



# Examining Obstacles Facing Social Science Curricula Teachers in Students' Life Skills Acquisition in Community Secondary Schools of Mbeya Region, Tanzania

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Abstract		Original Research Article
<p>This article studied the obstacles that social science curricula teachers face when enhancing life skills for community secondary school students in Tanzania's Mbeya region. The study's goal was to look into the obstacles that teachers of social science curricula confront when enhancing students' life skills acquisition. The study applied a qualitative research approach. Data collection was done through focus group discussions. This study used a non-probability sampling technique and a case study research design. The study consisted of ten focus group conversations, each with six participants. This study regards social science curricula as geography, history, and civics taught in ordinary-level community secondary schools. The study findings indicated that social science curricula teachers experience different obstacles during the enhancement of the social science curricula. Such obstacles were the lack laboratory, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, poverty, Internet access, language of instruction, insufficient library service and in-service training. Based on the identified obstacles, this study indicates that the government must take effective steps to improve the teaching and learning environment. The study suggests that such hurdles must be overcome to support teachers in enhancing pupils' learning of life skills. The research proposes that the government should take strong steps to reduce difficulties by strengthening infrastructure and solving the existing obstacles.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Life Skills, Curricula, Social Science Curricula, Enhancing Life Skills, Group Discussions</p>		

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, education provision is confronting several problems worldwide in terms of science and technology, as well as societal needs. Life skills education appears to be the sole solution for young people to deal with these issues in light of the global market connection. Life skill development has been a global concern for educational curricula at various levels. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2012), life skills education is a vital tool for preparing young people to negotiate and mediate life's obstacles and risks, as well as to engage productively in society. Prasertcharoensuk, Somprach, and Ngang (2015) found that the core curriculum of Thai basic education recognizes the relevance of life skills. This is also done in other countries of the world, like China, the United States of America, and Canada, to name a few. As a result, life skill development is a primary concern in students' learning processes (Prasertcharoensuk et al., 2015). As a result, life skills become the primary inputs learned during curriculum implementation for overall human development. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2015), better-educated and skilled people may perform more diverse, high-quality work while also being more creative and innovative. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2018), education may provide learners with agency and a sense of purpose, as well as the competencies necessary to shape their own lives and contribute to the lives of others. According to the OECD (2018), the concept of competency encompasses more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it also includes the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to satisfy complex demands that require both broad and specialized knowledge. This

demonstrates that education plays an important role in preparing young people for the workplace. According to UNDP (2015), globalization and technology revolutions, notably the digital revolution, are driving workplace transformation. According to UNDP, globalization has increased global interconnectedness, with significant implications for trade, investment, growth, job creation, and destruction, as well as networks for creative and volunteer activity.

Education in the twenty-first century is supposed to provide learners with life skills and abilities in Botswana, Rwanda, Kenya, Egypt, South Africa, and Ghana. According to the World Health Organisation (1994), Behrani (2016), and Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017), life skills are adaptive and positive behaviors that allow individuals to deal well with the demands and obstacles of daily life. According to Prajapati et al. (2017), life skills are a behavior or behavior development method that aims to balance three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills. Behrani (2016) and the World Health Organisation (1994) identify 10 fundamental life skills competencies: decision-making, problem-solving, empathy, self-awareness, communication, interpersonal connections, emotion and stress management, creative thinking, and critical thinking. Prajapati et al. (2017) classify life skills into three major categories: intellectual skills, social skills, and emotional abilities. To develop learners' life skills competencies, the school curriculum must be well-prepared and adaptable enough to encourage learners' mental cognition. The mind (not to be confused with the brain) is a collection of cognitive abilities that includes consciousness, imagination, perception, thinking, judgment, language, and memory (University of Guelph, 2021). It is commonly characterized as the ability of an entity to think and be conscious. According to Archana and Nair (2017), it possesses the powers of creativity, recognition, and appreciation, as well as the ability to process feelings and emotions, which results in attitudes and actions. This means that school curricula must provide opportunities for instructors and students to foster such learning traits, which will lead to the development of life skills abilities among students.

