

Empowering Teachers for Sustainable Development: A Review of Tanzania's Primary School Teachers Policies

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Abstract

Education serves as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by equipping individuals and communities with essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, and global citizenship. These skills are vital for addressing the complex challenges outlined across various SDGs. Teachers play a central role in developing these skills in learners. To understand whether primary school teacher preparation in Tanzania supports the development of such skills, it is important to conduct a documentary review of Tanzania's education policies, frameworks and primary school teacher education curriculum to ascertain the integration of 21st-century skills. The findings show that key national documents in Tanzania explicitly emphasize the importance of promoting 21st-century skills. For instance, the Education and Training Policy (ETP) 2014, 2023 Edition, its implementation strategy, and the National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education (NCFBTE) all highlight the need for the education system which promote 21st-century skills. Furthermore, the primary school teacher education curriculum clearly reflects this intention by incorporating specific competencies focused on developing teacher's abilities to foster 21st century skills. Therefore, it is concluded that key national documents and the primary school teacher education curriculum in Tanzania integrated 21st-century skills as essential components. Thus, teacher educators have to clearly interpret and effectively implement each element related to 21st-century skills as reflected in policies and curriculum. This is key to preparing competent teachers who can foster these skills in learners and enable them to adopt sustainable practices necessary for achieving the SDGs.

Key words: *Primary school Teachers, 21st century skills, Sustainable Development Goals, Policies and Tanzania.*

1.0 Introduction

Education serves as a catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by equipping individuals and communities with necessary knowledge, skills, and values needed to address global challenges in a dynamic and interconnected world (UNESCO, 2020). Similarly, education is an essential pillar for making individuals and communities able to make informed decisions, engage in civic activities, and support sustainable practices aimed at eradicating poverty (SDG 1), improving health and well-being (SDG 3), achieving gender equality (SDG 5), and fostering economic growth (SDG 8) and consequently contributing to long-term development outcomes (UN, 2019; UNESCO, 2017).

To fully harness the transformative potential of education in achieving the SDGs, education systems must go beyond traditional academic knowledge and focus on instilling 21st-century skills. These means education should also foster development of skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, global citizenship and life skills (Komba & Shukia, 2023; Martinez, 2022). These skills are vital for the holistic development of learners, equipping them with capability to participate meaningfully in both global and local workforces (Senjiro & Lupeja, 2023). Furthermore, they are essential for empowering learners to innovate, adapt, and act responsibly in complex global challenges related to poverty, health and well-being, gender equality and economic growth as part of SDGs (UN, 2019). This is clearly showing that fostering 21st century skills contributes directly to achieving the SDGs.

To fully empower learners with 21st century skills, it is critical for countries to embed all these skills into education curricula and expose each learner to learning activities that could effectively develop these skills. Without these skills, the capacity of education to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs remains limited. To align with such a demand of developing 21st century skills to each learner, in 2005 and 2009, Tanzania introduced competence-based curriculum (CBC) as the replacement of knowledge-based curriculum in primary schools and teacher education colleges, respectively. Competence-based curriculum emphasises the development of skills, including 21st-century skills (MoEST, 2019; URT, 2023).

The needs for developing 21st century skills places new demands on primary school teachers, particularly ensuring that teaching and learning as well as assessment are centred towards the acquisition of 21st-century skills (Mgaiwa & Milinga, 2024; Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020). Thus, primary school teachers as an agents for skills acquisition in schools need to be well prepared to design teaching and learning as well as assessment oriented to foster 21st-century skills to each learner (Herlinawati et al., 2024; Mgaiwa & Milinga, 2024). One of the means to understand whether primary school teacher preparation in Tanzania aligns with the demands of the 21st century is to conduct a comprehensive review of Tanzania's education policies. This is the motivation behind this policy review study. The purpose of this policy review study is to ascertain the integration of 21st-century skills in Tanzania's education policies, framework and primary school teacher education curriculum.

Getting an understanding of the integration of 21st century skills in different education policies in Tanzania is vital for understanding the quality and relevance of primary school teacher preparation in Tanzania. On the other hand, it ensures that teacher preparation aligns with the demands of the 21st century and hence capable of empowering learners to act responsibly in complex global SDGs challenges like poverty, health and well-being, gender equality and economic growth. Furthermore, this review is essential for identification of gaps in the current Tanzania's education policies, framework and primary school teacher education curriculum with regard to the integration of 21st century skills.

