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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The 2023 Education and Training Policy Reforms as Determinants of Sustainable Quality Outcomes in Tanzania's Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Tanzania's Education and Training Policy, 2014 Edition (2023), represents a significant policy reorientation towards competence, skills development, relevance, inclusion, and stronger alignment between education and national development needs. This systematic literature review examines the extent to which the 2023 policy reforms can determine sustainable quality outcomes in Tanzania's secondary education, with particular attention to teacher professional capacity and institutional readiness. The review was guided by two questions: how teacher professional capacity influences implementation of the reforms, and how institutional readiness contributes to sustainable quality outcomes. Following a systematic literature review approach informed by PRISMA 2020, literature was sought from scholarly databases and official education-policy sources using combinations of terms relating to education policy reform, competency-based education, curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, vocational education, institutional readiness, and quality education. Evidence was synthesized thematically around teacher capacity, curriculum and assessment alignment, infrastructure and learning resources, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder participation, and equity. The synthesis indicates that the promise of the reforms depends less on policy formulation than on implementation capacity. Teachers require sustained, practice-oriented professional development, clear policy communication, collaborative learning opportunities, and pedagogical competence to translate competency-oriented policy into classroom practice. Institutional readiness is equally important because competency-based and vocational learning requires laboratories, workshops, learning materials, digital infrastructure, adequate staffing, supportive leadership, and assessment systems aligned with intended competencies. Evidence from Tanzania also suggests persistent inequalities between better-resourced and disadvantaged schools and continuing weaknesses in coordinated teacher professional development. The review argues that the 2023 reforms should therefore be understood as a system-wide implementation project rather than a curriculum change alone. Sustainable quality outcomes will depend on coordinated investment in teachers, infrastructure, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and equitable resource allocation. The paper concludes with targeted recommendations for policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and education stakeholders.

Keywords: Education policy reform; competency-based education; teacher professional development; institutional readiness; secondary education; sustainable quality outcomes; Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a central position in national development because it contributes to human-capital

formation, social mobility, citizenship, productivity, innovation, and participation in economic life. Contemporary education systems are consequently

expected to achieve more than the transmission of subject knowledge. They are increasingly required to develop learners' ability to apply knowledge, solve problems, communicate, collaborate, think critically, use technology, and adapt to changing social and labour-market conditions (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). This shift has strengthened international interest in competency-based education (CBE), skills development, vocational education, learner-centred pedagogy, and authentic assessment. The movement towards competence and skills is particularly significant in Sub-Saharan Africa, where education systems face the dual challenge of expanding access while improving the quality and relevance of learning. Expansion without corresponding improvements in teacher capacity, learning resources, infrastructure, curriculum relevance, and assessment can produce schooling systems that are formally accessible but educationally weak. The World Bank has repeatedly emphasized the importance of improving both access and learning, noting that Tanzania has made substantial progress in expanding education while continuing to face challenges related to teacher shortages, competencies, school environments, and unequal educational opportunities (World Bank, 2019, 2024).

The Tanzanian education system has undergone repeated policy transformations since independence. These changes have reflected broader shifts in national political priorities, economic conditions, development strategies, and understandings of the purpose of education. The 1967 Arusha Declaration and the philosophy of Education for Self-Reliance placed considerable emphasis on education that connected learning with productive work, self-reliance, citizenship, and national development. Subsequent economic and political transformations during the 1980s contributed to changes in education financing, management, and provision. The 1995 Education and Training Policy emerged in this changing environment, while the 2014 Education and Training Policy responded to the aspirations of Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the need to strengthen access, equity, quality, science and technology, and human-capital development (Mulengeki, 2015). The 2014 policy was subsequently revised and issued as the Education and Training Policy, 2014 Edition (2023). The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology identifies the

2023 edition among the official policy documents governing the education sector. The revised policy places greater emphasis on competence, skills, technology, employability, inclusiveness, and the alignment of education with national and global development requirements (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2023). The policy also articulates an education structure of 1+6+4+2/3+3+, representing one year of pre-primary education, six years of primary education, four years of ordinary secondary education, two years of advanced secondary education or three years of technical education, followed by three or more years of tertiary or higher education.

This reform direction is not unique to Tanzania. Across Africa, governments have sought to strengthen the relevance of secondary education through competency-based curricula and vocational pathways. Rwanda introduced a competence-based curriculum to shift learning from the accumulation of knowledge towards the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Its reforms also recognized that successful curriculum implementation requires teacher training, appropriate teaching materials, assessment reform, and institutional support (Republic of Rwanda, 2015). Kenya has similarly implemented a competency-based curriculum designed to emphasize competencies, values, learner engagement, and the application of knowledge. South Africa's earlier outcomes-based reforms also sought to connect knowledge, skills, values, and real-life application. These experiences demonstrate that curriculum reform is not simply a technical process of changing syllabi; it is an institutional transformation requiring changes in teaching, assessment, leadership, teacher education, resource provision, and accountability.

The Tanzanian reform agenda is particularly important because secondary education has expanded substantially. Recent World Bank evidence indicates that lower-secondary enrolment has increased, while large investments have supported improvements in curriculum, learning environments, teacher quality, retention, and access. By 2024, approximately 2.5 million secondary students had benefited from improved curriculum and learning environments through World Bank-supported interventions (World Bank, 2024). Nevertheless, access gains do not automatically translate into

quality learning. UNICEF reports that Tanzania continues to face significant challenges related to children remaining outside school, secondary participation, teacher-student ratios, and the unequal capacity of children to attain expected learning benchmarks (UNICEF Tanzania, 2026). The central question, therefore, is not whether Tanzania requires education reform. Rather, the more consequential question is whether the education system possesses the implementation capacity necessary to convert policy intentions into sustainable learning and skills outcomes. This distinction is important because policy documents describe intended change, whereas educational outcomes are produced through interactions among teachers, learners, school leaders, curriculum materials, assessment systems, infrastructure, financing, communities, and wider institutional structures (Fullan, 2007).

