



## **Teachers' Practices for Enhancing Student Competence in Secondary Schools in Tanzania**

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### **ABSTRACT.**

This article examines the role of education in modern societies, which aims to equip individuals with essential skills and knowledge for navigating diverse and complex situations. The global education framework emphasizes key competencies, including global awareness, financial literacy, communication skills, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. However, progress in developing these competencies is notably lacking, particularly in developing countries. This study specifically investigates the practices employed by secondary school teachers in Tanzania to enhance students' competencies in alignment with 21st-century educational standards. Despite the recognized importance of these skills, the findings reveal significant challenges in their development. The research aims to identify effective educational practices that can help bridge this gap and improve outcomes for students in Tanzania.

**Keywords:** *teachers' practices, 21st century skills, students' competence*

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### **Introduction**

The primary goal of any education system is to cultivate competent and confident individuals capable of using their knowledge and skills to transform their lives and contribute to societal development. As Mandela (2003) states, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world," highlighting its significance in meeting the global competencies required in the 21st century. Education addresses many of humanity's challenges, enabling individuals to tackle complex issues in their environment. UNESCO (2013) emphasizes that education serves as a crucial channel for transferring knowledge and experiences. Moreover, the application of scientific principles acquired through education has led to significant innovations and advancements across various fields, including medicine, manufacturing, transportation, communication, agriculture, and administration (Beda, 2019; Sampath, 2014).

#### ***Brief history of competence enhancement process in Tanzania.***

Competence enhancement system emerged with competence-based education (CBE) during the early of 1970s in the United State of America., emphasizing much on measurable goals for knowledge and skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, as cited in Komba & Mwandangi, 2015). The movement spread to Europe and later to Australia, spurred by market changes.

In Africa, South Africa implemented competence enhancement process in 1998 to address professional shortages and equip individuals with relevant skills (Komba & Mwandangi, 2015). The United Nation advocates for education that fosters sustainable development, focusing on skills over rote learning (UNESCO, 2016).

Tanzania's educational system was reformed in post-independence period to meet local needs through the Education Act No. 37 of 1962 (Nyerere, 1967). The "Education for Self-Reliance" policy aimed to provide practical skills but declined in the mid-1980s due to economic changes, leading to increased unemployment among graduates (Ahmad et al., 2014).

In 2005, Tanzania adopted Competence Based Education to align education with socio-economic needs and promote essential skills (MOEC, 2005). However, challenges persist as teachers often prioritize content delivery over competency development, necessitating comprehensive educational reforms (Kimario, 2011).

#### ***Theoretical and literature Overview of The Study***

The theoretical framework of competence enhancement is rooted in social constructivism, a learning theory that emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their own knowledge. Unlike traditional views that see knowledge as transferred from teacher to student, social constructivism posits that

learners engage with information, reconstructing it through their experiences and interactions. Key figures such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky highlight the importance of experiential learning and social interactions in cognitive development.

In this framework, teaching methods shift from lecture-based approaches to learner-centered strategies, empowering students to take responsibility for their learning. Collaborative learning becomes vital, as students work together on tasks that reflect real-world challenges, fostering teamwork and essential skills beyond simple knowledge recall. Competence enhancement aligns closely with social constructivist principles, as learners engage in authentic tasks requiring practical application of knowledge, deepening their understanding and enhancing their skills. Collaboration with peers and mentors enriches learning by providing diverse perspectives and encouraging critical thinking. Scaffolding from teachers and knowledgeable peers supports learners in building on existing knowledge and facing appropriately challenging tasks as they progress.

The framework emphasizes authentic learning experiences situated in real-world contexts, allowing students to apply their skills meaningfully. Reflection plays a crucial role, enabling learners to assess their performance, identify areas for improvement, and set goals for further development. This metacognitive process fosters self-awareness and encourages a proactive approach to learning.

