

Assessment used to Measure Practical Skills in Competence Based Curriculum in Primary Schools in The Shiselweni Region in Eswatini (85)

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Abstract

Curriculum change is a pre-occupation of all countries, regardless of their political, social or economic status. Eswatini adopted competency-based education in 2019 after a comprehensive study that indicated that the objective based education did not cater for all learners. The purpose of this study was to explore the assessment used to measure a Competency Based Curriculum in primary schools in selected schools in the Shiselweni region. The study was guided by the following research objectives, identify the assessment modes used in the implementation of competency-based curriculum in primary schools, determine the adequacy of resources for the assessment of the implementation of competence-based curriculum in primary schools, Assess the teacher's skills and competencies in assessing competence-based curriculum. A Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were employed. The target population for the study were teachers teaching in eight primary schools (N= 120) Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide and document analysis for qualitative data. Focus Group discussion was used to generate items for the survey questionnaire. A sample of 92 teachers was drawn from the population using simple random sampling technique. The findings revealed that assessment skills in Competence Based Curriculum are not satisfactory. The mode of assessment used in schools was pen and paper. Lack of learning resources and large class sizes pose a challenge in the assessment of practical skills. The study concluded that most teachers lacked competence in assessing practical skills. The study recommended that the In-service department should prepare a document on assessment of practical skills and hold in service courses to equip teachers with skills they need to handle Competence Based Curriculum.

Keywords: Assessment, Competency-Based Education, Curriculum, Practical Skills

Introduction

Classroom evaluations are significant component of the teaching and learning process as they help teachers in decision-making in the classroom [1]. Assessments are learning tools as well as a way to assign grades and determine whether students fulfil their learning goals. Learning and quality of education defined through assessment and any improvement in learning relies on the quality of improvement in assessment [2]. Assessment is at the centre of all educational operations and in order to establish its validity and efficiency, each activity in education depends on evaluation.

Quality assessment carries on the quality of instructional inputs, procedures and therefore on the quality of education that society enjoys. Student evaluation is a cornerstone of efficient teach-

ing and learning, whether through standardized tests or classroom-based interventions. Good evaluations, taken as a whole, cannot only provide a reliable and valid measure of the learning and comprehension of a student, but can also help guide teachers and students on a daily basis. Assessment has played a key role in United States education policy over the previous two decades, as it has for many centuries in other nations. Large-scale, summative evaluations are seen as strong levers for affecting what occurs in schools and classrooms, and as such, evaluation studies are regularly conducted to gauge students' strengths and weaknesses. In the United States of America, the adoption of the 2001 slogan, No Child Left Behind Act has become more routine, more and more important and concentrated on key content fields. Results from large scale summative assessments, along

with other measures of achievement, are regularly used to determine whether students can advance to the next grade, and to judge the quality of schools and the educators who work in them, (21st partnership skills 2007) Assessment is a systematic process for collecting information that can be used to make inferences about characteristics of people or objects. Assessment according to is not only about gathering data, but is also a process used to evaluate the knowledge, understanding, skills or skills of learners and is an indistinguishably connected to a learning outcome course or programme. Other scholar such as has emphasized the need for the practical skills in assessment when he said:

We expect all teachers to teach all learners how to think and interact efficiently in order to survive in the 21st century, and they need to evaluate these abilities and benchmark expectations for what our high school graduates will require in the globe. Furthermore, in every class and at all grades, this must occur every day. If we do this in all our schools, while also stimulating curiosity and creativity, then all learners will have the abilities they need to get and maintain a decent job and be a citizen contributing economically, while our nation will have a workforce that can continuously generate innovations. An innovation-based economy in the 21st century will be more competitive and prosperous.

Effective assessment does not just happen; it requires teachers to have competency in testing skills. These include the need for teachers to explain the learning objectives to learners, to constantly check their understanding, demonstrate the standards learners are required to achieve and help them recognize when they have achieved that standard. For students to experience success in their learning, feedback on how well they are doing is of paramount importance. Teacher must always give effective feedback after assessment so that learners know what to correct and how to improve. Teachers should also demonstrate high expectations and make it obvious to learners that they believe that they can improve on their past performance. It is important therefore, for school principals to provide regular opportunities for teachers and learners to reflect on the past performance. These reviews are likely to assist learners“ to recognize aspects of their own work that need improvement and develop learners“ self-assessment skills. These assessment strategies have been found to increase the ability of skills development for the learners.

