

**Realization of Time as a Resource in the Practice of
Adult Education:
The Case of COBET Programme in Dar es Salaam Region**

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which time is realized as a resource in Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET) programme. The study was guided by the following two questions: How is COBET programme related to adult education? To what extent is time valued as an important resource in COBET programme? This study, which is inclined to a basic interpretative approach, was conducted in Dar es Salaam, mainly through direct observation and interviews administered to COBET class teachers and heads of learning centres. Documentary review on nature of COBET programme was also done. Findings from the study revealed that COBET programme is not purely adult education, and consequently, consideration of time as an important attribute of adult learning is not effectively taken care of. Moreover, learners' attendance schedules and teaching and learning methods make learners perceive themselves to be like pupils who are in a normal formal schooling system. Generally, time is not perceived as a very vital resource as adult learners are expected to do. The paper challenges researchers in adult education, policy makers and COBET implementers to pay required attention on time factor with intention of accentuating the value of time to the adult learners.

Keywords: Adult education, resource, time.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are all given equal distribution of time but they differ the way they schedule it or they accept the way others schedule it for them. But individuals consume time while they are alive as lifetime is limited by death for an individual, but not for a society, which may outlive specific individual members (Klein, 2007). These statements imply that time cannot be borrowed, traded, sold, or stored; but only consumed at a constant rate (Klein, 2007). Indeed, the fact that time is perceived to be endless may lead one to think that it is not something to draw much attention, but the reality is that time is worth more than most people realize. We are born in time; we live in time; we study in time; we work in time; and we die in the function of time.

In education, time is so intrinsic among adult educators such that it is often overlooked or at least not subjected to close scrutiny. The value of time is more realistic among adult learners than the way it is expected to be in non-adult learning settings because, as Tull (1968) argues, as people grow older time seems to pass more quickly. While school children live school life as preparation for future life, adult learners live today's life and, in some cases, strive to adjust to fill the gaps created in their past lives. From such arguments, one can then seek to assert that time is always limited among adult learners because of their many and varying roles and responsibilities and the fact that their age seems to move fast towards the evening of their lives thereby making their time seem to be shorter than the way they wish it to be or the way young people in schools perceive it.

Time is a very precious thing; but it has wings and as such is passing very fast; and once gone, it never comes back (Kenneth, 2011). This perception is more real among adult learners than among school children. It is this prevailing phenomenon that attracted the author of

this paper to conduct this study about consideration of the value of time in the practice of an adult education programme.

Purpose of the study and research questions

This study was carried out with the purpose of assessing the extent to which time value is realized in complementary basic education in Tanzania (COBET) programme with an assumption that it is an adult education programme.

The following two questions guided the study:

- (i) Is COBET an adult education programme?
- (ii) How is time value realized in practice of COBET classes as it is expected to be in adult education programmes?

RELATED LITERATURE

Conception of time

The concept of time differs, depending on the context and point of reference. From time immemorial, philosophers, teachers and theologians have speculated on true nature of time. In the 5th century, Saint Augustine noted that time is the most familiar of concepts used in organizations of thought and actions; yet, it is also the most elusive because it cannot be given any simple illuminating definition (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2005). Immanuel Kant believed that time has no existence outside the human mind; and Sir Isaac Newton perceived time as a container in which the universe exists and in which change takes place (Gupta, 2008). However, Newton noted that time and the universe are independent of each other because time would have existed even if the universe had not (Gupta, 2008).

Time can be defined by referring it to the fixed period of existence of the world, humanity or things as distinguished from eternity. It may also

be referred to, as the entire period of existence of the known universe, as distinguished from infinity (Smolin, 2003). Humans can grasp easily the concept of time by highlighting the major two characteristics of time. The first one is that time is both objective and subjective. Objectively, it is a linear progression of universal change in which events of different durations occur. It is a continuum, which is endless from the unknown past to the unknown future. In this sense, Smolin concludes, time is available everywhere and to everyone even when it is perceived not to be needed, (Smolin, 2003).

Subjectively, time is the processing rate and a holistically inclusive consciousness of change. It refers to a perceived mind picture of duration of an event, occasion or situation. It may possess different characteristics to different people as it is linked to consciousness. It moves fast when one has higher consciousness and it moves slower when one has low consciousness, (Smolin, 2003).

