Extent to which teachers' preparedness limitations affect the implementation of the new curriculum in primary schools in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam

Benitha K. Paschal[1]
Elizabeth Landa[2]

[1]benitharumisha@gmail.com
[2]elizalanda0@gmail.com

[1.2] Mzumbe University, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum reform in Tanzania has sought to move primary education away from teacher-centred transmission towards competency-based, learner-centred instruction, yet the success of such reform depends heavily on how well teachers are prepared and how clearly curriculum expectations are communicated. This study examined the extent to which teachers' preparedness limitations specifically in training and effective communication affect the implementation of the new primary school curriculum in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam. Guided by Systems Theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 242 primary school teachers using structured, five-point Likert-scale questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with head teachers, academic officers and district education officers, and analysed thematically. The quantitative results showed that teachers generally disagreed that they were adequately prepared, with a low overall preparedness mean of 2.24 (below the neutral midpoint of 3.00); the weakest areas were training duration (M = 1.84), in-service workshops (M = 1.95) and competency-based assessment (M = 2.15). The qualitative findings reinforced and explained these results through the themes of pedagogical dissonance and training fatigue and communication gaps and policy ambiguity: teachers understood the language of reform but could not translate it into classroom practice, felt overwhelmed by brief, theory-heavy workshops, and received curriculum guidance late and inconsistently. The study concludes that limited teacher preparedness is a central rather than peripheral barrier to curriculum implementation, and that reform is undermined when teacher capacity development is treated as a one-off event instead of continuous professional development. It recommends sustained, school-based professional development with mentoring and follow-up, clearer and more consistent communication of curriculum expectations, and targeted support for competency-based assessment.

Keywords: Curriculum Implementation, Competency-Based Curriculum, Effective Communication, Ilala District, Teachers' Preparedness, Teacher Training

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most apparent ways of achieving educational change is through curriculum reform, which is also among the most challenging to accomplish. Across the world, education systems have been adapting to the demands of problem-solving, creativity, collaboration and the application of knowledge (Irwan et al., 2024). The purpose of these reforms is to produce learners who can operate in a dynamic social and economic environment rather than merely regurgitate facts. This approach is also reflected in the revised primary education curriculum in Tanzania, which focuses on learner-centred pedagogy, practical skills and continuous assessment (Assey, 2022). However, the effectiveness of such reforms depends on the extent to which teachers are prepared, the clarity of communication from the education authorities, and the provision of ongoing support in schools.

This study uses two primary variables. The first, teacher preparedness, is the level of teachers' knowledge, pedagogical skills, assessment abilities and confidence to implement a new curriculum in the classroom; it is explored here in two ways: in terms of teacher training (both pre-service and in-service) and in terms of the effective communication of curriculum expectations. The second, curriculum implementation, is the extent to which the goals of the new competency-based and learner-centred curriculum are realised in everyday instruction, learning and assessment. These variables make it clear that a well-designed curriculum can have a poor effect if the teachers responsible for carrying it out are inadequately trained and poorly informed.

The challenges of urban schooling make the implementation of the reform in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam, particularly difficult (Mamabolo, 2021). The district is known for high enrolments, overcrowded classrooms, limited classroom space and heavy staff workload. Although Ilala is relatively advantaged in its proximity to training institutions and government offices, this does not necessarily translate into efficient implementation (Mathias et al., 2023). Teachers are still expected to teach in a learner-centred way, to engage learners in interactive learning, and to

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assess learners' competence rather than their rote recall. If they are not sufficiently prepared to do so, learners do not receive the full curriculum but a symbolic, partial and sometimes incomplete version.

Teacher preparedness is a significant issue because teachers are the ones who implement curriculum policy directly (Komba & Shukia, 2023). They translate abstract standards into concrete lesson plans, classroom interactions and assessment practices. Where training is weak, irregular or too theoretical, the reform is confined to the realm of policy rhetoric. The study, therefore, is not merely a technocratic question of teacher preparedness but a core governance issue of the curriculum. Experience in Ilala District indicates that teachers' knowledge, confidence and pedagogical support significantly affect the success of implementation.

