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## **Impact of Curriculum Reform Strategies in Enhancing Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania**

<sup>1</sup> Sophia M Aseri, <sup>2</sup> Onesmo Amos

<sup>1,2</sup> Jordan University College, A Constituent College of St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Morogoro Region,  
Tanzania

Corresponding Author: **Sophia M Aseri**

### **Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of curriculum reform strategies in enhancing academic achievement in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. The study adopted a positivist research philosophy, employing a case study design and qualitative approach focused on teachers as the target population, with a sample size of 12 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data collection utilized semi-structured interviews, while validity and reliability were assessed through credibility checks. Thematic analysis was applied for data analysis, and ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to, ensuring the study's ethical integrity. This study revealed challenges facing

execution of curriculum reforms including technical language, resource limitations, and inconsistent support that hampered implementation. Despite these hurdles, the strategies yielded positive results, enhancing student engagement, skills, and the learning environment. Addressing these challenges with clear guidance, inclusive practices, and ongoing evaluation is vital for maximizing the reforms' benefits and ensuring equitable outcomes. Recommendations include simplifying language, offering consistent teacher support, tackling resource issues, and implementing continuous evaluation for improvement.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Reform Strategies, Academic Achievement, and Public Secondary Schools

### **1. Background of the Problem**

Globally, the discourse on educational reform has been a central focus due to the evolving nature of society and the demands placed on education systems to prepare students adequately for the challenges of the 21st century. Curriculum reform has emerged as a significant strategy to address issues such as relevance, equity, and quality in education. In many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, curriculum reforms have been implemented to align education with contemporary needs, foster critical thinking skills, and enhance student outcomes (OECD, 2017) <sup>[13]</sup>.

In Africa, the need for curriculum reform is also pronounced. The African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of education in fostering sustainable development and addressing socio-economic challenges (African Union, 2015) <sup>[2]</sup>. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, curriculum reforms aim to improve learning outcomes, promote skills development for employability, and enhance the overall quality of education (UNESCO, 2018) <sup>[16]</sup>.

In East Africa, countries like Kenya and Uganda have embarked on curriculum reforms to modernize education and equip students with competencies relevant to the changing job market and technological advancements (Kimutai, 2020; Okumu, 2019) <sup>[8, 12]</sup>. These reforms focus on outcomes-based education, learner-centered approaches, and integration of ICT in teaching and learning.

Specifically in Tanzania, curriculum reform has been ongoing with initiatives such as the Competence-Based Curriculum (CBC) introduced to address gaps in the previous curriculum and align education with national development goals (URT, 2014) <sup>[17]</sup>. The Tanzanian government recognizes the role of education in economic transformation and social progress, leading to continuous efforts to improve curriculum content, pedagogy, and assessment practices (URT, 2020).

Within Morogoro Municipality, the impact of curriculum reform strategies on academic achievement is of particular interest. The municipality faces challenges typical of many regions in Tanzania, including resource constraints, teacher shortages, and varying levels of infrastructure. Understanding how curriculum reforms contribute to enhancing academic achievement in this

context is crucial for informed decision-making and continuous improvement of education quality.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

This study examined how curriculum reform strategies influence academic achievement in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. It sought to tackle societal needs by exploring how these strategies can help solve educational challenges and meet community demands, particularly in addressing issues like educational disparities and workforce readiness. The research aimed to illuminate the potential of curriculum reforms to benefit society by focusing on these pressing needs.

A key aspect of this study involved filling knowledge gaps in existing literature. Through a thorough review of relevant research such as Makunja (2016)<sup>[9]</sup> and Kanyankole (2019)<sup>[7]</sup>, the study aimed to identify areas where information is lacking regarding the specific impact of curriculum reform strategies on academic achievement in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. This approach ensured that the research is grounded in current knowledge while also uncovering new insights.

Consequently, the primary goal of this study is to evaluate how curriculum reform strategies influence academic achievement in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. By assessing the implementation and outcomes of these strategies, the research aimed to offer actionable recommendations for educational policymakers, school administrators, and stakeholders. Ultimately, the study contributed to the improvement of education quality by addressing societal needs through effective curriculum reforms strategies.

