

# Curriculum as a Political Activity in Tanzania: Evidences from Literature

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to answer the question why curriculum is regarded as a political activity. In the introductory part the key terms are defined followed by an overview of the curriculum process. The paper further describes how various individuals and groups with different interests and obligations are involved in the curriculum making process and their influences thus making curriculum a political activity. These individuals and/or groups are categorised as the ones who make direct decisions and the others who influence the decision makers. It is asserted that the Tanzania government through the Ministry of education, science and technology (MoEST) determines the official curriculum. Teachers are also curriculum decision makers in the sense that they are the mere implementers of the official curriculum in the classrooms, however they are less or not at all involved in making decisions on the curriculum mandatory aims, goals, objectives, contents and teaching and learning strategies. This paper therefore gives a critical analysis of the roles played by the curriculum decision makers and influential groups to see how curriculum making process is largely a political activity. Lastly a concluding note and recommendations are given.

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## 1. Introduction

It is important to understand these terms *curriculum*, *curriculum development*, *curriculum implementation and politics*. Understanding of these terms will shade the light towards the grasp of the notion of curriculum and politics. The term “*curriculum*” has been defined by so many scholars engaged in the curriculum field. According to Tyler (1949), *curriculum* refers to all of the learning of the students, which is planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals. On the other hand, Wheeler (1967, p.11) defines *curriculum* as the planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school. In addition, *curriculum* is defined as planned, guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge under the auspices of the school for the continuous and willful growth of the learner (Adirika, 2017).

These definitions suggest or imply that education curriculum (in this case) is ought to be planned, directed and/or intended towards achieving some set out objectives of an educational institutions be it a school, a teachers’ college, a university or a vocational training institution.

The term *curriculum development* refers to a process that involves the selection of objectives, content, learning experiences as well as organizing and evaluating these experiences to determine the extent to which they are effective in achieving stated objectives (Adirika, 2017).

According to Obilo and Saugoleye (2005), *curriculum implementation* refers to a process which involves dissemination of the structured set of learning experiences, the provision of resources to effectively execute the plan, and the actual execution of the plan in the classroom setting, where the teacher – learner interaction takes place. They add that it involves putting into practice the officially prescribed curriculum content. All stakeholders become part of the process by making their contribution to operationalise the curriculum.

The term *politics*, according to Weber (1971) refers to power and strive to influence the distribution of power among nation- state as well as among group mechanisms within a state. As contended by Ogunyemi (2009, p.2):

Politics permeates all human activities, including education. Three essential elements in the understanding of political relations are power/influence, authority and resources. Political actors strive to determine and influence activities and events around them. Through policy formulation and legislative procedures, they determine what happens virtually in all areas of the people’s life including the substance of their education or curriculum.

This is to say that curriculum designing (which includes making and organizing the curriculum elements namely: aims, goals and objectives, content, learning activities, and evaluation); planning; and development are waved within the power, authority and influences of different individuals in positions or with power, groups of

experts and even the laymen due to their varied obligations, interests and influences. According to Marsh and Willis (1995, p.307), “ some people enter into curriculum deliberations openly and cooperatively, while those who see the process as largely hostile and competitive may participate primarily to protect their own interests”.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to understand curriculum as a political activity. It is important to acknowledge that education is essentially a political activity. The political climate prevailing in a state or country is very important in determining the type of schooling and curriculum for the young. Education also has a political function in that it promotes ideologies which influence the power structure within society. It is noteworthy also that political forces, the most powerful of which are associated with the government of the time, are responsible for allocation of resources that are necessary to support a curriculum. Hence, the need to take the politicians views into consideration in curriculum planning. In addition, a curriculum worker is also likely to have a political and ideological stand in life that would influence his/her decision-making process in curriculum matters (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992).

The concern of this paper is to try to find the answer to why curriculum is regarded as a political activity. In answering this question, Tanzanian education curriculum is taken as the reference point, that is, the examples for substantiation of the contention are drawn mainly from Tanzanian education system by looking at different educational policies, practices and/ or decisions made both at macro and micro education levels along with the involved actors. In other words, the curriculum decision makers and the influential groups on the curriculum decision making are discussed pointing out their roles and the areas of concern. The time frame on the focus goes back to the 1960s when dramatic changes were initially made upon the Tanzanian (Tanganyika by then) education system as distinct to that of the colonial domination.