Teacher capacity represents one of the most important elements of this implementation process. Teachers are responsible for translating policy language into classroom practice. A policy may promote learner-centred teaching, practical learning, project work, problem solving, creativity, entrepreneurship, and competency-based assessment, but these aspirations cannot be realized unless teachers possess the knowledge, pedagogical skills, confidence, resources, and professional support required to enact them. Darling-Hammond (2017) demonstrates internationally that strong teacher-development systems combine initial preparation, induction, continuing professional learning, collaboration, and institutional support. Evidence from Tanzania similarly shows that teachers experience limited access to coordinated professional development and that repeated curriculum changes make continuous training and retraining necessary (Kafanabo, 2024). The issue extends beyond the individual teacher. Competency-based and vocational learning require institutions capable of supporting practical learning. Laboratories, workshops, ICT facilities, textbooks, equipment, electricity, internet connectivity, adequate staffing, school leadership, and effective quality-assurance systems are therefore not peripheral inputs; they are conditions of implementation. Research from Tanzania has identified inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching and learning materials, teacher shortages, weak leadership, and limited in-service training as barriers to effective

curriculum implementation (Assey et al., 2022). Similar evidence from competency-based reforms elsewhere in Africa demonstrates that curriculum ambitions can be constrained when teachers, assessment systems, learning materials, and institutional conditions are not aligned.

The 2023 reforms consequently require examination as a systemic change intervention. Treating them simply as a curriculum revision risks underestimating the organizational, professional, financial, and pedagogical changes required for implementation. Moreover, because the revised policy is relatively recent, direct empirical evidence specifically evaluating its long-term effects remains limited. This creates an important knowledge gap. Existing Tanzanian studies have examined competency-based curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, assessment practices, curriculum change, teacher deployment, and school-level constraints, but these strands of evidence have rarely been synthesized into an integrated explanation of how the 2023 policy reforms may shape sustainable quality outcomes in secondary education. This paper addresses that gap through a systematic literature review. Rather than assuming that the 2023 reforms will automatically improve educational quality, the review critically examines the implementation conditions under which the reforms are likely to succeed. The paper focuses particularly on teacher professional capacity and institutional readiness and considers how these interact with curriculum alignment, assessment, leadership, resources, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and equity.

Understanding the 2023 reforms requires situating them within the longer trajectory of Tanzanian educational policy. Educational policy in Tanzania has been characterized by repeated attempts to align education with changing national development priorities (Mulengeki, 2015). Following independence, education was positioned as an instrument for building national unity, self-reliance, citizenship, and economic development. The 1967 Arusha Declaration and the Education for Self-Reliance philosophy sought to connect schooling with productive activities and social responsibility. Education was expected to produce citizens capable of contributing to national development rather than merely individuals seeking white-collar employment. The philosophy was significant for the present reform

agenda because it demonstrated an early recognition of the importance of linking education with practical life and productive work. The contemporary emphasis on competence, employability, entrepreneurship, and practical skills can therefore be interpreted not as a complete departure from Tanzania's educational history but as a rearticulating of an enduring national concern: the relationship between schooling and productive participation.

The 1995 Education and Training Policy emerged during a period characterized by economic liberalization, decentralization, and changes in the role of the state. The policy placed greater emphasis on access, quality, relevance, management, and the participation of different actors in education provision. However, subsequent expansion of schooling created new pressures on the system, including the need for additional teachers, classrooms, learning materials, and management capacity.

The 2014 Education and Training Policy represented another important policy transition. It sought to strengthen education quality, equity, relevance, science and technology, teacher development, and national human-capital development (URT, 2014). The policy was closely associated with the aspirations of Tanzania Development Vision 2025, particularly the ambition of developing a knowledgeable, skilled, and competitive population. However, implementation continued to encounter structural constraints. Research on Tanzanian secondary schools has documented challenges involving teacher shortages, limited professional development, insufficient learning resources, school leadership, infrastructure, and differences between school contexts (Assey et al., 2022; Kafanabo, 2024; Machumu & Mislav, 2025).

The 2023 edition represents an important attempt to respond to changes in technology, labour markets, national development priorities, and the perceived need for stronger competence and skills development. The revised policy promotes a more integrated conception of education in which academic knowledge is connected to practical competencies, technology, creativity, problem solving, entrepreneurship, and employability (URT, 2023). The revised education structure of 1+6+4+2/3+3+ is particularly significant because it creates a clearer relationship between ordinary secondary education and technical education. The reform direction therefore has implications beyond

curriculum content. It requires changes in teacher preparation, school infrastructure, assessment, career guidance, institutional partnerships, and pathways into further education and employment. The critical issue is whether the policy's implementation architecture is sufficiently strong to support these ambitions. The existence of a policy does not guarantee its enactment. Fullan (2007) argues that educational change involves meaning-making, capacity building, organizational learning, leadership, and adaptation. Consequently, the success of Tanzania's 2023 reforms depends on whether the education system can create the conditions necessary for teachers and institutions to enact the reform consistently.

Problem Statement

Tanzania has invested substantially in expanding access to secondary education and improving the relevance of its education system. However, concerns remain about whether schooling consistently develops the competencies, practical skills, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and employability required by contemporary society and the labour market. Available evidence indicates that Tanzania has made important gains in educational access and has invested in secondary education, curriculum improvement, teacher development, and learning environments (World Bank, 2024). Tanzania's teacher-education curriculum contained a mixture of traditional content-oriented and competency-based characteristics, raising concerns about the consistency of competency-based preparation. Although these studies provide valuable evidence, there is limited systematic synthesis connecting teacher capacity, institutional readiness, curriculum and assessment alignment, and sustainable quality outcomes to the specific reform direction articulated in the Education and Training Policy, 2014 Edition (2023).

