

Curriculum Implementers' Perspectives on Relevance of Secondary Education in Real-Life Settings

Thabita L. Lupeja and Sotco C. Komba

ABSTRACT

The recent expansion of enrollment in secondary education in Tanzania has contributed to an increase in the number of secondary education graduates in the society than before. Regardless of the increase, there has been a poor transition rate to post-secondary education and therefore making the majority return to their communities to join the informal sector to sustain their livelihood. This article presents the findings on the relevance of secondary education curriculum to youth's livelihood in Tanzania. It addresses the issue of the application of secondary education knowledge to learners' social-economic context. Qualitative data were collected in 10 densely populated wards in the Mvomero district to secondary education leavers, headteachers, and academic teachers. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Content analysis was used to analyze data. The findings revealed secondary education has the potential to improve individuals' living standards and birth control. However, the study also showed that economic activities are still gender-specific, coupled with male-dominated traditions. In addition, the study revealed knowledge disjunction between the school and real-life settings. Moreover, the centralized curriculum widens the gap between school knowledge and real-life because it does not respond to the diversified geographical environment of Tanzania. Based on the findings the study recommends curriculum development process involve diverse groups of stakeholders to design contents that are reflective of the respective societal needs, integration of theory and practice in teaching and learning, and integration of both general and skill-based education.

Keywords: Curriculum, Relevance, Secondary Education, Tanzania.

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T L. Lupeja*

Sokoine University of Agriculture,
Morogoro, Tanzania.

(Email: lupejatl@sua.ac.tz)

S C. Komba

Institute of Social Work, Dar es salaam,
Tanzania.

(e-mail: sotco.komba@isw.ac.tz)

I. INTRODUCTION

Relevant education is the type of education in which the design of basic schooling relates to the life and work of the community in general (Lupeja & Komba, 2021b; Sinclair & Lillis, 1980). It is subjected to the contexts such as social, economic, and political situations that shape perceptions regarding what type of education is appropriate to cater to the needs of diverse categories of learners. Depending on the economic, social, and political status, the type of education differs from one place to another. Any education system thus should promote knowledge, skills, competences, and attitudes relevant to students' current and future needs (Sinclair & Lillis, 1980). According to TIE (2007), the secondary education curriculum in Tanzania prepares learners to be able to address challenges emanating from the prevailing socio-economic situations and cross-cutting issues. Therefore, this implies that the curricula being developed in Tanzania are geared towards addressing socio-economic challenges, hence relevant.

This paper presents the findings on the relevance of secondary education curriculum to youth's livelihood in Tanzania. It addresses the issue of application of secondary education knowledge to learners' social-economic context. By relating the social-economic information of secondary education graduates with what was learnt at school, it is empirically evident that secondary education is relevant in aspects such as birth control and living conditions improvement (Lupeja & Qi, 2016). However, knowledge from schooling does not seem to be relevant to youths' livelihood because a link is missing between the knowledge acquired in schools and livelihood strategies applied by youths in real-life settings.

The provision of education exists within the framework of macro-policies, ministries, sectoral policies, and programmes within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The macro-policies include the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP, 2010). The Tanzanian Development Vision 2025 considers education to be the key instrument in bringing social and economic transformation as it aims to sufficiently enable students acquire knowledge,

skills, and competences which can make them competent enough to solve development challenges which face the Nation (URT, 2000:19). Secondary education as a part of education that absorbs the majority of children, plays a crucial role in economic and social transformation in Tanzanian societies. The economic and social transformation can effectively take place if the school teaching and learning is meaningful enough to enable students acquire knowledge and skills that could enable them to solve developmental challenges in their immediate environment and the country at large.

Regarding the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty, secondary education aims at imparting knowledge and skills to students which could make them capable of fighting against poverty (TIE, 2007 ; Lupeja, 2021). Augmenting from the 1995 education and training policy, the current education policy (ETP, 2014) focuses on building students based on the formation of values, knowledge, skills, and self-reliance. The policy spells out that, “*Self-reliance education should continue leading the delivery of education and training to prepare students to be able to address social, political, economic, and technological changes occurring in their environment*” (ETP 2014:19). Since secondary education absorbs a big number of youths who are potential workers in the informal sector, the education policy of Tanzania regards it as an effective weapon towards development and poverty reduction.