## **2. The Reasons for Regarding Curriculum as a Political Activity**

As it has been pointed out in the introductory part, curriculum politics in the curriculum making process (deciding) emerge as more than one individual or groups are involved in the curriculum making process and that they affect curriculum making process either positively or negatively, directly or indirectly. Following the assertion by Mash and Willis (1995, p.309), “these individuals and/or groups may include state governments, decision makers, students, parents, school boards, professional associations, textbook publishers, testing agencies, employers, and news media. The following is a description of the curriculum decision makers and influential groups and the role they play in curriculum making process at both macro or national and micro or local or school levels making the curriculum political.

### **2.1 The Role of the Government on Curriculum**

Every government got the right and responsibility to ensure that the kind of education sought and given to her citizens is the most appropriate and potential in providing the necessary skills and knowledge for the ultimate development of an individual citizen and the community at large in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Tanzania as a sovereign state has assumed that role the way back since her independence from the British colonial domination in 1961. The government therefore especially in the centralized curriculum in Tanzania plays the central and vital role of educational policy formulation, the planning of the curriculum, curriculum design, curriculum reforms, monitoring and/or supervision. All these are undertaken at national level through the MoEST and its units, say the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) by a group of educational experts hired by the ministry (TIE, 2019).

Sometimes the president or the minister as it will be exemplified hereunder can make very big decisions on curriculum. All these are brought to place with less or no involvement at all of the teachers who are crucial actors on the part of the instructional curriculum. Let us now see how the government undertakes the said roles that indeed makes curriculum to be rendered as a political activity.

#### **2.1.1 Policies, Plans and Programmes Formulation**

Policy can simply be defined as a blueprint and/or rather framework in which all educational practices are dictated. In Tanzania the educational policy formulation has been predominantly a top-down approach. Thus a policy is formulated at the macro level, the national or ministry depending on the national educational philosophy to guide the practices that are carried out or implemented at the micro level or say school level (Nzima, 2016).

As claimed by Economic and Social Research Foundation (2004, p.4), “the Cabinet assists the president in decision-making as he is the executive policy decision maker”. This is what actually was done in 1967 by the first president of Tanzania, the late Julius. K. Nyerere when he came up with the Education for self-reliance philosophy.

#### ***Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) Philosophy***

The philosophy was made by an individual political leader as described here-above then circulated throughout the country via media, schools and the ruling political party, the Tanganyika National Union (TANU) by then, under single party political system. The policy was actually aimed at moulding responsible citizens by providing

them with the relevant knowledge and skills that would suit the Tanzanian socio-economic, cultural and political (socialist ideology) context to jointly combat the proclaimed three enemies, namely; ignorance, poverty, and diseases (Nyerere, 1967).

The policy was however misinterpreted by most of the officials and even the teachers who were the immediate implementers in schools. This is also observed by Njabili (1999, p.31) who argues that:

Implementers never managed to accurately translate the ideas into concrete operations. For example, the Ministry of education officials at one point issued a directive that, each student should manage a hectare of land. This was an impossible task to achieve.

From these descriptions we see that the ESR was largely a result of a political influence and authority by the virtue that it was initiated by an individual political authoritative leader then ordered to be implemented for the sake of the time political ideology-socialism, without much consideration of the fact that curriculum making is a complex process which needs piloting, improvement and broad involvement.

#### ***The Quota System***

In 1964, the government introduced quota system in public boarding secondary schools according to the regional population, performances and gender. The cut-off points were relatively lower in regions with small number of elites and relatively higher in the other regions for the purpose of enabling pupils from all regions to have access to secondary education. Also the girls had relatively lower cut-off points compared to boys (Ministry of Education and Culture [MOEC], 1995).

The policy decision was political in nature as it aimed at quantity enrollments rather than admitting the student with academically excellent ability. According to MOEC (1995), the system was abandoned because it was unfair and was set to temporarily correct the problems of inequality caused by historical factors including colonialism.

#### ***The Musoma Resolution***

It is argued that the Musoma Resolution of 1974 along with the policy of universal primary education (UPE) was made by the government in order to legalize educational actions taken as a result of the Arusha declaration and the philosophy of ESR. The Musoma Resolution directed and accelerated progress towards UPE by 1977, elimination of illiteracy and sufficiency in high level skills of manpower by 1980 (MOEC, 1995).