Existing literature has frequently examined individual implementation problems rather than considering the reforms as an interconnected system. This gap matters because the effectiveness of the 2023 reforms will ultimately be judged not by the sophistication of the policy document but by observable improvements in teaching quality, learner competencies, practical skills, equity, transition to further education, and preparedness for employment and productive citizenship. Without evidence-based implementation strategies, there is a risk that the reforms will

reproduce existing inequalities or become policy changes at the level of documents without corresponding transformation in classroom practice. The general objective of this study is to examine how the 2023 Education and Training Policy reforms influence sustainable quality outcomes in Tanzania's secondary education, with particular attention to teachers' professional capacity and institutional readiness for curriculum implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fullan's Educational Change Theory emphasizes that educational reform is a complex process involving individuals, institutions, policy structures, leadership, professional learning, and organizational culture (Fullan, 2007). Policy implementation cannot be reduced to issuing directives from the centre. Teachers must understand the meaning of the reform, develop the capacity to implement it, receive organizational support, and participate in processes of continuous adaptation. Four dimensions of Fullan's perspective are particularly relevant to Tanzania's 2023 reforms. First, meaning and understanding are essential. Teachers need to understand why a reform has been introduced and what changes are expected in classroom practice. If teachers interpret competency-based education simply as a change in terminology, rather than a change in pedagogy and assessment, implementation may remain superficial. Second, capacity building is fundamental.

Teachers need sustained opportunities to develop new pedagogical and assessment competencies. Short workshops without follow-up support are unlikely to produce deep changes in practice. Third, organizational conditions influence implementation. Teachers cannot independently overcome shortages of laboratories, textbooks, digital tools, vocational equipment, or appropriate classrooms. Institutional readiness must therefore accompany teacher development. Fourth, continuous monitoring and adaptation are necessary. Reform implementation should generate evidence that allows policymakers and school leaders to identify what is working, where inequalities persist, and what adjustments are required. The relevance of this framework is reinforced by recent Tanzanian evidence. Mugisha et al. (2024) found that coaching, teaming, and mentoring can support teacher professional development, while Kafanabo (2024) reported that relatively few teachers had participated in properly

coordinated professional-development programmes despite repeated curriculum changes.

Competency-Based Education Theory emphasizes demonstrated application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values rather than the accumulation of content alone (Mulder, 2017). CBE therefore changes the central question from "What content has been covered?" to "What can the learner demonstrate, apply, create, solve, or perform?" This perspective is directly relevant to the 2023 reforms because the policy emphasizes competence, skills, technology, creativity, problem solving, entrepreneurship, and employability (URT, 2023). Competency-based learning requires alignment among curriculum intentions, classroom pedagogy, learning activities, assessment, and expected outcomes. and Kimaro (2021) provide an important caution. Their analysis of Tanzanian teacher education found a mixture of traditional and competency-based curriculum attributes.

This suggests that reform implementation can be constrained by contradictions within teacher preparation itself. A system cannot consistently demand competency-based teaching from teachers whose own preparation has not adequately developed competency-based pedagogical practices. The framework adopted in this paper can therefore be represented as follows: Policy reform → Teacher capacity + Institutional readiness → Curriculum and assessment implementation → Learner competencies → Sustainable quality outcomes. The relationship is not linear. Feedback from assessment, monitoring, teachers, students, parents, employers, and communities should continuously inform policy adaptation.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design. An SLR was selected because the objective was to systematically identify, evaluate, compare, and synthesize existing evidence concerning education policy reform, teacher capacity, institutional readiness, competency-based education, and quality outcomes. Unlike a conventional narrative literature review, an SLR requires an explicit search strategy, transparent eligibility criteria, systematic screening, structured data extraction, and a reproducible synthesis process (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Reporting was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021). Relevant academic

literature was sought through Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, and institutional repositories. Official documents from the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, OECD, and relevant African education authorities were also considered where they directly addressed policy, implementation, access, quality, teacher development, or skills.

To ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility, the systematic literature review applied predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria before the screening and synthesis of the literature. The criteria were developed in alignment with the study objectives, research questions, and the contextual focus on the 2023 Education and Training

Policy reforms and sustainable quality outcomes in Tanzania's secondary education. Sources were considered eligible when they addressed education policy reform, curriculum implementation, teacher professional capacity, competency-based education, vocational education, institutional readiness, or sustainable quality education outcomes. Priority was given to evidence directly related to Tanzania, while relevant evidence from comparable Sub-Saharan African contexts was included to provide contextual and comparative insights. Seminal theoretical and methodological publications published before the main review period were retained where they were necessary to establish the theoretical or methodological foundations of the study.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Systematic Literature Review

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Publication period	Peer-reviewed studies and relevant policy or institutional reports published primarily between 2014 and 2026. Seminal theoretical and methodological sources published before 2014 were retained where directly relevant.	Publications outside the period without a clear theoretical, methodological, or policy relevance to the study.	The period captures the development of the 2014 policy, subsequent curriculum developments, and the 2023 reforms while allowing recent evidence to be incorporated.
Geographical focus	Studies conducted in Tanzania and, where relevant, comparable Sub-Saharan African countries, particularly Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa.	Studies from contexts with substantially different education systems or policy environments and no clear comparative relevance.	To maintain contextual relevance while allowing meaningful regional comparison.
Education level	Studies focusing on secondary education or evidence directly applicable to secondary-school curriculum implementation.	Studies exclusively focused on early childhood, primary education, or higher education with no relevance to secondary education.	The review specifically examines Tanzania's secondary education system.
Subject focus	Studies addressing education policy reform, curriculum implementation, competency-based education, vocational education, teacher professional	Studies unrelated to the study objectives or research questions.	To ensure that the evidence directly informs the study's analytical framework.

