



Competency-based education and training in Namibia: Educational transfer as imitation

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Abstract

The application of competency-based education and training (CBET) in the vocational sector started with the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in 1986 in the United Kingdom. Shortly after the implementation, the CBET approach was exported within the Commonwealth of Nations to New Zealand (starting in 1987; introduction of the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework in 1990/1991) and Australia (starting in 1990; introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework in 1995). Australia itself transferred CBET to South Africa (starting in 1992; introduction of the South African Qualifications Framework in 1995/1996), and both countries, Australia and South Africa, finally exported CBET to Namibia (starting in 1996; introduction of the Namibian Qualification Framework in 2006).

In this article, we compare the principles of the original NVQ-CBET of the 1980th with the characteristics of the current CBET approach in Namibia. Our research question is: Are the implemented CBET principles in Namibia an imitation, an adaptation or a transformation in comparison with the original principles? We focus in our comparison on two basic principles of the original NVQ-CBET: behaviourism and functionalism.

The findings show that the current CBET system in Namibia is predominantly an imitation of the original NVQ-CBET of the 1980th. Neither the time span, geographic or cultural distance and nor the domino transfer via Australia and South Africa have initiated a transformation or an adaptation of the original principles. The article ends with an assumption why the educational transfer in this case was so resilient.

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1 CBET: Principles and myths

The roots of competence-based education and training (CBET) can be traced to the USA in the 1920s. In the 1960s, the CBET approach experienced its central ascent in reaction to the Sputnik shock (1957), and the year of its political birth was probably 1968, when the US Office of Education awarded 10 sponsorship programmes to colleges and universities to develop CBET programmes. The aim of the programmes (input/process) was intended to establish precisely defined competencies and behaviours (outcomes) to improve the performance of students. In the 1970s, the approach diffused into the wider education system, although little or no evidence supported the idea that the CBET approach was superior to other forms of education (Tuxworth 1989). The lack of evidence still exists today (Lassnigg 2017).

Outcome orientation forms the core of the CBET approach. It is noteworthy, however, that this approach was initiated via a training programme in the United States. The relation between input, process and outcome got lost in the application of the concept in the United Kingdom. The U.K. adopted the CBET approach in the early 1980s, and the government institutionalised it in 1986 through the establishment of the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). The major task of the council was to create a five-level framework for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) “to simplify the ‘qualifications jungle’ ... within a single coherent system” (Department of Employment and Department of Education and Science 1986, p. 19). The NVQ framework was officially endorsed by the government in 1991 (Department of Education and Science 1991).

1.1 Behaviourism

The CBET approach originated in the intellectual climate of behaviourism before the cognitive turn (Neisser 1967), and these roots still cling to it today (Hyland 1994; Hyland 2017). The first principle of NVQ-CBET is that individual competence can be grasped as a qualification and measured objectively by means of *visible* performance for all forms of work and *intersubjectively comparable* by a standard: “An element of competence, with its performance criteria and range statement, constitutes a standard” (Mansfield 1991, p. 14). The approach of Bob Mansfield, a consultant and co-founder of the CBET approach in U.K., becomes clear in his statement: “I personally reject the concept of individual characteristics as a model for describing performance” (Mansfield 1993, p. 21). Thus, a behaviouristic approach based on behaviour and observation is a guiding principle without the consideration of the individual competence and cognitive categories (e.g., understanding, motivation, ability and attitude). As a ‘black box’, cognitive pro-

cesses are excluded from qualifications. The behaviourist NVQ-CBET approach places skilled workers on the level of ‘trivial machines’ (von Foerster 1985). In the article “Psychology as the behaviorist views” it by John B. Watson, the demand of behaviourism is formulated as follows:

Psychology, as the behaviorist views it, is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. (Watson 1913, p. 158)

To distinguish the concept of individual competence (knowledge, skills and attitudes) from this concept focusing on “elements of activities” (Tuxworth 1989, p. 9), the terms ‘competencies’ or ‘competency’ are often used (Mansfield 1989). The NVQ-CBET approach has been reductionistic from its beginning. The effects in U.K. have also been reductionistic. The existing ‘low skill equilibrium’ (Finnegold and Soskice 1988) continued after implementation, and the implemented approach strengthened the promotion of low-level qualifications on the first and second level of the newly developed five-level framework for the National Vocational Qualifications (Chapman 1994; Shackleton and Walsh 1995). Even these low-level qualifications were not valued by the employers:

occupationally, specific level 2 vocational awards (NVQ) generally offer poor or even negative returns, and are of particularly low value to males who obtain them in college or a public training scheme, and whose wages are on average 12% or 23% lower than those of matched contemporaries who are ‘less’ qualified. (Wolf 2011, p. 31)

This poor or negative return cannot be solely explained by low-skill equilibrium.

