

## **The unfolding Competency-Based Education Process in Swaziland 2010-2017**

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**Abstract:** This is a descriptive study, which examines how the re-emphasis on Competency Based Education(CBE) process unfolded in Swaziland in 2010-2017. This was achieved through these questions: Describe how the socio-economic changes urged the Swaziland government to refocus on CBE; describe how unfolding CBE process occurred. The macro/micro political theory was used to describe CBE process. Purposive sampling was used to select Inspectors and professionals from International Agencies. Data was collected through semi structured interviews and documents. The findings indicated that: world economic meltdown of 2010-2012, forced Swaziland to refocus on education. The World Bank recommended CBE as a viable tool to the country's economic stagnation, discussions on CBE were guarded by national policies and Higher institutions' involvement was seen as crucial because CBE not only has consequences for the sort of learning students expected to do but for teachers and higher institutions' professionals. Researchers concluded that refocus on CBE was initiated by socio-economic challenges of 2008- 2012 and facilitated by World Bank. It was recommended that CBE should be explained in details to all relevant professionals. Professionals and teachers should reflect on their perceptions and understanding of CBE and how their perceptions may affect the teaching of CBE.

**Key words:** Competency Based Education; Government; Higher institutions; World Bank;

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The interest on Competency Based Education by different governments including the Swazi government not only reflects the importance attached to education as determinant of future life chances of citizens, but also the growing commitment to an education system which put more emphasis on competencies (values, skills, knowledge) necessary for improving practices in work places (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto of 1972). Competency Based Education has been singled out as part as a vehicle for providing graduates with the necessary competencies (National Curriculum Framework of 2014). Competency Based Education is concerned with inculcation of basic competencies seen to be appropriate for society but remains with some controversy or misunderstandings. For example, the concept of Competency Based Education has been misunderstood and criticised in Swaziland and elsewhere (Epstein and Hundert, 2002). The fundamental problem in the critique of the notion of Competency Based Education in Swaziland and elsewhere emanates from unwillingness to learn and to learn about it and limited understanding of the concept, yet a significant body of knowledge exists across professions that consider the concept of Competency Based Education (Epstein and Hundert, 2002; Kaslow et al., 2004).

#### **11. Competency Based Education**

Competency Based Education is defined as a set of specific attributes (knowledge, skills-listening, communication, values, and attitudes) associated with successful performance (devries, 1999; Pruit and Shuman, 1980) was continuously re-emphasis by different governments through their education ministries as a remedy to the curricular deficiencies in teaching competencies. Their governments aimed at producing graduates or professionals who are defined or characterised by their competencies and proficiencies in their behaviours. Students and educators' competencies and proficiencies form part of Competency Based Education (devries, 1999). The emphasis on competencies and proficiencies and these are considered as key concepts in Competency Based Education; they complement each other (Dachnick, 1991). Competency Based Education requires graduates to demonstrate their abilities to perform at satisfactory level (competency) and also display a level of mastery (proficiency) in their professional work place. Dachnick, (1991) noted that Competency Based Education is an action and application-oriented type of education that requires the integration of knowledgeable

practitioners and subject matter experts who are knowledgeable and competent into the educational processes to ensure that the appropriate competencies are imported to students. Knowledgeable and competent graduates depend on schools and Universities professionals' reflection on their existing curriculum and on their cultural practices (Dachnick, 1991). Curriculum reflection process has a potential of help inschools and training institutions to ensure that their curriculum are better equipped to produce graduates who possess professional competency and proficiency (Roberts and Palvlak, 2002).

In addition, Competency Based Education is more about professionals' practices (teacher reflection on national goals or competencies) and continuous search for different means of ensuring adequate professional performance in their work places. It is about identified competencies and educational programmes, subject content which may enable students to develop the identified competencies. For professionals to be successful in their professional roles need to possess these competencies: knowledge of the subject matter, content and ability to execute the necessary practical or theoretic skills (Stewart et al., 1983; Cook, 1963). Content proficiency and competency play some role in teaching critical thinking skills, listening skills and their developments. This suggests that the achievement of identified competencies in any education system partly depend on professionals who are competent and proficient. For example, teachers who have developed productive listening capabilities play a key role in their classroom teaching (Arcavi and Isoda, 2007; Findly and Drake, 1989; Ready, 1967).

### **111. Competency Based Education / Outcome Based education**

In truth, most governments, through their education systems are implementing either OBE or CBE mainly for raising academic learning and standards for all students (Baron and Boschee, 1996). Both are philosophies and instructional processes designed to educate the whole child and to give each learner the opportunity to learn and be competent in his or her professional work. Schools and training institutions employing OBE or CBE are expected to identify a set of general outcomes or competencies that describe the behaviours and traits that graduates should exhibit. Then specific proficiencies or competencies must be identified from the broader outcome in order to provide the bases for planning and organizing subject curriculum, instruction and assessment within the subject area content.

Both OBE and CBE require educators to specify specific proficiencies or competencies which could be accurately measured, serve as indicator that learners have or not achieved competencies in the subject content and displaying the expected behaviour as expressed in the broader subject outcomes. Baron and Boschee, (1996) noted that the achievement of the outcomes which involves displaying the expected behaviours indicate that learners have acquired the expected attitudes, skills and knowledge that will make them competent in their professional work places. Their argument suggests that there is no clear line of demarcation between Outcome Based Education (OBE) and Competency Based Education (CBE). In addition their originality or history of origin highlight that OBE and CBE are similar concepts. For example, OBE has its roots in two educational reforms movements, the mastery of learning movement and Competency Based movement build on the premise that all learners are able to master desired outcomes if educators refashion their time and instructional parameters in which learning takes place (Baron and Boschee, 1996). Both make emphasis on specific competencies and learning outcomes which are usually used interchangeable. Both note that instructional pedagogy should be aligned with the learning outcomes or competencies and structured methodology. Learning outcomes or competencies are derived from the educational mission statement. Both are adopted and implemented to support an education mission, of preparing professionals for their future work or reaction to political changes (South Africa post-apartheid era) or reaction to the changing job market. Changing job market and political changes usually force governments to pose questions about their education systems, whether they are preparing the young people adequately for their future life roles or not.