## 3. Research Question

What is the impact of curriculum reform strategies on enhancing academic achievement in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality?

## 4. Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory was used in this study. The theory was developed by Gary Becker in the 1960s. Human Capital Theory is a prominent economic theory that suggests that individuals' education and skills are investments in their human capital, leading to increased productivity and economic returns. Becker's work was motivated by the recognition that education and training contribute to individuals' ability to generate income and economic growth. The theory gained significance during a time when education was increasingly seen as a crucial factor in economic development and individual success.

Human Capital Theory stands out for its capacity to offer a comprehensive framework for comprehending the economic advantages associated with education, as noted by Oketch (2014). The theory underscores the crucial connection between education and increased future earnings, emphasizing that education is an enduring investment rather than a mere cost, with the potential to enhance economic outcomes for both individuals and society at large. This perspective has significantly impacted policy dialogues and initiatives focused on fostering education and skill development. Nonetheless, critics, including Tan (2014), contend that Human Capital Theory has shortcomings. One major critique is its failure to consider non-economic facets of education, such as social and cultural benefits. Education,

critics argue, goes beyond economic productivity, playing a vital role in shaping individuals' social interactions, values, and cultural comprehension. Furthermore, the theory assumes a rational economic decision-making process, neglecting the impact of social inequality and limited educational opportunities, which can impede individuals' capacity to invest in their human capital.

Human capital theory provides a compelling rationale for using it in this study. This theory emphasizes that investments in education and training, such as curriculum reforms that enhance teaching quality, student engagement, and learning outcomes, contribute significantly to the development of human capital. By aligning curriculum reform strategies with human capital theory, educators and policymakers can focus on optimizing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students, thereby fostering their academic success and overall socio-economic development.

## 5. Review of Empirical Studies

Gouëdard, *et al.*, (2020)<sup>[6]</sup> analyzed the curriculum reform literature through the lens of the OECD-proposed implementation framework that promotes, among others, inclusive stakeholder engagement. Curriculum reform has indeed long been considered from a "top-down" perspective but has progressively shifted towards a more "bottom-up" approach, emphasizing the central role of teachers in the process. The analysis is enriched with successful practices and examples from different countries and concludes with a specific resource for countries to make the lessons learned actionable through the planning of a coherent curriculum implementation strategy.

Shah (2022)<sup>[15]</sup> conducted a study on teachers' perceptions about curriculum reform in Pakistan. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with eight English language lecturers employed in three public sector colleges in a major city. Findings revealed that, despite a positive attitude towards the concept of change, the lecturers who participated in this study considered the curriculum change project impractical due to a lack of planning for implementation. They also felt marginalized in the process of decision-making and found themselves unprepared to take up this challenge. Moreover, the participating lecturers expressed skepticism regarding the sustainability of the new curriculum owing to the political and economic instability at the time.

Chimbunde and Moreng (2024)<sup>[4]</sup> on a qualitative case study examining how teachers made sense of their participation in curriculum reform and implementation activities. Twelve teachers representing six primary schools in Zimbabwe were interviewed in Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews to gather data. Using the sensemaking theory as a lens, thematic analysis of qualitative data suggests that teacher participation in curriculum reforms enables teachers to be co-designers, which in turn improves ownership of the innovations, leading to an improved implementation fidelity of the new curriculum as teachers are provided with the authority to go through the implementation process with a comparable level of rigor as policymakers.

Aboagye and Yawson (2020)<sup>[1]</sup> examined the perception of teachers of the new educational curriculum in Ghana. Responses from six teachers interviewed were developed into a questionnaire and posted on the websites of teacher unions via WhatsApp. In all, 74 teachers responded. From

the study, teachers perceived that the new curriculum is important as it will encourage group work, assist students to get lifelong skills, prepare students for the job market, promote inclusive education, promote gender equality, and consider Ghanaian students' culture and society. The findings further revealed that the current curriculum does not include difficult content for teaching but contains a lot of workloads, lacks teaching and learning materials, and includes long class periods. Teachers were also of the view that the government should involve teachers in planning the curriculum, get books and learning materials ready, train teachers in advance, and pilot a new curriculum before implementation.