The competence-based curriculum education has brought a positive impact in the world economy especially in the developed countries. The practical skills realization has empowered individual and employability as well as productivity increase, advanced economies, high-growth economies, innovative sectors and companies. Jobs today involve trained individuals who can react flexibly to complicated issues, interact efficiently, manage data, work in teams and generate new knowledge, introduced the importance of competence-based curriculum in the 21st century by pointing out that competence-based education enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

For the practical skills assessment in primary schools to be effective the availability of resources is more important. Resources refer to any inputs used in learning that makes teaching to be more effectively achieve the desired outcomes. These could be human resource, infrastructure, and financial resources. Also re-

ferred to as teaching and learning curriculum support materials. Resources in education include both book and non-written materials and any other learning environment that provides a learning experience to a learner without leaving out the human resources. Resources in education play a very important role in facilitating learning and learning outcomes.

For effective curriculum implementation and curriculum assessment, quality physical and human resources are required. Indeed, it is difficult to envisage learning without resources. In educational institutions, resources are critically important for ensuring wide access to quality practical skills assessment in education are therefore selected and used to stimulate interest and motivate learning (UNESCO, 2002). For effectiveness of curriculum implementation, teachers are considered as the key people in the whole process. The competency-based curriculum in the assessment of practical skills require the competency of teachers in the assessment of the practical skills. It is helpful for the teacher to be knowledgeable about educational assessments because the results may have a significant impact on other people’s lives. Assessment results are widely used for selection, certification, diagnosis, special instruction or placement. Furthermore, tests, exams, quizzes, projects, assignments or portfolios are part of teaching and assessment is valuable for the teacher to have knowledge of using the assessment kit for the learners and their development. The ability to develop worthwhile assessments does not come naturally but it is a skill that can be acquired and it needs knowledge as well as experience. Moreover, assessments demand teacher’s attention because they are a sizable portion of professional workload.

Statement of the Problem

Research had revealed that there is a mismatch between teaching in the institutions of learning and the needs of the labour market. Students have no practical experience; they learn through lectures and academic textbooks and are academically sound but they have limited opportunities of acquiring practical experiences by using machinery, equipment and practical techniques associated with their professions. There is lack of qualified teachers to teach vocational, innovative, entrepreneurship and job skills. Therefore, they learn different things, different from what they are planning to do.

The lack of practical skills defines that the learning process and the assessment process does not consider clearly the practical skills. The lack of practical skills for these learned fellows bars the youth from employability, in form of formal employment and self-employment. Hence Eswatini has changed the curriculum from the content -based curriculum to competency -based curriculum education, there is a need to look for ways the practical skills are assessed in primary schools in Eswatini. The education system does not fill the gap between teaching and learning and the skills imparted to the learning, which means out of the school system the learners, cannot do anything with their certificate. They are lacking the practical skills to apply in their environment. The study was assessing the implementation of competence-based curriculum in the Shiselweni region primary schools after being rolled out in 2019.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to determine the assessment modes use to evaluate the practical skills in a competence based curriculum a case study of selected schools in the Shiselweni region. The following research objectives guided the study:

1. Determine the assessment modes used to evaluate practical skills in competency-based curriculum in primary schools
2. Identify teaching resources available for the assessment of practical skills in competency-based curriculum.
3. Determine the teachers' skills and competencies in assessing practical skills in competency-based curriculum.

Learning is more than just memorization. In order for learners to really comprehend and apply knowledge, they have to work on solving issues, to discover new things for themselves, to fight with ideas, for example, with practice, the students will be able to apply the mathematical formula and grind out with the correct answers. The task of education is not to pour information in students' heads, but to engage their minds with powerful and useful concepts, which are the constructive learning [2]. The proponent of constructivism theory is John Dewey 1933, which is rooted in the democratic learning theory of 1916. Constructivism theory as one of educational theories has long tried to understand how information is accumulated, transferred, and understood from one individual to another. John Dewey, one of the pioneers of education theory, claimed that knowledge is transferred from one generation to the next by the learner's presentation of information and reconstruction of this knowledge, thus strengthening the understanding of this current information by that learn-

er. Constructivism argues that learners must deliberately think about deriving significance when listening to or observing the instructor facilitating their learning environments, and with this observation, learners build their own knowledge. Divergent though their respective theories might be, Piaget, Brown, and Thomas all emphasize the principle idea that learning occurs through social interaction [3].