Studying teacher preparedness in this urban environment is important for both policy and practice. It shifts attention from the curriculum document to the human and communicative conditions that make reform possible, and it provides evidence-based, practical guidance to education authorities on where to invest in order to build capacity. The results, therefore, have implications for teacher-preparation institutions, district-level education offices and administrators responsible for supporting the shift towards competency-based teaching.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Although the new primary curriculum is competency-based and learner-centred in design, this approach is yet to be realised in classrooms in Ilala District. Teachers in the district experience inadequate preparation because their pre-service preparation was limited and in-service workshops have not been sufficiently deep, of adequate duration, or aligned with the needs of the revised curriculum (Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022). The issue is not solely one of curriculum design; it is one of the capacity to implement that design. Without valuable professional development or clear communication, teachers are likely to revert to familiar teacher-centred approaches; which undermines the planned reform.

The urban context of Ilala District compounds the problem. The impact of inadequate teacher preparation is intensified by overcrowded classrooms, high workload and administrative pressure. Competency-based instruction is not viable if teachers are not sufficiently trained in learner-centred pedagogy, competency-based assessment and lesson design. This has created an implementation gap in which the curriculum exists in policy form while its transformative purposes are not consistently visible in day-to-day classroom practice.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine the extent to which teachers' preparedness, in terms of training and effective communication, affects the implementation of the new curriculum in primary schools in Ilala District.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Systems Theory

This study adopts a Systems Theory approach, which is appropriate for studying curriculum implementation as a system rather than as a collection of isolated individuals. From this perspective, all stakeholders in the system teachers, school leaders, curriculum officers, training institutions and resource flows influence implementation outcomes, and a lack of competence or support in any part can affect the whole (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024). For instance, inadequate teacher training not only affects the performance of individual teachers but also how lessons are taught, how learning is assessed, and how the reform is perceived by learners and the wider community. Systems Theory therefore has merit because it explains why teacher preparedness cannot be discussed without reference to communication structures, supervision and institutional support.

This theoretical perspective also emphasises feedback mechanisms. When teachers are mentored regularly and supervised with clear guidelines and ongoing support, they are more likely to adapt their practice; when they receive only short workshops and poorly worded directions, the system provides weak feedback and low fidelity to the reform. The theory further recognises that simply issuing a new curriculum does not guarantee its implementation; rather, it is the alignment of the system teacher capacity, leadership coordination, material support and communication that enables it (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024).

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Teacher Preparedness and Training Limitations

Empirically, teacher preparedness has been shown to be one of the most significant factors in the success of curriculum reform. In the Arusha Region, Nkya et al. (2021) reported that teachers had a general understanding of the competence-based curriculum but lacked a deeper grasp of the pedagogical demands it placed on them; limited training and insufficient follow-up constrained teachers' capacity to design learner-centred lessons and competency-

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based assessments. Similarly, Shiboko and Mrema (2024) found that a lack of adequate professional development was among the key challenges facing the implementation of the competence-based curriculum in Same District.

A study by Ntumi et al. (2023) on the national pre-tertiary education curriculum framework in Ghana likewise revealed inadequate preparation and insufficient support for implementation. These findings indicate that awareness alone is not sufficient; teachers require ongoing, practical training capable of changing classroom behaviour. Other African contexts reinforce the same pattern. Mamabolo (2021) showed that teachers in South Africa struggled to adapt to curriculum changes because they had not received adequate training, guidance or confidence in using the new curriculum.

In Kenya, Waruingi et al. (2022) reported that teachers experienced difficulties in implementing the competency-based curriculum owing to poor training and heavy workloads, as they were overwhelmed by the new competencies they were expected to teach and assess. Taken together, these findings reveal that inadequate teacher preparedness is not a Tanzania-specific problem but a challenge widely faced wherever teacher capacity is low, underscoring the need for sustained support if the curriculum is to be implemented effectively.

2.2.2 Communication and Policy Clarity in Curriculum Implementation

Rizki and Fahkrunisa (2022) found that unclear policy directions and ambiguous communication from education authorities led to confusion and uncertainty among teachers and school administrators. Komba and Shukia (2023) similarly noted that teachers' understanding of expected learning outcomes and assessment procedures was hampered by gaps in curriculum documents and implementation guidelines.

Ndari et al. (2023) reported comparable difficulties in implementing a restructured, competency-based curriculum, observing that teachers found little guidance to aid implementation. These studies indicate that preparedness cannot be understood solely in terms of workshops and certificates; it also depends on the timely, comprehensible and useful communication that teachers receive about what the curriculum expects of them.

