

Utilisation of performance-based rewards to improve teachers' work performance in Tanzanian secondary schools

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Abstract

In this study we explored the heads of schools utilisation of performance-based rewards (PBR) to improve teachers' work performance (TWP). The study employed a qualitative approach and an exploratory case study design. A sample of 20 participants, including heads of schools, teachers, ward educational officers (WEOs), and internal school quality assurance officers (ISQAOs), was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection methods involved interviews and documentary reviews, and were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that heads of schools utilised the PBR to motivate teachers to increase students' pass rates in national examinations, fostering a culture of hard work among teachers, and recognizing and celebrating academic achievements in national examinations. Additionally, the study showed that teaching practice focused on content coverage and lack of a conducive teaching and learning environment impeded teachers from effectively integrating the LCA into their lessons. The study concluded that heads of schools utilised PBR to improve TWP. The study recommends expansion of the scope of PBR to include the reward of teachers who effectively incorporate LCA into their instructional practices. The study further recommends providing teachers with training on effectively integrating LCA into their instructional practices and creating teaching and learning environments that are conducive to the implementation of LCA. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of PBR in improving TWP within the context of private secondary schools.

Keywords: Performance-based rewards, Learner-centred approach, Teaching and learning

Introduction

In recent years, education stakeholders have increasingly recognized the importance of equipping students with 21st century competencies that are applicable to a variety of situations, both now and in the future. The 21st century competencies include critical thinking, learning-to-learn, reflection, reconciling tensions, creativity, and problem solving, among others (Gulled, 2023; OECD, 2020). In response to this, many developed and developing countries changed their curricula to incorporate competence-based curriculum (CBC) elements. Following the adoption of CBC, there has been a paradigm shift in pedagogy from teacher-centred approach (TCA) to learner centred approach (LCA). LCA has received recognition for its potential of supporting students in developing 21st century competencies through promotion of active participation and interactive learning (Foster & Piacentini, 2023; Gulled, 2023; Leyendecker et al., 2008; Vavrus et al., 2011). In addition,

LCA is recognised for its ability to promote democratic societies that are suitable for both the present and future economic contexts (Schweisfurth, 2013).

The Tanzanian government aimed to develop a creative, innovative, and well-educated population by 2025 to address societal challenges, drive development, and enhance competitiveness at regional and international levels. For Tanzanians to progress to this point of development, the curricula at various levels of education have to be reformed to align with the current needs as stipulated in Vision 2025 (United Republic of Tanzania, 1999). In 2005, Tanzania undertook a significant curriculum reform, switching from a knowledge based curriculum to a CBC. The CBC emphasises that teachers should adhere to the principles of LCA to foster active student participation, facilitate interaction between students and teachers and peers, and support learners in critical thinking, idea generation, and the creation of meaningful artefacts (Tanzania Institute of Education, 2013).

Nevertheless, the 2020–2021 education sector performance audit report revealed that many secondary school teachers in Tanzania exhibit poor work performance due to lack of knowledge about CBC and ineffective utilisation of LCA (United Republic of Tanzania, 2021). In addition, it has been observed that a significant number of teachers have been struggling in implementing the LCA in their instructional practices (Nkya et al., 2021). Moreover, many teachers are failing to plan learner-centred lessons, thus resulting in less engagement of students in the teaching and learning process (Komba & Mwandaji, 2015). Ndomondo et al (2022) revealed that many teachers have not yet adapted their instructional practices to LCA, hence potentially jeopardising the anticipated benefits of CBC. It was also reported that many teachers still rely on traditional content-based teaching and learning strategies, something that makes students memorise the facts taught instead of developing their practical competencies (Kafyulilo et al., 2013). Thus, the ineffective integration of LCA by teachers in their instructional practices has hindered the realisation of quality education through implementation of CBC in Tanzania (Makunja, 2015).