The success of Outcome Based Education implementation depends on different factors (Baron and Boschee, 1996), such as transforming learning outcomes into specific competencies or measureable proficiencies. It further, requires educators to identify specific proficiencies or competencies for each learning outcome in order to provide the base for organizing the curriculum, instruction and assessment.

The crafting the draft of the Swaziland National Curriculum framework of 2014 was an additional attempt to address the inadequacies of the education system in relation to the future prospects of the Swazi students and the country's economic status. Emphasis was made on the key basic competencies in the education system and the required curriculum changes related to societal demands, particularly economic related needs. The re-emphasis on Competency Based Education in Swaziland was economic-oriented in nature because it was perceived as an economic matter.

The Competency Based Education embraced by the draft national curriculum framework 2014 had a competency focus on clear stated competencies expected to be demonstrated by students, teachers and other professionals as they execute their duties. The Swazi government did not seek to eliminate the existing curriculum but to make more emphasis on some key competencies as required by economic related challenges.

The hallmark of the Competency Based Education is the development of generalised core competencies that seek to equip students with the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities to perform effectively in the work place.

Teachers as key partners and others including the Examination Council of Swaziland were expected by government to design a clear system for assessing students' competencies, performances and creating a learning environment explicitly organised to assist in acquiring and assessing the stated competencies. Government believes that these have a potential of contributing positively to the mission of education-preparing effective professional workers who can contribute to the betterment of the Swazi nation and the world. As Pruit and Shuman, (1980) stated that educational programmes are responsible for educating future practitioners in their professional basic ways of thinking, performing and acting with professional integrity. The Swazi government and others perceive Competency Based Education as the best tool in the struggle for moral regeneration in societies and economic prosperity. Attaining these goals need more than technically competent professionals but it requires professionals who are value guarded (professionals who have a firm appreciation of the dignity of the individual citizens of the world, clients, and the concept of being a servant to the people) (Metkowsky, 1983). These are expected to be integrated into the curriculum, appearing in a variety of forms throughout the students' course work because it is academically irresponsible to produce graduates who are technically competent but lack understanding of their roles as professionals.

Competencies and curriculum changes more often than not demands radical changes on teacher training and reflection on professionalism, and on the processes of educational institutions' reflection on assessment and pedagogy (Halpern, 1999). Institutions' self-reflection helps them to conceptualise and define the fundamental competencies in their actions and inactions in a way that could guide curriculum design, implementation and to determine some means of assessing that students have mastered the competencies which relates into practice. Competency Based Education is more about work place competencies and societal competencies. This involves the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and observable competency and proficiency behaviours in practice. These competency and proficiency behaviours are measured through peoples' actions and inactions. Educational institutions are expected to provide educational opportunities for students to gain practice in the application of competencies and reflection in practice.

The concept of Competency Based Education was not a new phenomenon in Swaziland's educational debates and change effort in 2010; it once dominated the Swazi education system in the 1970's. Different states including Swaziland have either passed or debated a legislation dealing with Competency Based Education. In Swaziland Competency Based Education was part of the vocabulary used during the educational reforms in the 1970's (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto of 1972). The Swazi Government was keen in preparing effective, competent, efficient and moral guarded professionals who can contribute to the betterment of the Swazi society after independence (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto of 1972).

The refocus on Competency Based Education in 2010 was facilitated by the World bank but guarded by the country's national policies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan of 2007 (see World bank paper no. 188, the Education System in Swaziland Training and Skills Development for Shared Growth and Competencies and the Swaziland Education, Training and Skills Development Sector-ETSDDS, 2010), both Swaziland government and the world Bank were concerned about the country's economic stagnation in the 1990's. This suggests that education systems and educational organisations are in a continuous change process of re-inventing themselves in many different ways to align themselves with contemporary societal and economic related challenges, so as to better survive and thrive in their own changing socio-economic environment (Tight, 2013).

The World Bank Investment Climate Assessment (ICA), World Bank Institutes (WBI) and World Economic Forum (WEF) analysis claimed that the economic downturn experienced by Swaziland was partly a product or result of the inadequacy of Swaziland Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDDS), to effectively contribute towards addressing economic challenges and the achievement of national development goals as presented in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (PRSAP). The World Bank claimed that the acceleration of economic growth, regional and global competitiveness could be knowledge driven and technological driven (ETSDDS, 2010). The World Bank emphasis on knowledge and technological related skills as key factors for economic growth and sustainable development and this claim influenced the Swazi government to adopt Competency Based Education (characterised by knowledge, technological skills, communication skills, listening capabilities and moral values, and attitudes) to be implemented by educational institutions.

For the past years the education system of Swaziland and elsewhere has been challenged repeatedly to demonstrate the adequacy of its graduates and practitioners, their competencies and proficiencies. Competencies and proficiencies have become strategic management tools for monitoring and evaluating educational programmes, recruiting, selecting, training employees, and school and market alignment (Bogo et al., 12011). The issue of market alignment challenges education systems and educational institutions to look ahead and anticipate emerging competencies (skills, knowledge, and values) that could impact the preparedness of

graduates for future employability. Educational institutions were considered as the best tools for equipping graduates with relevant competencies to improve their fundamental ways of thinking and acting with integrity while dealing with societal challenges (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto of 1972).

OBE or CBE have been implemented in Swaziland and elsewhere but with some complexities such as professionals' inability to direct school's subjects and instructional efforts towards the achievement of clearly defined outcomes or competencies that all graduates are expected to demonstrate in their professional work places. Professionals' inability to transform the broad subject learning outcomes into specific measurable competencies, proficiencies has limited the reliability of their assessment in the classroom. The learning outcomes or competencies were not properly aligned with the key national education goals. Learning outcomes are expected to align and derived from the national educational statement or goals (producing graduates who are competent). This has urged the Swazi government to re-focus on the concept of CBE in the education system.