2.3 Research Gap

Much prior work focuses on teacher preparedness, communication of policy, or resources in isolation, without considering the interrelationships among these factors, and fewer studies examine how they interact in dense urban primary schools. The challenges of implementing new curricula in primary education are often discussed separately along these dimensions, as in recent international research by Xhemajli et al. (2025). The present study addresses limitations in teacher preparedness in terms of both training and communication factors that have a direct bearing on implementation and is relevant to the comparatively complex demands of reform in an urban Tanzanian context of high enrolment pressure.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach using a convergent parallel design to explore the level of teacher preparedness in relation to the implementation of the new curriculum in primary schools in Ilala District, focusing on teacher training and effective communication. The mixed-methods approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sreekumar, 2023; Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in Ilala District, Dar es Salaam, because of its large number of public primary schools, high enrolment rates, high population density and heavy administrative burden features typical of urban schools in which the competency-based curriculum is being implemented. The district thus provides a rich setting in which to analyse how well prepared teachers are to influence curriculum implementation under real urban pressures.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised classroom teachers, head teachers and district-level education officers concerned with the teaching curriculum. Teachers were included because they implement the curriculum directly; head teachers and education officers were included because of their role in supervising and supporting curriculum implementation at the school and district levels.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Both simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers, while purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and education officers because of their direct role

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in ensuring curriculum implementation. A sample of 285 respondents comprising primary school teachers, head teachers and ward or district education officers was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95 per cent confidence level with a 0.05 margin of error.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires and a semi-structured interview guide were used to collect primary data. The questionnaire included five-point Likert-scale items assessing teachers' preparedness in relation to pre-service training, in-service professional development, competency-based assessment skills and communication about curriculum reforms. The interview guide was designed to add insight and depth to the quantitative findings by exploring participants' perceptions of the challenges encountered in implementing the curriculum.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations and presented in tables; a mean score below the neutral point of 3.00 was interpreted as disagreement, indicating a preparedness gap. Qualitative data were analysed thematically: interview transcripts were coded and recurring themes were identified and interpreted in relation to the study objective.

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations

The validity of the instrument was established through expert review, and the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an acceptable value ($\alpha > 0.70$). With respect to ethics, research permission was obtained from the relevant authorities, informed consent was secured from participants, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and participation was voluntary (Susilawati et al., 2025).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 285 questionnaires and interview schedules distributed, 270 were returned, giving an overall response rate of 94.7 per cent, which is considered very well for a study of this kind. Table 1 shows the response rate by respondent category.

Table 1

Response Rate by Respondent Category

Respondent Category	Sampled (N)	Participated (n)	Return Rate (%)
Primary school teachers	255	242	94.9
Head teachers	20	18	90.0
Ward/district education officers	10	10	100.0
Total	**285**	**270**	**94.7**

The full participation of ward and district education officers (100 per cent) ensured that the top-down policy perspective was well represented, while the high teacher response rate (94.9 per cent) provided a dense data set from the frontline of classroom implementation. Table 2 summarises the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 270)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	15.6
	Female	228	84.4
Professional qualification	Certificate	32	11.9
	Diploma	134	49.6
	Degree	98	36.3
	Masters and above	6	2.2
Teaching experience	0–5 years	18	6.7
	6–10 years	56	20.7
	11–15 years	98	36.3
	Over 15 years	98	36.3

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The respondents were predominantly female (84.4 per cent), which is characteristic of urban primary schools in Tanzania. Most held a diploma (49.6 per cent) or a bachelor's degree (36.3 per cent), indicating a formally qualified workforce. Notably, 72.6 per cent of respondents had more than 11 years of teaching experience, meaning that the majority possess deeply established, largely teacher-centred pedagogical habitsa pattern that is relevant when interpreting the preparedness findings that follow, since long-standing routines can slow the adoption of the discovery-oriented methods the reform requires.

4.2 Teacher Preparedness and Training Limitations (Quantitative Findings)

Table 3 captures teachers' perceptions of their preparedness, training adequacy, confidence and ability to apply the new curriculum in practice, based on the 242 teacher respondents. The average score for the objective was 2.24, which is below the neutral midpoint of 3.00 and therefore indicates general disagreement that teachers are adequately prepared. Respondents largely perceived training limitations as a real barrier to implementation.