Tanzania, like other African countries, has an effective life skills education model that has been tested and developed at all levels of delivery (Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), 2020). This emphasis on learners and their learning is justified by secondary education's goals and objectives (MOEVT 2016). The goals and objectives of secondary education are thoroughly examined in policies. However, there are still significant obstacles to providing secondary education. The blame for this scenario has frequently been focused on education systems inherited from colonial overlords.

Tanzania has recently changed its curriculum from a content-based to a competency-based paradigm (URT, 2014). Secondary education curriculum revision aims to create a productive society that is creative and imaginative in solving current concerns. Eller (2017) defines social science as the systematic application of scientific methods to explore and explain human beings and conduct. Geography, sociology, anthropology, economics, and social psychology are some of the subjects that fall under social sciences. In this study, social science curricula comprise geography, history, and civics disciplines taught in Tanzanian secondary schools. However, the assessment of social science curricula issues in impeding the effective development of students' life skills competencies is not well understood, thus study is needed to establish knowledge that bridges the current knowledge gap. Despite attempts by the government and other stakeholders to improve secondary school education curricula regularly to promote learners' competencies, there are still graduates who are unable to apply their knowledge to grasp their surroundings (Uwezo, 2017). In other words, despite receiving an education based on ability, they do not fit in with society. The increased number of graduates who are unemployed or looking for work raises concerns about the quality of education delivered to pupils in community high schools. While others, such as Wandela (2014), Makunja (2016), Alli (2021), and Mkimbili & Kitta (2020), believe that poor instructional resources are the root cause of the problem. Owolabi and Adedayo (2012) argue that instructors' availability and qualifications contribute to current difficulties. Scholars such as Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) investigated the importance of life skills education and the benefits of incorporating it into the curriculum, i.e., developing social, emotional, and thinking skills in students, as these are the essential building blocks for a dynamic citizen who can cope with future challenges and survive well. As a result, this study was carried out in response to previous research on the assessment of obstacles related to social science curricula teachers in terms of improving students' life skills acquisition.

## 1.1. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine obstacles facing social science curricula teachers on students' life skills acquisition.

## 1.2. Statement of the Research Problem

Tanzania has modified its secondary school curriculum four times since independence, including in 1967, 1979, 1997, and 2005 (Kopweh and Mtitu, 2014). Except for 1979, all evaluations aimed to shift the school curriculum from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach, with the promotion of learning competencies and skills among learners being the curriculum's priority and emphasis, as well as the instructors' pedagogical practices. The primary goal has been to facilitate teaching and learning by linking or connecting theories acquired in class with learners' real-life situations. This indicates that the government recognizes the importance of skill and competency development among learners. Despite numerous efforts by the government and other education stakeholders to improve the quality of basic education, particularly by promoting learners' life skills competencies, teachers remain trapped in the teacher-centered chalk-and-talk system of teaching, although the curriculum requires them to use a variety of pedagogies (Lham et al., 2020). Using these tactics requires teachers to focus on subjects rather than students. Teachers struggle to complete the syllabus without transforming students by boosting life skills such as decision-making, communication, critical thinking, argumentation, and problem-solving abilities. Teachers' classroom dominance means stunting children's intellectual development (Alam, 2013). According to Selemani et al. (2021), instructors' teaching practices are distinguished by the seldom use of teaching and learning resources, the low engagement of learners in the learning process, and the limited use of ICTs. This indicates that instructors do not receive in-service training on growing pedagogical challenges in the school curriculum or teacher education. All of these factors have prompted the creation of this study in response to the issues that confusing social science curricula teachers have in improving students' learning of life skills. This study filled in the gap.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researcher used non-probability sampling, specifically the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is used because, given the study's goals and objectives, various types of people may have diverse and relevant perspectives on the ideas and issues at hand, and hence must be included in the sample (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher used a qualitative research approach with a case study research design. This study included focus group talks as part of its research methodology. The focus group discussion consisted of ten groups with fifty members from all community secondary schools. Each cohort had five students from each community secondary school. One community secondary school principal, two social science instructors (two from each secondary school), and two secondary school students. The study involved ten community secondary schools from five districts in the Mbeya region. This study followed a case study research design. A case study is a research design in which researchers conduct in-depth analyses of a case that comprises a process, animal, person, home, organization, group, industry, culture, or nationality (Asenahabi 2019). It is a thorough examination of a phenomenon that includes subjective details rather than objective ones. The study used an explanatory research approach to obtain data from several groups of participants. Explanatory studies aim to answer the questions of 'why' and 'how' (Boru 2018). This permits the researcher to apply qualitative tools. The study includes three key processes: transcribing the focus group discussion outcomes, sorting and synthesizing data, and developing themes. NVivo represents codes as nodes. The nodes were divided into themes based on the research objectives, research questions, literature review, and obtained data. Related themes were combined to make the core idea.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Data analysis and discussion in this part are based on various issues encountered during data gathering. The problems explored are those connected with social science curricula teachers in enhancing students' life skills acquisition.