The constructivist revolution is deep rooted in the history of education. The theory draws heavily on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky and both emphasize on the cognitive learning. Modern constructivist thoughts draw most from Vygotsky's theory, which has been used to support classroom instructional methods that emphasize cooperative learning, project-based learning and discovery learning. The theory of Vygotsky has four principles, which are social learning, zone of proximal development, cognitive apprenticeship and mediated learning. This study will look at social learning only on its application in the competence-based curriculum implementation. The essence of constructivism theory is the idea that learners must individually discover and transform complex information if they are to make their own constructive discoveries. The theory considers that learners continually check updated information against the old regulations and then revise rules when they no longer work. The constructivism theory has a profound theory implication for the total teaching and learning process because it argues for more active role for students in their own learning typical instructional classroom [2].

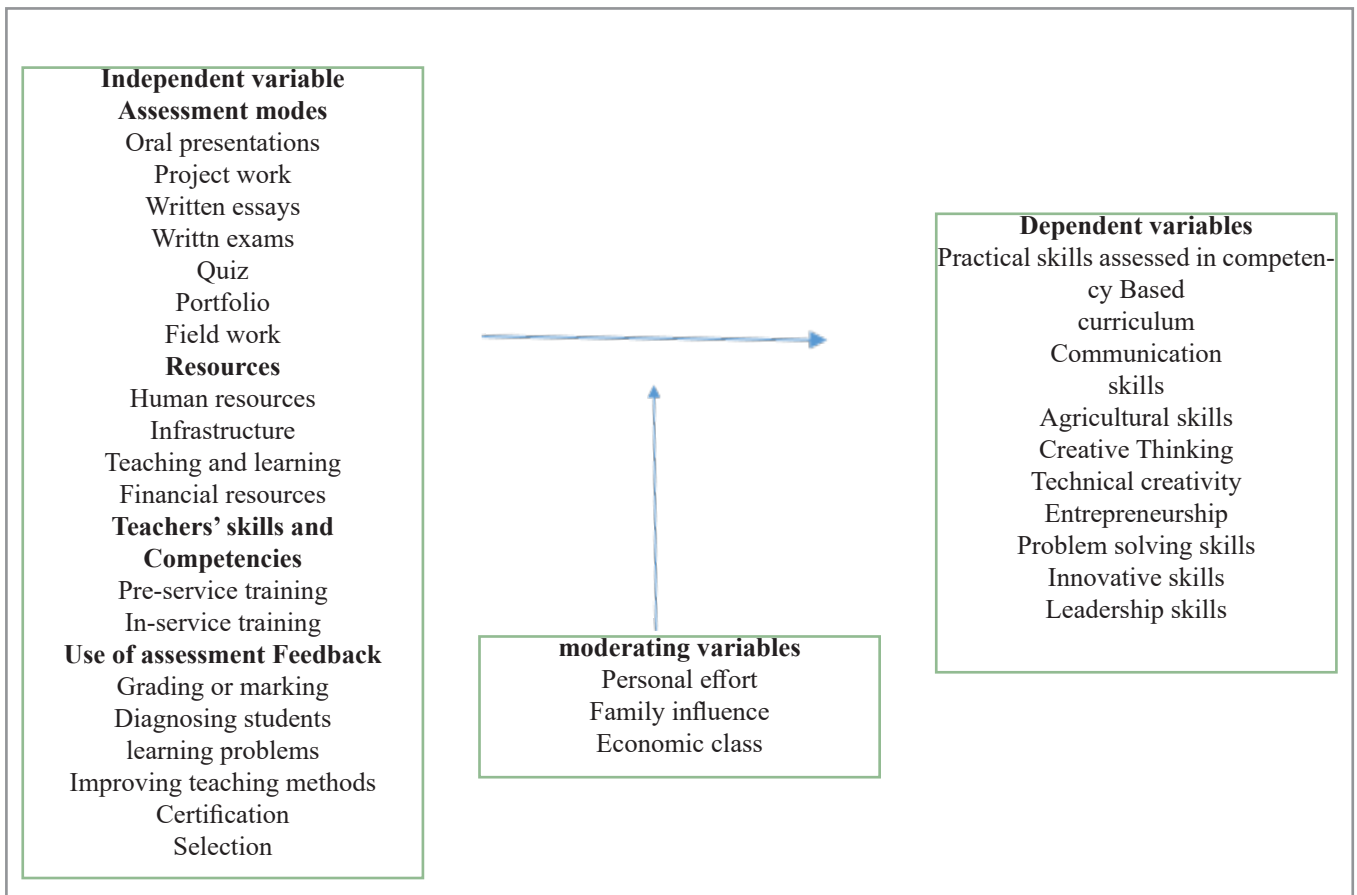


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Practical skills that students learn in school are those skills that could help an individual create self-employment. They include communication skills, agricultural skills, entrepreneurial skills, vocational and technical skills, innovation and creativity and ICT skills. Assessment in competence-based curriculum is part of the curriculum implementation process and is supposed to be competence based as well. Several assessment methods include the use of portfolios, rating scales, checklists, oral presentations, project work, practical tasks to demonstrate performance skills, written essays or reports, analysis of texts and in-class tests and end of terms written examinations [4]. established that improvement of learning occurs when teachers use classroom assessment information to establish knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by their students and incorporate that information in planning for lessons [4]. asserted that the type of assessment used by the teacher help the learner to develop the practical skills in their learning process Resources refer to any inputs that are used in the learning environment to make effectively achieve the desired outcomes. These could be human, infrastructure, or financial resources. They are also referred to as teaching and learning curriculum support materials.