The implementation of OBE or CBE was affected by factors within and beyond the classroom. This includes the reality that provision of further higher education has become increasingly expensive in Swaziland and this denied the trainees the opportunity to undergo proper training. Training which could expose trainees to relevant competencies. The Country's strained economic growth vis a vis the high cost of providing further education training has further undermine the OBE or CBE programme. This suggests that OBE or CBE was built on inequitable educational structures. As a result it increased the unacceptable high level of in-competencies and further reproduce and re-inforce in-competencies among the students and graduates.

The attempt by the Ministry of Education to impact equity at school level (providing free education) without corresponding support or initiatives at further education training level of the education system was an exercise in futility. The training programmes were undermined and graduates may graduate without the necessary competencies, skills and knowledge needed at the school level system.

For the past few years, students' enrolment increased at university level in Swaziland and elsewhere. As the enrolments grew, more resources were required to support meaningful university experience. Lack of resources in higher education eventually created conditions for mediocre higher education and school education. These had impact on the teaching of some competencies.

In South Africa, politicians' rhetoric on social justice, particularly on advocating for an increase in access for the poor previous marginalized communities, to university education in the face of increasing tuition fees undermined the implementation of OBE or CBE (Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). In addition, teachers' lack of understanding and the importance of cultural competency in promoting OBE or CBE principles further undermined the implementation process. Cultural competency was and remains the key in promoting meaningful teaching and learning in South Africa because of its diverse ethnic students community and the country's historic past. Understanding cultural competency by teachers has a potential of helping them to prepare and empower students with knowledge, skills, values, so that they will be able to successfully address complex community based problems.

In both countries, Swaziland and South Africa, their governments have crafted policies which aimed improving education. In their policies, it stated that higher education and schools are expected to play a key role in providing quality of education. For example, the role of higher education is recognised in the White paper on higher education (1997) in South Africa, where it states that the purpose of higher education:

*to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and attitudes throughout their lives. To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge driven and knowledge dependent society, with the ever –changing high level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. Higher education teaches and trains people to fulfil a specialised social functions, enter the learned professions, or pursue vocations in administration, trade, industry, science, technology and the arts.*

In Swaziland the role of higher institutions of learning were noted by the Imbokodvo policy of 1972 and also re-emphasised on the consultative document for effective implementation of the Swaziland General Certificate of Secondary Education (SGCSE) (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). According to the consultative document, for effective implementation of the SGCSE syllabus, teachers (who are product of higher institutions of learning) needed to display competencies in the planning and organizing materials, teaching equipment, planning activities, using relevant teaching methods and innovative teaching strategies (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). Higher institutions were expected to reflect on these educational matters and to other key national educational programmes and provide clarity. Higher educational institutions' reflection was expected to concentrate on the outcomes of the educational processes, the national educational specified competencies and proficiencies. Higher institutions were also expected to promote the culture of teacher reflection which could allow teachers to think about what they do, with the aim of strengthening or transforming their practices to align them with the stated national competencies. Competency Based Education is an institutional process that expected to move educational process from merely focusing on what academics believe graduates need to know to what students need to know and able to do in different

complex situations. This requires professionals to engage into reflective thinking process. Professional or teacher reflection in schools in Swaziland remains a challenge, yet it is key aspect of a Competency Based Education system. Most of education policies are silent on teacher reflection.

Teacher reflective thinking for example, is essential in leading teacher into deeper understanding around the areas of key competencies which might be otherwise ignored. It involves reflection “in-action” and reflection “on-action” (Chetham and Chiver, 2005) and cognitive processing of relevant knowledge based on their interactions with both academic and non-academic situations they encountered. This notes that Competency Based Education does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by the context and cultures in which it is situated (Pithers and Soden, 2000, P 246). The context and organisations’ cultures, for example, challenges teachers to reflect on their own attitudes, perceptions and understanding of Competency Based Education and how one’s perceptions affects the teaching of competency based related skills (Eraut, 1994), and how one’s emotions and subjective reactions towards Competency Based Education and limited knowledge and understanding affects the viability of the working relationship between the key stakeholders in their effort to achieve competency based educational goals (Ruch, 2007). This notes that competency based education is not only about performing of behaviours but also peoples’ reflective practices, cognitive processes (reasoning) and use of competencies (knowledge, skills and values). Competency Based Education challenges students, graduates and practitioners to engage in a continuous reflection and not to lose sight on this key question: how they use and eventually use the competencies (knowledge, skills and values) in the real world of practice in the classroom and communities (Bogo et al., 2011).

### **Purpose and objectives**

The purpose of the paper was to examine how the process of re-emphasizing Competency Based Education unfolded in Swaziland. This was achieved through these following research objectives:

1. Describe the socio-economic processes which urged the Swaziland government to refocus on Competency based education;
2. Describe how educational processes in regard to Competency Based Education were managed;
3. Ascertain how Higher educational institutions and other related institutions roles were embraced in the process of refocusing on Competency Base Education in Swaziland.

### **Research questions:**

1. What were the local and international socio economic forces which urged the Swazi government to refocus on Competency Based Education?
2. Explain how the educational processes in regard to Competency Based Education were managed?
3. Explain how the roles of higher institutions of learning were embraced during the Competency Based Education deliberations?

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The study was designed to be descriptive survey in nature, which aimed describing the processes in regard to Competency Based Education in Swaziland. The macro/micro political theory was adopted for this empirical work because it had the capability to link macro level practices with micro ones. All macro events are also micro events. Neither a macro nor micro event exists without the other, nor macro event is ever summarised without the other (Sanders, 1990). This argument helps to diagram or to focus the research on the macro and micro socio economic forces and on the relationships and interactions between and among professionals from National Education Office/Ministry of Education and Training and the National Curriculum centre.