Release (2023) used Derrida's deconstruction theory to read and engage with the discourse on curriculum integration in these documents: Curriculum and Assessment Policy (2009), Guide to Continuous Assessment, and Integrated Curriculum (Grade 1-7 syllabi). By deconstructing the integration narrative in these policy documents, the study's findings reveal contradictory messages about integration within the curriculum policy and its supporting documents. The policy advocates for a 'holistic view and treatment of issues', yet the syllabi promote compartmentalization of subjects. The policy also espouses different integration models within the new curriculum. Therefore, this paper argues that the contradictory messages and the unclear integration model followed can lead to multiple interpretations by the implementing agents, which ultimately cripples the implementation at the classroom level. This deconstruction and unpacking of discourse may contribute to scholarship, curriculum evaluation, and policy implementation during educational reforms.

Makunja (2016)<sup>[9]</sup> investigated what stakeholders in education thought about strategies to enhance the competence-based curriculum's effective implementation in Tanzania's secondary schools. The research methodology: A case study research design was used in the study. 112 participants from various educational categories, including District Education Officers (DEO), Quality Assurers (QA), heads of secondary schools, and teachers, participated in focus groups and interviews to acquire the data. The study also employed a thematic approach to data presentation and analysis. The study's findings identified several strategies that can be used in Tanzania to successfully implement a competency-based curriculum: Ensure that heads of schools regularly receive pedagogical leadership training, improve in-service teacher training, improve school-based indoor training, employ enough teachers, improve school infrastructure, provide enough teaching and learning materials, ensure effective partnership between schools and parents improve library services and improve the use of information technology, improve school-based assessment procedures and establishment of school-based quality assurance department.

Kanyankole (2019)<sup>[7]</sup> examined primary school teacher's perceptions of the implementation of curriculum change for standards III to VI, with special reference to Kinondoni Municipality. A key focus was teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the curriculum. The study was qualitative in nature and data were collected from 38 teachers through individual interviews. An inductive approach was used to analyze qualitative data based on the main ideas from each teacher's responses. The study revealed that the implementation of curriculum change is facing several

bottlenecks. To address the existing dilemmas, it is worth providing more training to all teachers and head teachers as the primary implementers of the curriculum change. The supply of curriculum materials and other facilities must be given priority by the Tanzania Institute of Education and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

## 6. Research Methodology

This section presents the research methodology that was used in the study. The study used a positivist research philosophy, a case study research design, and a qualitative research approach. The target population includes teachers. The sample size was 12 respondents. Purposive sampling techniques were used in the selection of respondents. Data collection instruments include semi-structured interviews. Validity and reliability were tested through credibility. Collected data were analyzed by using thematic analysis. Ethical considerations were precisely followed, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical clearance from Jordan University College and Morogoro Municipal Council.

## 7. Findings and Discussion of the Study

The focus group discussions with teachers provided valuable insights into the implementation and impact of recent curriculum reform strategies. These discussions aimed to evaluate various aspects of the reform. Results for such aspects are presented below:-

### 7.1 Clarity and Alignment of Curriculum Reform Strategies

#### 7.1.1 Clear Articulation of Strategies

Most teachers agreed that the curriculum reform strategies are clearly articulated in the policy documents and guidelines. They noted that the strategies are detailed and specific, making it easier to understand the expectations. One teacher remarked the following in a FGD A,

*"The strategies are laid out in a step-by-step manner, which helps us to follow them without confusion."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

However, a few teachers felt that while the strategies are stated, the language used is sometimes too technical, making it challenging for some educators to fully comprehend. These verdicts concur with a study by Oates (2014)<sup>[11]</sup>, who suggested that well-designed material that provides clear guidelines supports the implementation of the new curriculum, as it makes the transition easier for teachers by providing a focus on students' learning progress and reducing the uncertainty and anxiety that may come from a new curriculum.