Competence enhancement in Tanzanian secondary schools refers to educational practices aimed at equipping students with practical skills and knowledge relevant to their socio-economic environment. Grounded in competence-based education (CBE), implemented in Tanzania since 2005, this approach addresses the need for individuals capable of contributing effectively to the workforce (MOEC, 2005). It focuses on developing specific competencies aligned with Labor market demands, emphasizing inquiry-based learning, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The objective is to prepare students not only for examinations but also for real-world challenges, enabling them to be self-reliant and employable across various sectors, including agriculture and industry (Ahmad, Krogh, & Gjotterud, 2014).

However, challenges remain in implementing competence enhancement programs. Many educators continue to prioritize traditional content delivery rather than actively fostering competencies (Kimaryo, 2011). This situation underscores the need for comprehensive reform in environmental preparation, instructional preparation, and assessment practices to truly enhance students' competencies.

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## RESEARCH METHODOGY

This study explores how teachers enhance student competence in secondary schools in Tanzania, focusing on Songea Municipal secondary schools. It employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research to gather comprehensive insights. The case study design centres on teachers as the primary participants, while also incorporating perspectives from students and secondary school leavers. Data collection methods include structured questionnaires, interviews, document reviews, and classroom observations. Data analysis primarily uses thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes, supplemented by quantitative data for context. To ensure credibility, the study implements strategies such as member checking and triangulation.

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## Findings And Discussion of The Study

### Environmental Examination on Students' Competence Enhancement Process

The investigation into the teaching and learning environment's impact on student competence enhancement in Tanzanian secondary schools reveals significant findings. Approximately 70% of teachers perceive the school structure as only partially supportive to competence enhancement programs, with 13.3% deeming it inadequate. This indicates an urgent need for improvements to better align school environments with the demands of student competence development.

Furthermore, only 20% of teachers believe that school leadership effectively supports initiatives aimed at enhancing student competencies. This suggests that existing efforts often lack coherence and effectiveness, which can hinder the implementation of comprehensive strategies necessary for skill development as argued by Mosha, (2017).

Data indicate that around 66.7% of teachers partially align their practices with community culture and student interests. While there is some recognition of these factors, a deeper integration is necessary. This gap implies that teaching practices may not fully reflect the cultural and contextual realities of students.

Additionally, the integration of ecological and environmental elements in teaching is insufficient, with 80% of teachers incorporating these aspects only partially. This limitation is likely due to resource scarcity and inadequate training, which impede the development of students' technological and creative skills.

Practical learning experiences are also minimal only about 33.3% of subjects include practical sessions, which often prioritize examination requirements over fostering genuine student interest. This focus on examination preparation complicates the educational landscape, promoting rote learning rather than holistic competency development as suggested by Wang & Degol, (2016). Although 86.7% of teachers claim to incorporate student perspectives into their practices, inconsistencies remain, indicating areas for improvement in effectively engaging all students.

These findings highlight substantial environmental challenges, including inadequate school structures, limited leadership support, insufficient integration of community factors, and a lack of practical learning opportunities. Addressing these issues is crucial for enhancing student competencies and fostering a more effective learning environment in Tanzanian secondary schools.

### Examination of the Teacher's Instruction Preparation

The effectiveness of teachers' lesson preparation, teaching materials, and content delivery in enhancing student competencies is also examined. Findings reveal that while teaching materials are moderately aligned with student interests and curriculum demands, a gap persists between ideal and actual engagement levels.

It is 63.3% of teachers attempt to integrate experimental activities into their lessons, though this integration is often inconsistent. Additionally, 66.7% of teachers partially incorporate innovative and creative skills into their preparations, underscoring the need for improved strategies and resources.

Interviews and observations suggest that the competence enhancement process is frequently documented in lesson plans and schemes of work primarily for inspection purposes rather than actual implementation. Many teachers express a preference for traditional methods due to time constraints and resource shortages. For instance, a history teacher noted using competence-based methods mainly for inspections, which undermines the teaching process.