Macro/micro political theory is an action theory which integrates macro and micro social or educational processes (Sanders, 1990). This theory believes that educational changes at macro level is understood as occurring because of peoples’ actions/practices or needs at both macro and micro levels. This suggests that educational change does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by the micro/macro level contexts, and cultures in which it is situated (Pithers and Soden, 2000, P 246). Macro (national level) educational process should be informed by micro (local/school level) processes (Pithers and Soden, 2000). Macro level practices are manifested in the micro situations such as irrelevant skills and knowledge to the country’s economic needs. Macro level educational practices are influenced by micro level situations and practices (poor students’ performance, incompetent professional or graduates). This suggests that Competency Based Education is not mechanistic devoid of micro and macro contexts, and removed from advocacy and educational change efforts from policymakers and from macro level and other practitioners from micro level (Marion, at al, 2011).

Professionals from macro and micro educational levels are expected to advocate for educational change and provide a roadmap or blue print of what students can expect to learn, how teachers should ensure that learners are learning the expected relevant skills and knowledge. Focusing on professionals’ interactions at both macro and micro levels was helpful in understanding the educational processes in regard to Competency Based

Education and the expected roles to be played by higher institutions of learning in facilitating Competency Based Education. More often, than not higher institutions of learning are expected to play a key role in supporting educational changes through training teachers and other professionals. Professionals such as teachers are expected to use competence based teaching which facilitates not only the accumulation of knowledge or transfer of knowledge but also the development of technical competencies, problem solving and critical thinking.

The macro/micro political theory as a conceptual framework was used to understand and describe the educational processes undertaken by the Office of the Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Centre, and other relevant departments in regard to the management of Competency Based Education. This helped in examining the key actors' behaviours: training institutions in regard to Competency Based Education and view their expected functions not in isolation but in relation to teachers, as products of training institutions. The theory captures professional practices from both macro (Ministry of Education) and micro levels (National curriculum centre).

The Ministry of Education Office and the National Curriculum centre Office were the key players in this educational change process (government's focus on Competency Based Education. The Curriculum centre office is in charge of interpreting government educational policies and designing subject curriculum.

The targeted population of the study were the educationists who were involved in the processes of re-focusing on Competency Based Education. These included Curriculum designers at Curriculum Centre. In Swaziland Curriculum designers are based at the Curriculum centre. The targeted population also included Inspectors from the Ministry of Education and Training, professionals from UNESCO (Swaziland Office) and European Union Support to Education and Training 11 programme officers. These were targeted because they were involved in some processes regarding Competency Based Education in the country. The rationale for selecting these participants was to attain as much diversity views as possible.

The participants of the study were selected through snowball sampling procedure. The researcher approached the Ministry of Education and Training Office at the headquarters to find out about the programme, Competency Based Education. The researcher was interested on the programme because he was involved in the training of teachers in the country. He has to be fully aware of it, in order to make some adjustments where necessary in his teaching practices and on subject content. The researcher was referred to the national Inspectorate offices, Curriculum Centre, UNESCO (Swaziland Office) and European Union Support to Education and Training 11 programme officers because they were fully involved in the process of refocusing on Competency Based Education in the country.

The National Inspectorate Department consists of senior inspectors of different subjects: Inspector of English, Maths, Siswati, Science, Home Economics, Agriculture, History, French, Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

<b>Table 1 Sample: No of the participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants interviewed</b>
Subject Inspectors	<b>1</b>
UNESCO Officials	<b>1</b>
European Union Support to Education and Training 11 programme officers	<b>2</b>
Curriculum Designers from Curriculum centre	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

Interviews were used to gather data from the participants. In addition, documents such as policies and Consultant Competency Based Education reports were used. These documents include review of Primary Curriculum report, 2014; Situation Analysis, 2016; scope and Sequence Competency Matrices for the Foundation (Grades 1-2) and Middle Primary (Grades 3-4) Phases of the Primary Curriculum, 2016. Documentary evidence was used to trace the originality of the concept from government perspective and to gain understanding and clarity. The debate about Competency Based Education and competency based teacher education are hampered by lack of conceptual clarity (Leat, 1993). Conception of competence should pay attention to analytical, creative thinking and feelings (Leat, 1993). Documentary evidence is the best form of gathering data when dealing with sensitive matters. Policy matters are sensitive matters, which need a systematic technique for analysing message content and message handling. Documentary evidence becomes a handy tool for observing and analysing the invisible messages and peoples' or government's behaviour-through policy. The use of interviews and documentary evidence in the form of the Swaziland Education Situation Analysis, 2016; Scope and Sequence Competency Matrices for the Foundation (Grades 1-2) and Middle Primary (Grades 3-4) Phases of the Primary Curriculum, 2016 were helpful in accessing information as most participants were unwilling to share their views on this programme.

The use of interviews and documentary evidence were helpful in triangulating the data. Triangulation (using three different data sources: interviews and documentary evidence) was adopted to enhance the validity of the study (Yin, 2004, pp 97-101). Triangulation could be defined as one of the research means used to produce more complete picture of an investigated phenomena. Guba and Lincoln, (1981) defined triangulation as a technique which promotes the culture of verifying facts from different sources. It helps in providing a more complete picture or understanding of an phenomena through the use of multiple data. This could be referred to as data triangulation. Cowton, (1989) stated that secondary data can also be used to provide triangulation, aiming at increasing the credibility of research findings particularly from primary data. For example, secondary source could provide evidence of what was done at the time of the educational programme, while evidence gathered by interviews could provide the recollection of ideas, intention about the educational programme (Cowton, (1989). Triangulation strengthens reliability (Merriam, 1991).

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the participants: Curriculum designers from National Curriculum centre, an inspector from the Ministry of Education and Training and professionals from International agencies (UNESCO and European Educationist experts) who were involved in the process regarding Competency based education in Swaziland (see Table, 1). Different participants were interviewed to verify interpretations and give their perspectives. The interviews were not recorded, instead key points were written down. Some participants noted that they do not want to appear as if they were sabotaging the work on Competency Based Education. Some claimed that the right people to talk too were Curriculum designers at Curriculum centre, who were fully in charge of this educational project: Competency Based Education. This shows how micro actions are shaped and constrained by macro peoples' behaviour and characteristics.