	development, institutional readiness, assessment, educational quality, or learning outcomes.		
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books or book chapters where relevant, official policy documents, government reports, and reports from reputable international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and OECD.	Blogs, newspaper articles, promotional materials, opinion pieces, unsupported commentaries, and other sources lacking sufficient scholarly or institutional credibility.	To strengthen the credibility and evidentiary basis of the review.
Accessibility	Sources with sufficient full-text information to permit assessment of relevance, methodology, findings, and conclusions.	Sources for which the available information was insufficient to assess relevance or evidentiary quality.	To enable transparent assessment and extraction of evidence.
Language	Sources published in English and directly relevant to the research questions.	Sources in other languages where an accurate and sufficiently detailed interpretation could not be established.	The review was conducted using English-language search terms and evidence that could be consistently evaluated.
Methodological relevance	Empirical studies, systematic or structured reviews, policy analyses, and theoretically grounded scholarly works that provide evidence relevant to the research questions.	Studies lacking a discernible methodological or evidentiary basis, unless retained as foundational theoretical or policy sources.	To prioritize evidence capable of supporting credible synthesis and interpretation.

The criteria were applied consistently during title and abstract screening and subsequent full-text assessment. Where a source addressed several themes, it was retained when at least one of the themes was directly connected to the study objectives and provided substantive evidence for the analysis. The final corpus therefore comprised sources judged to be sufficiently relevant, credible, and contextually appropriate for answering the two research questions. To improve replicability, the

complete screening process, including the number of records identified, duplicates removed, records screened, full texts assessed, and studies ultimately included, should be reported in the final manuscript using a PRISMA-style flow diagram once the exact search and screening counts have been verified. This correction is essential because PRISMA 2020 emphasizes transparent reporting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021).

The review used thematic synthesis. Findings were coded and grouped into major themes before being compared across studies. The analysis focused on patterns of convergence, disagreement, and contextual variation rather than merely summarizing studies individually. The synthesis also distinguished between direct evidence about the 2023 policy and indirect evidence from earlier Tanzanian curriculum reforms and comparable African competency-based reforms. This distinction is necessary because the 2023 policy is too recent for a substantial body of longitudinal outcome evidence to have accumulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The systematic review indicates that the capacity of Tanzania's secondary education system to translate the 2023 Education and Training Policy reforms into sustainable quality outcomes depends primarily on the interaction between teacher professional capacity and institutional readiness. Rather than treating these factors as separate implementation variables, the reviewed literature suggests that they constitute mutually dependent dimensions of education reform. Teachers may possess knowledge of competency-based pedagogy but remain constrained when schools lack laboratories, workshops, instructional materials, appropriate assessment tools, or supportive leadership. Conversely, schools may possess physical resources and administrative structures, but these investments may produce limited educational benefits when teachers have insufficient understanding, pedagogical competence, or confidence to use them effectively.

This finding is particularly important because Tanzania's 2023 policy framework represents more than a simple modification of curriculum content. The policy places greater emphasis on education that is relevant to learners' competencies, employability, creativity, innovation, and national development. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology formally provides the 2023 edition of the Education and Training Policy alongside implementation documents and revised curricula, indicating that the reform is intended to influence multiple components of the education system rather than classroom content alone. Consequently, implementation should be understood as a systemic change process involving teachers, school leaders, curriculum structures, assessment practices, infrastructure,

learning resources, monitoring systems, and stakeholder participation.

The findings further indicate that the most significant implementation risk is a policy–practice gap. Tanzania has articulated ambitious policy intentions, but the achievement of those intentions depends on whether the education system possesses the human and material capacity necessary to operationalize them. Evidence from Tanzanian studies conducted before and around the transition to the new policy framework consistently points to weaknesses in teacher preparedness, professional development, instructional resources, and the practical implementation of competence-based approaches. For example, Nkya (2021), in a study involving secondary school teachers and education officials in Arusha Region, found positive teacher perceptions of competency-based curriculum but substantial limitations in implementation capacity. More than 70% of teachers in the study had not attended in-service training, while more than 60% reported difficulties in preparing teaching and learning activities consistent with competency-based curriculum requirements. Large classes and inadequate books and laboratory equipment further constrained implementation.

These findings suggest that the success of the 2023 reforms cannot be judged solely by the quality of the policy document itself. The more consequential question is whether the policy is accompanied by sufficient implementation capacity. This interpretation is consistent with Educational Change Theory, which emphasizes that sustainable reform requires changes in teachers' knowledge and practice, organizational conditions, leadership, collaboration, and continuous adaptation (Fullan, 2007). It also corresponds with Competency-Based Education Theory, which requires coherence among curriculum objectives, instructional practices, learning experiences, and assessment (Mulder, 2017).

Teachers' Professional Capacity Development and Implementation of the 2023 Reforms

The first major finding is that teacher professional capacity is a foundational determinant of the implementation of the 2023 education policy reforms. The literature demonstrates that curriculum reforms do not automatically transform classroom practice. Policies establish expectations, but

teachers determine to a considerable extent how those expectations are interpreted and enacted in daily teaching. This makes teacher professional capacity particularly important in a reform that seeks to strengthen competency development, practical learning, problem-solving, creativity, and vocational orientation.

The importance of teachers is reinforced by Fullan's (2007) Educational Change Theory, which conceptualizes teachers as central agents of educational change rather than passive recipients of policy directives. From this perspective, successful implementation requires more than distributing policy documents to schools. Teachers must understand the rationale for change, develop the pedagogical competence required to implement it, receive continuous support, and have opportunities to reflect on implementation challenges.