1.2 *Functionalism*

The second principle is related to the first one: In NVQ-CBET, the starting point builds an occupational sector with a special key purpose such as the “construction sector (an occupational sector): Establish, maintain and modify the use of the natural and built environment, balancing the requirements of clients, users and the community” (Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 106). This key purpose shall be subdivided into functional key areas, such as “A) Plan the build environment, B) Design the built environment, C) Construct, maintain the built environment, D) Co-ordinate and control the development, construction and maintenance of the built environment” (Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 110). These functional areas shall be subdivided into key roles or work roles as an expected behaviour in a work

environment. These key roles shall be subdivided into functional units. Functional units can be taken in another step a) as a unit of competence, the two or more functional units can be b) combined into a new unit of competence or even c) subdivided into two or more units of competencies. A selection and collection of units of competencies then build a qualification/NVQ title (see Fig. 1). Synonyms for Units of Competencies are ‘elements of competence’ or ‘occupational standards’. For the measurement of NVQs, the units of competence have to be broken down into ‘performance criteria’, which will be specified through ‘range statements’. Range statements are descriptions of the situational attributes of a sub-sub-sub-activity. This method is called functional analysis (critical: Wolf 1995; advocating: Mansfield and Mitchell 1996).

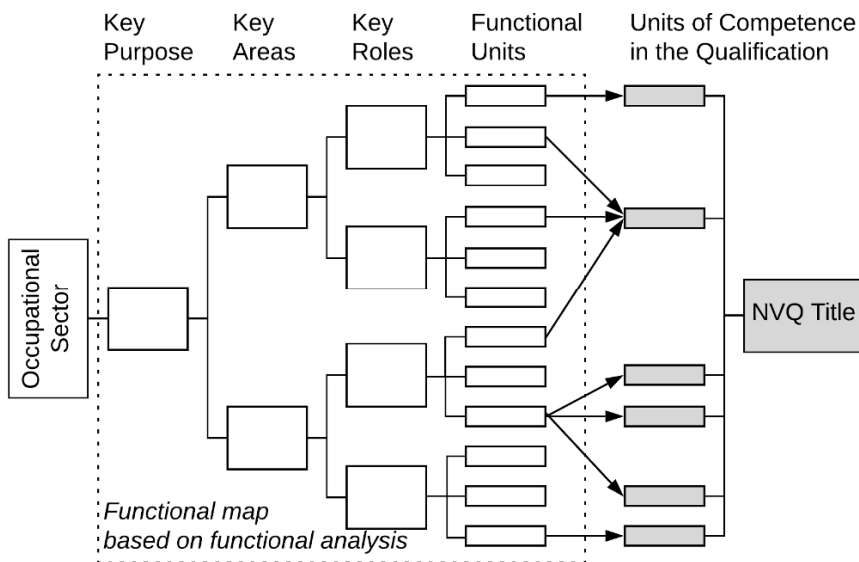


Fig. 1: Functional analysis and qualification

(Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 133)

The differences between a functional map/functional analysis and a qualification are: (1) “A functional map and its constituent standards represents **all** the roles in an occupational sector; a qualification is a **selection** from the standards. Many different qualifications may be developed from a single functional map” (Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 132). (2) “The structure also differ in that the functional map has a number of levels of analysis, whereas the qualification only has one -

the overall qualification title and the units of competence” (Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 132).

The ISCO International Standard Classification of Occupations from 2008 distinguish more than 7,000 occupational titles which can be seen as an equivalent for the construct ‘key role’ or ‘work role’ in the functional model. These occupational titles consist of at least five tasks (usually much more), therefore at least 35,000 functional units. If we take into account that this basis is not stable, new roles arise, others are aging or disappear, and *performance criteria* and *range statements* for each unit of competence are additionally needed, the checking, updating, development and abolition can never reach a sufficient up-to-date status.