The interview process took place at the participants' offices. For example, some in Mbabane, where the participants from International agencies such as UNSECO were based and at National Curriculum centre where subject Curriculum designers were stationed. About twenty–thirty minutes were spent interviewing the participants. Special appointments for the interview were arranged with the participants but sometimes the appointments were not honoured or cancelled at the eleven hour. Different reasons were cited for such disruptions. Most cited reason, was over meetings with other key stakeholders who were involved in the process on Competency Based Education.

The other data source was national policies, Consultant reports on Competency Based Education in Swaziland produced by international agencies, independent research work. Policies could be used as a source of rich data, where visible and invisible organisational agenda could be revealed. Policies could be used as key mechanisms for accessing justice in regard to educational change.

The documentary and interviews data were analysed using content analysis procedures and summarised in descriptive form in relation to research objectives. According to Krippendorff (1999), content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make inferences from text. Content analysis was considered as an ideal data collection and analysis procedure in this study. The purpose of content analysis is to provide knowledge, insights, facts and a practical guide to action. This relates to this study which aims at shedding light on government's refocus on Competency Based Education in Swaziland. It was used in this study because it was considered as something more than a method of analysis, instead as a method of observation the educational changes through government policies and reports. It allowed the researcher to take the communications that government and Consultant have produced and then asks questions based on those communications (Kerlinger, 1964).

The following steps were used as recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1981) : the acquisition of these documents ( review of Primary Curriculum report, 2014; Situation Analysis, 2016; scope and Sequence Competency Matrices for the Foundation (Grades 1-2) and Middle Primary (Grades 3-4) Phases of the Primary Curriculum, 2016). Content analysis was employed to describe how the planned Competency Based Education as noted within the Curriculum framework of 2014 was managed. Documents were helpful because they highlighted how the Competency Based Education Consultative team reflected on the discussions on Competency Based Education, content of primary school subjects, teacher teaching methods, the sequence of the context and they were assessment.

In this context, content analysis focuses on analysing the sequences of subjects' activities that were intentionally developed by the Swazi government to provide education experiences or competencies for students. Subject content was one of the key focuses of the analysis because it is expected to highlight the core competencies or set of values, knowledge, attitudes and skills and illustrate practice behaviours expected of students, graduates. Students are expected by government to be exposed to these competencies and demonstrate practice behaviours as expected. The content analysis also focuses on how the competencies were articulated in relevant documents and how they would be assessed, which involves defining assessing practice teacher ability. Competencies are expected to be articulated in language that is clear and accessible, be more relevant in the world of practice, avoid expressing them in an abstract, vague manner that makes them impossible to assess.

Competencies are expected to help students in their future fundamental ways of learning and acting with integrity in their future professional work places (Shulman, 2005).

The analysis also paid attention on how the Competency Based Education or national Curriculum framework 2014 was developed in Swaziland. These helped to establish if there was a culture of inclusive collaboration and deliberation over issues among the key educational establishments or not. Marion, (2011) claimed that the Canadian Council of Social work regulators once attempted to develop a professional competencies framework without partnering with academics. While the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada brought a wide range of professionals from different professions such as teachers, nurses, dentist, occupational therapy to develop a competency framework through national and provincial collaboration (Marion, 2011).

The data was analysed and developed into lists and presented in tables (see table 1, interviews; 2, documentary evidence). Trends and patterns from the analysis were observed in order to respond to each research questions. Categories were used because each consultant document, education policies, interviews script emphasized the categories in different ways. Some documents for example, emphasized others over others (see Tables below).

**Table 1, interviews content analysis**

<p><b>Objective/Question1:</b> Describe how the socio-economic processes urged the Swaziland Government to refocus on Competency based education?</p>	<p><b>Objective/Question 2:</b> How was the overall process regarding Competency Based Education unfolded in Swaziland?</p>	<p><b>Objective/Question3:</b> Ascertain how Higher educational institutions and other related institutions roles were embraced in the making of the Competency Base Education in Swaziland?</p>
<p><b>Categories</b> - world economic meltdown; -local economic challenges; -world bank report; -inadequate skills. -gap between knowledge acquisition and ability to apply. -Knowledge acquisition and application of knowledge complexities</p>	<p><b>Categories</b> -international Consultants; -series of discussions; -good questions asked but without adequate answers; -linkages between instructional systems (teaching approaches) by higher institutions and the competencies overlooked; -teacher training institutions involvement were noted; -Research by international consultant appreciated; -involvement of international agencies appreciated.</p>	<p><b>Categories</b> -roles of higher institutions were embraced but without detailed information; -culture of institutions, not emphasized; -teacher training was noted but without details; -Teacher training institutions have a responsibility to pre -service teachers; -align with the Competency Education Based reform agenda; - reform their curriculum to respond to the Competency based education; -form their strategies of capacitating teacher trainees; -Shifting of institutional working culture.</p>

**Table 2, Documentary analysis**

<p><b>Objective/Question1:</b> Describe how the socio-economic processes urged the Swaziland Government to refocus on Competency based education?</p>	<p><b>Objective/Question 2:</b> How was the overall process regarding Competency Based Education unfolded in Swaziland?</p>	<p><b>Objective/Question3:</b> Ascertain how Higher educational institutions and other related institutions roles were embraced in the making of the Competency base education in Swaziland?</p>
<p><b>Categories</b> -World bank economic report on Swaziland; -Vision 2022; -</p>	<p><b>Categories</b> -guarded by Country-wide review of the education system 2007, 2016; -Curriculum review report of</p>	<p><b>Categories</b> -NCC, National Examination Council, teacher training colleges, INSET, European Union, UNESCO –International Bureau of</p>

	2014; -review process not given enough time frame; - review process was rushed through; -lack of conceptual clarity on Competency Based Education.	Education; -
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### III. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The discussions of the research findings were guarded by the research objectives/ questions.