### **3.1 Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Social Science Curricula**

This paper shows different obstacles that were raised by the focus group during the discussion. Lack of a social science curriculum laboratory, poor infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, poverty, Internet access, language of instruction, insufficient library service and in-service training

#### **3.1.1 Absence of social science subject's laboratory**

The focus group discussion had five (5) members. The participants were two social science subject teachers, the head of the secondary school, and the head boy and girl students from each secondary school. Participants in the focus group discussion were asked to describe obstacles facing teachers on social science curricula teachers on students' life skills acquisition. During the conversation, it was emphasized that social science teachers face a variety of obstacles. The following are the challenges that were raised during the conversation. The first difficulty is the lack of laboratories for social science disciplines; as a result, teachers face difficulties in lesson

preparation which requires laboratory experiments. It was noted that even the government does not recognize the importance of building social science curricula laboratories for teachers to ease lesson preparation. The emphasis is primarily on science subjects while social science curricula subjects are considered theoretical subjects. Some topics need serious experiments. For example, there is a topic on minerals. Teachers need to teach the characteristics of minerals through experiments. One social science teacher responded, saying:

*“To my side, the experiment is a kind of communication during teaching and learning that enables learners’ acquisition of life skills. For one to extract minerals, one should make sure that one knows well the kind of minerals needed for extraction. Teachers should have, know, and use the tools for minerals detection Practical teaching should be done to let the learners capture the characteristics of the targeted minerals. Using practical teaching results to develop effective communication”.*

According to Akani (2015), a laboratory is a space or facility used for scientific research, experimentation, demonstrations, testing, and data analysis, among other things. However, everything is done in the science lavatory is to obtain or acquire skills that will aid in the advancement of scientific knowledge and, as a result, the growth of human society. During the conversation, it became clear that there are themes in social science that require experiments, demonstrations, testing, and data analysis. Agriculture, economic development management, sustainable forest use, sustainable mining, climate and natural regions, and sustainable electricity and entrepreneurship are some of the subjects discussed. This demonstrates that several social science areas require students to conduct experiments, demonstrations, examinations, and/or analyze data to gain the necessary skills to succeed in society. Chen (2022) identifies laboratories as one element that facilitates teaching and learning.

### **3.1.2 Poor infrastructure**

The discussion revealed that schools face issues due to poor facilities, such as poor libraries, laboratories, classes, teachers’ houses, and offices. It was discovered that the majority of community secondary schools have chosen rooms that are used as libraries but were not designed for library services, such as Itewe Secondary School in Chunya District. Furthermore, the schools were found to have only two teachers’ houses which accommodate only three staff, the rest of the teachers do not live within the school grounds. There are dusty roads, substandard playing fields, and a shortage of teacher offices. Such bad infrastructure may discourage a teacher during teaching sessions. During the group discussion, one head of a community secondary school said:

*“To be honest, I view infrastructure as a concern in community secondary schools. There is no dedicated study library at our school. Our school has recently decided to designate one classroom as a library. Furthermore, no buildings serve as experimental laboratories.” Even when it rains, the windows in the classrooms remain open. Such a setting can discourage teachers during in-class instruction”.*