Each breakdown step within the functional analysis reduces the coherence and scope of the starting point, the work role and the value of the addressed qualification. The “experience of NVQs in England and other outcomes-based systems indicates that attempts to increase the precision of outcomes can only lead to them becoming trivialized” (Young 1996, p. 28). The NVQ-CBET approach is, as described, situated in functionalism, typically for the era of Taylorism, even if the authors proclaim the opposite:

Functional analysis is not an attempt to return to functional, separated, departmental thinking, although the very appearance of the functional map, with formal statements in boxes, joined up with lines in an apparent flow chart can appear to represent the very essence of rigid operational thinking. (Mansfield and Mitchell 1996, p. 99)

Alternative approaches with the same purpose are ‘job or task analysis’ with onsite observations to subdivide tasks into their constituent parts and ‘Developing a Curriculum’ (DACUM) with guided group discussions instead of job observations (Allais 2016).

The importance of *work process knowledge* had to be ignored in the three approaches (functional analysis, job or task analysis and DACUM) three times: (1) on the one hand, knowledge is excluded from the CBET ideology because of the behaviourist perspective, and on the other hand, (2) the importance of social competences at the workplace (Aarkrog and Wahlgren 2017) and (3) organisational innovations towards process orientation and team work (Roos et al. 1991) are excluded because of the functional perspective. In contrary, work process knowledge is individually and socially constructed in a process of shared sense making and it is actively used by the employees in the performance of work, especially when they are solving problems. It is not isolated, not fragmented and not ‘inert’. Work process knowledge encompasses, especially for the sense making, the systems-level understanding of the work process in the organisation as a whole, and therefore the understanding of the interaction between business process, production process and labour process. It is integrated, holistic and relevant.

Work process knowledge is not *knowing how*, it is not *knowing that* and it is not *knowing why*. It is the necessary synthesis of these forms of knowledge (Boreham et al. 2002). Work process knowledge is furthermore a development process within a novice to expert continuum (Shearer and Lasonen 2018).

The CBET approach is therefore not only reductionistic but also outdated, and persons assessed on the grounds of this philosophy are not able to solve complex problems and meet the needs of the world of work (Pfeiffer 2018). Training curricula and training which are developed on this ground have to fail because of their inappropriateness for capturing the demands of the world of work with the means of a ‘formal feedback mechanism’ (Markowitsch and Hefler 2018). A gap in lost value and skills is the logical consequence. The gap is not just within a qualification defined by the distance between a work role and its performance criteria. Another gap relates to the distance between the suspected and fragmented work role, used in NVQs, and the applied and integrated work role, used in the work environment.

2 Namibia

In this section we describe first the general recent situation in Namibia, second the establishing CBET in Namibia, followed by an analysis of the principle *behaviourism* in a third and *functionalism* in a fourth step.

2.1 Context

Namibia is a large country with a small population of 2,5 million, more than 400,000 of whom live in Windhoek. In 2017, Namibia’s Human Development Index (HDI) was 0,647, situating it within the medium human development group and above the average for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (0,537). However, the country’s Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, is 61,0. This is the second highest in the world, just below South Africa (63,0). If inequality is considered, Namibia’s HDI falls to 0,422, a loss of 34,8%. In total, 22,6% of the population lives below the income poverty line (\$ 1, 90 a day), and 26,4% of employed people aged 15 and older live on less than \$ 3,10 a day. Also, 45,5% of youths (aged 15–24) are unemployed, and 33,4% are not in school or employed. The median age of the population is 21 years, and the HIV prevalence among adults (aged 15–49) is 13,8% (United Nations Development Programme 2019).

Namibia is rich in resources such as diamonds, uranium, zinc, tin, lead, tungsten, copper, silver and gold, and it is heavily dependent on mineral exports. There is very little industrial production, and fifty percent of the country’s foreign ex-

change earnings are provided by mining, accounting for about 12,5% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and half of industry's contribution to the GDP (26,3%). The country's already-high dependence on tourism is growing; 67% of the GDP is provided by services. Just 6,7% is provided by agriculture. In drought years, such as the last few years, food shortages and famine are common, especially in rural areas. Also, employment is affected, as more than 30% of the labour force works in the agriculture sector. About 50% of the country's cereal requirements are imported (Central Intelligence Agency 2019).