The second characteristic is that time is measurable. It is measured in units by using clocks and expressed on calendars; and the units of time are derived from upon two movements of planet earth (Tull, 1968). The earth is both spinning round on its own axis and at the same time orbiting round the sun. From the spinning, humans get a day and from the orbiting, humans get a year. The year is the most important unit of time when referring to long time events such as people's life existence, and it is broken into months. Years are referred to as number of cycles the earth goes in its revolution round the sun; and they can be grouped into tens (decades), hundreds (centuries) and thousands (millennia). A day is an important measure of short events and it is broken into small units, which are hours, minutes, seconds and milliseconds. Yet, it should be noted that time is there even if the earth was not moving and the movements are only used as basis for quantifying it (Tull, 1968).

The beginning of time is very difficult to state. To overcome difficulties of obtaining the beginning of counting time, a point in time is chosen as a starting point in counting years. Christians, for example, number years from the year in which Jesus Christ was born; and thus, each year is counted based on how many years Before Christ (B.C.) or After Christ [**Anno Domini** (A.D.)], (Tull, 1968). Since this dating system has become popular worldwide, to avoid symbols that are so westernized or Christian-oriented, some historians prefer to use the abbreviations B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) instead of B.C. and A.D. (Spielvogel, 1999). The Mohammedans count from 622 A.D., the year in which Muhammad fled to Medina (Tull, 1968).

Time as a Resource in Adult Learning

Dick (n.y.) says, “Imagine time running backwards. People would grow younger instead of older and, after a long life of gradual rejuvenation – unlearning everything they know – they would end as a twinkle in their parents’ eyes.” Wrote a science fiction writer Philip K. Dick in a novel available at http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/156723.Counter_Clock_World). Adults in the learning environment wish that to happen.

Time is one of the resources people have in life. To an individual, time is scarce: as already said, time once consumed cannot be consumed again (Klein, 2007). This perception is based on the fact that time is a good or resource taken from nature. Consumption of time period by one individual does not preclude use of that same period by another. A lifetime is limited by death for an individual, but not for society, which may outlive specific individual members. Individuals consume time while they are alive. To cease to consume time is to die (Klein, 2007).

Time can be manipulated infinitely (Gupta, 2008). So, one can utilize given time in playing, singing, reading or sleeping. Decision on use of

time is within human control but no choice on whether to spend time or not because time must be spent; the matter is on how to spend it. This situation indicates that unlike other renewable resources, in usual undertakings, time continues but supply of hours cannot be increased beyond 24 a day.

The presented conception of time provides a basis for an understanding that adult education, like other kinds of education, is not practiced in a vacuum, but in the background of time. As a matter of fact, time surrounds the concept and practice of adult education. In this paper, adult education is perceived to be an education avenue in which people who are recognized by society as adults obtain an opportunity of learning without necessarily abandoning their day-to-day livelihood activities and responsibilities. From this view, adult education is not any education and on everything; it is education for adults.

The definition of an adult depends on the interplay of psychological, socio-cultural, legal and age factors. Adult education is the interplay of age aspect and a life-cycle aspect in relation to aspects of time, formality, organization, intentionality and normality (Nordhaug, 2006). Age is the function of time and it influences all other factors. It is hereby argued by the author of this paper that, be it an important factor or not, age (the time one has lived so far) is a central determinant factor in defining an adult because there is no society in which the adult-defining psychological, socio-cultural and legal factors come at any age, say during infancy, babyhood or childhood. Nafukho, Omulabi and Otunga (2005) put the definition of an adult in a simple way, “an individual whose age and biological state require an expected form of behaviour and a set of social roles.”

While time is short to everyone, the problem of scarcity of time is serious among adult learners. They are time-bound and hence, time conscious.

They distribute short time they have to accomplish learning activities and, at the same time, striving to meet requirements of the other roles, responsibilities and desires of today and tomorrow, while making adjustments or rectification of activities, affections and perceptions of yesterday to avoid repetitions of experienced failures.

Overview on COBET Programme

The word COBET is an acronym for complementary basic education in Tanzania. It was initiated in Tanzania in 1999 by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) with support from UNICEF to cater for learning needs of children and adolescents that for various reasons did not have the opportunity to enroll in primary schools (Macpherson, 2007; Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010). Its general aim was to mainstream school-age children into the formal system, especially to enroll children and youth from the disadvantaged groups including those with disability and girls (Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010). It started as a pilot project in five districts, namely, Kisarawe, Masasi, Musoma Rural, Ngara and Songea Rural. In 2003/2004, COBET programme was scaled up countrywide (Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010).

