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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Instructional Practices of School Heads and Quality Education Under the 2023 Competence-Based Education Reform in Public Secondary Schools in Mwanza City, Tanzania

Deus Toga

Department of Education Foundations, St. Augustine University of Tanzania

Corresponding Author

Deus Toga, Email: deustoga1@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how the instructional practices of school heads supported quality education during implementation of Tanzania's 2023 competence-based education reform in public secondary schools in Mwanza City. The study is guided by Human Capital Theory and pragmatism, also, the study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The accessible population comprised teachers, students, and school heads in ten selected public secondary schools, together with city education officers. The final sample was 213 participants: 96 teachers and 104 students completed questionnaires, while ten school heads, one Teachers Service Commission officer, one District School Quality Assurance officer, and one District Education Officer participated in semi-structured interviews. Schools were selected by simple random sampling; teachers and students were selected through proportionate stratified random sampling; and key informants were selected purposively. Quantitative data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics 27 using frequencies, percentages, and means, while interview data were coded thematically in NVivo 14 and integrated with the survey results. The findings revealed that school heads generally supported learner-centered teaching, professional development, pedagogical innovation, formative assessment, and access to instructional resources. Students similarly perceived that classroom practices encouraged active participation, practical-skill development, regular feedback, differentiated learning, and instructional support. Interview evidence reinforced these findings through descriptions of school-based coaching, curriculum monitoring, feedback routines, and resource mobilization. The study concludes that school heads were perceived to create enabling conditions for reform-aligned teaching, although the descriptive cross-sectional evidence does not establish causality. City authorities should institutionalize sustained professional learning, strengthen formative assessment, and provide equitable instructional resources.

Keywords: instructional leadership; teacher professional development; formative assessment; learner engagement; mixed-methods research; Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Tanzania's 2023 revised curriculum seeks to shift teaching away from teacher-dominated recitation and rote memorization toward learner-centered competence development, including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, and the application of knowledge. Early implementation evidence shows that this transition requires continuing professional learning, practical

support, and sustained monitoring at school level rather than policy issuance alone (Hamza et al., 2026; Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025). These requirements place school heads at the center of the reform because they translate curriculum expectations into routines for teaching, assessment, teacher learning, and resource use.

Instructional leadership concerns the deliberate actions through which school leaders define learning priorities,

monitor curriculum and classroom practice, support teachers, and build conditions for improved learning. International syntheses show that leadership generally influences student outcomes indirectly, especially through teacher capacity, instructional quality, professional collaboration, and school climate (Gümüş et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2024; Gechere et al., 2025). Consequently, the quality of a competence-based reform depends partly on whether school heads can organize these mediating conditions consistently.

In a competence-based system, quality education extends beyond examination performance. It includes active learner participation, acquisition of practical competencies, constructive feedback, responsiveness to individual learning needs, and access to appropriate instructional support. School heads can strengthen these outcomes by modeling learner-centered methods, facilitating teacher development, encouraging pedagogical innovation, supervising formative assessment, and mobilizing learning resources. However, leadership effects are context-dependent and should not be assumed from policy expectations alone.

Evidence from Tanzania reinforces this contextual concern. Bush and Anania (2023) found that an instructional-leadership initiative strengthened school leaders' understanding of classroom observation and related leadership processes, while Aron and Damka (2024) linked instructional leadership with more efficient management of teaching and learning resources. At the same time, recent curriculum evidence identifies continuing dilemmas involving teacher preparedness, resources, and movement from intended to enacted competence-based practice (Hamza et al., 2026; Kasuga & Kalolo, 2025). This combination makes municipality-level evidence from teachers, students, and key education officers necessary.

Statement of the Problem

The 2023 competence-based education reform expects public secondary schools to develop learners who can apply knowledge, solve problems, collaborate, communicate, and learn independently. Yet the existence of a revised curriculum does not guarantee corresponding classroom change. Teachers may require practical coaching, formative-assessment support, differentiated strategies, and adequate materials,

while school heads must balance instructional leadership with extensive administrative responsibilities. If these conditions are weak, the reform may remain formally adopted but unevenly enacted.