According to [5]. inadequate instructional resources compromise the quality of education through poor curriculum implementation strategies. The availability of resources in school improves the assessment of practical skill in the implementation of practical skill and on the other hand, the absence of resources in schools affects the assessment of practical skills in schools. Teachers skills are very important in assessment of student's skills. Therefore, teachers need to be very competent in competency-based curriculum. Teachers skills and competencies can improve through in-service training [6]. asserted that overburdening teachers make it difficult for them to effectively use assessment strategies that could provide a comprehensive picture of students learning. Teachers might use assessment information obtained from students in classes to give students grades or marks, to provide feedback to students and to diagnose students learning problems. Feedback is used to correct student errors and to discuss fields that need to be improved with them. Teachers also use the information from assessments to report to parents, to assign students to different programme or tracks or to plan for future lessons [7]. argues that the information on the assessment is useful in helping a teacher find better teaching methods that lead to better instruction. As a result, learners are encouraged to learn because of the duties they are able to perform; and communication with parents is enhanced. According to [7]. assessment information obtained from students is used to give students grades or marks, to provide feedback to students and to diagnose students' learning problems.

Methodology

A sequential exploratory mixed method design guided the study. A sequential convergent mixed-methods design is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods concurrently, prioritising both methods almost equally [8]. This means that the quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other, and provide for the triangulation of findings, hence greater validity of the emerging inferences. In quantitative research, researcher used Cross Sectional Survey Design to collect data at one point in time [9]. For instance, when visiting schools,

the researcher collected data from teachers and head teachers. In qualitative approach, the researcher used phenomenological design to explore the meaning of individual perspectives and lived experiences of head teachers about assessment of practical skills in Competency Based Curriculum. This study used semi-structured interview to collect data from head teachers. The interview guide was appropriate for this study since it made the head teachers to open up and provide adequate data for the study [10].

The interview guides were appropriate for the head teachers because they have a busy schedule and might not have time to fill a questionnaire. The use of interview guide enabled the researcher to elicit detailed information on assessment of practical skills. The interview was face to face and focused on the modes used by teachers, resources available for assessment, how teachers use information collected from practical skills assessment as well as utilization of practical skills outside the four walls [11].