Since independence, Tanzania has put adult education among the top agenda. In due regard, education has been regarded as a tool for combating poverty, ignorance and diseases (Kassam, 2000). The then President of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, considered it as a very important tool to help people think clearly; to enable them examine possible alternative courses of action; to make choice between those alternatives in keeping with their own purposes; and to equip them with the ability to translate their decisions into reality (Nyerere, 1978). Such desire brought about a strong drive in establishing different adult education programmes, including COBET, which was under this study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study followed qualitative research approach and it was informed by a basic interpretative study approach. This approach, according to Ary and colleagues (2010), is employed in seeking to understand cultural patterns, perspectives or naturally occurring behaviour of the group; and it helps to seek for understanding a phenomenon using data that are collected in a variety of ways, such as interviews, observations, and documentary review.

Area and Population Sample

Findings from this study emanated from direct observations and interviews made at four COBET centres in Dar es Salaam Region, namely, Bunju A, Kawe A, Kunduchi, and Muzimuni. All four centres are located in Kinondoni district. The researcher selected those centres because of their convenience in terms of access: they were centres that the researcher happened to assess the IAE students in their field practice. The observations were focused on the way the programme is being implemented in comparison to the way it was designed or planned. Observation went hand-in-hand with interviews held with the head teacher of each of the four COBET centres and twelve (12) teachers in the COBET programme at the 4 centres. The head teachers were purposively sampled and convenience-based sampling was used to obtain the 12 teachers. Selection of the area and participants was based on the fact that in qualitative research, one selects people or sites that can best help understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are “information rich” (Patton, 1990).

A thorough review of three study reports on nature of COBET in Tanzania was done to provide foundational data on nature of the programme.

The first report was that from the study done by John Massawe, Beniel Seka, Catherine Baynit and Jeanmina Mtitu in the year 2000, pioneered by Tanzania Institute of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture and UNICEF. It aimed at evaluating COBET materials and learners' achievement in the pilot districts of Masasi and Kisarawe. The second document is titled "Country Profile prepared for the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008 Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?* Tanzania Non-formal education," which was produced by UNICEF through Ian Macpherson in 2007. The third one is the study done by Y. M. Bwatwa and A. S. Kamwela in 2010 for review and revision of implementation of adult and non-formal education. From these reports, findings related to the theme of this paper are presented together with those from key informants. Besides these three documents, other studies' reports and other kinds of literature on time, and nature, implementation and performance of the COBET programme were reviewed with an endeavor to establish the background of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented and discussed in an organization, which follows the pattern of the questions they answered.

COBET as Adult Learning Programme

According to literature on establishment of COBET, the programme is designed for two groups of beneficiaries: Cohort I, which constitutes enrolled out-of-school girls and boys in the age group of 11-13 years, and Cohort II, which constitutes girls and boys in the age group of 14-18 years. Children who enter COBET Cohort I (11 to 13 years) are eligible for mainstreaming into the formal schooling system (primary school) when they finish their learning cycle, while those in Cohort II (between 14 and 18) are eligible to join secondary education and other forms of education such as vocational training and join the labour

market after they complete their learning cycle, (refer for example to Macpherson, 2007; Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010).

COBET programme is designed to offer tailor made educational instructions based on the real learning needs. The curriculum for the older cohort differs from that of the young ones in order to address their needs for livelihood skill training. While the pedagogy is based on child-friendly principles, it follows the primary school curriculum (see Bhalalusesa, 2002; DeJaeghere, 2004). The programme curriculum, developed by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) in collaboration with the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) and the Ministry of Education, indicates subjects, number of periods per week, and duration per period including total course duration. For each cohort, there are the following five core subjects: communication skills (Kiswahili and English), general knowledge (maarifa), mathematics (hisabati), work skills (stadi za kazi) and personality building (ujenzi wa haiba) (Bhalalusesa, 2002).

When all programme attributes are analyzed, it becomes difficult to judge whether COBET is adult education or not. Its design signifies some elements of adult and non-formal education. The evaluative study by UNICEF (2009) found that most learners were aged between 15 and 18 years; and that was a result of mainstreaming of those learners in Cohort I, which began in 2006. The fact that the programme was structured to have Cohort II learners indicates that the programme has elements of adult education.

Thus, findings indicated that in its planning, COBET was intended to adhere, to a certain degree, principles of adult learning. The fact that the programme is so flexible to permit multiple entries and that it exists to other openings, depending on the learner's abilities to accommodating people of different ages and slow and fast learners

(Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010) indicates that it is an adult learning programme. The fact that the programme is designed to provide an alternative avenue of obtaining basic education (primary education) for those who could not obtain it at the right or regular age makes it a sort of adult education programme. The fact that its curriculum provides for learning about livelihood activities is an indicator that it was designed for individuals who have multiple roles in society.