Though the Tanzania education policy stipulates that Tanzania education system should provide relevant education to students, one could ask questions such as, are the school leavers competent enough to address challenges in real-life settings? Are the curriculum contents relevant to real-life settings? Are the written policies and manifestations concerning knowledge and skills acquired in secondary education useful in real-life settings? In an attempt to reveal all these, this study made an assessment of the relevance of secondary education teaching and learning to real-life settings considering a dramatic increase of secondary education leavers working in the informal sector.

The recent expansion of secondary education enrollment has increased the number of secondary education leavers in the society. Regardless of the increase in enrollment, there has been a poor transition rate to post-secondary education (MoEST, 2019). Moreover, the pass rate for form four national examinations has been decreasing each year making the majority of candidates miss qualifications to further their studies. Studies spell out that poor performance in ordinary level secondary education has been increasing as years unfold (Lupeja, 2021; Lupeja & Komba, 2021b). For example, in 2019, about 79 percent of candidates who sat for the ordinary level secondary education examinations failed (NECTA, 2019). When the candidates fail the examinations, it means that they have insufficient qualifications to proceed to tertiary education level. The youths who fail the examinations return to their communities to join the informal sector to sustain their livelihood. Thus, the knowledge and skills acquired in secondary education could be applied in their livelihood strategies. The issue at stake is whether the skills and knowledge implied in secondary education are applicable in real-life settings and whether school teaching and learning reflect what is going on in real-life settings.

In view of the foregoing, there is limited empirical evidence on what is happening in the informal economy which absorbs more than 80 percent of secondary education leavers’ youths every year (BEST 1998-2012; 2016; Lupeja, 2021). Since the informal sector occupies 75% of the Tanzania economy (HDR, 2014; Lupeja & Komba, 2021b), this study assessed the relevance of secondary education knowledge to secondary education leavers real-life settings in the world of work. It was envisaged that the study would provide useful feedback to education policy makers and curriculum developers on how best the provided education could be made meaningful and relevant.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was founded on the capability approach as pioneered by Sen (1993). Education ought to expand an individual’s capability sets by developing curricula that are multidimensional, instrumental, and transformative potential (Dre’ze & Sen, 2002). The transformative potential such as reasoning skills can facilitate an individual to opt for better functionings. As a capability building, formal education has a special ability to raise students’ awareness by exposing them to the realities of society (Vaughan & Walker, 2012).

Education and school, in particular, should have the potential of providing young people with access to positive resources that ensures the ability to make choices that matter to them (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). However, for a school to be a place of nurturing and flourishing students’ capabilities, it needs a relevant curriculum that could address societal needs. The 2002 UNESCO report recommends that policies should be judged to be successful if they have enhanced people’s capabilities (Lupeja, 2021). The evaluation should be based on the impact of the policy on individuals’ present and future capabilities. This study thus focused on establishing the extent to which secondary education has the potential to make students capable of achieving their livelihood upon completion.

III. MATERIALS AND MEHODS

The study employed cross-sectional design to collect qualitative data in 10 densely populated wards in Mvomero district. Both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used to select a sample of 170 respondents. A total of 150 secondary education leavers were systematically selected while 20 teachers were purposively selected. Each school was represented by the head and academic teacher as key informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, the semi-structured interviews involving both heads of schools and academic teachers were conducted. Data were analyzed using content analysis.

IV. THE RELEVANCE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION TO STUDENTS' SOCIAL-ECONOMIC STATUS

The key indicators that could be easily observed if there is a change in socio-economic status are the demographic information of individuals. The study assessed secondary education leavers' social-economic characteristics to establish whether education had a contribution on their livelihood. The findings revealed that secondary education has the potential to improve individuals' standards of living as detailed in the following sections:

A. *The Role of Education on Birth Control*

Regarding this aspect, 36.67 percent of all respondents had children while 63.33 percent had no children. Those who had children, 47.27 had one child, 29.09 percent had 2 children, and 16.36 had 3 children. In addition, 5.46 percent had 4 children and 1.825 percent had 5 children. The study has revealed a correlation between education and number of children an individual had. These observations are similar to those of the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS, 2015-2016; Lupeja & Qi, 2016) which pointed education level of an individual as a significant factor in determining the number of children in Tanzania. This implies that when people are educated, birth rates can be controlled for socio-economic development. The impact of secondary education on birth control among Tanzanian youths correlates with international demands such as the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The less number of children as revealed by the study could be a result of late marriages as the study (Lupeja & Qi, 2016) found delayed marriages in secondary education leavers.