**Objective 1: Describe how the socio-economic processes urged the Swaziland Government to refocus on Competency based education**

The study indicated that the world economic meltdown which was experienced by many countries which almost crippled the key operations of the Swazi government, forced the government of the day to refocus her attention on different key developmental tools such as the education and its relevance to economic challenges (see table 1). The education system was assessed in terms of its ability to resuscitate the economy. In this effort the government received some technical assistance form the World Bank. The refocus on Competency Based Education was indirectly initiated and facilitated by the World bank but guarded by the country’s national policies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan of 2007 (World bank paper no. 188, the Education System in Swaziland Training and Skills Development for Shared Growth and Competencies and the Swaziland Education, Training and Skills Development Sector –ETSDS, 2010), both Swaziland government and the world Bank were concerned about the country’s economic stagnation in the 1990’s. The economic stagnation was perceived as stumbling block towards the realisation of vision 2022 and the World Bank recommended CompetencyBased Education as a viable tool. Other recommendation such as reduction of wage bill or number of civil servants was rejected by government because of its unsustainability.

**Objective 2: How was the overall process regarding Competency Based Education unfolded in Swaziland?**

The study revealed that the overall process surrounding Competency Based Education were guarded by different education reports such as the country-wide review of the education system 2007, 2016 and curriculum review report of 2014. These documents saved as road maps for the Competency Based Education discussions. Critical educational matters were discussed. During the deliberations somecritical questions were raised by National Curriculum Centre (NCC) and Curriculum development Educators and critical ideas were noted in these documents though were not deeply debated or discussed. For example, restructuring of programmes in higher institutions were overlooked, yet their programmes should be aligned with Competency Based Education in all the levels of the education system. Training of Curriculum developers on Competency Education was noted but without details on how it should be done.

The findings also revealed that Curriculum developers needed some training, knowledge and skills that could help them in assessing whether or not the existing educational programs consist of the required competencies. The inadequacy of training on the concept of Competency Based Education was also emphasized in the Education Situation Analysis report of 2016 p 9: *Since 2014, educators at the National Curriculum Centre have received some basic training in the competency-based approach but the training has not been comprehensive or consistent; not all members of staff possess the same level of understanding or application. The training was carried out through committee and, at times, outside of the NCC. This has resulted to a level of training that has not necessarily prepared NCC educators with a shared level of expertise, nor has the training always been of the same quality, coherency, or uniformity.*

This suggests the need for proper training of all key stakeholders on the concept of Competency Based Education particularly on its application in practice. As Everwijn et al, (1993) study indicated that Competency Based Education (CBE) aims at overcoming the gap between knowledge acquisition and ability to apply. They further indicated that Competency Based Education aims at ensuring that knowledge acquired by students gets transferred into ability to apply. This concurs with Mentskowski, et al, 1993) findings that Competency Based Education is more about producing graduates that are better prepared for their future professional tasks: people who have acquired and learned the skills to adapt their abilities to variety of situations and economic related challenges. Their findings further revealed that Knowledge acquisition and application of knowledge are two kinds of learning thatcharacterized Competency Based Education and which best prepares students for future professional positions but these are complex educational processes. This also noted was also emphasized in the Education Situation Analysis report of 2016 p 9: *Since 2014 :*

*for the success of the programme the process training must reach every level of education, from Ministry of Education officials to new teachers, parents, business people, and members of the general public ; there must be a clear and*

*coherent alignment between all levels and types of training; people need to learn how to differentiate the Competency-Based approach from other approaches; this depth of knowledge will allow educators to face questions from the community with more confidence.*

The findings of the study revealed that the re-emphasis on Competency Based Education was characterised by collaboration. As the results of the Competency Based Education Situation Analysis for Swaziland report, (2016) indicated that the European Union and UNESCO –International Bureau of Education (IBE) were part of the educational processes undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Training on Competency Based Education and their involvement facilitated the discussion processes. The European Union provided technical support in regard to Competency –Based Education and also helped in reviewing the curriculum for primary schools level, developing the curriculum framework, specifying the competencies in primary level, developing the syllabi for the foundation phase and providing training for some National Curriculum Centre officials (Competency Based Education Situation Analysis for Swaziland report, 2016; Independent Review of Primary Curriculum Report, 2014).

The findings of the study revealed that UNESCO –International Bureau of Education (IBE) was one of the key partners in building the necessary capacity at some levels of the education system. The Ministry of Education and Training in a bid to improve the quality of education approached the UNESCO-IBE (UNESCO International Bureau of Education) for support to achieve this. After the initial exercise of analysing the Education System using 15 tools of the General Education Quality Analysis/Diagnosis Framework (GEQAF), one of the areas that were identified to be needing attention was the curriculum. Hence the UNESCO International Bureau of Education commissioned an expert, to conduct a situational analysis and later an action plan regarding CBE. This exercise led to the documentation of the 2016 Situation Analysis for Swaziland Education System and 2016 Program and Action Plan for Swaziland Education System. These educational reports were products of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Training, and other international educational partners in Swaziland. This also highlights that education reform is too complex to be handled or accomplished by government alone. For example, results of the study of Malen and Ogawa, (1988) indicated that educational reform cannot be a done alone matter because it does not only depend on the ministry's effort alone nor individual teacher's ability to teach but also in creating the education or school systems and school cultures that enable teachers to apply the teaching methods they were trained to use. As also stated by the Independent Review of Primary Curriculum Report of 2014 p 73 observation on English review exercise: *the grade 1-4 textbooks are organised around short themed units, but in reality individuals lessons frequently do not relate to each other or to the theme, meaning that there is no sense of overall progression, and a very rapid turnover of new vocabulary. This is particularly the case with the workbooks which tend to contain a number of unrelated tasks, as can be seen on page 8 of the grade 3 workbook. The title of the unit is Zanele's brother has AIDS'. Below the title is a drawing of a sheep which learners have to write words with the 'ee' sound on. The next page is a 'read and draw' activity to revise three prepositions. This type of lesson by lesson organisation encourages a fragmented and directionless approach to teaching. Nor is it conducive to effective language learning as learners do not get sufficient opportunities to reuse new vocabulary and structures either within the unit or in different contexts in successive units.*

The independent report of 2014 highlighted the school culture (teachers and school management to work collaboratively in assessing the quality and relevance of textbooks in schools) and its potential of undermining the processes of Competency Based Education.