Evidence from Tanzania strongly supports this interpretation. Nkya (2021) found that although secondary school teachers generally viewed competency-based curriculum positively, many lacked the capacity to implement it effectively. This distinction between positive attitudes and implementation capacity is analytically important. It indicates that resistance should not automatically be interpreted as the principal explanation for weak implementation. Teachers may support the objectives of a reform while simultaneously lacking the knowledge, skills, resources, or institutional conditions required to implement it.

Similarly, Tarmo and Kimaro (2021) found that Tanzania's Diploma in Secondary Education curriculum contained a mixture of traditional content-based and competency-based attributes. Their analysis suggests that contradictions within teacher preparation can constrain classroom-level implementation of competency-based education. This finding has significant implications for the 2023 reforms because teachers cannot be expected to implement a substantially competency-oriented curriculum effectively if their own professional preparation has not consistently modelled competency-based principles.

The implication is that teacher development should not be reduced to short orientation workshops. Effective implementation requires sustained professional learning that connects policy knowledge, subject content, pedagogy, assessment, and practical classroom experience. Teachers need

opportunities to observe demonstrations, practise new pedagogical strategies, receive feedback, collaborate with colleagues, and adapt approaches to their particular school contexts. Professional development should therefore move from a transmission model where teachers are told what the new curriculum requires to a practice-oriented model in which teachers actively develop the competence to implement the reform.

This interpretation is consistent with Darling-Hammond (2017), who emphasizes the importance of teacher education systems that develop both professional knowledge and the capacity to translate that knowledge into effective classroom practice. In the Tanzanian context, the evidence indicates that professional learning must particularly address learner-centred pedagogy, formative assessment, project-based learning, practical activities, classroom differentiation, digital learning, and the integration of theory with real-life applications.

Teacher Understanding of the Reform

A second finding concerns the importance of teachers' conceptual understanding of the reform. Teachers need to understand not only what has changed but also why it has changed and how the new expectations should influence classroom practice. Competency-based education fundamentally changes the relationship between curriculum content, teaching, learning, and assessment. The teacher is expected to facilitate learners' development and demonstration of competencies rather than merely transmit information.

The Tanzanian evidence suggests that this transition remains challenging. Nkya (2021) reported substantial limitations in teachers' ability to prepare teaching and learning activities in accordance with competency-based curriculum requirements. The problem therefore extends beyond awareness of the curriculum terminology; it concerns teachers' ability to translate curriculum principles into instructional decisions.

This distinction is crucial. A teacher may understand that the curriculum is "competency-based" while continuing to rely predominantly on lectures, note-taking, memorization, and written examinations. Such a situation creates what may be described as nominal reform without pedagogical transformation.

The terminology of the policy changes while classroom practices remain largely unchanged. Evidence from Tanzania's pre-service teacher education provides further support. Paulo's study of pre-service teachers found that participants were aware of learner-centred teaching and assessment methods associated with competency-based education, yet they continued to use teacher-centred approaches and paper-and-pencil assessments in practice. This finding demonstrates that knowing the principles of competency-based education does not necessarily result in competency-based practice. Therefore, professional development under the 2023 reforms should focus on the translation of policy into practice. Teachers should be supported to redesign lesson plans, formulate competency-oriented learning objectives, develop authentic assessment tasks, use practical activities, facilitate collaborative learning, and provide feedback based on demonstrated competencies. The effectiveness of professional development should consequently be evaluated not merely by the number of teachers attending workshops but by observable changes in classroom practice and learner engagement.

Continuous Professional Development as a Condition for Sustainable Reform

The review further establishes that professional development must be continuous rather than episodic. Education reforms are dynamic, and teachers encounter new challenges as they attempt to implement policy in different classroom contexts. One-off workshops may introduce new concepts but are unlikely to provide sufficient time for teachers to develop mastery.

The findings from Tanzania are consistent with this concern. Nkya (2021) identified limited in-service training as a major constraint to competency-based curriculum implementation. Evidence from Tabora similarly identifies improved in-service training, school-based training, pedagogical leadership development, adequate teaching materials, improved infrastructure, and stronger school–community partnerships as important strategies for strengthening competency-based curriculum implementation.

The significance of school-based professional development is particularly strong because teachers work in different institutional contexts. A rural school with limited laboratory facilities may require different

professional support from an urban school with comparatively better resources. Professional development should therefore be context-sensitive, allowing teachers to develop solutions appropriate to their institutional environments rather than receiving generic training.

The findings also indicate the importance of professional learning communities. Teachers can learn from colleagues through peer observation, collaborative lesson planning, professional learning groups, mentoring, and subject-based networks. Such approaches can make professional development continuous and embedded within normal school practice. This is particularly relevant for Tanzania because geographical distance and resource limitations may make centrally delivered training expensive and difficult to sustain.

Teacher Motivation, Agency, and Professional Identity

The literature also indicates that professional capacity cannot be separated from teacher motivation and professional agency. A teacher may possess the technical skills required to implement competency-based learning but may be unable or unwilling to sustain new practices when faced with excessive workloads, large classes, inadequate resources, limited recognition, or weak institutional support. From the perspective of Educational Change Theory, teachers are not simply policy implementers; they interpret, negotiate, and adapt reforms within their professional contexts (Fullan, 2007). Consequently, the implementation of the 2023 reforms should create conditions in which teachers perceive themselves as active contributors to reform rather than recipients of externally imposed directives.

