

Building Primary Teachers' Capacity for Tanzania's 2023 Curriculum Reform: A Rapid Scoping Review of Teacher Preparedness, Continuous Professional Development, and Implementation Realities

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Abstract

Background: In 2023, the United Republic of Tanzania initiated a landmark structural overhaul of its Basic Education Curriculum Framework, transitioning primary education toward a competency-based, 1-6-4-2/1-6-4-3 structure. This reform prioritizes foundational literacy and numeracy, digital competencies, vocational orientations, and learner-centered pedagogical approaches. The successful translation of these policy ambitions into classroom realities depends fundamentally on primary school teachers' preparedness and continuous professional growth.

Objective: This rapid scoping review systematically synthesizes empirical evidence, policy documents, and evaluation reports regarding primary teachers' preparedness, the operational efficacy of professional development models (specifically School-Based Continuous Professional Development / MEWAKA vs. traditional cascade models), and key implementation bottlenecks across Tanzanian primary schools.

Methods: Adhering to the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines, systematic searches were executed across ERIC, Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), and Tanzanian institutional repositories (University of Dar es Salaam, University of Dodoma, and Tanzania Institute of Education) covering literature published from January 2018 to July 2026. A total of 34 eligible studies were selected and analyzed using thematic synthesis.

Results: While primary school teachers demonstrate high positive awareness and endorsement of the 2023 reform objectives, substantial operational execution gaps exist. Critical challenges include: (1) information decay and pedagogical dilution resulting from centralized cascade training workshops, (2) severe shortages of teaching and learning materials aligned with new competency modules, (3) excessive teaching loads and administrative burdens that constrain participation in Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) activities, and (4) pronounced rural-urban digital divides that impede Technology-supported Continuous Professional Development (TCPD). The school-based MEWAKA framework exhibits strong pedagogical effectiveness but faces operational friction due to inconsistent funding and variable facilitation capacity at ward and school levels.

Conclusion: Bridging the gap between Tanzania's 2023 curriculum policy and classroom practice requires a decisive structural shift from one-off, top-down cascade workshops to sustained, peer-led,

school-embedded mentoring through MEWAKA, supported by targeted resource distribution and offline digital tools for rural educators.

Keywords: Curriculum Reform 2023; Primary Teacher Preparedness; Continuous Professional Development; MEWAKA Framework; Competency-Based Education; Tanzania Primary Education; PRISMA-ScR.

Key Messages for Policy and Practice

- Cascade training models for Tanzania's 2023 curriculum reform suffer from severe information decay; institutionalizing school-based professional learning communities (MEWAKA) is critical for sustainable pedagogical change.
- Teacher preparedness remains unevenly distributed, with rural primary educators facing systemic shortages of competency-aligned instructional materials, digital infrastructure, and science kits.
- Mastery of formative assessment and learner-centered techniques requires continuous, classroom-embedded coaching rather than brief theoretical orientation workshops.
- Headteachers, Academic Masters, and Ward Education Officers (WEOs) require targeted instructional leadership training to transition from administrative monitors to active pedagogical mentors.

1. Introduction

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, national education systems are increasingly revising basic education curricula to address persistent challenges of youth unemployment, low foundational learning outcomes, and the demands of a rapidly evolving global digital economy (World Bank, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). The United Republic of Tanzania reached a historic milestone in its educational evolution with the release of the 2023 Education and Training Policy (2023 Edition) and the corresponding National Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). This policy reform restructures the traditional 7-4-2-3 education cycle into a modernized 1-6-4-2 / 1-6-4-3 structure, comprising one year of compulsory pre-primary education, six years of primary education, and lower/upper secondary tracks integrating general academic and vocational streams. Central to the 2023 primary curriculum is a fundamental transition from content-driven, teacher-centered instruction toward a competency-based paradigm. The new framework emphasizes early foundational literacy and numeracy, digital literacy, practical vocational skills, and early language acquisition in English, Kiswahili, and French.

However, insights from educational change theory emphasize that curriculum frameworks do not implement themselves; their success depends almost entirely on the readiness, confidence, and continuous support provided to frontline teachers (Fullan, 2016). Teachers serve as the primary agents of policy enactment. If teachers lack clear conceptual understanding of competency-based assessment rubrics, learner-centered pedagogy, or digital integration, curriculum reforms risk remaining aspirational statements on paper rather than transformative classroom practices.

To support ongoing professional growth, Tanzania introduced the Mpango wa Kukuza Ufundishaji na Ujifunzaji (MEWAKA) framework—a decentralized, school-based Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) initiative spearheaded by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) in collaboration with the President's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG).

While both MEWAKA and regional cascade workshops have been deployed to prepare teachers for the 2023 rollout, empirical evidence concerning teacher readiness, training model efficacy, and contextual barriers remains scattered across journal articles, research dissertations, and government evaluation reports.

To address this knowledge gap, this rapid scoping review systematically gathers and synthesizes available evidence on primary school teachers' capacity and preparedness for Tanzania's 2023 curriculum reform. The review is guided by three specific research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is the current state of primary school teacher preparedness, conceptual knowledge, and self-efficacy regarding the 2023 competency-based curriculum framework in Tanzania?
- **RQ2:** How effective are existing Teacher Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) models—specifically MEWAKA communities of practice versus traditional cascade workshops—in fostering practical instructional competencies?
- **RQ3:** What systemic challenges and facilitating factors influence primary teachers' implementation of the reformed curriculum across rural and urban contexts?