Traditionally, Namibia has had great economic dependence on South Africa. For example, South Africa provides 61,4% of Namibia's imports, especially higher-value products and many agricultural goods. However, this leads to challenges for Namibia. First, the Namibian dollar is tied to the South African rand and thus lacks financial sovereignty. Second, the recession in Namibia, which has continued since 2016, is connected to developments in South Africa.

Namibia also faces several environmental problems, including depletion and degradation of water and aquatic resources; desertification; land degradation; loss of biodiversity and biotic resources; and wildlife poaching. Thus, environmental protections were incorporated into the country's constitution, which was written in 1990. Namibia was the first country in the world to do this. Today, 14% of the country is protected under these provisions (Central Intelligence Agency 2019).

2.2 *Establishment of CBET in Namibia*

After a 23-year war and gaining its independence from South-Africa in 1990, Namibia started to reform the existing education and training sector. The former vocational system was predominantly industry-based, with a strong focus on apprenticeships, only a few organisations provided training, and there was strong discrimination due to apartheid. Thus, after independence a policy directive was developed. This directive prioritised four development goals: access, equality, quality and democracy (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993).

The National Vocational Training Act 18, which was developed in 1994 but brought into force in 1996, created a Chief Inspector position within the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources Development to oversee apprenticeships and a tripartite vocational training board. The function of the Chief Inspector was described as follows:

No person shall, after the commencement of this Act, employ in terms of a contract of apprenticeship any person as an apprentice in a designated trade for which a scheme has been approved without having first been granted the written approval of the Chief

Inspector to do so and except in accordance with the provisions of this Act or any other law. (Republic of Namibia 1994, p. 28)

The act also stipulated that fines are to be imposed if an employer fails to follow the rules stated within the act.

The function of the Vocational Training Board was to advise the Minister of Labour and Human Resources Development, to establish minimum standards for vocational training (including the development of vocational standards³) and trade testing procedures and arrangements and to “co-ordinate, encourage, facilitate and promote vocational training activities by private and public institutions in respect of agriculture, industry and commerce at all levels of vocational qualifications” (Republic of Namibia 1994, pp. 12–13). All of the rights and obligations of the Vocational Training Board were incorporated into the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) in 2008.

The Namibia Qualification Act 29, which was developed in 1996 and brought into force in 1998, set the framework for an outcome-based approach through the establishment of a juridical person and a statutory body called the Namibia Qualification Authority (NQA). The act defines the objectives of the NQA as follows (Republic of Namibia 1996, pp. 3–4):

- To set-up and administer a national qualifications framework;
- to set the occupational standards for any occupation, job, post, or position in any career structure;
- to set the curriculum standards required for achieving the occupational standards for a given occupation, job, post, or position in a career structure;
- to accredit persons, institutions and organisations providing education and courses of instruction or training of meeting certain requirements;
- to evaluate and recognise competencies learnt outside formal education.

In 2006, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) came into force. It consists of 10 levels with descriptors and credits (1 credit represents 10 hours of notional learning time). Qualifications (certificate, diploma, bachelor’s, bachelor’s with honours, professional bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree) and unit standards can be registered at the NQF. Both, qualifications and unit standards, are considered occupational standards (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 56).

The Vocational Education and Training Act 1 of 2008 established the NTA, the purpose of which is as follows (Republic of Namibia 2008, p. 2):

3 The 1994 act uses the term *vocational standards*, not *occupational standards*. Thus, the law does not seem to be affected by the CBET approach. Also, the 1994 act stipulates that the National Trade Testing and Certification Center should be established. However, the Namibian Qualification Act of 1996 does not use the word *trade* at all.

- To regulate the provision of vocational education and training (VET);
- to provide for the funding of VET;
- to provide for the imposition of a VET levy;
- to provide for the appointment of inspectors and designation of quality system auditors; and
- to provide for incidental matters.

In 2012, the NTA was tasked with accrediting and registering training providers and their programmes. Registered training providers are only allowed to offer training programs that have been registered (Republic of Namibia 2012).

On 1st April 2014, the Ministry of Education imposed a levy on employers. Under this levy, each employer with an annual payroll of N\$ 1,000,000 (approximate 62,500 €) or more has to pay 1% of the annual payroll (Republic of Namibia 2014a). Up to 15% of this amount is used for administration of the levy, up to 50% is used to pay training grants and up to 35% is used to pay key priority grants (Republic of Namibia 2014b).

The Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation (MHETI) is responsible for the VET system of Namibia. Specifically, the MHETI supervises higher education; vocational education; and the above-mentioned SOEs, the NQA and the NTA.

In a 2016 review report, UNESCO noted that the tasks of the NQA and NTA are not clearly delineated, and some overlap:

Existing governance and financing arrangements, involving MHETI, the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), the National Training Fund (NTF) and the National Student Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF) are complex, with five key features: non-separation of key functions, duplication and overlap of mandates, difference between institutions' legal mandates and actual responsibilities, lack of capacities and actions regarding the evaluation of impact of VET, and lack of autonomy of VET institutions. In the meantime, the contribution of the private sector to the VET system is insufficient, in terms of governance, contribution to curriculum development and contribution to delivery. (UNESCO 2016, p. 13)

The UNESCO review paints a critical picture of the VET system in Namibia.

2.3 Behaviourism and low-level qualifications

As mentioned before, the NQF consists of 10 levels. We analysed the registered unit standards (March 2019: N=1,277) in terms of level and credits (1 credit = 10 learning hours). Of all registered units, 72,6% are at levels 1–3, with most registered at levels 2 and 3. Most containing 50 learning hours (5 credits) or less are

registered at level 2. To reach a level 1 qualification, most units (79,2%) include less than 50 learning hours, while the average learning time required to reach level 3 is less than two weeks and the average to reach level 6 is less than three weeks. The same phenomenon is observed in the U.K.: the VET system includes numerical mostly low-level qualifications (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Unit standards registered on the NQF

Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Registered units (N=1277)	120	403	403	250	81	17	3
Percent of registered units (cumulative)	9,4%	41,0%	72,6%	92,2%	98,5%	99,8%	100%
Units with < 5 credits (%)	79,2%	67,5%	53,6%	32%	9,9%	5,9%	0%
Learning time per unit (mean)	37,9 h	51,4 h	67,4 h	85,2 h	99,4 h	110 h	180 h

(NQA March 2019)

The unit standards are grouped to form qualifications (e.g., the National Vocational Certificate [NVC]) that are registered under the NQF. Nevertheless, each unit standard has to be assessed separately. NVCs structure the training provided by vocational training centres and vocational schools; the first level is achieved in the first year, the second level is achieved in the second year and so on. In the following table, we illustrate this level system using the example of an NVC in Civil and Building Services Engineering (Plumbing), which was registered on 31 May 2018. Levels 5 and higher do not exist in the vocational sector.

The 2006 regulations that established the NQF in Namibia broadly define the outcome of learning as “an ability of an individual in terms of specific knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes attained as a result of a period of formal or nonformal learning” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 2). However, the outcome of learning has not been assessed because “unit standards are not directly used in the delivery of learning or training” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 58).

The decision regarding whether somebody passes or fails an assessment of a unit standard is based on performance criteria. These criteria “describe the evidence that must be considered in making an assessment decision. Performance criteria must ... refer to essential activities and/or results related to the outcome being assessed” (Republic of Namibia 2006, pp. 62–63). Performance criteria specify units (also called elements) that are used in combination or alone to create a unit standard. Elements are required to be demonstrable, and so both elements and performance criteria are behaviour-oriented.

Tab. 2: NVC in civil and building services engineering (plumbing)

Level	Compulsory		Expected, not compulsory
	Credits (1 C = 10 h)	Unit Standards	Job attachment
1	90	21	Minimum 3 months
2	79	15	Minimum 6 months
3	62	11	Minimum 6 months
4	85	12	Minimum 9 months
<i>Sum</i>	<i>316</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>Minimum 24 months</i>

(NTA 2018)

Compared with the descriptors of the NQF, this behavioural approach is valuable for level 1 (employs recall and a narrow range of knowledge and cognitive skills and does not generate new ideas) and level 2 (employs basic operational knowledge using readily available information and uses known solutions to familiar problems with little generation of new ideas) because operational knowledge and activity are mostly interchangeable. However, problems begin to arise at level 3 (employs some relevant theoretical knowledge and interpretations of available information and uses discretion and judgement for a range of known responses to familiar problems) and level 4 (employs a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts or in-depth applied knowledge and skills in a specific area, performs analytical interpretation of information, makes informed judgements and offers a range of sometimes innovative responses to concrete but often unfamiliar problems) and higher levels because demonstrable activity plays a decreasing role in competence and demand for knowledge and expertise grows.