According to Kapur (2019), it is widely known that school infrastructure improvement has a substantial impact on learners' ability to meet educational objectives. The blame for this scenario has frequently been placed on education systems inherited from colonial overlords. As a result, the authorities must ensure that schools provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning activities. Such an atmosphere comprises a good library with all of the necessary amenities, such as internet access, textbooks, reference resources, and library furniture

### **3.1.3 Lack of teaching and learning materials**

Teachers do not have teacher guidebooks. A teacher’s guidebook is essential for teachers to prepare for their lessons. If the teacher misses a concept, the guidebook will help him or her keep on track with his or her lesson to teach. Additionally, teachers and students lack textbooks. One social science teacher stated that:

*“In addition to what my colleagues have mentioned, I consider the availability of teaching and learning materials such as students’ textbooks and teacher’s guidebooks as additional problem. These are critical texts because they are required to meet the curriculum requirements. To me, these are some of the issues that may impede the implementation of social science curricula in boosting students’ acquisition of life skills”.*

The library is incredibly valuable for both class preparation and learner knowledge and skill acquisition. Mubofu and Malekani (2019) emphasize the presence of subpar library amenities. This is similar to how Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) explain that rural South African schools lack resources for teaching and learning. This becomes difficult in lesson facilitation since the teacher must gather the content to teach from his or her resources.

### **3.1.4 Poverty**

Teachers are unable to prepare enough exercises, workshops, experiments, practical activities, and field and trip studies due to financial constraints. There is no preparation for printed weekly and monthly tests in the digital age. Students study by copying notes as directed by their instructors. The social science programs include no practical studies. Even when they are expected to conduct something

practical, a theoretical approach is used. One head of a community secondary school responded, saying:

*“What I have noticed is that we have some students from low-income homes whose parents or guardians are unable to provide their children with suitable uniforms, teaching, and learning materials. They sometimes miss school because they are hungry, and there is no way to address the situation.”*

### **3.1.5 Free Education in Community Secondary Schools**

Community secondary schools were set free from school fees. This resulted in overcrowded classes. If classes are overcrowded, automatically class management becomes difficult for teachers to teach effectively. If the teachers fail to manage the class, good performance becomes difficult. Overcrowding classes should be solved with an increase of resources including employing teachers and advancing infrastructure such as classes, offices, laboratories, and libraries. Politicians tend to initiate programs with no budget while the burden is left to teachers. On the other hand, the number of students increases without matching the student-teacher ratio. One student commented saying:

*“Overcrowding classrooms is another difficulty; it has become a nuisance in the classroom as a result of political leaders' generosity in providing free education. This discourages students from working hard on social science curriculum subjects because they do not have adequate space during teaching and learning.”*

### **3.1.6 English language as a medium of instruction**

Teachers in Tanzania use English to teach community secondary school students. The majority of learners at community secondary schools attended government Swahili primary schools. Primary schools teach entirely in Swahili, except English, which is taught as a subject. They attend community secondary schools with limited English proficiency. This leads to bad use of the English language. Sometimes teachers utilize poor English grammar to teach students. This is a challenge in knowledge and skills acquisition to learners. One social science teacher explained that:

*“In my experience, the English language in community secondary schools is poorly used in terms of grammar, particularly syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics. As a result, during teaching and learning, teachers encounter issues such as accurate pronunciation and sentence structure formation. This forces us to implement bilingualism, which includes English and Swahili.”*

There are two choices. The first is to employ English as a medium of education from pre-primary to higher study. The second alternative is to teach Swahili in all community secondary schools beginning with pre-primary school. This will aid in language mastering, allowing for easier comprehension in the acquisition of knowledge and skills during teaching and learning. According to Benson (2005), using familiar language to teach beginning literacy helps students learn sound-symbol or meaning-symbol correspondences.