The number of children per individual has a great impact on socio-economic development because a small number of children provides a room for adult family members to participate in economic activities. In addition, people with less numbers of children are likely to invest more in their children in aspects such as health and education. Investing in health and education for children is very important for their social-economic welfare, hence breaking vicious cycles of poverty in future generations. A study on the relationship between fertility rate and economic growth in developing countries (Li, 2015; Lupeja & Qi, 2016) found high fertility to be negatively correlated with economic growth. This means that when the economy grows, fertility rate decreases.

B. *The Role of Education on the Quality of a House Owned by An Individual*

Among the respondents who were involved in the study, 81.95 percent owned houses roofed with iron sheets and 80 percent of houses were constructed with cement blocks or burnt bricks. In the same light, 83.2 percent of houses were made of cement/ floors while 16.8 percent owned mud floor houses. These findings are far better than those of the Tanzania census (NBS, 2012 in HDR, 2014) which indicated that 65 percent of Tanzanians owned houses roofed with iron sheets, and 30 percent of houses had floors made of cement or ceramic tiles. This remarkable difference in the quality of houses owned by secondary education leavers has a great implication on the role of secondary education in national development. In other words, it could be deduced that secondary education knowledge has the potential in improving the living standards of people especially those who attended.

Although the study has identified some notable benefits of secondary education to youths' livelihood, the observed benefits are minor compared to the policy and curriculum expectations. The delayed age for the first birth that is negatively correlated with the number of children an individual possesses does not necessarily imply that the skills and knowledge acquired in secondary education plays a greater role. It could mean delayed marriage or sexual relationships due to the number of years spent in school. With respect to the policy manifestations, the benefits and relevance of secondary education should be realized from the knowledge and skills acquired during schooling. This means that the knowledge and skills identified in the curriculum key learning areas should have an impact on graduates' livelihood by being applicable in socio-economic activities.

Though the study has shown the relevance of secondary education in improving living standards in aspects of house quality and fertility rate, the role of secondary education in narrowing the gender gap in opting for livelihood strategies among secondary education leavers in the informal sector is still low. The economic activities preferences among secondary education leavers are still gender specific, coupled with

male-dominated traditions. Studies acknowledge the benefits of secondary education in enhancing women's well-being and providing them with better opportunities for participating in the community and labor market (Heath & Jayachandran, 2017; Svetlana & Luciana de la Flor, 2020; Bbaale, 2014; Shamchiyeva, Leyla, Kizu, Takaaki, Kahyarara & Godius, 2014). Although secondary education is the greatest payoff investment that addresses the social and economic constraints (ICRW, 2005), the findings show less impact in widening opportunities in economic activities for women. This means that secondary education in Tanzania has not made a significant contribution in increasing women's options and opportunities in economic activities. The findings are in line with those of Lupeja and Qi (2016) which indicated that secondary education had no impact on women's participation in the labor force in rural Tanzania. This implies that secondary education provision in Tanzania should focus on narrowing gender gap in economic activities participation.

C. Knowledge and Skills Needed by Youths to Earn Livelihood in the World of Work

Like other developing countries, 75 percent of Tanzania's economy is occupied by the informal sector of which the mainstay is agricultural-related livelihood strategies. To effectively practice a particular livelihood strategy/or socio-economic activity, an individual is supposed to possess pre-requisite knowledge and skills. This can be acquired either through formal education or non-formal education. However, it is worth noting that some livelihood strategies require indigenous knowledge and/or experience. This part presents the skills needed to be incorporated in school teaching and learning with a view of enabling learners acquire knowledge and skills to effectively practice their livelihood strategies in the world of work.