But contrasts are there. Some organizational and implementation features of COBET permit a person to broadly perceive it in a different view. Answers to the questions, which required analysis on the relationship between COBET as an adult education programme and the way its objective, teaching methods and implementation modality are structured indicate that it is not an adult education programme. That is seen right from the nature of its design.

The main objective of introducing COBET programme was, “to raise the rate of enrollment in primary education” (Massawe *et al.*, 2000). Its rationale is based on the desire to have children attain an avenue for getting mainstreamed into the formal schooling system and hence, clear the backlog of illiterate children and arrest illiteracy from increasing. That is confirmed by Massawe and colleagues (2000 quoting from Katunzi and Manda, 1999) in arguing that the overall objective of COBET is to “provide alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school children, particularly girls.” When based on these policy-related ideas, an argument that COBET is not an adult education programme becomes strong because the programme is meant for ‘children’ and children are not adults. This view is also supported by the fact that learners in COBET programme wear school uniforms.

In this study, through observation, it was evident that learners at all four COBET centres were found dressed in the same school uniforms like

pupils of the regular schooling system. Bwatwa and Kamwela (2010) found the same case and presented photographs of COBET learners in the classrooms and depict that all wore school uniforms at Kiroka centre, in Morogoro district. The reason for this was reported by teachers and heads of learning centres that learners are interested with uniforms and they desire to look like normal schooling pupils. Such learners' desire indicates that they consider themselves as school children and not COBET learners.

Macpherson (2007) gives some clues, which indicate that COBET is not adult education. He says that key characteristics of the COBET programme are that it is "child centred, based on community participation and capacity building, of integrated development, and with flexibility and relevance." The first characteristic in that statement, which features out first before others, shows that the programme is child-centred, as opposed to adult-centred. On the other hand, Mushi and colleagues (2002) add that COBET curriculum is flexible and relevant to educational needs and interests of children who are out of school.

It was documented in study reports that learners in COBET are enrolled in cohorts based on age. Bwatwa and Kamwela (2010) report that three target groups are conceived in the Adult Education and Non-Formal Education Strategy: 11-13 year old children and disadvantaged children aged 7-13 from nomadic communities, street children, disabled orphans and out of reach; 14-18 year old youth; and 19+ year old adults. The same authors continue that COBET aims at mainstreaming the first group into formal education and allows the second group to take the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and stimulate skills development for the workplace. The integrated community based adult education (ICBAE) programme conducts literacy and functional literacy classes targeted for the third group (Bwatwa and Kamwela (2010).

On the contrary, findings from this study indicated that the centres enroll children who are between 11 and 16 years to be taught for the purpose of getting mainstreamed into the formal school system. Moreover, the two cohorts, which exist at the centres, are not based on age but degree of academic ability. At some centres (for example, Kawe A), the divisions, which are based on academic achievement levels, are not called cohorts, they are called COBET A, COBET B and COBET C (three classes). At Muzimuni centre, the learners compose of one class and they are few. At Kunduchi centre, the two groups are called cohorts but they are not categorized according to age, but academic ability, and they are usually accommodated in the same room at the same time only with different alternating learning timetables.

In-depth analysis of these findings showed that designing of the programme into the two cohorts implies that Cohort II is purely adult education. Also, people who are enrolled in this cohort are perceived as adults in many Tanzanian societies due to their age and roles in society. Such pattern could permit one to conclude that COBET is a mixture of adult education and child education through the non-formal education system. Yet, implementation in the field is not found to be like what was designed.

In the studied centres, adults who are above 16 years are not accepted for enrollment. At Kunduchi centre, for example, adults (by age) who cannot read and write usually go for enrollment but they are not accepted because they are perceived to be too grown up to enroll. Also, at all four centres, learners in Cohort I and Cohort II (if it is really Cohort II) are mixed in the same classroom. At most of the centres, COBET learners attend classes at one time with the regular pupils and, at one of the four centres, shortage of classrooms forces teaching and learning in COBET to be conducted in the room, which is at the same

time used as teachers' office (staff room). In this case, COBET is suffering from two challenges at a go: mixing Cohorts I and II, and conducting the mixture of the two categories of learners in a room that has got teachers. While the problem of mixing the two cohorts forces learners of one category to learn contents designed for or delivered through methods designed for another group category or vice versa, there is yet a problem of learning while surrounded by teachers.

Realization of Time in COBET

Realization of time was based on three aspects regarded as indicators to show the extent to which time is valued and properly used. The aspects are learning timetables, class attendance, and punctuality on beginning and ending of learning sessions.