### **3.1.7 Insufficiency of library services**

#### **3.1.7.1 Internet accessibility**

Lack of Internet accessibility; the current world is digitalized through Internet access. Even teaching and learning materials are digitalized through the Internet. Through the Internet, teachers can get suitable teaching and learning materials. Having internet access will enable teachers to get more teaching and learning materials. Also, teachers need internet access to become more current in the changing world of science and technology. A history teacher from Kyela district had the following comment;

*“I enjoy using the internet for individual study and lesson planning while at school. The issue is that our schools do not have internet access. Students are unable to commit time to obtaining educational materials. In terms of accessibility and community, the modern world resembles a village. Books can be published anywhere in the world, and you can easily access them from anywhere. Change happens swiftly and is recognized on the internet.”*

Selemani et al. (2021) claim that insufficient infrastructure and a lack of ICT knowledge and abilities among teachers hinder the teaching and learning process. This raises the likelihood that inadequate ICT teachers are preventing students from learning ICT in community secondary schools. Students thus struggle to study and practice utilizing the internet. Selemani et al. (2021) continue by highlighting the necessity of ICT integration for the development of a sustainable second-world economy. This highlights how important it is to develop your internet skills and knowledge. Additionally, more efficient class planning will be possible for teachers. Therefore, internet access should be available at the school to provide easy access to instructional resources.

#### **3.1.7.2 Lack of textbooks i.e., teachers' guide books and students' textbooks**

It was observed that none of the secondary schools the researcher visited had textbooks or teacher guides. The researcher requested a textbook and teacher's handbook, however the books were not turned in. During a focus group discussion, a geography teacher from the Mbeya district confirmed this. She made a statement and said:

*"In the 1990s, getting a teacher manual for instruction was not difficult. For a particular subject, teachers were given teacher guides and textbooks. There are a lot of books here right now, which sometimes confuses me. In my opinion, the Ministry of Science, Science and Technology ought to give significant consideration to creating teacher guides. Every topic in community high schools should have a well-written textbook, according to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. The literature needs to be appropriate for the learning environments."*

It is recommended that school quality assurers make a visit to community secondary schools in order to verify the availability of teacher guidebooks and textbooks. They should take action to guarantee that teacher's books and textbooks are available if they find that the books are missing. It appears that teachers are having trouble planning lessons because there aren't enough teacher books or textbooks available. Conversely, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) contend that the continuation of poverty has led to inadequate support for learners' education, a shortage of resources, underqualified teachers, and the instruction of multiple classes in one classroom (multi-grade teaching).

### **3.1.7.3 Absence of librarians in community secondary schools**

It was observed that the library is experiencing a labor deficit, leading to the replacement of librarians by teachers. As they work on other initiatives, let the government show that it is serious about hiring librarians. A library is a hub for scholarly materials. Thus, having a professional librarian will facilitate simple access to teaching and learning resources for secondary school students in the community. This is a result of the professional librarian's expertise in providing pupils with pertinent materials. Different teachers at community secondary schools require different resources for instruction in secondary schools. Teachers need library services for lesson preparation class sessions. This indicates that a qualified librarian will allow the library service task to go without hiccups. A head from a community secondary school in the Mbeya region's Rungwe district commented saying:

*"Occasionally, the timetable necessitates dedicated study sessions for lesson preparation. These are the ideal hours for teachers to study and prepare the lesson in libraries. Due to a lack of librarians, it can be difficult for instructors to use library services. The government should be aware of the significant role that librarians play in inspiring teachers for lesson preparation in the library."*

According to the aforementioned comment, there is a personnel issue. Mubofu and Malekani (2019) claim that the government is unaware of the importance of community secondary schools' libraries. The quality of staff at community secondary schools has a direct impact on how well pupils learn to read and acquire knowledge.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study's findings draw attention to the issues of using social science courses to help teachers enhance students' life skills acquisition in community secondary schools in Mbeya Region, Tanzania. Among the problems were inadequate facilities, a shortage of resources for instruction and learning, poverty, and a deficiency of English language proficiency in community secondary schools. This serves as a warning to the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Education to address the issues found in the research region.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends the following. The first step is to employ familiar languages throughout the teaching and learning sessions. Second, Tanzania's government must devise strategies to address difficulties such as inadequate facilities, a lack of resources for instruction and learning, poverty, and a lack of English language proficiency in community secondary schools. Third, I recommend the coordination to be under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to solve the difficulties identified in the research region

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