Table 3

Teacher Preparedness and Training Limitations (n = 242)

No.	Question/Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Adequate pre-service training was received for the new curriculum	12	24	32	112	62	2.22	0.94
2	Regular in-service workshops are provided for new methods	8	18	24	120	72	1.95	0.88
3	I feel confident in using learner-centred pedagogy	22	56	48	84	32	2.82	1.12
4	I have been properly trained on competency-based assessments	10	20	34	118	60	2.15	0.91
5	Training duration was long enough to cover curriculum changes	6	14	22	128	72	1.84	0.82
6	It is easy to translate theoretical concepts into practice	14	32	42	108	46	2.45	1.04
	Average Score for the Objective						**2.24**	**0.95**

Scale: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

The overall conclusion from the data is that current training provision is inadequate for the new curriculum. The mean for pre-service training was 2.22, indicating that most teachers felt they were not sufficiently prepared for the competency-based model during their initial training. This matters because pre-service training establishes the pedagogical groundwork on which classroom practice depends; where this groundwork is shaky, teachers begin with limited technical readiness to enact the curriculum.

The lowest score in the table concerned training duration, where teachers indicated that the training they received was not long enough to accommodate the curriculum changes. This is particularly problematic because competency-based reform demands more than exposure to new terminology; it must be put into practice through repeated application, modelling, feedback and reflection, and years of teaching habits cannot be changed in a brief workshop. The score for regular in-service workshops was also low (1.95), indicating that continuous professional development is irregular or inadequate. Since implementation is an ongoing process rather than a single event, teachers need sustained support to progress from understanding the concepts of reform to applying them in real classrooms; without such support, reform is likely to remain superficial.

The competency-based assessment item scored 2.15, revealing another significant deficiency. Assessment lies at the heart of competency-based learning, since it gauges application, performance and skill development rather than mere memorisation. Where teachers are not well trained in designing and using competency-based assessments, the curriculum is unlikely to meet its goals. Assessment literacy is thus one of the most precariously prepared areas of teacher preparedness in Ilala District. The highest score in the table was for confidence (M = 2.82), yet it too fell below the neutral point, indicating that while teachers are moderately confident in using learner-centred pedagogy, that confidence is unevenly distributed and accompanied by a lack of readiness. Some teachers may grasp the language of learner-centred teaching without being technically skilled enough to apply it effectively and consistently.

Taken together, these findings indicate that teachers' preparedness limitations are real, widespread and consequential. The parallels with the empirical literature are striking: Nkya et al. (2021) and Shiboko and Mrema (2024) noted the same lack of training and support for competency-based implementation in regions of Tanzania; Mamabolo (2021) showed that preparedness requires ongoing capacity building; and Ntumi et al. (2023) and Waruingi et al. (2022) reported comparable gaps in Ghana and Kiambu County respectively. The Ilala results are clearly part of this pattern and indicate that the problem persists in urban primary schools in Tanzania.

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The qualitative strand enriches and personalises the quantitative results. Semi-structured interviews with head teachers, academic officers and district curriculum implementers were transcribed and analysed thematically, and their accounts were interpreted in relation to the study objective. Two themes emerged that map directly onto the two dimensions of teacher preparedness examined in this study: (1) pedagogical dissonance and training fatigue, which speaks to the training dimension, and (2) communication gaps and policy ambiguity, which speaks to the effective-communication dimension. Representative participant responses are presented below to illustrate each theme.

4.3.1 Pedagogical Dissonance and Training Fatigue

A dominant theme across the interviews was a mismatch between teachers' theoretical understanding of the competency-based curriculum (CBC) and their practical ability to apply it. Although teachers were familiar with key concepts such as competencies, learner-centred pedagogy and continuous assessment, many lacked the confidence and technical mastery to enact them in the classroom. One head teacher explained:

> *"Our teachers can explain what a competency is during meetings, but when they enter the classroom, they return to chalk and talk. It is not because they resist change, but because they don't know how to translate theory into practice."*

This reflects what may be termed pedagogical dissonance a situation in which teachers cognitively accept the language of reform but struggle operationally. Academic officers reported that most pre-service and in-service training did not fully anticipate the methodological shift the CBC requires. As one curriculum implementer noted:

> *"The training was rushed. We were called for a few days, introduced to new terminologies, and expected to transform our teaching immediately. It is unrealistic."*

Participants consistently described the workshops as too short, overloaded and theoretical, with little of the mentoring and follow-up needed to change practice. A senior teacher remarked:

> *"Sometimes you attend a workshop for two or three days, and they expect you to master new assessment strategies. But you need practice, mentoring, and follow-up. That part is missing."*

This absence of sustained professional development produced what several respondents called training fatigue. Teachers reportedly attend workshops frequently, yet the impact on classroom practice remains minimal. One head teacher stated:

> *"Teachers are overwhelmed. Every year there is a new directive, a new format, or a new reporting tool. Some of them feel tired before they even begin."*