The fact that teaching and learning (T&L) in Tanzania has remained low raise concerns about the potential for students to acquire the 21st century skills necessary to address real-world problems (Kafyulilo et al., 2013; Komba & Mwandaji, 2015; United Republic of Tanzania, 2021). Nevertheless, it was expected that heads of schools who serve as chief educational supervisors at school level would not only guide teachers in performing their teaching duties using LCA but also recognise and reward those who do so (Chua & Mosha, 2015). Given the above context, it is still unclear how heads of public secondary schools in Tanzania are utilising PBR to improve TWP as many studies have only examined the performance of teachers in relation to CBC and LCA (Kafyulilo et al., 2013; Mkimibili & Kitta, 2019). Thus, it was important to explore how heads of schools utilised PBR to improve TWP and identify the barriers that prevented teachers from effectively integrating the LCA into their teaching. The key research question was: How do the heads of schools *utilise the performance-based rewards (PBR) to improve the TWP in Tanzania?*

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the Goal Setting Theory (GST), developed by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham. GST explains how clear goals motivate people to improve their performance and accomplish goal-related tasks (Locke, 2013). According to GST, goals represent the desirable performance standards that individuals are required to achieve or

demonstrate. Those with clear, specific goals tend to perform significantly better than those without goals. The absence of goals or presence of inappropriate goals can lead people to believe that they are performing better when in reality they are not (Locke & Latham, 2002; Seijts et al., 1998). The core principles of the GST include the following:

- Individuals exhibit a strong commitment to goals and activities with high rewards and a lesser commitment to goals and activities with lower rewards;
- People can only perform to the level of standards required if they have the competence needed;
- People cannot perform to the required standard in a work environment with high constraints; and
- Close monitoring of work performance and feedback provision allow workers to know their performance level and the improvement they need.

The GST implies that instructional supervisors set clear goals that motivate teachers to devote a significant portion of their efforts and resources to curriculum implementation. It also requires supervisors to adequately reward teachers who successfully achieve the goals set for them. Additionally, it is essential for instructional supervisors to create work environments that facilitate effective teaching and learning.

Research Methods

Research approach and design

This study employed a qualitative approach which enabled participants in their natural settings to share their experience and perspectives on the use of PBR to improve TWP (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study also used an exploratory case study design, which allowed the use of multiple data sources to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Crowe et al., 2011).

Area of the study

This study was conducted in Kilimanjaro region, which is recognized as the top-performing region in the country based on recent results from the Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (CSEE) (refer Table 1). Despite the potential benefits of PBR and LCA, their contribution to student achievement in the CSEE remains unclear. Once again, the question that remains is whether teachers in this high-achieving region encounter any difficulties while incorporating LCA into their instruction. Therefore, data from Kilimanjaro could provide valuable insights into the potential of PBR in improving TWP.

Table 1: Kilimanjaro region CSEE Performance

YEAR	RANK (N=31)
2020	2
2019	1
2018	1
2017	1
2016	5

Source: (National Examinations Council of Tanzania, 2017, 2018, 2019; Kolumbia, 2021)

Sampling techniques and sample size

Criterion purposive sampling techniques were used to select the participants with experience in PBR and TWP. The criterion purposive sampling entails looking for people who fit a specific description, such as having gone through a specific experience in life (Given, 2008). Participants included six (06) teachers, six (06) heads of schools, two (02) WEOs, and six (06) ISQAOs. All twenty participants were selected from six public secondary schools. Based on CSEE results from 2017-2019, half of them were from the top three highest-ranked schools and the other half were from the bottom three lowest-ranked schools. The sample size was deemed adequate for obtaining comprehensive data, based on the principle of data saturation. That is to say, further data collection after reaching saturation point was viewed as unnecessary as it would yield ideas similar to those already collected (Given, 2008).

Data collection methods

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and document reviews. The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions, which facilitated consistent discussion of the research topic while allowing interviewees to express their unique perspectives. It also allowed the researcher to maintain control over the conversation by focusing on the key research questions. Additionally, the guide enabled the interviewer to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewees' responses. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted in quiet environments to ensure clear voice recordings. By implementing this technique, the voices of the participants were captured effectively, hence leading to improved quality of transcription (Creswell, 2012; Given, 2008).

In addition, utilising document review was the most efficient method since the data were readily available in text format, thus saving time on transcription (Creswell, 2012). The reviewed documents included school strategic plans and school performance evaluation reports (SPERs) prepared by external school quality assurance officers (ESQAOs). The SPERs provided data on the perspectives of ESQAOs regarding the state of PBR and TWP. Similarly, school strategic plans provided data on how school heads planned or implemented the PBR to improve TWP.