The findings of the study indicated that there was a need to focus on Competency based approach and to learn how to differentiate Competency-based approach from other approaches. As also stated by Tompkins et al, (1996) it is important to consider the relevance of an approach in Competency Based Education and its capability in promoting knowledge acquisition, skill development and values simultaneously. A holistic approach which helps in linking the required competencies (cognitive knowledge of professionals, general skills-communication, personal skills, technical skills, public values- respect, serving the people) to the desired outcomes (competent professionals). Leat, (1993) in his study also indicated that teachers should use an approach which promotes the teachings of broad clusters of abilities and the reflection on the content taught and reflection on the teaching processes.

The findings of the study also indicated that the holistic approach has a potential of helping those designing a Competency Based Education and curriculum to define competencies broadly, in terms of knowledge, skills and values, so to provide students with opportunities to develop a full range of individual capabilities and competencies as stated in subject curriculum and establish the linkages between instructional systems (classroom teaching approaches) and educational outcomes. De Wits (2012) in his study also revealed the importance of establishing a linkage between classroom teaching approaches and educational outcomes.

Through content analysis of national policies such as Imbokdvo National manifesto of 1972 and Independent Review of Primary curriculum report of 2014, the study revealed that there is no much difference between the Post education system and the newly advocated Competency Based Education. The study

revealed that competencies such as skills, values and attitudes were emphasised by the Imbokodvo National Manifesto back in 1972. Then the government of Swaziland wanted an education system capable of producing competent and capable citizens ready to shape the economic development of the country in a positive way. This is noted on the Imbokodvo National Manifesto of 1972 p 26, section 68, B that: *the purpose of education is to produce an enlightened and participant citizenry; C the content must be work-oriented from primary to highest levels. The content must be particularly emphasised in the case of adult education.*

The findings of the study revealed that the newly advocated Competency Based Education in Swaziland has been branded to accommodate new relevant skills; it had just added new competencies and skills or new ways of teaching different skills in different subjects. As also stated by the Independent Review of Primary Curriculum Report of 2014 p 78 on teaching listening skills: *instead of dividing the listening skill into very specific activities such as 'to follow a story', 'to listen and recall an announcement' or 'to listen and pronounce speech sounds', the listening skill could be broken into four strands which cover the various attributes involved in developing the listening skill, such as: listening for information, instructions and directions; listening in groups; listening in order to respond to texts and awareness of type of text.*

Objective 3: Ascertain how Higher educational institutions and other related institutions roles were embraced in the making of the branded Competency base education in Swaziland

The findings of the study revealed that higher institutions' role in making Competency Based Education works was crucial because Competency Based Education not only has consequences for the sort of learning students expected to do in the classroom but for teachers and professionals from higher institutions as well. The findings of the study also indicated that Teacher Training institutions have a responsibility to pre-service teachers. For them to be relevant they must align with the reform agenda. Central to it is to reform their curriculum to produce teachers that are competent to handle Competency based system of education. As noted by Kaslow et al. (2004) in their studies that higher institutions have a responsibility to explain and teach the competencies which government aim to accomplish in a clear accessible manner. This includes conceptualisation of the fundamental components of Competency Based Education which could facilitate the training of professionals, teachers in particular to understand that Competency Based Education as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are expected to be evident, displayed in the behaviour of professionals as they execute their professional duties in the classroom or in the work place.

The findings of the study indicated that Professionals from higher institutions were perceived as key partners in the process of restructuring the educational institutions culture and the curriculum so to reflect the national competencies. The findings of the study also revealed that the process of Competency Based Education challenges higher institutions professionals, teachers and other professionals to reflect on their practice, keep developing professionally, since they are expected to be competent at developing and relating subject specific concepts, knowledge, skills, more general knowledge and skills (communication, problem solving and theories) and relate these to practice. As noted by Pithers and Soden, (2000) in their study that teachers and other professionals are expected to teach what is required and engaged in reflective learning process. They claimed that higher institutions are expected to reflect on how they provide educational opportunities for University students to acquire the competencies and gain practice in the application of competencies in the work place and this should be supported by Competency based assessment.

The findings of the study revealed that higher institutions have to reflect on their own perceptions and understanding of Competency Based Education and how one's perceptions may affect the teaching of competency based related skills and how one's emotions and subjective reactions towards Competency Based Education and limited knowledge and understanding may affect the viability of the working relationship between the key stakeholders in their effort to achieve Competency Based Education goals. For example, the results of the study of (Pithers and Soden, 2000, p 246) indicated that Competency Based Education does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by the context and cultures in which it is situated. In addition, Bogo et al., (2011 and Ruch, (2007) in their studies also revealed that Competency Based Education is not only about performing of behaviours but also peoples' reflective practices, and use of competencies (knowledge, skills and values in their professional practices).

The findings of the study revealed that Competency Based Education challenges institutions of higher learning to shift their working culture and engaged in a systematic process of reworking their existing organisational cultures to suit the demands of Competency Based Education, which include working in teams- using the team based approach characterised by mutual respect and trust. This could avoid the unprofessional critique of Competency Based Education which usually arises from limited understanding of the concept and unwillingness to learn.

#### **IV. V CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study concluded that the refocus on Competency Based Education was initiated by socio-economic factors particularly the economic slowdown of 2008- 2012 and facilitated by the World Bank, but remain guarded by country's national policies:Swaziland Imbokdvo National Manifesto, of 1972, Swaziland National Development Strategy,1999, Swaziland Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan of 2007, Swaziland Constitution of 2005and Swaziland Education Sector Strategic Plan 2010-2022).

Hard relevant questions were posed during the deliberations on Competency Based Education and this served as a catalyst for further good discussions in regard to the meaning of Competency Based Education and other necessary training logistics. The complexities surrounding Competency Based Education was noted during the training sessions or workshops organised by National Curriculum Centre and International agencies, and a holistic approach was suggested as an appropriate approach for understanding Competency Based Education, modifying the existing curriculum content, teaching strategies and assessment procedures. It was concluded that there was a slightly difference which exists between Competency Based Education and the post independent education, particularly on teaching approaches and assessment procedures.