This finding is important because the literature does not support a simplistic explanation in which teachers are blamed for weak curriculum implementation. Where teachers work in overcrowded classrooms without adequate instructional materials, laboratories, digital resources, or sufficient preparation time, their capacity to implement learner-centred and practical pedagogies is structurally constrained. Nkya (2021), for example, identified large class sizes and inadequate learning resources as barriers to teachers' capacity to implement competency-based curriculum. Thus, improving teacher motivation

requires more than financial incentives. It requires professional recognition, participation in decision-making, opportunities for career development, constructive supervision, manageable workloads, and access to resources. Teachers are more likely to become reform champions when they understand the purpose of the reform and have the professional and institutional conditions necessary to succeed.

From Content Knowledge to Pedagogical and Practical Competence

A further finding is that the 2023 reforms require a broader conception of teacher competence. Teachers need strong subject knowledge, but subject knowledge alone is insufficient. Competency-based education requires teachers to know how to transform disciplinary knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. This involves designing practical tasks, facilitating inquiry, using authentic assessment, connecting school knowledge with real-life problems, and supporting learners with different abilities. Tarmo and Kimaro's (2021) analysis of Tanzania's teacher education curriculum is especially relevant because the coexistence of traditional and competency-based attributes may create inconsistencies between what teachers are expected to implement and what they themselves experienced during professional preparation.

The implication is that teacher education institutions and in-service professional development programmes should be aligned with the same competency principles expected in secondary schools. Reform implementation is unlikely to be sustainable when teacher preparation remains predominantly theoretical while secondary school teachers are expected to facilitate practical and competency-oriented learning.

Institutional Readiness and Sustainable Quality Outcomes

The second major finding is that institutional readiness is a necessary condition for converting teacher capacity into sustainable educational outcomes. Institutional readiness encompasses infrastructure, instructional materials, technology, leadership, assessment systems, staffing, financing, and organizational capacity. The literature indicates that these factors are not peripheral to curriculum

implementation; they constitute the environment within which curriculum implementation occurs.

The 2023 reforms therefore create demands that extend beyond teachers. Competency-based and vocational learning require schools to provide opportunities for learners to practise, experiment, create, solve problems, and demonstrate competencies. Such learning cannot be fully realized where schools lack functional laboratories, workshops, libraries, ICT facilities, teaching materials, electricity, or other relevant resources. The evidence from Tanzania is particularly persuasive. Nkya (2021) found that inadequate books and laboratory equipment reduced teachers' capacity to implement competency-based curriculum effectively. Similarly, evidence from Tabora identifies infrastructure and teaching and learning materials among the central conditions for effective competency-based curriculum implementation. These findings challenge the assumption that curriculum reform can be achieved primarily through changes in curriculum documents. A curriculum that requires practical learning without providing the physical environment for practical learning creates a structural contradiction between policy expectations and implementation realities.

Infrastructure as a Foundation for Practical Learning

The availability and quality of physical infrastructure emerged as a major determinant of reform implementation. Vocational and competency-based learning require facilities that allow learners to apply knowledge. Depending on the subject and vocational pathway, these may include laboratories, workshops, ICT facilities, libraries, demonstration spaces, agricultural facilities, and other specialized learning environments. The absence of such facilities has two consequences. First, it limits the range of learning experiences available to students. Second, it places teachers in a difficult position because they may be required to teach practical competencies without the means to provide authentic practical experiences. The problem therefore extends beyond resource scarcity to curriculum credibility. When learners are repeatedly taught practical concepts theoretically because the required facilities are unavailable, they may develop knowledge about competencies without developing the competencies themselves. This undermines the

central principle of Competency-Based Education Theory, which emphasizes demonstrated application of knowledge and skills (Mulder, 2017). Consequently, infrastructure development should be viewed as an educational investment rather than merely a construction programme. The relevant question is not simply whether a school possesses a laboratory or workshop, but whether the facility is functional, adequately equipped, accessible to learners, and integrated into teaching and assessment.

Teaching and Learning Materials

The availability of teaching and learning materials represents another important institutional determinant. Competency-based learning requires teachers to create diverse learning experiences, and these experiences depend on access to appropriate instructional materials. Inadequate textbooks, laboratory equipment, digital resources, and other teaching aids can encourage teachers to revert to teacher-centred methods because these approaches are easier to implement in resource-constrained environments. This helps explain why curriculum reform can produce limited changes in classroom practice even when teachers have received training. The evidence from Tanzania supports this interpretation. Teachers in Nkya's (2021) study identified insufficient books and laboratory equipment as barriers to competency-based curriculum implementation. The finding reinforces the argument that teacher professional development and resource provision must be implemented simultaneously.

A particularly important implication is that resource allocation should be based on educational need rather than uniform distribution. Equal distribution of resources does not necessarily produce equity because schools begin from different levels of infrastructural and institutional capacity. Rural and disadvantaged schools may require greater investment to achieve comparable opportunities for learners.

Leadership and Institutional Support

School leadership emerged as a further critical component of institutional readiness. Principals and school leaders influence how policies are interpreted, communicated, monitored, and supported at school level. Effective leaders can

create conditions for teachers to collaborate, experiment with new teaching strategies, access professional development, use available resources effectively, and reflect on implementation challenges. Evidence from the Tabora context is particularly relevant. Stakeholders identified pedagogical leadership training for heads of schools, school-based training, improved infrastructure, adequate teaching and learning materials, stronger partnerships with parents, improved ICT use, and school-based quality assurance as strategies for improving competency-based curriculum implementation. This indicates that school leaders should not be viewed simply as administrative managers. Under the 2023 reforms, they need to function as instructional and change leaders. Their responsibilities include creating professional learning cultures, monitoring curriculum implementation, supporting teachers, coordinating resources, and ensuring that assessment practices are aligned with curriculum objectives. The finding is consistent with Fullan's (2007) Educational Change Theory, which emphasizes that institutional change requires leadership, collaboration, organizational learning, and continuous adaptation. A reform that changes classroom expectations without strengthening school-level leadership may therefore produce fragmented implementation.