#### 7.1.2 Alignment with Educational Goals

Teachers generally believed that the reform strategies were well-aligned with broader educational goals, particularly in terms of enhancing critical thinking, inclusivity, and practical skills. One teacher commented the following in a FGD A,

*"These strategies reflect our aim to develop well-rounded students who can think critically and apply their knowledge practically."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

Despite this positive feedback, some teachers expressed concerns about a gap between the stated goals and the actual

implementation, with resources and support not always matching the aspirations of the reforms. These findings concur with a study by Chimbunde and Moreeng (2024) [4] who pointed out the following, teachers who do not participate in specific ways may lose their sense of purpose and direction, their framework of reality, and their confidence that they know what must be done.

## 7.2 Support and Training for Implementation

### 7.2.1 Support in Implementation

A significant number of teachers felt that support is inconsistent and heavily depends on the school's leadership and available resources. Some felt they were left to implement the reforms on their own without adequate support. One teacher shared the following in a FGD A,

*"We have regular training sessions and a very supportive team that helps each other out."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

These findings align with a study by Elabbar (2017) [5] who pointed out the following, old-generation teachers, new-generation teachers, social workers, and school HQs, as well as university educators, TAs, university deans, heads of departments, and university administrators require ongoing shared workshops, coaching, focus groups, and shared studies to link the main goals of the reform with practice.

### 7.2.2 Training for Implementation

Several teachers indicated that the training provided was insufficient or too infrequent, leaving them feeling unprepared. One teacher said the following in a FGD A,

*"The training sessions have been very helpful in preparing us to implement the new strategies,"* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

This contribution aligns with the conclusions of Dube and Jita (2018), Nziramasanga (2018), and Yidana and Aboagye (2018), which state that teachers' active involvement is essential to the curriculum's successful implementation. According to the findings, teachers' participation during the design phase is critical to successfully implementing a new program, even though their contributions are frequently disregarded, particularly in systems of centralized curriculum development.

## 7.3 Impact on Student Engagement and Understanding

### 7.3.1 Enhancing Student Engagement

Teachers observed increased student engagement, noting that the interactive and practical elements of the new curriculum strategies captured students' interests more effectively. One teacher said the following in a FGD A,

*"Students are more involved in classroom activities and discussions, which is a positive change."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

A few teachers, however, pointed out that engagement varies, with some students struggling to adapt to the new methods, especially those with different learning styles. Human Capital Theory is relevant to these results as it stresses the importance of investing in education to enhance the skills and knowledge of students, leading to greater engagement and effective learning.

## 7.3.2 Improving Student Understanding

Many teachers reported improved student comprehension of key concepts due to the hands-on and practical approach of the new curriculum strategies. One teacher noted the following in a FGD A,

*"The students are grasping concepts much better because they can see how they apply in real life."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

Nonetheless, some teachers felt that while understanding improved for some students, others found the pace of the new strategies overwhelming. These verdicts support Human Capital Theory which posits that investment in education enhances individuals' skills and productivity, leading to better outcomes. The improved student comprehension reported by teachers due to the hands-on and practical approach of the new curriculum strategies aligns with this theory, as it reflects the enhancement of students' cognitive and practical skills through effective educational practices.

## 7.4 Promoting Critical Thinking and Inclusivity

Teachers appreciated the inclusive approach of the new strategies, which they felt better addressed the needs of students from various backgrounds and abilities. One teacher noted the following in a FGD A,

*"These strategies make it easier to include all students, regardless of their learning needs."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

However, some teachers felt that while the strategies aim to be inclusive, practical implementation is challenging due to a lack of resources and support for special needs education. These findings concur with a study by Assey (2022) who suggested that it will be possible to adequately apply the competency-based curriculum in the classroom if there is a positive teaching and learning environment that is characterized by having sufficient teachers, teaching and learning resources, and knowledgeable school leaders.

## 7.5 Enhancing Practical Skills and Learning Environment

### 7.5.1 Enhancing Practical Skills

Teachers widely agreed that the new strategies significantly enhance students' practical skills, with more hands-on activities and real-world applications included in the curriculum. One teacher shared the following in a FGD A,

*"Students are gaining valuable practical skills that will help them beyond the classroom."* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

A few teachers mentioned that while practical skills are emphasized, there is still a need to balance these with theoretical knowledge. Human Capital Theory is relevant here as it emphasizes investing in teachers' skills and professional development, which enhances their ability to create a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere. This investment in human capital leads to improved student motivation and enthusiasm for learning, as teachers are better equipped to facilitate an effective learning environment.