Prior studies demonstrate that school leadership matters, but they leave three gaps. First, much of the international evidence examines achievement or teacher outcomes outside Tanzania rather than implementation of the 2023 reform. Second, Tanzanian studies have focused on leadership development or resource management without integrating teachers' accounts of school-head practice with students' experiences of classroom quality. Third, early evidence on the revised curriculum identifies implementation challenges but does not show how school heads address them within public secondary schools in Mwanza City. This study therefore examined the instructional practices of school heads and how participants perceived those practices to support quality education under the reform.

The Objective of The Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the instructional practices of school heads and the realization of quality education under the 2023 competence-based education reform in public secondary schools in Mwanza City.

Significance of The Study

The study provides city education authorities and school leaders with evidence on the leadership practices that teachers and students associate with reform-aligned teaching. The findings can inform the design of school-based professional learning, classroom monitoring, formative-assessment support, and resource allocation. For policy makers, the integration of teacher, student, and key-informant perspectives shows where implementation support should accompany curriculum directives. Academically, the study extends instructional-leadership research into the early implementation of Tanzania's 2023 reform and demonstrates how Human Capital Theory can connect investment in teacher capacity and instructional resources with perceived quality in teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Instructional Practices and Quality Education

Instructional practices of school heads are the leadership behaviors directed toward the core work of teaching and learning. They include communicating instructional priorities, observing and discussing teaching, coordinating curriculum, supporting professional learning, promoting evidence-informed pedagogy, and ensuring access to learning resources. Research across several decades indicates that these practices operate mainly through teachers and school organizational conditions rather than through a simple direct effect on learners (Gümüş et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2024; Gechere et al., 2025). In the present study, quality education was operationalized through active learner engagement, practical competency development, regular feedback, responsiveness to individual needs, and availability of instructional support.

A five-point Likert response format was appropriate because the study sought ordered judgments about the extent of agreement with clearly specified practices. Frequencies and percentages summarized the distribution of responses, while means indicated the overall response level for each item. Reporting both measures provides a clear basis for interpreting the strength of participants' perceptions and is consistent with guidance that carefully constructed Likert-scale data may be summarized with means when assumptions and interpretation are made explicit (Norman, 2010).

International and Regional Empirical Evidence

Özdemir et al. (2024) systematically reviewed 144 studies on school leadership and student achievement and developed an updated framework showing that leadership works through interconnected instructional and organizational conditions. Although the review provides current international evidence, it does not explain how these mechanisms operate during Tanzania's 2023 reform. Its implication for the present study is that leadership should be examined as a connected set of practices within the local curriculum context.

Raji and Ambotang (2025) surveyed 418 teachers in Malaysian TS25 secondary schools and reported a positive relationship between principals' instructional leadership and teacher quality ($r = .578$, $p < .05$). Although the study provides recent evidence from a school-transformation setting, it

relied on teacher reports and did not incorporate student experience or qualitative explanations. The present study addressed this empirical gap by integrating teacher questionnaires, student questionnaires, and interviews with school and municipal leaders.

Kaffenberger et al. (2026) synthesized rigorous evidence on teaching at the right level and identified interactive instruction, regular assessment, aligned materials, ongoing coaching, and practice-based training as core components of effective pedagogical support. The synthesis is relevant to competence-oriented reform, but it does not describe school-head practice in Tanzanian secondary schools. For this study, the implication was to examine both leadership inputs and perceived instructional outcomes.

Gechere et al. (2025) used a concurrent mixed-methods design in secondary schools in the Wolaita Zone of Ethiopia and found positive relationships among principals' instructional leadership, teacher efficacy, and student performance. The work demonstrates the value of integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence in a resource-constrained African setting. However, it emphasized efficacy and performance rather than the implementation of a newly revised competence-based curriculum. The present study therefore transferred the mixed-method logic to a different reform and city context.

Gümüş et al. (2022) showed that school leadership can be associated with socioeconomic achievement gaps, highlighting the need for socially responsive instructional leadership. Their study strengthens the case for examining leadership in unequal settings, but it does not address Tanzania's 2023 curriculum or the mechanisms through which municipal school heads support competence-based teaching. Its implication for the present study was to treat context and resource conditions as part of the leadership-quality relationship. Professional support is another recurrent mechanism. Kaffenberger et al. (2026) identified ongoing coaching and practice-based training as core elements of pedagogical support, while Bush and Anania (2023) showed that instructional-leadership capacity can be developed in Tanzania. These recent studies imply that professional development should be embedded in coaching and feedback rather than treated as isolated workshops, a proposition examined through local participants' accounts.