However, the announcement was made by the ruling party (Tanganyika African National Union [TANU]) without critically considering the availability of inputs such as infrastructure, teachers, teaching and learning materials. This was therefore a merely political decision as issues like human and material resources were not well accounted for which could be well projected by experts.

#### ***The Establishment of Special Schools***

In 1990s the government launched the idea of special schools for high performing students in primary school leaving examinations (PSLE). As contended by Liwa (2001) that such schools aimed at developing the special students' ability to discover, integrate and become experts of modern science and technology for the nation to achieve fast development.

According to Omari (1998), special schools were introduced in Tanzania so as to concentrate the minimal resources in terms of key supplies such as food, textbooks and teachers on a few schools where the top performers (120 and above scores for boys and 110 and above scores for girls) would go. Both special and regular schools followed a common curriculum for all subjects (O-saki, 1992). According to Liwa (2001), seven schools were identified as special. These were Ilboru, Mzumbe and Tabora Boys for boys, Kilakala, Msalato and Tabora Girls for girls, and Kibaha which was a co-educational.

However, specialty of these schools was questionable because the schools lacked special teachers and important facilities like special laboratories and special libraries. Moreover, the schools encountered the following shortfalls: they did not favour bright students in rural primary schools who were not chosen to join special schools because they had poor learning environment with few teachers and fewer learning materials such as books in their schools. The decision was too political and contradicted with the ESR which aimed at promoting equity and equality in education provision.

#### ***The Induction courses for Teachers***

In 2005 the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) launched a crash program in order to produce teachers to solve the problem of shortage of teachers in secondary schools. The program involved training of advanced level certificate holders who preferred to join teaching profession as soon as they completed form six. They had to undergo a one month training program in teaching methods, preparations of schemes of work, lessons plans, learning on teaching profession conduct, preparation of teaching and learning aids. Upon completion of their studies they were given license to teach for two years and thereafter were required to be enrolled and undergo on job professional training (MoEVT, 2005).

This was a result of the rapid increase in enrollments of students in schools due to Primary/ Secondary Education Development Plans (PEDP and SEDP) launched in 2001 and 2004 respectively.

### ***The Two Tier Systems***

The two tier systems was introduced for diploma students to study at colleges in their first year and wind up their second year studies in secondary schools before they went back to colleges for their final examinations. As it was stipulated that the college phase will be implemented in the teachers' colleges in the first year and the school phase will be implemented in selected secondary schools in the second year. After the college phase ends in May 2008. In June 2008, students will be posted to the selected secondary schools for their practicum. It is assumed that all the necessary preparations will be in place before the commencement of the school phase; thereafter they come back to colleges for their final examination (MoEVT, 2008).

It can at this juncture be established that, politics of education by formulating the described policies, plans through legitimate government department/units determine the aims, goals, objectives; content, teaching/ learning activities and evaluation strategies of the curriculum.

#### **2.1.2 Financing and Management of Education System**

It is undeniable fact that Tanzanian educational system is basically financed and managed by the government. As it is argued that the government and local authorities shall ensure that appropriate infrastructure, facilities, equipments, instructional materials and teachers needed for optimum and effective implementation of the curriculum are available by setting standards and providing the funds (TIE, 2005, p.22).

Management of the education system particularly curriculum implementation is vested in two ministries, namely, the MoEST and the President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) (TIE, 2019). MoEST is entrusted with a number of responsibilities. It is responsible for training and producing qualified teachers and other educational experts, supervising and ensuring accountability of the education system, setting assessment and evaluation standards for primary, secondary and teacher educational levels, overseeing quality assurance matters, overseeing educational organizations, agencies and programmes. Other bodies such as TIE and NECTA, ADEM are under the jurisdiction of MOEST (TIE, 2019).

Likewise, PO-RALG is responsible for managing the provision of pre-primary, primary and secondary education including inclusive student enrollment, retention and completion; ensuring the availability of teaching-learning resources including books, furniture and infrastructure; overseeing the recruitment and deployment of teachers as well as their social/remuneration needs; overseeing parental and community participation in the education of their children and overseeing the conduct of teachers and other educational personnel in respective regions (TIE, 2019).