2.0 Methods

This policy review study aims to ascertain the integration of 21st-century skills in Tanzania's education policies, framework, primary school teacher education curriculum. A documentary review of 2014 Education and Training Policy (ETP), 2023 version, implementation strategy of the 2014 ETP, 2023 version, National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education (NCFBTE) of 2019, Curriculum for Diploma in Primary Teacher Education of 2023 was conducted. Documents selected in this policy review study are considered essential for providing a comprehensive understanding of the integration of 21st-century skills in Tanzania's teacher education preparation. Additionally, these are the documents that expect to give a clear status of how primary school teacher education in Tanzania is expected to be. A 21st century skills framework which covers critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, and global citizenship and life skills was used to conduct documentary review in each of the document selected in this study. The review focused on looking for purpose, specific objectives, targets and policy statements while reviewing ETP and its implementation strategy as well as NCFBTE. Furthermore, general aim, specific objectives and competencies were reviewed while conducting documentary review of curriculum for diploma in primary teacher education.

3.0 Findings and Discussion

This policy review study aims to ascertain the integration of 21st-century skills in Tanzania's education policies, framework and primary school teacher education curriculum. Thus, below are the findings of the documentary review.

3.1 Education and Training Policy of 2014, 2023 Edition

Based on the documentary review of recent ETP, 2023 edition, the results showed that ETP clearly reflect the intention to develop 21st century skills as indicated in the policy objective number five which targets:

“To produce graduates with the skills to maintain peace, withstand challenges and resolve conflicts in society”. (i.e., related to life skills).

Similarly, the policy objective number six targets.

“To produce graduates with the skills and capacity to use various languages in communication”. (i.e., related to communication skills).

This shows an emphasis given to peacebuilding, persistent and conflict resolution as non-cognitive skills as well as communication skills as among the beneficial 21st century skills. Additionally, the policy highlighted several general objectives of education and training in Tanzania. Some of the objectives which clearly align with 21st century skills include objective (a), (c) and (f). These objectives states that education and training in Tanzania should target;

To foster and build the character of Tanzanians so that they can transform their lives and contribute to the development of society, the nation and the world;

To enable Tanzanians to develop and appropriately utilise technology skills, innovation, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication for personal and national development;

To enable Tanzanians to understand, protect and uphold the principles of national ethics and integrity, including humanity, patriotism, unity, transparency, honesty, accountability and to appreciate civil rights, responsibilities and corresponding duties;

The above general objectives of education and training in Tanzania shows that the country value all elements of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, global citizenship and life skills. On the other hand, the policy reflects the intention to develop 21st century skills. This appeared in 3.6.1.2 policy statements which stated that;

“The Government will ensure that teachers, tutors and lecturers are prepared to effectively implement competency-based curricula and promote the 21st-century skills for students”.

It is also reflected in 3.6.8.3 policy statements which stated that;

“The Government, in collaboration with stakeholders, will ensure that skills for maintaining peace, patriotism, ethics and good governance are integrated into curricula at all levels of education and training” (i.e., related to life skills).

These two policy statements are directly emphasizing the need for the teachers, tutors and lecturers with competencies to effectively implement competency-based curricula and consequently promoting the 21st-century skills to students. Based on the policy objective number five and statement number 3.6.8.3, it shows that Tanzania value life skills as one of the beneficial 21st century skills. Thus, each learner in Tanzania is expected to be taught and develop such skills. These review findings show that the recent 2014, ETP, 2023 edition has clearly integrated all essential elements of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, digital literacy, global citizenship and life skills.

These findings reflect what has been reported by Komba and Shukia (2023) that the intention to promote 21st century skills in Tanzania is clearly reflected in 2014 ETP. This aligns with global education trends that emphasize the development of non-cognitive or life skills such as peacebuilding, patriotism, ethics, and good governance. These skills help learners contribute

to transformed societies capable of addressing 21st-century challenges and resolving complex global issues across social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental domains (UNESCO, 2014).

3.2 Implementation Strategy of the Education and Training Policy of 2014, 2023 Edition

A documentary review of implementation strategy of the ETP of 2014, 2023 Edition showed that, education implementation plans paid attention on the strategies to develop 21st century skills. This appeared in the aims of implementation strategy and one of its targets. For instance, one of the aims of implementation strategy of the 2014 ETP, 2023 Edition is to ensure that

“Education and Training provided in the country meet the quality standards recognized nationally, regionally, and internationally by strengthening the provision of teacher education to prepare teachers to effectively implement competency-based curricula and promote 21st-century skills”.

Interestingly, in similar document, the government of Tanzania targeted to make sure that;

“21st -century skills are integrated into curricula at all levels of education by June 2024”.

This implies that Tanzania education implementation plans for the ETP of 2014 – 2023 Edition, aims to ensure education and training systems meet high-quality standards accepted both locally and globally. Additionally, the government planned to improving teacher education so that teachers can effectively deliver competency-based curricula and foster essential 21st-century skills in students. These findings still confirm the intention of the government of Tanzania to have an education system which clearly aim to promote 21st century skills to each learner.