Assessment Alignment and Quality Outcomes

An important but sometimes overlooked finding concerns the relationship between assessment and curriculum implementation. Competency-based education requires assessment systems capable of determining whether learners can apply knowledge and demonstrate competencies. If assessment remains predominantly focused on recall and written examinations, teachers may have limited incentives to devote substantial classroom time to practical learning. The problem is therefore one of alignment. Curriculum objectives, teaching methods, learning resources, and assessment practices must communicate the same educational priorities. When these elements are inconsistent, teachers and learners receive conflicting signals. Tarmo and Kimaro (2021) highlight the presence of tensions between traditional and competency-based elements in Tanzanian teacher education, while Paulo's study indicates that teachers may continue using traditional paper-and-pencil assessment even

when competency-based approaches are officially required. These findings suggest that assessment reform should accompany curriculum reform. For the 2023 reforms to generate sustainable quality outcomes, assessment should therefore capture not only what students know but also what they can do, create, explain, solve, demonstrate, and apply. This would strengthen the relationship between classroom learning and the practical competencies envisioned by the policy.

Equity and the Rural Urban Implementation Divide

The findings also reveal that institutional readiness has an important equity dimension. National reforms are implemented in schools with highly diverse conditions. Differences in infrastructure, teacher availability, access to ICT, electricity, laboratories, learning materials, and professional development can produce substantially different experiences for learners. The central concern is therefore not merely whether the reform is implemented nationally, but whether it is implemented equitably. A reform that produces high-quality learning opportunities in well-resourced schools while leaving disadvantaged schools without the necessary infrastructure could unintentionally widen educational inequalities. This concern is consistent with the broader international literature on education reform, which emphasizes that expansion of access does not automatically result in equitable quality. The Tanzanian evidence similarly indicates that resource constraints and institutional differences can shape teachers' ability to implement competency-based approaches (Nkya, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Accordingly, implementation planning should incorporate differentiated resource allocation, targeted professional development, infrastructure improvement, and continuous monitoring of disadvantaged schools. Equity should not be treated as an additional outcome of reform; it should be embedded within the implementation strategy itself. The Tanzanian findings become more persuasive when considered alongside experiences from other African countries that have adopted competency-oriented reforms. Rwanda, for example, shifted from a knowledge-based curriculum toward a competency-based curriculum in 2015. Evidence from Rwanda indicates that teachers experienced challenges in implementing the new approach,

demonstrating that curriculum transformation requires substantial teacher preparation and institutional support. Kenya has similarly experienced challenges associated with teacher understanding and preparedness during competency-based curriculum implementation.

These comparative experiences suggest that Tanzania's implementation challenges are not unique. Rather, they reflect a broader African pattern in which governments adopt curricula designed to strengthen practical competencies while schools and teachers face constraints in professional preparation, infrastructure, resources, assessment, and implementation support. However, the comparison also provides an important lesson: competency-based reform should be treated as a long-term system transformation rather than a curriculum replacement exercise. The experience of neighbouring countries demonstrates that policy adoption is only the beginning of implementation. The more difficult task is building the institutional ecosystem necessary to make the policy operational. For Tanzania, this means that the 2023 reforms should be accompanied by sustained implementation planning, teacher professional development, school leadership development, infrastructure investment, curriculum–assessment alignment, and evidence-based monitoring.

Teacher Capacity and Institutional Readiness as Interdependent Determinants

The most significant finding of the review is that teacher professional capacity and institutional readiness should not be conceptualized as independent determinants. They form an interdependent implementation system.

Teacher capacity without institutional readiness produces frustrated professionalism. Teachers may understand competency-based pedagogy and be willing to implement practical learning but remain unable to do so when laboratories, equipment, textbooks, digital tools, or adequate classroom space are unavailable. Institutional readiness without teacher capacity produces underutilized infrastructure. Schools may possess laboratories and other facilities, but the intended learning outcomes will remain elusive if teachers lack the competence to integrate those facilities into curriculum delivery. This interaction provides a stronger explanation of sustainable quality outcomes

than either variable alone. It also strengthens the theoretical contribution of the study. Educational Change Theory explains why implementation requires capacity, leadership, organizational support, and adaptation (Fullan, 2007), while Competency-Based Education Theory explains the nature of the learning outcomes that the reform seeks to produce (Mulder, 2017). The findings demonstrate that the two theoretical perspectives are complementary: Educational Change Theory explains the conditions of implementation, while Competency-Based Education Theory explains the intended direction and character of learning outcomes.

Sustainable Quality Outcomes: Beyond Examination Performance

The findings also require a broader interpretation of the term quality. If quality is measured exclusively through examination scores, the transformative ambition of the 2023 reforms may be underestimated. Competency-oriented education seeks to develop broader outcomes, including problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, practical skills, adaptability, and the ability to apply knowledge in authentic contexts. This broader understanding is consistent with international competency frameworks that emphasize the need for education systems to prepare learners for changing social, economic, technological, and employment environments (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). For Tanzania, the significance of the 2023 reforms therefore lies partly in their potential to strengthen the connection between secondary education and learners' future educational, occupational, entrepreneurial, and civic opportunities.