Lesson structures tend to be rigid, adhering to traditional stages without accommodating external factors or practical activities. Reviewed lesson plans often lack clear objectives focused on developing student competencies, with many outcomes not explicitly defined.

Resource scarcity is a significant challenge, as overcrowded classrooms lacking adequate furniture and teaching materials restrict the implementation of interactive methods. Teachers typically rely on basic resources like blackboards and chalk, despite intentions to use a more diverse array of teaching aids. Instructional strategies predominantly rely on lectures, limiting opportunities for student interaction and engagement.

Overall, these challenges highlight the need for better alignment of teaching materials with student interests, improved integration of practical activities, effective resource utilization, and a shift from traditional to more interactive teaching methods to enhance student competencies in Tanzanian secondary schools.

### Examination of the Teacher's Assessment Methods

The effectiveness of teachers' assessment practices in enhancing student competencies is explored as well. Survey results indicate some strengths in accommodating student needs for real-life applications; however, significant areas for improvement exist. For example, authentic assessment methods are underutilized, with only 10% of teachers employing them comprehensively, while 76.7% do not utilize them at all. This lack of authentic assessment limits evaluations to theoretical knowledge, restricting students' practical skill development as suggested by Kita & Tilya, (2020).

Additionally, only 20% of teachers incorporate problem-based assessments into their practices, while 76.7% use them inconsistently. This inconsistency hampers the development of students' problem-solving skills, which are essential for real-world applications. Approximately 66.7% of teachers do not utilize criterion-based assessments, focusing instead on relative performance, which may lead to unclear evaluations of student competencies.

Observations reveal that teachers primarily focus on the cognitive domain of learning, often overlooking the psychomotor and affective domains vital for a comprehensive skill set. Assessment methods predominantly consist of traditional practices such as tests and quizzes, particularly in practical subjects like chemistry and physics, where hands-on activities are rarely observed.

Overcrowded classrooms exacerbate these issues, leading to a preference for group assignments over individual tasks, which may not accurately reflect each student's abilities. Moreover, assessment practices often misalign with competency enhancement goals, focusing more on theoretical knowledge than practical applications.

Finally, the lack of resources to support diverse assessment methods further limits the implementation of effective practices. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving assessment strategies and enhancing student competencies in Tanzanian secondary schools.

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## Recommendations for Enhancing Student Competencies

To address the identified gaps in Tanzanian secondary schools, the following recommendations aim to improve student competencies through a collaborative approach involving educational leaders, policymakers, and the community.

**Aligning the School Environment with Competency Goals:** Educational leaders should establish clear, actionable goals focusing on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Continuous dialogue among school leadership, teachers, students, and the community is essential to foster a collaborative environment. Schools should create strategic plans aligned with these competency goals, supported by policy changes in curriculum design and teacher evaluations. Incorporating local culture and student interests into teaching will enhance relevance and engagement.

**Enhancing Instructional Preparation:** Schools need to regularly review and update teaching materials to align with the curriculum and student needs. Collaboration between teachers and curriculum developers is crucial. Expanding teacher training programs focused on innovative pedagogical strategies such as project-based and student-centered learning will enhance student engagement. Addressing resource constraints and overcrowded classrooms through additional funding and improved infrastructure will create a conducive learning environment.

**Improving Assessment Methods:** Schools should diversify assessment techniques beyond traditional tests. Integrating authentic assessments, problem-based evaluations, and criterion-based methods into the curriculum will provide a broader view of student competencies. Increasing practical assessments, particularly in science and vocational subjects, will enhance real-world applicability. Professional development programs on diverse assessment strategies will equip teachers to implement these methods effectively.

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## Recommendations for Further Studies

Future studies should explore key areas such as the impact of school leadership on competency development, effective community engagement strategies, and the role of technology in enhancing student competencies. Investigating innovative teaching methods, resource allocation, and assessment practices will further contribute to educational improvement. Research should also address teachers' professional development needs and evaluate the long-term outcomes of competency development in Tanzanian schools.

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