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected were systematically categorized, quantitative data from questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21/23. Descriptive statistic generated in form of frequencies and percentages summarized quantitative data that was presented in tables. Qualitative data from interviews and document analysis guide were analysed using content analysis and organized into themes. Content analysis involved grouping topics into meaningful segments, coding and analysing them into categories. The researcher simultaneously combined categories into themes and presented narration of the experiences of the head teachers on assessment of practical skills in primary schools. The first research question was to assess modes used to evaluate practical skills in competency-based curriculum. The researcher sought to find out whether teachers assessed students' practical skills. The findings showed that majority of the teachers (79.7%) indicated that they did not assess students' practical skills while (20.3%) assessed students' practical skills. Majority when asked to explain how practical skills are assessed, 95.7% of the teachers explained that practical skills are only assessed in subjects like physical education, agriculture and consumer science whereby students are required by the examination body to do practical but in other subjects the grading is 100% from theory.

In the interview the respondents indicated that the teachers might not be assessing practical skills in all subjects, the teachers are assessing students in form of pen and paper. It was sited that the in-service department have not developed an instrument to assess practical skills but there is a problem of the teachers to accept changes. The assessment of practical skills as part of competence-based curriculum it seems is not clear for most of the teachers, even those teachers teaching subjects, which involves practical training like physical education they are not aware on how to assess practical skills like creative and critical thinking which were developed by practical subjects. Also, the teachers who teaches art and performance which include the music and fine art also are not aware even though their subject are more practical. These finding disagrees with that of Noonan [12, 13] who found out that improvement of learning occurs when teachers use classroom assessment information to establish knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by their students.

The findings also showed that teachers still use the traditional modes of assessment. The finding concurs with study, which revealed that the traditional methods of assessment are dominantly used in primary schools. Since the examinations are in the form of the old model of pen and paper, there is a need to train teachers on other modes of assessment that also assess students' practical skills as the implementation of competence-based curriculum. The researcher found out that there was a controversy between the document of competence-based curriculum and the actual implementation.

Through document analysis guide, the researcher assessed the format of the end of term examinations questions asked by the classroom teachers. The researcher checked some of the examination papers to identify the assessment of practical skills in the examination. The researcher found that past examination papers examined content-based learning. Most of the questions in these papers required the learners to explain, to elaborate and to describe. The papers did not indicate questions which require the learner to apply some entrepreneurship skills. The questions asked were not practical, examination given were questions which required only paper and pen to attempt. From the analysis of the questions from past papers, the researcher wondered whether these questions develop adequate critical thinking, creativity and problem solving. The questions asked seems to be assessing theory, memorization than the competency-based skills in addition to those entrepreneurship and communication skills as stated in the curriculum. The researcher found that the questions were measuring memorization.

This was confirmed by interview from the head teachers who supported the findings from the teachers that practical skills are not assessed in primary school. Their arguments were based on the fact that end of term examinations was summative in nature. In such kind of examination there is no way the talents which are non-academics can be assessed in the summative examinations. The information was confirmed by the head of schools who said, students are assessed by using quizzes, tests and in form of pen and paper which were the common ways of assessing. They said that they are not assessing because there are no tools developed by the curriculum developers for assessing the practical skills in primary schools. The same sentiments were seconded by another head of school who said, they use pen and paper assessment mode because is the only assessment mode used by Examinational Council of Eswatini. Another head of school added that even though the teachers in school level are trying to work to teach by following the practical skills it is a big challenge because the final examinations are not in practical skills modality [14].

This implies that although there are various assessment modes used to assess students' practical skills, the level of practical skills assessment in primary schools is still very low and teachers use only the content-based approach hence it becomes hard to assess students' competency in various skills that could help to nurture students' talents. The finding concurs with Salema [9]. that many teachers use teacher centred approach in both teaching and assessment procedures. The students are not actively involved in the learning process which can only be done if students carry out practical's where the teacher guides and the students perform the action.

The findings were supported by the interview conducted by the researcher in different times to the head teachers who indicated that resources required for assessment practical skills includes books, computers, laboratories, music instruments, sports equipment, workshops for manual works and libraries. Moreover, they added that human resource meaning well trained curriculum implementer is very crucial in the assessment of practical skills.

Most of the head teachers especially from government school said that there is poor supply of teaching and learning resources. One of the head teachers said the implementation of free primary education pose another challenge This money is very little to run a school he said the circumstance of schools and the implementation of free education are very difficult to meet the target of the required resource in schools. The finding agrees with [15]. who revealed that teachers were aware of resources used to assess students' practical skills in implementation of competence-based curriculum. The resources like laboratories are used for practicing the theory taught in class, music instruments for nurturing music talents, sports equipment for practicing various sports like football, netball, athletics, workshops for manual works like embroidery and arts and libraries for reading and enhancing communication skills.