As it should be noted that curriculum development and implementation processes incur costs through expenditures on, say, in-service teacher training and workshops, teachers' and other educational personnel's salaries plus the different education development projects building constructions to mention a few. This means that the funding of education is merely political as it is dependent upon the set out priority areas by the ministry with less or non involvement of the curriculum implementers basically the teachers even through their union. This leads to dissatisfaction and misallocation of the funds hence ineffectiveness in the process implementing the curriculum. On the other hand it is the government which decides who to hire as teachers and when to do so.

#### **2.1.3 Entry into Education Institutions and the Examination System.**

Entry into education institutions, say primary schools and secondary schools is determined by the government. As stipulated in the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 that a child joins primary education at the age of 6/7 years (MOEC, 1995, p.4).

The examination system is largely run by the central government through the parastatal of the MoEST called the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA) which is responsible for setting, administering, and marking of the national examinations such as the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), Form Two National Examination, Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE), Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (ACSEE) and Certificate of Diploma in Secondary Education Examination (CDSEE) (TIE, 2019).

Nevertheless, the government also decides pupils' or students' evaluation modality even just by a politician. For instance, while announcing the 2011 PSLE results, the then deputy minister for MoEVT said that there would be a qualifying test to screen the candidates reading and writing abilities before they could join secondary education. The order was very political hence strongly criticized by experts and education stakeholders saying it was unprofessional and ill-timed.

#### **2.1.4 Selection of Curricular Content and Materials**

On the part of the content to be included or removed from the curriculum, the MoEST is responsible for putting in place criteria for evaluating and ensuring that only quality teaching and learning materials will be selected to support the teaching and learning in the classroom (TIE, 2005). For instance in 2005 the MoEVT's minister whether influenced or just personal conscience, ordered a merge of Physics and Chemistry subjects, taught at Ordinary secondary level, into Physics with Chemistry.

Furthermore there was a move by the ministry's minister in 2008 to use the books printed by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the few other legitimized as the only standardized materials in schools for

educational quality assurance and ban the use of other text books written by different individuals of whom some are experts in the specialized subject areas. There was an introduction of new subjects like TEHAMA and Stadi za Kazi in the primary school curriculum and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the secondary school curriculum by the ministry.

## **2.2 Teachers and Principals/School Heads as Curriculum Decision Makers**

These are referred here as curriculum decision makers due to the roles they play on the curriculum. Marsh and Willis (1995, p.309) contend that, “teachers always make decisions about how curricula are enacted in their classrooms. Principals can and do make decisions that affect the planned and the enacted curricula in their schools. Although such decisions are part of their professional roles, teachers may themselves be influenced by their students; and principals by parents”

In other words, this is to say for instance that teachers can decide to use lecture teaching method leaving aside the recommended participatory teaching strategies. They can also decide to teach any topic regardless of the scope and sequence of the subject matter. Principals on the other hand can order much inclusion of extracurricular activities in the school time table and also can decide to have remedial classes and purchase of some teaching/ learning resources. Most importantly, their supervision determines much of the curriculum implementation. Nonetheless, teachers, heads of schools and/or principals are termed as curriculum decision makers but they decide only at micro level- school/ college level mainly on the instructional curriculum under indirect influence of the students, parents and other powerful influential community members.

## **2.3 Influential/ Pressure Groups**

Marsh and Willis (1995, p.311) define influential groups as, “the ones that are concerned with about language, procedures, and substance and that deliberately set out to promote their own agendas. They have specific goals in mind and have devised appropriate methods to achieve these goals. Even when without official status within curriculum deliberations, pressure groups often exert powerful influences on participants and on their decisions”. An influential group can have either public goodwill motive of improving the quality of education whilst others may have their own private interests. Moreover these influential groups may be either professionals or nonprofessionals. Let us now look at some of the influential groups to see their role on curriculum process.

### **2.3.1 School Boards**

The Tanzanian school boards are made up of the school heads (as the secretary), local leaders and some community representatives who are either professional or nonprofessional. The major role of the school boards is to oversee the administrative mechanism of the schools. Thus the school boards have the duty of approving the spending of the school funds and all projects undertaken by the school (TIE, 2019).

However, as Marsh and Willis (1995, p.11.) put forth, that, “the majority of school boards appear to be near to curriculum decisions made by principals and teachers, but also school boards may be influenced by the power structures within the community”. For instance, a school board can abolish a practical work done by the pupils/students following some varied perceptions they get from the community.