Evidence on formative assessment is similarly conditional. Cañadas (2023) found that formative assessment contributed to the development of teaching

competencies, whereas Boström and Palm (2023) found no significant achievement difference in a particular mathematics intervention and stressed variation in implementation. The gap is therefore not whether formative assessment is desirable, but how school leadership supports its consistent enactment. This implication informed the inclusion of assessment monitoring and feedback as a distinct leadership dimension.

Differentiated instruction also has promising but uneven evidence. Pozas et al. (2021) reported that students' perceptions of differentiated instruction were positively associated with well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept, while Nketsia et al. (2024) found gaps between teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' perceptions of differentiated-practice use in Ghana. These current studies show the importance of student voice and teacher preparation, but neither addresses Tanzanian curriculum reform. The present study therefore examined perceived responsiveness to individual needs.

Evidence From Tanzania

Bush and Anania (2023) found that a British Council initiative improved Tanzanian school leaders' understanding of instructional leadership, including classroom observation and related leadership processes. The study demonstrates that leadership capacity can be developed, but its intervention focus and participant reflections did not establish how teachers and students experience leadership during the 2023 reform. The present study extends that work by examining enacted practices in ten public secondary schools.

Aron and Damka (2024) found that instructional leadership supported efficient resource management in public secondary schools in Kigoma-Ujiji Municipality. This finding establishes resource mobilization as part of instructional leadership, but it concentrates on management efficiency rather than a wider set of reform-aligned teaching and learning outcomes. This study retained resource support as one dimension while adding professional learning, innovation, formative assessment, engagement, and student experience. Kasuga and Kalolo (2025) identified dilemmas affecting successful competence-based curriculum implementation in Tanzania, while Hamza et al. (2026) reported that the revised curriculum was

accompanied by staged teacher training intended to support learner-centered practice and twenty-first-century skills. These studies provide the most direct reform context, but neither integrates school-head practice with questionnaire evidence from both teachers and secondary-school students in Mwanza city. That population, respondent, and local implementation gap motivated this research study.

Theoretical Framework and Relationship Of Variables

Human Capital Theory, associated with Becker (1962), proposes that investment in knowledge, skills, and productive capability can yield individual and social returns. Applied to school leadership, teacher development, coaching, formative assessment expertise, and instructional resources are investments that can strengthen teachers' capacity to enact a demanding curriculum. The theory is useful because it identifies the capacity-building pathway through which school-head practice may be connected with educational quality.

The independent construct was school heads' instructional practice, operationalized as modeling active learning, facilitating professional development, encouraging pedagogical innovation, monitoring formative assessment, and providing resources. The outcome construct was perceived quality education, operationalized through active student participation, practical-skill development, regular feedback, responsiveness to individual needs, and access to support. Human Capital Theory predicts a positive, mainly indirect relationship: leadership investments build teacher capacity and improve the conditions in which reform-aligned classroom practices occur. Because this study used descriptive cross-sectional evidence, the relationship is interpreted as a coherent pattern of perceptions and qualitative explanations rather than a causal estimate.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm, Approach and Design

The study was guided by pragmatism and used a mixed-methods approach. A convergent parallel design enabled quantitative and qualitative data to be collected during the same phase, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This design was appropriate because survey distributions established the breadth of participant perceptions, while interviews explained how school heads enacted

instructional leadership. Convergent integration is particularly useful when different data sources address complementary aspects of the same problem (Creswell & Inoue, 2025; Feters et al., 2013).

Study Area and its Justification

The study was conducted in Mwanza City, Tanzania. The area was selected because its public secondary schools serve heterogeneous urban and peri-urban communities, operate under differing resource conditions, and were implementing the 2023 revised curriculum during the study period. The municipality therefore provided a relevant setting for examining whether reform expectations were being translated into leadership and classroom practices across varied school contexts. The concentration of schools and city education offices also made it possible to integrate school-level and system-level perspectives.