When reference is made to learning timetables, responses from interviewees disclosed that COBET classes have got timetables. At all four centres, the same was reported. The researcher could see timetables on walls inside classrooms. In this matter, it is indicated that time is valued as a resource, whose use needs to be planned. However, the time-related problem that observed was about the matter of following the timetables. At all four centres, though at different degrees, attendance of both learners and teachers were observed to be time-table related challenges. The reported reasons for failing to follow the timetable thoroughly varies from centre to centre, but mostly they are common.

The problem of poor attendance was observed at all four centres. At Muzimuni centre, learners' attendance was so poor that in most cases, the class constituted of only four (4) learners in the class of 23 learners. At Kawe A and Bunju A, attendance was not a serious problem; a reasonable number attended.

At Kunduchi, serious circumstances related to time value were observed. Learners properly attended at the centre because they are required to report at the centre in the morning at the same time when other pupils do. However, the critical problems of this centre, which have something to do with time realization are that the two groups in COBET programme use the same room at the same time where they learn alternatively (i.e., when one group is learning, the other one is in the same room waiting for their turn but remaining quiet in the same room) and the fact that part of the same classroom is the staff room. Two different levels staying in the same classroom at the same time, but having alternative learning sessions, do not only jeopardize the timetable but it also makes time wasted and learning boring.

While the head of Muzimuni centre reported that the main causes of low rate of attendance are long distances from learners' points of residences to the schools where learning centres are located, engagement in other socio-economic roles and responsibilities, and lack of family support, were reported to contribute to the problem. Teachers at all centres reported about the problem of poor motivation and annoyance among learners due to lack of appropriate and specific teachers who can apply appropriate methods of making the learners learn and get interested to learn.

Information obtained through interviews from teachers indicated that facilitators who are assigned to teach COBET classes are not well trained to undertake such responsibilities. As such, learners are not sufficiently taught. These findings are related to those by Bwatwa and Kmwela (2010), which show that as the programme was designed, each class should have two facilitators - a Para-professional with a minimum qualification of Form IV or above and a professional Grade IIIA teacher - and that, when COBET programme was expanded country wide in

some areas, qualified facilitators were not available and instead, Standard Seven leavers and Form Two leavers were appointed (see Bwatwa and Kamwela, 2010; p 45).

The question about who plans or decides on reporting time and class timetables was simple to be answered by the respondents. “It is the school management,” said one of the heads of centres. The other one said that it is the academic teacher who assists to design timetables. The other two said that timetable for COBET programme is prepared when timetable for all other classes is prepared.

When these findings are critically examined, another problem arises – poor involvement of learners in planning time and learning activities. It is evident that enough efforts are not made to provide an opportunity for learners to plan their limited time. There seems to be low awareness that adult learners have their own perception on their time. Treating their time the way it is treated for formal school children is not fruitful to them. Poor attendance and loss of interests in learning are outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that partly COBET is an adult education programme. While it was designed to have Cohort I learners who are to be mainstreamed into the formal education system, it has also Cohort II, whose age and other attributes are likely to define them as adult learners. In contrast to their being adult learners, the study has evidently shown that some adult learning characteristics regarding time value are not well observed in the programme. In their attendance, reporting and leaving time, and class timetables, the learners are made to follow the time, which is set by someone else instead of having the learners participate in scheduling their activities and priorities in the limited time that they seem to have.

There is no doubt that with whatever notable challenges, which it has been facing, COBET has achieved a remarkable degree of success in providing learning opportunities for some members in society. It has managed to capture a good number of out of school children and adolescents into the formal schooling system and provides an avenue for others to learn what they could not have opportunities to learn. However, in addition to other challenges that researchers can explore and come out with, time value is a challenge. It is, probably, a serious challenge, but which people may overlook.

The fact is that, among adult learners, time is ubiquitous but it is not an abundant resource that it needs to be reconsidered. Failure to involve them in determining appropriate times for learning and in setting learning timetables is both a motivational challenge in learning and a barrier restricting attendance at the centres. The problems of poor attendance and drop-outs among COBET learners can be connected to their multiple responsibilities and un-educational backgrounds, but deep analysis of the problems arises from their inconveniences in time use and time distribution. To them, time is limited but elastic. It can be stretched in different ways and accommodate more roles and activities, including learning. But, that can best be done by themselves and not someone else scheduling it for them. Therefore, actors in adult education programmes, including COBET, are hereby called upon to keep in their minds the reality that time is a sensitive factor among adult learners in their course of learning. Researchers and policy makers need to find out appropriate implementation strategies that can serve the adult population, which missed out primary education at their right age by reviewing and improving COBET programme or designing new ones that can best provide a better learning opportunity to the adult population.

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