Another interviewee added candidly that attendance does not equate to transformation:

> *"Let me be honest, sometimes teachers attend workshops mainly because of the allowance. They sign the attendance sheet, but real transformation requires more than attendance."*

The emotional tone of the interviews suggested anxiety and uncertainty rather than outright resistance. Teachers feared being evaluated against standards they had not been adequately supported to meet, as one academic officer explained:

> *"There is a fear of failure. Teachers worry that if inspectors come, they will be judged harshly for not applying CBC correctly."*

Pedagogical dissonance is therefore not merely a skills gap but also a psychological burden. These accounts directly explain the confidence gap observed in the quantitative data (M = 2.82 for confidence and M = 2.45 for translating theory into practice): teachers navigate complex reforms without sufficient time to internalise them, producing surface-level compliance rather than deep pedagogical transformation.

4.3.2 Communication Gaps and Policy Ambiguity

The second theme concerned the clarity and timeliness of communication about curriculum expectations. Participants described receiving policy guidance late and inconsistently, which created uncertainty at the school level. One academic officer observed:

> *"Sometimes we hear about new changes through rumors before official circulars reach us. That creates uncertainty."*

Related to this was the absence of a structured, standardised professional-development framework, which left schools to improvise and widened disparities between them. As one head teacher remarked:

> *"There is no standardized CPD calendar from the district. Each school improvises. Some do well, others struggle."*

These accounts confirm that preparedness cannot be understood solely in terms of training events; it also depends on the timely, consistent and actionable communication teachers receive about what the curriculum expects of them. The finding echoes Rizki and Fahkrunisa (2022) and Komba and Shukia (2023), who linked ambiguous communication and gaps in curriculum documents to teacher confusion, and it explains why well-intentioned reform can stall even where teachers are willing to change.

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4.3.3 Interpretation through Systems Theory

Interpreted through Systems Theory, these findings illustrate that curriculum reform is not implemented by teachers alone but depends on training institutions, district officials, school leaders and communication structures that support teachers in real time (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2024). When teacher preparedness is weak and communication is unclear, the whole system feels the effect: lesson planning drifts from competency-based principles, assessment remains traditional, and the intended learner-centred classroom never fully emerges. In practical terms, the study indicates that reform in Ilala District should be judged not by whether teachers have attended workshops but by whether those workshops changed classroom behaviour. The gap between attendance and competence is central, and the evidence suggests that current professional development has limited transfer value because it is too short, too theoretical and too weakly connected to classroom realities, while communication is too intermittent to guide practice reliably.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The extent to which teachers' preparedness limitations affect curriculum implementation in Ilala District is substantial. The evidence shows that teachers are generally underprepared, under-supported and insufficiently trained to implement the new curriculum as intended. The quantitative results point to low mean scores across all preparedness indicators, with an overall objective mean of 2.24, while the qualitative findings reveal frustration, pedagogical mismatch, training fatigue and communication gaps arising from inadequate professional development and unclear guidance. Together, these findings demonstrate that limited teacher preparedness is not a peripheral issue but a central barrier to the effective implementation of Tanzania's new primary curriculum in Ilala District, and that curriculum success depends on the quality of teacher preparation and communication rather than on the existence of a new curriculum document alone.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings give rise to several practical recommendations for education authorities in Ilala District and comparable urban settings. First, because the weakest indicators concerned the frequency and duration of professional development (in-service workshops, M = 1.95; training duration, M = 1.84), teacher development should shift from one-off workshops to continuous, school-based professional learning that is practical, classroom-oriented and sustained over time, with mentoring, demonstration lessons and follow-up visits built into the system so that training is judged by its transfer to classroom practice rather than by attendance. Second, given that unclear and inconsistent communication emerged as a barrier in both the literature and the interviews, communication about curriculum expectations should be made clearer and more consistent, so that teachers receive timely, actionable guidance rather than abstract or delayed directives, supported by a standardised district professional-development calendar.

Third, since competency-based assessment was one of the weakest areas of preparedness (M = 2.15), it should receive special attention through targeted, hands-on training in designing and using performance-based assessments. Finally, because preparedness is shaped by the wider system, teacher-training colleges and district education authorities should align their support with the real demands of learner-centred instruction in overcrowded urban classrooms, ensuring that pre-service curricula, in-service programmes and supervisory structures reinforce one another. Implemented together, these measures would strengthen both the capacity of teachers and the institutional conditions in which they work, thereby narrowing the gap between curriculum design and classroom reality.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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