Data analysis and ethical issues

Thematic analysis was employed in this study to identify significant concepts and patterns by segmenting, grouping, and reconstructing data (Given, 2008). Specifically, the data analysis procedures included the following steps: First, all interview audio data were converted into text through transcription. Subsequently, texts in the Swahili language were converted into English language through the process of translation. Second, the transcripts were read repeatedly through the process called data familiarisation. This enabled the researcher to be familiar with the data content and views expressed by the participants while noting all relevant information. Third, codes were created through a process called code generation. This step involves labelling the recurring ideas in the data to distinguish them from others. Fourth, further analysis was done on codes to generate categories or sub-themes. This process facilitated the linking and grouping of previously coded data sets with similar meanings. Fifth, additional analysis was made on the categories of data through the process known as theme generation. This process led to the merging of some categories of data together to form themes.

In addition, the study adhered to all research ethics, including obtaining research approval, obtaining the participants' informed consent, truthfully reporting participant's opinions, and using pseudonyms to shield the participants and institutions from potential harm.

Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure trustworthiness, the study utilised several strategies. Firstly, it implemented triangulation of data sources and collection methods to corroborate evidence and draw reasonable conclusions. Additionally, purposive sampling technique was employed to deliberately include the participants with prior experience in both PBR and TWP, thereby ensuring depth and breadth of data collection. Furthermore, the inclusion of the participant quotes enhanced the thick description and provided other researchers with the means to assess relevance of these findings in other similar contexts (Allen, 2017).

Findings

The following section presents the findings of the study, which align with the research objectives.

Utilisation of PBR by heads of public secondary schools to improve TWP

The findings indicate that heads of schools utilised PBR to enhance students' pass rates, encourage hard work, and celebrate success. The following subsections provide a detailed presentation of these findings.

Enhancing students' pass rate

The study found that all the six heads of public secondary schools implemented the PBR programmes. Participants widely believed that the PBR was used to motivate teachers to enhance students' pass rates in national examinations. During the interviews, one of the heads of schools suggested that PBR programmes should help to enhance results of T&L. Using farming and football analogies, one of the participants said:

Brother, let no one deceive you, if you plant maize, we expect to see your harvest.... even in football, they don't get points or win trophies for the number of dribbles and passes players make in the field but for the goals scored to win the match. That's why there is an award for the best scorer and a trophy for teams that win more matches. Now even with us, the principle is the same that we reward teachers based on the results in national examinations. (Interview with head of school "C", October, 2020).

The findings from the documents reviewed further substantiated the findings generated from interviews that suggested a deliberate intention of providing PBR in order to improve students' pass rate. The determination of PBR eligibility for teachers was based on their effectiveness in assisting students to achieve grade "A" or "B" in the Form Two National Assessment (FTNA) and Form Four Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations (CSEE). This is evident in a passage from the document titled "Strategy to Improve Academic Performance" from one of the schools, which stated:

The school will make sure it eradicates the achievement of division zero for the classes participating in the national examinations. In order to accomplish the objectives, the following measures will be implemented: a monetary reward of Tsh.10, 000 will be granted for attaining A, and Tsh.5,

000 for attaining B, for the respective subject among Form Four teachers. A monetary reward of 10,000 Tsh. for Form Two teachers who achieve grade A in the respective subject. (School "E" Strategic Plan of 2020).

These findings suggest that PBR was preferentially awarded to teachers whose students achieved higher grades in FTNA and CSEE. This implies that the primary goal of establishing and implementing PBR programmes in public secondary schools was to motivate teachers to increase students' pass rates in the national examinations.

Encouraging hard work

The study also revealed that heads of schools used PBR to encourage teachers to work hard. During the interview, one of the heads of schools from school "D" explained that rewards were provided to motivate teachers:

We have created an environment that makes the teacher motivated to teach, especially those teachers who are teaching examination classes. This means that teachers who teach the examination classes usually know that after the results are out, and their students have performed well, there is something that they are going to be given... (Interview with head of school "D", November, 2020).

In addition, the findings from the document review also indicated that heads of schools need to put more effort to encourage teachers to work hard through rewards. In a section 'What is working well,' an excerpt from the 2019 SPERs for school "B" states: "There is a good policy of awarding teachers and students who excel academically; it encourages teachers and learners to work hard." Moreover, comparable suggestions were observed in the SPERs as outlined below:

The practice of rewarding students who excel academically motivates them to work hard. Teachers who do exceptionally well in national exams in the subjects of their specialisation are also given rewards. As a result, both students and teachers put in extra effort to improve their performance. (School Performance Evaluation Report of School "D" for 2018).

The findings above suggest that heads of secondary schools utilised PBR as a means to encourage teachers to work hard in implementing their teaching and learning duties for the improvement of students' academic performance and achievement.