Accessible Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The accessible population consisted of all teachers and students in the ten public secondary schools selected for the study, the heads of those schools, and the municipal officers directly responsible for teacher service, school quality assurance, and education administration. The final sample comprised 213 participants: 96 teachers, 104 students, ten school heads, one Teachers Service Commission (TSC) officer, one District School Quality Assurance (DSQA) officer, and one District Education Officer (DEO).

A multistage procedure was used. First, ten public secondary schools were selected by simple random sampling from the municipal sampling frame. Second, teachers and students were organized by school and selected through proportionate stratified random sampling so that each selected school contributed respondents. Third, the ten school heads and three municipal officers were selected purposively because their formal responsibilities provided information directly relevant to curriculum implementation and instructional leadership. Thus, 200 participants completed questionnaires and only 13 key informants were interviewed; the sample of 213 was not treated as a qualitative interview sample.

Instrument Construction, Data Collection and Standardization

Two structured questionnaires were constructed from the study objectives, Human Capital Theory, and the instructional-leadership and competence-based education literature. The teacher instrument contained five items on school-head practices; the student instrument contained five parallel items on experienced classroom quality. Both used a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Wording, response anchors, instructions, administration procedures, and scoring were standardized across schools. A semi-structured interview guide used the same domains to obtain explanatory accounts from school heads and municipal officers.

Questionnaires were administered to the 96 teachers and 104 students. The researcher conducted 13 semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. With consent, interviews were audio recorded and supplemented with field notes before verbatim transcription. Data saturation was assessed iteratively through code redundancy: the final interviews were reviewed against the developing codebook and produced no substantively new category relevant to the study objectives.

Validity and Reliability

Content and face validity were strengthened through review by two educational-management specialists and one measurement specialist, who examined alignment with the objectives, clarity, coverage, and appropriateness for the respondent groups. The instruments were piloted in public secondary schools outside the final sample, and ambiguous wording was revised before administration. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha with .70 as the minimum acceptance rule; this procedure is consistent with established guidance on the interpretation of alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Qualitative trustworthiness was supported by using a common interview protocol, audio recording, verbatim transcription, maintenance of a coding log, comparison of codes across participant categories, and integration with questionnaire evidence. Thematic analysis followed familiarization, initial coding, category development, theme review, definition, and reporting, consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006). Representative quotations were retained to demonstrate the connection between interpretations and participant accounts.

Data Analysis and Mixed-Method Integration

Quantitative data were cleaned and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 27. Frequencies and percentages were reported for each response category, while item means summarized the overall response level. Means from 1.00-1.80 were interpreted as strongly disagree, 1.81-2.60 as disagree, 2.61-3.40 as neutral, 3.41-4.20 as agree, and 4.21-5.00 as strongly agree.

Interview transcripts were managed and coded in NVivo 14. Themes were developed deductively from the study domains while allowing inductive subthemes to be added. Quantitative and qualitative findings were then merged by matching each survey item with the corresponding interview evidence and relevant literature. Convergence, complementarity, and any divergence were considered when drawing the final interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from St. Augustine University of Tanzania, followed by administrative permission from the Mwanza City authorities. Participation was voluntary. Adult respondents provided informed consent; student participation followed assent and applicable parent or guardian consent procedures. Participants were informed of the study purpose, their right to decline or withdraw, and the confidential handling of information. Names of individuals and schools were replaced with participant codes, and recordings and transcripts were stored securely for research purposes only.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tables 1 and 2 report frequencies, percentages, and means; indented interview quotations explain the survey findings and are followed by interpretations supported by previous studies.