The findings of this study have revealed that the livelihood strategies practiced by secondary education leavers in the world of work include motorcycle taxi business (bodaboda), tricycle taxi business (Bajaji), restaurant, retail shops, and peasantry, salon and business middlemen. Others include carpentry, cereal crop business, masonry, motorcycle mechanics, and electronic money agents. The skills needed to practice such livelihood strategies range from basic skills to technical know-how. Some livelihood strategies require basic skills and knowledge which are almost covered by the secondary education curriculum. Although the curriculum addresses the prerequisite knowledge for livelihood strategies, this study has revealed that the majority of youths fail to apply school knowledge in the world of work. One of the secondary leaver had this to say:

"I do not apply the knowledge I got from school in my economic activities because there is no direct linkage between school knowledge and livelihood strategies in real life settings"

What seems to be a challenge is not the knowledge itself but putting the knowledge into practice. Studies (Weaver, 2011; Lucas, 2014; Lupeja & Komba, 2021a; Lupeja, 2021) affirm that relevant education should balance both theory and practice to allow students to explore the knowledge and be able to make sense of it. In this study, it has been observed that having relevant knowledge, skills, and competences stipulated in the curriculum is one step but enabling learners to acquire them and make use of the same in real life situations remains an issue that requires further pursuance.

Although the curriculum content entails livelihood-related skills, it is evident that theory overrides practice during the teaching and learning process. Taba (1962) cautioned about the possibility of dealing with significant curriculum content in a manner that could result in irrelevant outcomes. It was further pointed out that curriculum implementation process could make the curriculum content relevant or irrelevant. This study has revealed that practical skills are vital for the relevant curriculum as students could directly link the school knowledge with their livelihood strategies. Having the opportunity to practice the skills and knowledge in school is likely to enhance students' capability for the livelihood strategies they would opt once they complete schooling.

D. Curriculum Contents and Youths' Livelihood Knowledge Gap

The curriculum encompasses all the learning of students which is planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals (Tyler, 1949). It is a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students (Eisner, 1979). The education goals and objectives should be achieved not only by incorporating relevant content but also adequate time for the implementation process and all necessary facilities. Though the secondary education curriculum has relevant content, this study has found the existence of a livelihood-related knowledge gap among secondary education leavers. The observed gap is on poor linkage between the curriculum content and real-life settings as four leavers seemed to be incompetent in applying school knowledge in their daily activities. Although students exhibited awareness of knowledge facts, it was hard for them to apply in actual life settings because of inadequate opportunities for practice during schooling.

As pointed out earlier, the gap between the school knowledge and field application is attributable to lack of balance between theory and practice. This implies that when a curriculum is being developed, both contents and pedagogical aspects of the curriculum should be organized to enable meaningful learning to take place. When a curriculum is theoretical and facts-oriented, it cannot enable learners develop practical

skills relevant to their daily livelihood activities. Referring to the science secondary education curriculum, scholars posit that it is neither 100% contextualized into the Tanzanian culture and traditions nor is it 100% assimilated with the colonialists (Lucas, 2014; Lupeja & Komba, 2021a). In addition, it has also been argued that secondary education curriculum in Tanzania has never been modified to suit African economic needs. This has led teaching and learning to be theoretically oriented and irrelevant because students could not link school science with real-life settings (Shizha, 2013; 2016).

The fact-oriented and theoretical curriculum has been acting as a setback for students to link the subject knowledge to their livelihood because it does not allow students to practice, hence unable to develop relevant knowledge. This has made students regard school education as quite different from livelihood. This was attested by a physics teacher who had this to state:

“The physics subject content knowledge does not prepare students to use physics in the real world, what is being taught is just memorization of facts and not application”.

Although the curriculum aims and objectives affirm secondary education as relevant to real-life settings, the type of content to achieve this end matters significantly. The content which emphasizes the linkage of facts and their applications is likely to make the curriculum relevant. There are well-documented studies worldwide on students' negative attitude towards learning facts rather than reality in both primary and secondary schools (Royal Society, 2008 b; Sturman & Rudduck, 2009; UNESCO, 2010). When there is more emphasis on facts than the reality of the knowledge, meaningful learning cannot take place. In such a situation, learners tend to view learning as irrelevant.

Like other studies, the negative consequences of putting more emphasis on facts during teaching and learning was also noted in this study as a contributing factor for the majority of students to avoid science subjects in secondary schools. This was acknowledged by another physics teacher who had this to say:

“I know a student who dropped physics subject two years ago on poor performance grounds. He is currently a famous technician in water pump machines in our suburb”