It was argued that there was for instance a fierce reaction against the school “shamba”(farm) projects that aimed at implementing the then politically and ideologically stressed out slogans such as “Elimu ni Kazi” (Education is Work). The school board members including the parents condemned the projects that they were meant to profit the teachers whilst using much of the children’s time that would otherwise be used for studying. On top of that the school boards present the views of the parents about execution of certain programs/ topics. For instance the issue of sex education was once condemned that it was unethical for the kids to be taught. Thus school boards have influence on the micro curriculum that is the implemented curriculum at the school level.

### **2.3.2 The News Media**

News media refer to radio, television, news papers and the internet. The core role of the news media is to report news (the education ones being our concern here) as they happen. However it can be noted that the news media can act beyond that. As Marsh and Willis (1995, p.315.) assert that “...the news media indirectly exert influence on curriculum decision makers because of what they may have chosen to report about education and how they have chosen to report it”. If the news that is reported is investigative enough brings about a positive impact on the curriculum when the reports are carefully examined by the curriculum makers.

For instance the removal of the Form Two national Examination screening cut- off points was bitterly condemned by almost all news media spearheaded by the news papers. They argued that it attributed to massive failure of the students in 2010 Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) as it was the first group that was not screened in form two. The failure was about 50% yet happened before! The ministry took the action to restore the screening as from this year.

Also through different advertisements on the media, say radio and television, such as the advertisements by *HakiElimu* (a nonprofit education nongovernmental organization) on the utilization of the national wealth for education development and on the haste introduction of some subjects such as Information and Communication



Technology (ICT/ “TEHAMA”) without consideration of the prerequisite resources--teaching and learning facilities like computers, books, electricity and both knowledgeable and skilled teachers. Therefore media has a very vital influence on curriculum process though the influence is indirect and sometimes can be unprofessional and individualized hence care need to take its course in determining the useful media propositions to be considered in curriculum process (Mongula, 2007).

### 2.3.3 Employers

Curriculum is always influenced by the market and the employers’ needs or demands. If employers need peoples with certain knowledge and skills so as to boost the organizational productivity hence more profit and relatively low costs on the employees, the curriculum will have to address the same. For example the additions of the courses like entrepreneurship, ICT/ “TEHAMA” in the curriculum might be a result of the employers’ influence as they would require employees to be computer literate.

Employers are however often pre occupied with short range goals to reduce the costs of employment and increase profits. Moreover, the government as the major teacher employer introduced the induction course in 2006 to train form six leavers for one month to be employed as teachers by the government in a bid to have a short time solution to teacher scarcity problem as a caused by a drastic increase in enrollment resulting from expansion of secondary education by SEDP.

### 2.3.4 Textbook Publishers

These have narrow interests in curriculum decision making. However, they may portray their only interests as creating the finest textbooks available for use within the curriculum chosen by a school or college. Their interests extend to capturing the largest possible share of the market. By doing this publishers protect their own interests in the whole process. Sometimes these publishers may defend their positions by saying that, the specific topics included in their textbooks match with the topics that decision makers include in the school curricula.

Marsh and Willis (1995, p. 314), contend that “...this might be done by providing free sample copies of textbooks, teachers’ guides, coordinated videotapes, and audiotapes, thus influences the subject matter and organization of the curricula in schools”. Writers can for instance influence addition of ICT in the secondary school curriculum by composing fine books on the subject which clearly state the usefulness of studying the subject at the given level.

## 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

As it has been discussed in this paper it is not possible to separate politics from curriculum making process. This is because politicians are the major curriculum decision makers especially at the macro level as they make policies, the aims and goals of education, decide the content and mode of curriculum evaluation, to mention a few. Other individuals and pressure groups influence the curriculum decisions by the virtue of their own private needs or public good. A kin eye is therefore of a paramount importance in the curriculum making process to have the curriculum that reflects the societal needs rather than the individual or rather a group desire.

We also have to recognize the importance of including the teachers effectively in the process as they play a vital role on the operational curriculum without which curriculum would be nonsensical. The teachers’ affairs like earnings should also be improved, to suggest the pay as you earn income tax system should be reviewed to give the teachers some tax relief as one of the motivations. It is ought to be remembered and understood that teaching is the mother of all other professions so it is as important as that hence worthwhile giving its respective weight.

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