### 7.5.2 Fostering a Positive Learning Environment

Teachers observed a more positive and engaging classroom atmosphere, with students being more motivated and enthusiastic about learning. One teacher noted the following in a FGD A,

*“The classroom environment is much more dynamic and positive since we started using the new strategies.”* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

These findings support Human Capital Theory which emphasizes the value of investing in education and training to enhance individuals' skills and productivity. The observed positive and engaging classroom atmosphere, with motivated and enthusiastic students, reflects the effective development and utilization of human capital, leading to improved educational outcomes.

### 7.6 Guidance and Meeting Diverse Needs

#### 7.6.1 Guidance on Implementation

Teachers appreciated the guidance provided through mentoring programs, instructional coaches, and clear guidelines. One teacher shared the following in FGD A,

*“The guidance we receive helps us to implement the strategies more effectively.”* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

However, several teachers felt that guidance was sporadic and not always available when needed, leading to feelings of uncertainty.

These findings are in parallel with Human Capital Theory, which posits that equipping teachers with targeted support and professional development, enhances teachers' skills and effectiveness, ultimately improving educational outcomes. This alignment emphasizes the theory's principle that investing in human capital, through structured guidance and continuous learning opportunities, yields significant returns in the form of improved teacher performance and student achievement.

#### 7.6.2 Meeting Diverse Student Needs

Teachers generally agreed that the strategies are designed to meet diverse student needs, with differentiated instruction and inclusive practices. One teacher noted the following in a FGD A,

*“These strategies allow us to cater to the varying needs of our students more effectively.”* (FGD A, Personal Communication, May 3, 2024).

Nevertheless, some teachers indicated that fully addressing diverse needs remains challenging due to factors such as large class sizes and limited resources. These observations align with the study by Gouédard *et al.*, (2020) <sup>[6]</sup>, which suggested that including diverse stakeholders in educator teams within design-based implementation research (DBIR) exemplifies collective sense-making. DBIR advocates for co-constructing curricula based on principles such as: 1) focusing on practical problems from multiple stakeholder perspectives, 2) committing to iterative, collaborative design, 3) emphasizing the understanding of classroom learning and implementation, and 4) prioritizing the development of capacity for systemic change.

## 8. Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

### 8.1 Summary of Findings

The focus group discussions with teachers highlighted the clarity and alignment of recent curriculum reform strategies with educational goals, though some technical language and implementation gaps were noted. Support and training for implementation were found to be inconsistent, impacting teachers' preparedness. Despite challenges, the strategies enhanced student engagement, understanding, and practical skills, fostering a more positive learning environment. However, effectively meeting diverse student needs requires continuous guidance and support to address resource constraints and ensure inclusive practices.

### 8.2 Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the implementation and impact of recent curriculum reform strategies. While the strategies were generally well-articulated and aligned with educational goals, challenges such as technical language, resource constraints, and inconsistent support hindered effective implementation. Despite these obstacles, the strategies showed promising outcomes in enhancing student engagement, understanding, and practical skills, and creating a positive learning environment. Moving forward, addressing the identified challenges through targeted support, clear guidance, and inclusive practices will be crucial to maximizing the benefits of the curriculum reforms and ensuring equitable educational outcomes for all students.

### 8.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be made to improve the implementation and impact of curriculum reform strategies. Firstly, there should be efforts to simplify technical language in policy documents and guidelines to enhance teachers' understanding and implementation of the strategies. Additionally, providing consistent and adequate support, such as regular training sessions and mentoring programs, can help teachers feel more prepared and empowered to effectively implement the reforms. Moreover, addressing resource constraints, particularly in terms of materials and personnel, is essential to bridge the gap between stated goals and actual implementation. Finally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the reforms, along with soliciting feedback from teachers and students, will enable continuous improvement and refinement of the curriculum reform strategies.

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