Relevant stakeholders were involved in the deliberations but others' involvement (particularly University of Swaziland involvement) was minimal and this has a potential of undermining the educational reform process or Competency Based Education) and the spirit of inclusivity and collaboration. Yet, these (culture of inclusivity and collaboration) are the best requirements for Competency Based Education success.

The culture of collaboration was also observed during the subject view process of the primary school curriculum. Though the review process was characterised by collaboration but the process itself was problematic and raised more questions than answers. For example, the two days observation of two schools by the Independent review team was not enough when taking into account the serious nature of the national assignment (see Swaziland Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum report, 2014). This review has a serious impact on the future of the nation and its economic status and it needed the necessary attention it deserves. After all this educational reform was initiated by economic related problems and where different situational analysis reports indicated that the country's economic problems could be addressed through proper education.Thus, they suggested Competency Based Education.

The role of higher institution was emphasised in the process of Competency Based Education process but they lacked deeper discussion mainly on key issues pertaining higher institutions' role in key matters (training of teachers, working collaboration with other relevant departments). It was concluded that Competency Based Education challenges institutions of higher learning to shift their working culture and engaged in a systematic process of reworking their existing organisational cultures to suit the demands of Competency based education, working in teams- using the team based approach characterised by mutual respect and trust.

Competency Based Education challenges higher institutions lecturers, students, graduates and practitioners to engage in a continuous reflection based on this key question: how they use and eventually use the competencies (knowledge, skills and values) in the real world of practice at Universities and in communities.

It was observed that the current process of Competency Based Education agenda which focuses on primary and secondary education without emphasis on higher institutions may make the education system reform unsustainable. The emphasis should be in all the levels of the education system because the Continuous Professional development (CPD) which is offered by higher institutions of learning should relate to the process of Competency Based Education and its requirements.

#### **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The concept of Competency Based Education should be explained in details to all relevant professionals, particularly teachers and not be avoided by professionals.This could be encouraged through critical reflection, which could help professionals to challenge their existing social, political and cultural conditions, ethical and moral assumptions about the Competency Based Education. Professionals, particularly from higher institutions should be trained on the competencies which is referred to as broad clusters of abilities which are closely linked (Leart, 1993). Roberts and Palvlak (2002) claimed that Competency Based Education and training has been avoided by educators for different reasons, including lack of understanding the concept itself, cultural conditions, fear for change, lack of understanding of Competency based pedagogy practices and deployment of relevant methodologies.
- Institutions of Higher learning as key partners in this educational reform (Competency Based Education) should engaged into a systemic cultural re-working. This included the promotion of a collaborative culture among and between higher institutions of learning and relevant faculties and the Ministry of Education and Training. In addition, they should be shift their culture of "working isolation" and embraced the spirit of mutual respect, trust and team based approach to suit the demands of Competency Based Education.
- Higher institutions of learning professionals and teachers should reflect on their own perceptions and understanding of Competency Based Education and how their perceptions may affect the teaching of

competency based related skills, and how their emotions and subjective reactions towards Competency Based Education and their limited knowledge and understanding may affect the viability of the working relationship between the key stakeholders (National Curriculum Centre, Ministry of Education, teachers and students) in their effort to achieve Competency Based Education goals in Swaziland. This could be achieved through working very close with the Curriculum Centre's Curriculum designers. A close working relationship could help professionals from higher institutions to teach critical skills an aspect of Competency Based Education in a manner which is relevant to schools and industry. As Halpern, (1999, p 72) in his study indicated that Critical thinking is more than the successful use of the right skills in an appropriate context but also an attitude or disposition to recognise when the skill is needed and the individual's willingness to exert the mental effort needed to apply it in practice.

- Higher institutions of learning should strive for supportive learning environment. This includes providing the necessary learning materials, which include changing the professionals' attitudes towards Competency Based Education and educational partners. This has a potential of stimulating learners' towards independent learning (Yildirim, 2012) and this is a key aspect of Competency Based Education.
- In their training programmes and practices higher institutions of learning should take into account the fact that policies omit some policy details and the extremely heterogeneous population of educators who are expected to understand, and implement the education initiative (Competency Based Education). In their training programmes and practices they should not lose sight of the fact that Competency Based Education differs from other systems because it aims at overcoming the gap between knowledge acquisition and ability to apply. In their teachings and assessment practices they should encourage the use of both modes of learning simultaneously (knowledge acquisition and application), in an integrated way.
- The subjects review process should be guarded by a clear focus such as establishing the existence of linkages between instructional systems (teaching approaches) and the competencies and this may help in restructuring the subject curriculum, content, pedagogical methods and assessment techniques so that the required competencies are developed.
- The subjects review process should be given enough time frames, and observations in schools should be enough and all the subjects should be observed. Meaningful classroom observation of the subjects should be considered in this important national exercise because Subject reviewers could observe teachers as professionals of the institutions they serve (schools), expertise teachers have, how they apply them and what knowledge they need to acquire. The latter is important for future teacher training purposes. For example, language teachers in schools are expected to know not only about the language, but also they have to apply or use it accurately. This involves mastering of the pedagogic methods and technics of instructions.
- The sampled schools should be reasonable and should fall within the known 10% of the population. Few primary schools were involved in the review process, yet we more primary schools. The sampled schools should be drawn from schools across the country not from one region as it was the case in this review process. In addition, the review process should not be rushed through and it should be planned in advance. Draw more schools across the country, not only two primary schools out of more than eight hundred primary schools in Swaziland undermined the purpose of the review. Local researchers should work together with international professionals in such an important national exercise to share ideas and expertise thus promoting the process of cross fertilisation of ideas and expertise.
- The spirit of collaboration among international educational organisations and Consultants should be encouraged and maintained. As it promotes sustainable development through education. This could be maintained through a more joint or collaborative international educational projects, either in higher institutions or within the Ministry of Education and Training.

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