Table 1. Teachers' responses on school heads' instructional practices (n = 96)

Item	SDis		Dis		Neu		Agr		SAg		M
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Models active student engagement	4	4.2	5	5.2	10	10.4	39	40.6	38	39.6	4.06
Provides professional development opportunities	5	5.2	6	6.2	11	11.5	41	42.7	33	34.4	3.95
Encourages innovative pedagogical approaches	4	4.2	7	7.3	9	9.4	46	47.9	30	31.2	3.95
Emphasizes formative assessment and feedback	3	3.1	5	5.2	10	10.4	45	46.9	33	34.4	4.04
Ensures access to teaching materials and digital tools	4	4.2	5	5.2	8	8.3	46	47.9	33	34.4	4.03

Note. f = frequency; SDis = strongly disagree; Dis = disagree; Neu = neutral; Agr = agree; SAg = strongly agree; M = mean; scale = 1-5. Source: Field data (2026)

Teachers' perceptions of school-head practices

Data in Table 1 show that 80.2% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school heads modeled active student engagement, with a mean score of 4.06 out of five. The percentage and mean indicate that most teachers perceived learner-centered modeling as a commonly practiced instructional-leadership approach.

We encourage student-centered approaches by modeling them during lesson observations and staff meetings. I often demonstrate how teachers can

engage students through practical activities and appropriate technology. These approaches give learners opportunities to participate actively, solve problems, communicate with others, and express their ideas with confidence. (HoS H, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that school heads translated learner-centered leadership into practical demonstrations during lesson observation and staff meetings. This finding agrees with Özdemir et al. (2024), whose systematic review shows that leadership works through instructional and

organizational conditions. It also supports Raji and Ambotang's (2025) finding that instructional leadership is positively related to teacher quality. Thus, modeling helped teachers understand how reform expectations could be applied in classroom practice, although the evidence does not establish a direct causal effect on achievement.

Concerning professional development, 77.1% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school heads provided professional-development opportunities, with a mean score of 3.95 out of five. These findings imply that most teachers received leadership support for improving their knowledge and instructional skills, although the percentage was the lowest among the teacher items.

"Heads of schools in this region are active in facilitating professional-development workshops focused on implementing the competence-based reform. These workshops help teachers understand new instructional strategies and classroom expectations. Teacher feedback shows that the support strengthens their confidence, improves lesson preparation, and provides a clear basis for quality-assurance follow-up." (DSQA officer, March 2026)

The response shows that workshops helped teachers interpret the competence-based reform, improve lesson preparation, and strengthen confidence in using new strategies. This finding supports Bush and Anania's (2023) evidence that instructional-leadership development can improve leaders' capacity to support teaching. It also agrees with Kaffenberger et al. (2026), who identify ongoing coaching and practice-based training as core components of pedagogical support. The findings therefore suggest that workshops should be reinforced through regular coaching and sustained school-based professional learning.

Regarding pedagogical innovation, 79.2% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school heads encouraged innovative approaches, with a mean score of 3.95 out of five. The responses indicate that many school heads supported technology use, collaboration, problem solving, and other teaching methods associated with the competence-based reform.

"Innovation is an important part of modern education, and school heads must create an environment that supports new teaching methods. We promote collaboration, problem solving, and appropriate

technology in classroom instruction. We also conduct workshops that help teachers incorporate these innovations into their lessons and follow up during supervision." (HoS F, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that innovation was promoted through workshops, supervision, collaboration, problem solving, and appropriate technology. This result is consistent with Kasuga and Kalolo (2025), who describe the competence-based shift toward applied and learner-centered practice in Tanzania. It also reflects the reform's emphasis on creativity and communication reported by Hamza et al. (2026). Therefore, school heads need to combine encouragement with continued supervision so that innovative methods are sustained in classroom instruction.

Data on formative assessment and feedback show that 81.2% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school heads emphasized this practice, with a mean score of 4.04 out of five. The findings imply that formative assessment was widely recognized as an important leadership-supported component of curriculum implementation.

"Formative assessment is central to the competence-based education reform. School heads must ensure that teachers assess competencies regularly, provide constructive feedback, and use the results to adjust subsequent teaching. This process helps learners recognize their progress, address areas of weakness, and improve learning outcomes before the final examinations." (DEO, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that school heads expected teachers to assess competencies regularly, give constructive feedback, and use assessment results to improve subsequent teaching. This finding agrees with Cañadas (2023) on the contribution of formative assessment to competence development and with Wu and Yu (2025) on the importance of supportive conditions in formative assessment. However, Boström and Palm (2023) caution that formative-assessment interventions do not produce uniform achievement effects. Therefore, supervision should examine not only whether assessment occurs but also how its evidence is used to improve learning. Concerning instructional resources, 82.3% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school heads ensured access to teaching materials and digital tools, with a mean score of 4.03 out of five. This was the highest percentage among the teacher

items and indicates that resource support was a visible aspect of school-head instructional practice.