3.3 National Curriculum Framework

In 2019, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) prepared the National Curriculum Framework for Basic and Teacher Education (NCFBTE) which was developed to specify standards of curriculum and provision of education in Tanzania (MoEST, 2019). The documentary review of the NCFBTE showed that 21st century skills have been considered as an important aspect in NCFBTE. For instance, in the NCFBTE it is stated that:

When developing curricula for different levels of education, the learning outcomes shall be oriented towards having the 21st century skills acquired by all students in schools and colleges. Additionally, teaching and learning processes will be undertaken in such a way that students will develop such skills to prepare them for a more complex life and work environment in the 21st century.

Furthermore, NCFBTE stipulated that, one of the objectives of teacher education is to

...promote creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation in teaching and learning and develop ability to communicate both orally and in writing using the relevant medium of instruction.

This shows that 21st century skills related to creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation and communication have been reflected in the NCFBTE. Given the fact that, NCFBTE is a crucial national document prepared to provide to provide standards of curriculum and provision of education in Tanzania in Tanzania, hence this shows that the government through its MoEST has explicitly targeted to ensure that education system in Tanzania is transformed to align with the world skills demands (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020; UNESCO, 2014). These findings reflect what has been reported by Komba and Shukia (2023) that the intention to promote 21st century skills through education in Tanzania is clear and reflected in the NCFBTE.

3.4 Diploma in Primary School Teacher Education Curriculum

A documentary review of primary school teacher education curriculum of 2023 showed that curriculum reflect the intention to capacitate prospective primary school teachers with specific 21st century skills as well as how to foster them to learners. This has been reflected in the general aim which stated that;

"This curriculum has been developed with the aim of preparing a teacher with knowledge, skills, and a positive attitude to contribute to national development, taking into account changes in science and technology and the demands of the 21st century."

This clearly show that 21st century skills are an important component in primary school teacher education curriculum of 2023. Furthermore, specific objectives of the same curriculum have also reflected 21st century skills. For example, 3/8 objectives reflect 21st century skills. Such objectives require that prospective teachers after going through the curriculum shall be expected to develop ability to;

"Adopt creative and innovative approaches in teaching and learning by taking into account the needs of students" (i.e., relate to creativity and innovation)

"Use ICT and assistive technology in teaching and learning." (digital literacy)

"Use the relevant language fluently in teaching and learning" (i.e., relate to communication skills).

On the other hand, the curriculum has also covered specific teachers' competencies which are directly linked to 21st century competencies. These are like *presenting professional information in and outside the classroom using appropriate language* (i.e., relate to communication), *managing the use of technology and other assistive devices in teaching and learning of different subjects* (i.e., relate to digital literacy) which are integrated in each of the subject specific teaching and learning method lesson.

Furthermore, other specific teachers' competencies included in the Science Teaching and Learning Methods curriculum include *mastering the teaching and learning methods of theory, investigation and scientific experiments* (i.e., relate to critical thinking, creativity, innovation and problem solving) and *mastering teaching and learning methods for different subjects outside the classroom* which are integrated in each of the subject specific teaching and learning method lesson. All these aspects takes teaching beyond the traditional classroom setting and thus encourages real-world application, interdisciplinary learning, and active engagement, all of which are essential components of 21st-century education (Senjiro & Lupeja, 2023; Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020).

Generally, the findings confirm that specific 21st century skills such as creativity, innovation, digital literacy, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving are clearly integrated into primary school teacher education curriculum of 2023. These findings slightly aligns with that of Herlinawati et al. (2024) which revealed that 21st century skills (i.e., communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration) are partially integrated into faculty of education in one university in Indonesia. On the other hand, Komba and Shukia (2023) highlighted a critical disconnect between curriculum intent and actual learner outcomes in basic education (pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education) in Tanzania. This raises significant worries for primary school teacher educators. To reveal evidence for this, future studies can explore teacher educator's preparedness and their perceived practices in preparing future teachers ready to teach in 21st century.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This policy review study aims to ascertain the integration of 21st-century skills in Tanzania's education policies, framework and primary school teacher education curriculum. Based on the findings, it is concluded that key national documents and primary school teacher education curriculum in Tanzania integrated 21st-century skills as essential component. To clearly avoid a disconnect between the country's intent as stipulated in national documents and actual implementation as pointed out by Komba and Shukia (2023) , it is crucial for teacher educators to clearly interpret and effectively implement each element related to 21st-century skills as reflected in the policies and curriculum. This is key to preparing competent primary school teachers for sustainable development who can foster these skills in learners and enabling them to make informed decisions and adopt sustainable practices necessary for achieving the SDGs.

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