Celebrating success

The findings indicated that heads of schools utilised PBR to celebrate teachers and students' success in the National Examinations. Nevertheless, the scale of the celebration depended on the school's financial resources. For example, schools with limited resources, such as school "E," arranged simple celebration ceremonies. Regarding the celebration of success, a participant from a lowly-ranked school in CSEE elaborated:

A teacher whose students perform better in their subject should receive substantial rewards. Unfortunately, it is difficult for us to do so due to limited funding. We will try to sort it out through the meal contributions.....after all, anything is better than nothing. (Interview with head of school "E", November, 2020).

Nevertheless, further analysis revealed that some financially stable and highly-ranked schools in terms of performance in CSEE, such as school “A” and “D”, in Kilimanjaro region held events at upscale venues to celebrate the success of their teachers and the school as a whole. During these events, which included dining and drinking, teachers whose students had achieved outstanding results were given cash rewards. The following statement from one of the participants confirms this celebration:

There are prizes during the graduation ceremony. The head of school sometimes gets funds from the school projects to make teachers feel good, to motivate them. This time, for instance, if everything goes well, teachers will hold a party at Moshi Pazuri. (Interview with the Internal School Quality Assurance Officer of School "A", October, 2020).

The above findings reveal that heads of schools, regardless of their financial situations, put forth meaningful initiatives to celebrate the success of their teachers. This suggests that teachers are motivated by these celebrations organised by their school leaders to improve their performance.

Barriers hindering teachers from effectively integrating LCA into their teaching practices

The findings reveal two major barriers that prevented teachers from integrating LCA into their teaching practices: teaching practices focused on content coverage and an unfavourable T&L environment.

Teaching practices focused on content coverage

The study revealed that some teachers were reluctant to implement LCA in their lessons due to concerns about the increased time required to cover the curriculum. During the interview, one of the teachers made the following comment:

I prefer the learner-centred approach, but what makes me change the teaching techniques is the time required to cover the syllabus. It is difficult to cover the syllabus by using the learner-centred approach because it needs more time. Something that was supposed to be covered in 40 minutes may require 160 minutes if a learner-centred approach is used. (Interview with a teacher from school “F”, October, 2020).

Also, one of the ISQAOs mentioned the influence from external education officers who forced teachers to adopt lecture methods so as to cover the syllabus contents on time. On this, he said:

Even our education officer came to visit us one day...He said ‘I want all the topics to be taught in this term. I told him, it is ok. But when I went out of the meeting room, I told my school head, ‘Excuse me, I will not teach the fifth topic because it will force me to change the approach from using the learner-centred to lecture method so that I finish all topics within time’. What I noticed is that our bosses think that finishing teaching all the topics determines the students’ pass, which is not true. It is unfortunate that such things do exist; they do not only

come from politicians but also from the custodians of academic issues. The education officers are there but they do not promote the competence-based methodology properly. (Interview with the Internal School Quality Assurance Officer of School "A", October, 2020).

The excerpt above suggests that many teachers are centering their teaching on subject content coverage, while citing time limitations and pressure from various education stakeholders as reasons behind this. This underscores the importance of teachers and other stakeholders to understand the true essence of teaching and learning for successful LCA integration in secondary education.

Unfavourable T&L environment

The study found that many classrooms had a challenging environment when it came to applying to LCA due to language barrier and lack of textbooks. Regarding the language barrier, it was revealed that students from Swahili-medium schools struggled to participate actively in English—the official language of instruction in secondary schools. As a result, the situation forced teachers to use a non-participatory approach. In connection to this, a teacher from school "B" stated:

They are active if you speak Kiswahili, but the issue is that exams are written in English. Therefore, you find that the teacher is the one talking the most, but you still have to give them notes to read in order for them to understand better. (Interview with a teacher from school "B", October, 2020).

The findings also indicated that teachers were not effectively implementing LCA due to lack of access to essential textbooks for pre-lesson reading for many students. Consequently, students depended on the teacher for information about the subject matter. A remark from one of the ward educational officers confirms this:

You find that a school has only four or five books, and there are more than 160 students in four streams. If you consider those four books that the school has and the number of students that should use them, you will realise that it is difficult for a learner-centred approach to be implemented effectively. Thus, spoon feeding those pupils like a baby is the only option left. (Interview with the WEO 1, November, 2020).