"We focus on giving teachers the resources required to implement the revised curriculum effectively. This includes access to teaching materials, available digital tools, and relevant instructional guidance. When the school cannot provide everything internally, we seek external training and additional support so that teachers can meet learners' needs." (HoS B, March 2026)

The interview response shows that school heads mobilized teaching materials, digital tools,

instructional guidance, and external training when internal resources were inadequate. This pattern supports Aron and Damka's (2024) finding that instructional leadership contributes to effective resource management in Tanzanian public secondary schools. The findings further imply that resource provision should be treated as an instructional responsibility connected directly with curriculum implementation rather than as a purely administrative function.

Table 2. Students' responses on reform-aligned classroom practices (n = 104)

Item	SDis		Dis		Neu		Agr		SAg		M
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Teaching methods encourage active participation	5	4.8	6	5.8	12	11.5	39	37.5	42	40.4	4.03
Lessons develop practical skills rather than memorization	4	3.8	7	6.7	10	9.6	41	39.4	42	40.4	4.06
Regular feedback identifies areas for improvement	3	2.9	5	4.8	9	8.7	41	39.4	46	44.2	4.17
Activities respond to individual learning needs	6	5.8	7	6.7	12	11.5	39	37.5	40	38.5	3.96
Teachers provide support and learning resources	5	4.8	6	5.8	10	9.6	38	36.5	45	43.3	4.08

Note. *f* = frequency; *SDis* = strongly disagree; *Dis* = disagree; *Neu* = neutral; *Agr* = agree; *SAg* = strongly agree; *M* = mean; scale = 1-5. Source: Field data (2026)

Students' perceptions of classroom quality

Data in Table 2 show that 77.9% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that teaching methods encouraged active participation, with a mean score of 4.03 out of five. The percentage and mean indicate that most students experienced discussions, group work, problem solving, and other participatory learning methods.

"We promote active learning methods and ensure that teachers use them consistently in the classroom. We encourage interactive and engaging lessons through group discussions, problem-solving tasks, practical activities, and guided participation. During lesson observations, teachers demonstrate how students are involved in learning rather than listening passively." (HoS A, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that school heads promoted active learning and used lesson observation to ensure that students participated rather than listened passively. This finding complements teachers' reports on leadership modeling and is consistent with the learner-centered direction of the revised curriculum described by Hamza et al. (2026). Kaffenberger et al. (2026) similarly identify interactive instruction as a core pedagogical component. The findings therefore show that classroom participation was supported through both teacher practice and school-head supervision. Regarding practical skills, 79.8% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that lessons developed practical competencies rather than emphasizing memorization, with a mean score of 4.06 out of five. These responses imply that many students

experienced teaching intended to connect classroom knowledge with meaningful application.

"The revised curriculum places strong emphasis on developing practical skills. Teachers are encouraged to plan lessons that promote critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, and the application of knowledge. These competencies enable students to participate meaningfully in lessons and prepare them to respond successfully to real-life situations." (TSC officer, March 2026)

The interview response shows that teachers were encouraged to develop critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, and application of knowledge. This pattern agrees with Kasuga and Kalolo's (2025) account of the intended competence-based shift in Tanzania. However, the evidence represents students' perceptions rather than direct measurements of competence. Future studies should therefore combine learner reports with performance tasks, classroom observation, and assessment records.

Concerning regular feedback, 83.7% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that feedback identified areas for improvement, with a mean score of 4.17 out of five. This was the highest percentage and mean among the student items, indicating that feedback was the most widely recognized reform-aligned classroom practice.

"Feedback is one of the pillars of the competence-based education reform. We encourage schools to provide feedback to students frequently, promptly, and constructively. This enables learners to monitor their progress, understand what they have achieved, identify areas that require improvement, and take appropriate steps toward the intended learning outcomes." (DSQA officer, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that schools were expected to provide feedback frequently, promptly, and constructively so that learners could monitor progress and address weaknesses. The result supports the current evidence on formative assessment reported by Wu and Yu (2025) and Boström and Palm (2023). It also agrees with teachers' reports that school heads emphasized formative assessment. The convergence of the two respondent groups shows that feedback was a visible component of reform implementation in the sampled schools.

