommended that the NECTA be involved in performance-based assessment to be able to record individual learners' abilities to act as well as to self-regulate their social well-being in the course of learning.

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