Nevertheless, the literature indicates that these outcomes cannot simply be assumed to follow from policy adoption. They depend on implementation quality. If teachers continue to rely primarily on lecture-based instruction, if practical facilities remain inadequate, and if assessment continues to reward memorization, the intended transformation may remain largely rhetorical. The central argument emerging from the review is therefore that the 2023 reforms have transformative potential, but potential should not be confused with demonstrated impact. Because the policy is relatively recent, there is not yet sufficient longitudinal evidence to establish its

long-term effects on student achievement, employability, entrepreneurship, or national productivity. The strongest evidence currently available concerns the implementation conditions inherited from previous competency-based reforms and the structural requirements articulated in the new policy framework. This distinction is essential for scholarly interpretation. The present findings should therefore be understood as evidence about the determinants and implementation conditions of sustainable quality outcomes, rather than definitive evidence that the 2023 reforms have already produced those outcomes.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Policy Learning

A final finding concerns the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Because the 2023 reforms represent a major transformation of the education system, implementation should not be treated as a fixed process in which policy directives are issued once and subsequently assumed to be implemented uniformly. Continuous monitoring should examine whether teachers understand and use the new pedagogical approaches, whether schools possess the required resources, whether practical learning is actually taking place, whether assessment reflects competencies, and whether students are developing the intended skills. This is consistent with Fullan's (2007) argument that educational change requires continuous feedback and adaptation. Monitoring should therefore move beyond compliance indicators such as the number of schools receiving policy documents or the number of teachers attending workshops. More meaningful indicators should examine quality of implementation. For example, monitoring could examine: the proportion of teachers receiving sustained competency-based professional development;; changes in teachers' classroom practices; availability and functionality of laboratories and vocational facilities; availability of teaching and learning materials; use of practical and authentic assessment; student participation in practical learning activities; differences in implementation between rural and urban schools; school leadership capacity; student acquisition of targeted competencies; and longer-term transition outcomes, including further education, employment, entrepreneurship, and other forms of productive participation. Such a monitoring framework would

transform policy implementation from an administrative exercise into a process of evidence-based policy learning.

Generally, the findings demonstrate that the 2023 Education and Training Policy reforms represent an important opportunity to reposition Tanzania's secondary education system toward greater relevance, practical competence, and responsiveness to changing national development needs. However, the evidence strongly suggests that the achievement of these ambitions depends on implementation capacity rather than policy ambition alone.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This systematic literature review examined the 2023 Education and Training Policy reforms as a potential determinant of sustainable quality outcomes in Tanzania's secondary education, with particular emphasis on teachers' professional capacity and institutional readiness. The evidence reviewed indicates that the reforms represent an important policy shift toward a more competency-oriented, practical, and vocationally responsive education system. The reforms have the potential to strengthen the relevance of secondary education by enabling learners to acquire not only academic knowledge but also practical competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, creativity, adaptability, and skills that can support further education, employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. However, the review demonstrates that policy ambition alone is insufficient to guarantee sustainable educational transformation. The success of the reforms depends substantially on the capacity of teachers and institutions to translate policy intentions into meaningful teaching and learning experiences.

Teachers remain the principal agents through whom curriculum reform becomes visible in classrooms. Their understanding of the reforms, pedagogical competence, assessment literacy, motivation, and access to continuous professional development will therefore significantly influence the quality of implementation. Similarly, institutional readiness emerged as a fundamental condition for reform success. Competency-based and vocational learning require adequate infrastructure, laboratories, workshops, learning materials, digital

resources, qualified personnel, supportive leadership, appropriate assessment systems, and effective administrative structures. Where these conditions are inadequate, teachers may be unable to provide the practical and experiential learning opportunities envisaged by the reforms. Consequently, there is a risk that curriculum innovation could remain largely at the policy level while classroom practices continue to reflect traditional, examination-oriented approaches.

The review further demonstrates that teacher capacity and institutional readiness are not independent factors. They are mutually reinforcing components of an effective reform ecosystem. Well-trained teachers require supportive institutional environments, while well-resourced schools require competent teachers capable of converting available resources into meaningful learning experiences. Sustainable quality outcomes are therefore most likely to emerge when professional capacity, institutional resources, leadership, curriculum, assessment, financing, and monitoring systems are aligned around common policy objectives. Equity is another critical consideration. Differences in infrastructure, teacher availability, technological access, and institutional capacity between urban, rural, and otherwise disadvantaged schools may produce unequal experiences of the reforms. Without deliberate equity-oriented implementation strategies, the reforms could unintentionally widen existing disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes. Sustainable quality education must consequently be understood not only in terms of improved national performance but also in terms of equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities.

Overall, the findings suggest that Tanzania's 2023 education policy reforms constitute a promising foundation for transforming secondary education, but their success will depend on the strength and consistency of implementation. The reforms should therefore be approached as a long-term process of systemic educational change rather than a one-time curriculum intervention. Sustained investment in teachers, schools, assessment, leadership, equity, monitoring, and stakeholder participation will be essential if the reforms are to produce durable improvements in the quality, relevance, and outcomes of secondary education.

Recommendations

The findings provide several important directions for future research. First, longitudinal studies should be conducted to examine how implementation of the 2023 reforms evolves over time. Such studies could track changes in teacher competence, pedagogical practices, student competencies, assessment practices, and school readiness across several years.

Second, mixed-methods studies should investigate the experiences of teachers, students, school leaders, policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders. Quantitative data could provide evidence on the scale and distribution of implementation outcomes, while qualitative evidence could explain why particular implementation patterns occur.

Third, future research should conduct comparative studies between rural and urban schools to determine how differences in infrastructure, teacher availability, leadership, technology, and socioeconomic conditions influence reform implementation and learning outcomes.

Fourth, further research should examine the relationship between competency-based assessment and student outcomes. Particular attention should be given to whether assessment practices genuinely measure practical competencies, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and other intended learning outcomes.

Finally, future studies should undertake policy implementation evaluations using primary data and clearly defined outcome indicators. Such research would help determine whether the promising potential identified in this review is being translated into measurable improvements in learning, equity, practical competence, and post-school opportunities.

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