The narrative above by the WEO1 indicates that an unsupportive teaching and learning environment are hindering teachers from effectively implementing the LCA. These results imply that successful implementation of the LCA requires a teaching and learning environment that encourages active participation from both teachers and students.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicated that school heads utilised Performance-Based Rewards (PBR) to motivate teachers and improve student pass rates in national examinations, particularly for high-achieving students. An interesting observation is that the pass rate of low-ability students was negatively affected. These findings are consistent with a study conducted in the Netherlands by Leuven et al. (2010), who found the same that heads of schools implemented the PBR to their teachers. The findings are also supported by a study

conducted by Chua and Mosha (2015) in Tanzania who reported that heads of schools enhanced the students' pass rates in examinations through the implementation of the PBR system for teachers as well as strictly adhered to school policies and regular internal assessments.

These findings on the utilisation of PBR as a means to encourage teachers to work hard, correspond with that of Ayeni (2012) in Nigeria. The study by Ayeni revealed that the provision of commendation letters and other merit-based rewards to teachers who demonstrated exceptional performance significantly enhanced their job interest and commitment. Similarly, a study by Maliyamungu (2022) in Tanzania revealed that rewards for exemplary performance served an anticipatory role by potentially inspiring other teachers to exert greater efforts with an anticipation of receiving similar rewards. It has been hypothesised that the act of rewarding teachers who exhibit exceptional performance can act as a catalyst towards the motivation of other teachers to improve their own performance for them to obtain the same rewards. As a result, the overall performance of the school, teachers and students, improves (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013).

Moreover, the findings revealed that PBR was used to celebrate the teachers' success. These findings align with that of Santiago et al. (2013) in Chile, who found that teachers' exceptional performance was recognized and celebrated by rewarding them as a sign of appreciation for what they did. The findings from the same study indicated that the excellence of teachers in pedagogy is also rewarded through the "Programme for the Accreditation of Pedagogical Excellence Allowance". It should be noted here that of recent, there has been a strong emphasis on the value of encouraging teachers who have achieved exceptional performance or made improvements in their performance such as enabling higher students' pass rates compared to the previous years. This serves to reinforce positive behaviours, especially for those who consistently meet established standards in their professional duties (The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2013).

On the other hand, the emphasis on teaching for subject content coverage aligns with findings from studies conducted in Rwanda, Malawi, and Saudi Arabia by (Cyiza and Maniraho (2022), Matewere et al. (2022), and Tawalbeh and AlAsmari (2015). For instance, research in Rwanda revealed that subjects such as Mathematics had an overloaded syllabus that was difficult to cover within the planned time using LCA (Cyiza & Maniraho, 2022). In Malawi, teachers often resorted to non-participatory teaching methods as they believed that they would consume less time to cover a significant amount of content (Matewere et al., 2022). The implementation of LCA in Saudi Arabia also posed a challenge due to the perception that the approach was excessively time-consuming as it necessitated students to play a central role in conducting lesson activities in groups, participating in discussions, negotiating meaning, and engaging in cooperative learning (Tawalbeh & AlAsmari, 2015).

In addition, language barrier and lack of adequate textbooks for students resulted in an unfavourable environment, thus affecting effective implementation of LCA. These findings are consistent with previous research findings in Zimbabwe and Botswana respectively by Gladys et al., (2012) and Mungoo and Moorad (2015). For example, in Zimbabwe, it was revealed that the implementation of LCA was hindered by the absence of textbooks, as in some schools there was only one Mathematics textbook available. An observed trend in secondary schools in Botswana indicated that students with low

proficiency in English language showed lack of enthusiasm towards the utilisation of LCA because of the difficulties for them to actively participate in group discussions (Mungoo & Moorad, 2015).

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore the utilisation of PBR to improve teachers' work performance in Tanzanian secondary schools. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that heads of schools utilised PBR to improve TWP. However, findings have shown that teachers did not effectively integrate the LCA into their teaching practices. It is recommended in this study that school heads need to intentionally expand the scope of PBR to include the recognition and rewards for teachers who successfully implement LCA in their instructional practices. Curriculum developers and policymakers also need to provide comprehensive training to teachers for them to effectively integrate the LCA into their instructional practices. It is equally important that school heads in collaboration with teachers should implement programmes aimed at promoting fluency in the official language of instruction in their respective schools.

It is again imperative for the government to ensure the provision of suitable textbooks and supplementary reading materials that facilitate students' access to the crucial information necessary for active participation in classroom discussions. School heads, further, must closely monitor the teaching and learning activities in the classrooms and provide support to teachers who struggle to implement LCA. Since this study was carried out in public secondary schools.

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