The researcher also sought to find out whether the teachers were aware of the resources required for assessment. The head teachers of schools from public schools had the same view about the adequacy of resources to facilitate the assessment of practical skills in primary schools. In school, it is common to find a class with 80 and above students instead of the recommended 45-50 students. Also, the infrastructures are not friendly to the teaching and learning. We are facing challenges on the availability of the chairs and tables whereby some students are forced to share them. We have inadequate classrooms, offices for teachers. The government is responsible for supply of human resource, financial resources and building the school infrastructure like classroom and laboratories and the school is strictly instructed not to solicit any fund from the parents because the government is implementing the policy of free education [16].

The implication of these arguments from different people is that the assessment of practical skills is not possible in such a situation where the teaching and learning resources are not available. The researcher realized that teachers knew the resources needed and their uses but the challenge for the resources like computer workshop for manual work, and music instrument are not available to facilitate the teaching and assessment of practical skills. The second research question sought to establish the availability of resources for the assessment of practical skills in competence-based curriculum. The findings showed that teachers and students used course books, computers, laboratories, music instruments, sports equipment, workshops for manual works and libraries. This shows that teachers are aware of various resources required for successful assessment of students, practical skills even though are not assessing the practical skills. Although teachers said that, they were aware on how to use these resources in the assessment of soft practical skills in school, they contradicted themselves in their explanation. That made the researcher concludes that the teachers lacked knowledge and technical knowhow on assessment of practical skills since they did not use them for assessment.

The researcher observed that the resources for the assessment practical skills were not available in schools. Most of the schools were lacking the human resources, financial resources, infrastructure and teaching and learning resources. The absence of resources has been an obstacle for the assessment of practical skills. From all schools the researcher visited, only two schools had workshop for manual works; one is a government while the other is a private school. The teachers in school acknowledged that they were facing many challenges on the assessment of practical because of poor availability and uneven distribution of the required resources that rendered assessment of practical skills impossible [17].

The third research question examined the skills and competences teachers possessed in assessments of Communication, Agricultural, Creative Thinking and Entrepreneurship Practical Skills integrated in Competency Based Curriculum. Such information was important, as teachers are the key resource people in curriculum implementation and their competence in their career are of necessity. Key findings showed that most teachers handling Competence Based Curriculum lacked skills on how to assess practical skills.

Conclusion

The mode of assessment used in evaluating students in primary schools is mostly paper and pen assessment. The implementation of Competency-Based Curriculum is not realized well in the assessment of practical skills because the In-service department has not developed instruments of assessing the practical skills. The assessment of practical skills does not occur because the resources for assessing the practical skills are not available. The challenges of resources included human, financial and infrastructure. The classrooms were overcrowded and a few teachers. The challenges of resources were more in government schools than in private schools. The competency of teachers in assessing practical skills in the competence-based curriculum was lacking. The challenge is that teachers do not assess the practical skills, they assess the theory and rote learning which is more in the content base curriculum the reality is it seems there is poor monitoring on the curriculum implementation. Hence the need to improve on monitoring of curriculum implementation and assessment in the competence-based curriculum

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that In-service department should develop a clear document for the assessment of practical skills in primary schools. The horizon of education should be widening from reading and writing only to instruction and doing in to help the learners to develop their talents and practical skills, which will help them in the real life. The mode of assessment used in schools is pen-paper evaluation. There manual work and other non-academic activities are not considered in the assessment, the educational stakeholder should come up with the mode of assessing the practical skills. The education system must involve change of mind set in all teaching to prepare the learners for the reality of life outside school.

Schools are to take initiative towards the implementation of competency-based curriculum in the assessment of practical skills. Lastly, the construction of the examination should be aligned with the requirement of the competency-based curriculum in the assessment of the practical skills. The questions

constructed should not only evaluate rote learning because they do not include doing activities as suggested in the competency-based curriculum. The assessment of other talents like athletics, football, music and art and performance will make learners to perfect on these talents. The training of teachers in the teacher training institutions should involve the assessment of practical skills as part of implementation of competency-based curriculum. The government should provide the funds for the training of teachers especially the in-service training for teachers.

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