Regarding individual learning needs, 76.0% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that classroom activities responded to their differing needs, with a

mean score of 3.96 out of five. Although the responses were generally positive, this was the lowest percentage and mean among the student items, suggesting that differentiated practice required further attention.

"Catering to individual learning needs is a priority in our schools. Teachers are expected to use differentiated teaching methods and provide additional assistance where necessary. This ensures that every student has an opportunity to learn at an appropriate pace, build on individual strengths, and receive support in areas of difficulty." (DEO, March 2026)

The interview response indicates that teachers were expected to vary teaching methods and provide additional support according to learners' individual difficulties and strengths. This finding is consistent with Pozas et al. (2021), who associated students' perceptions of differentiated instruction with positive academic and social outcomes. It also reflects the training and practice gaps identified by Nketsia et al. (2024). School heads should therefore strengthen differentiated instruction through collaborative planning, usable materials, and observation-based feedback.

On teacher support and learning resources, 79.8% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that teachers provided the necessary assistance and materials, with a mean score of 4.08 out of five. The responses indicate that instructional support and resources were available to a substantial majority of students.

"It is important to ensure that teachers and students receive appropriate instructional resources. We focus on providing teaching materials, available digital tools, and further training for teachers. With this support, teachers can organize effective lessons, respond to learners' needs, and help students attain the competencies required by the reform." (HoS C, March 2026)

The interview response shows that schools supported instruction through teaching materials, digital tools, and further teacher training. This result agrees with the teacher finding on resource provision and supports Aron and Damka (2024), who linked instructional leadership with effective resource management. Taken together, the responses indicate that resource mobilization was reflected in classroom support, although the descriptive design cannot determine whether resources caused improved learning outcomes.

Integrated Interpretation

The convergent evidence forms a coherent pathway. Teachers reported that school heads modeled engagement, supported professional learning and innovation, emphasized formative assessment, and mobilized resources. Students reported corresponding classroom experiences of participation, practical skills, feedback, differentiation, and support. Interviews explained this alignment through observation, coaching, workshops, assessment monitoring, and resource mobilization. In Human Capital Theory terms, the leadership practices represent investments in teacher and school instructional capacity, while the student experiences represent the perceived educational conditions through which those investments may produce returns.

The strongest teacher finding concerned resource support at 82.3% with a mean of 4.03, while the strongest student finding concerned regular feedback at 83.7% with a mean of 4.17. Professional development among teachers received 77.1% with a mean of 3.95, and responsiveness to individual needs among students received 76.0% with a mean of 3.96. These results support a generally positive implementation pattern while also showing the areas in which school leadership and classroom practice require further strengthening.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Human Capital Theory proposes that investment in professional capability and enabling resources strengthens productive performance. Consistent with that proposition, the integrated evidence shows that school heads in the sampled public secondary schools were perceived to build instructional capacity through professional support, pedagogical guidance, formative-assessment monitoring, and resource provision. Teachers' accounts of these leadership practices corresponded with students' reports of active participation, practical-skill orientation, feedback, differentiated learning, and support. The study therefore concludes deductively that school-head instructional practice formed an important enabling condition for perceived quality education under the 2023 reform. This conclusion is deliberately limited to an associative, perception-based claim; the cross-sectional descriptive evidence does not establish that the leadership practices caused changes in student achievement.

Recommendations

1. City education authorities should institutionalize regular school-based professional learning and coaching on learner-centered pedagogy rather than depend mainly on one-off workshops.
2. School heads should combine lesson observation with timely, developmental feedback focused on student participation, practical competence, and differentiated support.
3. Schools should establish routine formative-assessment reviews that examine not only whether assessment occurred but how evidence was used to adapt instruction and give feedback to learners.
4. City and school leaders should map resource gaps and prioritize equitable access to curriculum materials and context-appropriate digital tools.
5. Future evaluations should add classroom observation, competency-based performance measures, and longitudinal or multilevel analysis to test whether the reported leadership practices predict learning outcomes.

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