When the respondent's remarks are analyzed, it could be deduced that facts taught in subjects, and particularly science subjects, have no direct application in real life situations. Camps (1925) in UNESCO (2010) recommend the curriculum developers to select curriculum contents that balance theory and practice. Referring to science-based subjects which have been dominated with facts, Camps points out the importance of balancing theory and practice as it enables learners to participate fully in their learning. In that way, learners get opportunities to learn to live together (conducting science practical works together), learning to do (defining, refining and resolving problems), and learning to know (getting to know basic concepts of science, how to use them to explain and understand the world around them, and how to change it). Thus, it could be seen that balancing theory and practice could make the curriculum more relevant in promoting appropriate skills for the livelihood activities. When students have the opportunity to both learn the facts and relate the same to practice, they would develop skills and knowledge that could be helpful in their life as one participant noted:

“In the late 1980s, students had the opportunity to learn and practice the knowledge and skills at school and thus acquired relevant skills and knowledge which were the key instrument in their life after school”

The teachers' voices are in line with studies (Weaver, 2011; Lupeja, 2021; Lupeja & Komba, 2021a) which pointed out that the school curriculum in Tanzania has failed to provide relevant knowledge due to a widening dichotomy between theory and practice (THDR, 2014). Concerns about lack of employability skills among youths is essentially a result of theoretical education provided in Tanzanian schools. Despite the fact that education is considered a means of equipping youths with livelihood skills, the curriculum implementation does not seem to respond to that effect.

Apart from the poor balance between practical and theory, the centralized curriculum also limits students to develop relevant skills needed in their immediate environment. The centralized curriculum does not respond to the diversified geographical environment of Tanzania and livelihood strategies because the societal needs are diverse. This has also been witnessed in other countries such as Indonesia where the centralized curriculum was facing challenges in accommodating the diversified needs of the society (Kusumaningrum & Triwiyanto, 2015). Likewise, Lawrence and Tate (1997) emphasize shifting policies towards decentralization of educational systems to the feasibility and diversity of livelihoods in their unique settings. Tanzania, like other countries, has a diverse geographical environment, hence diversified livelihood strategies.

A decentralized curriculum tends to respond to the diversified needs of the society, hence making it meaningful and impactful. Although the centralized curriculum has advantages such as having uniformity of learning materials across the country and simplicity in monitoring standards and evaluating achievements, it has been revealed that secondary education curriculum in Tanzania is not responsive to the needs of the people as theory is more dominant than practice. For the curriculum to bear both elements of centralized and decentralized features it should decentralize some of the contents and the other contents should be taught universally. This could be done by putting special emphasis on certain topics in responding to the local needs of the community. The findings suggestions relate to the Burkina Faso school curriculum

which divided contents into two main parts such as 80 percent of the curriculum content is centralized and 20 percent is locally related (Ziba, 2011; Lupeja, 2021). By designing a curriculum that would reflect the local needs, students could thus acquire both general and relevant knowledge which could be useful to their immediate environment. Similarly, Tiari *et al.* (2015) acknowledged the semi-decentralized curriculum as vital for Iranian development. In the case of Tanzania's curriculum, subjects such as agriculture fishery, animal husbandry, and others should be contextually emphasized. Therefore, what seems to be more important is to design the curriculum in way that theory and practice are balanced and the contents are responsive to the diverse needs of society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyzed the extent to which secondary education in Tanzania is relevant to real-life settings. The findings indicate that secondary education acts as an important tool for birth control and up-scaling the living standards. On the aspect of birth control, the findings show that people who attended secondary education had less number of children and owned better houses than their age mates who did not. However, the findings show that secondary education does not offer enough economic opportunities to women. This paper, therefore, suggests that the ministry of education in Tanzania should provide secondary education to every child to reduce birth rates and improve the living standards of people. The provision of secondary education should strive more on narrowing the gender gap.

Although the secondary education curriculum in Tanzania covers the prerequisite knowledge for livelihood strategies found in the informal sector, the study revealed that the majority of youths fail to apply the school knowledge in the world of work because at school, they learnt theoretically. Learning theoretically without practice does not help students to develop necessary skills that could be applicable in their real-life settings. Moreover, the gap between the school knowledge has been widening through the adoption of the centralized curriculum which does not necessarily reflect the immediate environment. It is, therefore, recommended for the curriculum developers to contextualize education and balance both theory and practice to make education more relevant.

Also, the study recommends institutional integration of vocational training in the secondary education curriculum by incorporating both general and skill-based education. This could allow students to have a wider choice when opting for higher stages of academic education as well as having useful skills in the world of work. This could be done in different approaches such as work-related skills to be taught as separate subjects or integrated into the particular fields of knowledge. This could make secondary education more relevant to real-life settings.

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