This problem has been solved by development of additional unit standards focusing on knowledge (Tab. 3). We illustrate these unit standards using the above-mentioned NVC in civil and building services engineering (plumbing).

Tab. 3: NVC in civil and building services engineering (plumbing)

Level	Apply knowledge of:		
2	Pre-basic mathematics	Basic building drawing	Basic building science
3	Basic mathematics	Fundamental building drawing	Fundamental building science
4	Intermediate mathematics	Advanced building drawing	Advanced building science

(NTA 2018)

In this example, fragmentation is not only hierarchical, occurring between different levels; it is also vertical, occurring between skills (e.g., installing storm water and sub-soil drainage systems as part of plumbing operations) and knowledge (e.g., applying fundamental knowledge of building science in different contexts).

The basic approach to CBET in Namibia is — according to the original NVQ — behaviour-oriented and focused on low-level qualifications.

2.4 *Functionalism and skill gaps*

The Namibian approach features a classification comprised of three tiers: fields, subfields and domains:

Fields of learning, being the broadest aggregation of learning outcomes with a coherent alignment. *Subfields of learning*, being logical sub categorisations of Fields, and *Domains of learning*, being the smallest coherent aggregation of learning outcomes, having a more narrow and specific alignment. (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 9)

Qualifications and unit standards are registered in a domain. Wide and major qualifications (certificate, diploma, bachelor's, bachelor's with honours, professional bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree) are used in the academic field. Smaller National Vocational Certificates and minor unit standards are used in the vocational field. Thus, two different logics are applied to education: a more holistic qualification-based approach in the academic field and a more fragmented unit-based approach in the vocational field.

A unit standard usually consists of different elements, but single-element unit standards are also possible. Elements “break the outcome of learning and/or work activity that will be formally recognised into sub outcomes that assist in explaining the title. Element(s) must: represent outcomes of learning and/or work activities that are demonstrable and assessable” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 62). Elements are concretised via performance criteria, which “refer to essential activities and/or results related to the outcome being assessed” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 63). In addition, “*range statements* indicate the breadth or limits of performance contexts applicable to any element” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 63). Additional ‘special notes’ may be used to “provide definitions of any specialist terms or words being used in a special context” (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 66).

Comparison with the functional analysis described above (see Fig. 1) shows that the Namibian approach is an application of the NVQ approach.

Work process knowledge is ignored in three ways in the three approaches (i.e. functional analysis, job or task analysis and DACUM): (1) knowledge is excluded from the CBET ideology because of its behaviourist perspective and (2) social competences as well as (3) organisational innovations towards a process orientation and teamwork are not included.

Consider the example shown in table 4:

- The preparation of the necessary materials (such as tables, chairs, candles) is not mentioned in the unit standard. At least two additional unit standard would therefore be needed: ‘Pre-preparing a site for a bush braai in a wilderness area’ and ‘assist with pre-preparing a site for a bush braai in a wilderness area’. Unit standards necessarily produce a lack of work process knowledge: what happens before and after a unit standard remains unclear.
- In the special notes, a distinction is drawn between ‘under the direction of others’ and ‘undertake a number of tasks independently’. However, the division of tasks involves a relation between at least two persons, which means that teamwork is relational, dynamic and contextualised. How much independence and how much followed instruction in variable situations is needed to be assessed as competent?

The unit standards are never complete (due to the orientation on tasks and the ignoring of work process knowledge) and never precise (due to the orientation on definitions and ignoring of work reality). These problems cannot be solved by more definitions and analyses. In fact, breaking down each step within the functional analysis reduces the coherence and scope of the starting point, the work to be done and the value of the addressed qualification. The functional logic leads to fragmented, artificial aspects of activities that are distant from the realities and requirements of work.

Tab. 4: Comparison between the NVQ in the U.K. the NQF in Namibia

NVQ (U.K.)	NQF (Namibia)	Example (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 69-71)
Occupational sector with a key purpose	Fields of learning	Tourism
	Subfields of learning	Safari tourism
Key areas	Domains	Safari camp operations
Key roles	Qualification	--
Functional units	Unit Standards	Assist with preparing a site for a bush braai in a wilderness area
Unit of competence	Elements (E)	E1: Assist with preparing a site for a bush braai. E2: Assist with setting tables for a bush braai. E3: Assist with clearing a site after a bush braai.
Performance criteria	Performance criteria (PC)	17 Performance criteria are mentioned (e.g. E2-PC3: seating is arranged around the fire such that

NVQ (U.K.)	NQF (Namibia)	Example (Republic of Namibia 2006, p. 69-71)
		guests will likely be warm yet safe from sparks from the fire).
Range	Range	A function of 12–20 persons and/or a minimum of two tables.
	Special Notes	Three notes are mentioned, including the following: ‘Assist’ means taking on a significant role in the activities described in this unit standard. The candidate may be under the direction of others but will undertake a number of tasks independently of others. Assessment of this unit standard may require assistance to be given on a number of different occasions to ensure that assistance is given across the full range of activities to be demonstrated.

(Author’s own compilation)

In 2014, the NTA commissioned CBET consultants — TEN (PTY), Ltd., and Windhoek, Namibia, and Learning Australia (PTY), Ltd., Melbourne, Australia — to review the implemented CBET system and propose strategies for further development. The consultants proposed a reformed CBET system, a key part of which “is the planned phase out of all non-unit standards-based qualifications and the establishment of a single unit standards-based qualifications framework for the VET system in Namibia” (Durango et al. 2015, p. 69).

3 Imitation transfer and the myth of simplicity

The term ‘educational transfer’ describes the transfer of educational ideas, structures and/or practices from one place to another. The unit of analysis can be located at a national level or even at a local level within a country, region, city or school (Perry and Tor 2009). Educational transfer is often associated with political reforms or regeneration. Alternative terms used in this context are ‘policy transfer’ (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996) and ‘policy borrowing’ (Phillips and Ochs 2003). Lewis describes the characteristic of educational transfer as follows: “The borrowing country abstracts the intent of the model of interest and designs a system that maintains its essence but takes on local character.” (Lewis 2007, p. 474). Researchers regularly expect adaptations but not an imitation or duplication: “A closer

look shows that importing a system, or parts of it, involves more than mere duplication. It is a process of selecting and adapting certain components to suit the objectives and conditions of the potential importing country” (Euler 2013, p. 6). An exception from this rule of thumb is the case of transformation. Learners (or institutions or countries) construct a new framework for their collective activity and develop new objects within this framework (Gessler 2017; Gessler and Peters 2017). The transfer and implementation of the CBET system in Namibia is another case. In relation to the original model in United Kingdom it is a duplication, or imitation. Functionalism is a clear imitation of the original principle of the NVQ; no adaptations were implemented. Behaviourism is still largely the same, although it was in the meantime slightly updated.

In this case study we compared the beginnings with the recent situation. The transfer process and intervening factors were not considered. Nevertheless, the question should be raised, which factors make such an imitation transfer possible.

One factor might be the presumed *simplicity* of the model. Simplicity seems to be its ongoing purpose and marketing message: a “simple list of three questions and three specifications produces a VET standard which has a close link to the labour market” (Mansfield 2001, p. 5). The next step is “to go for simple controllable tests, formally administered and comfortingly familiar” (Graham and Tytler 1993, p. 127), with assessments structured on a “simple pass or fail basis” (Smithers 1993, p. 33). It is “recognized that these simple requirements result in a large body of knowledge at professional levels” (Jessup 1991, p. 27). Implementing and controlling a CBET system seems to be easy, and the implemented system offers, en passant, a simple solution to a variety of problems, as it supports skill development and economic competitiveness, and promotes furthermore equity, social justice and social inclusion (advocating: Jessup 1989, 1991; critical: Allais and Young 2011; Avis 2018). This simplicity of the model “in fact oversimplifies: it cannot capture the complexity of education, and it ignores economic problems, the structure of the labour market and the absence of other social policies which are likely to lead to a demand for skills” (Allais 2016, p. 454).

By the 1990s, the failure of the NVQ-CBET approach was already documented and widely known in the U.K. Despite this, it was promoted for educational transfer. According to Hyland (1998, p. 378), “Exporting failure in this way might be regarded in some circles as being, at best, as ethically dubious as selling television soap operas to impoverished third world countries”. Namibia was one of several developing countries that implemented the CBET approach and still today, many countries (e.g., Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya) try to implement or improve the CBET approach, often with the support of the same consultants who worked already in Namibia.

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