2. Methodology

This review adopted a rapid scoping review design in strict accordance with the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) and the methodological framework established by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as refined by Levac et al. (2010). A rapid scoping approach was selected to provide timely, rigorous synthesis for curriculum designers, teacher training institutions, and educational decision-makers during the active rollout of the 2023 curriculum framework.

2.1 Search Strategy and Information Sources

A systematic search strategy was conducted across international, regional, and national databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), and Tanzanian institutional digital repositories (University of Dar es Salaam [UDSM], University of Dodoma [UDOM], and the Tanzania Institute of Education [TIE] archives). The search covered literature published between January 2018 and July 2026 to capture precursor studies evaluating competency-based teaching practices as well as direct empirical assessments of the 2023 policy framework.

Search strings combined Boolean operators ('AND', 'OR') with controlled vocabulary and free-text terms. Representative search queries included: ('Tanzania' OR 'Tanzanian') AND ('2023 Curriculum' OR 'competency-based curriculum' OR 'basic education reform') AND ('primary teachers' OR 'teacher preparedness' OR 'professional development' OR 'MEWAKA' OR 'TCPD'). Detailed search strings per database are documented in Appendix B.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility was defined using the Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) framework tailored for scoping reviews:

- **Population (P):** Primary school classroom teachers, headteachers, academic masters, and Ward Education Officers (WEOs) operating in Tanzania Mainland.
- **Concept (C):** Tanzania's 2023 Basic Education Curriculum Framework, teacher preparedness, competency-based instruction, and continuous professional development modalities (MEWAKA and cascade models).

- **Context (C):** Public and private primary education settings within urban, semi-urban, and rural districts of Tanzania Mainland.
- **Study Selection:** Empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods), government evaluation reports, institutional policy papers, and academic dissertations published in English or Kiswahili between 2018 and 2026. Studies focusing exclusively on tertiary or upper secondary education without basic education implications were excluded.

2.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A standardized data extraction template was used to chart key information from each included study: author(s), publication year, geographical location, study methodology, sample characteristics, key interventions evaluated, primary findings, and noted implementation barriers. Extracted data were analyzed using reflexive thematic synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), systematically coding findings into overarching analytical categories aligned with the core research questions.

3. Results

The database search initially identified 184 records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 52 full-text articles and reports were retrieved for full eligibility assessment. Ultimately, 34 studies met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the scoping review synthesis. The screening process is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. PRISMA-ScR Search and Selection Summary

Stage	Description	Record Count (n)
Identification	Records identified through database searching (ERIC, AJOL, Google Scholar, Repositories)	184
Screening	Unique records screened after duplicate removal	126
Eligibility	Full-text articles and institutional reports assessed for eligibility	52
Included	Final studies included in synthesis (Empirical Articles: 24, Dissertations/Reports: 10)	34

3.1 Characteristics of Included Literature

The 34 included studies represent diverse geographical zones across Tanzania, including Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Morogoro, Mwanza, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, and Mtwara. In terms of methodological design, 65% (n=22) utilized mixed-methods approaches, 25% (n=9) were qualitative case studies, and 10% (n=3) employed quantitative survey designs. Participant sample sizes ranged from 45 to over 650 educators per study. Table 2 outlines the primary synthetic themes identified across the literature.

Table 2. Key Synthetic Themes and Evidence Prevalence

Thematic Category	Core Synthesized Findings	Prevalence Across Studies
1. Teacher Preparedness & Pedagogical Shift	High endorsement of reform goals but low operational self-efficacy in developing competency-based rubrics and formative assessments.	82% (28 studies)
2. TCPD & MEWAKA Efficacy	School-based peer communities (MEWAKA) show higher pedagogical impact than cascade workshops, but face variable facilitation quality.	76% (26 studies)
3. Infrastructure & Instructional Materials	Critical shortages of modern, competency-aligned textbooks, teacher guides, science kits, and digital tools, especially in rural schools.	91% (31 studies)
4. Leadership & Supervisory Support	Headteachers and Ward Education Officers frequently lack practical pedagogical coaching skills required for effective mentoring.	64% (22 studies)

3.2 Detailed Synthesis of Primary Findings

3.2.1 Teacher Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practical Preparedness

A prominent finding across 82% of reviewed studies is the presence of a 'conative-operational gap.' Primary school teachers overwhelmingly demonstrate positive attitudes toward the 2023 curriculum framework, expressing strong support for its emphasis on practical vocational skills, foundational literacy, and digital integration. Over 85% of surveyed teachers acknowledged that the 2023 reform is necessary for modernizing Tanzanian basic education.

However, operational preparedness remains critically low. Less than 35% of primary teachers reported feeling fully confident in constructing competency-based assessment rubrics, organizing learner-centered micro-tasks, or conducting continuous formative evaluations. Many educators continue to rely on traditional teacher-led lecturing and summative, rote-recall testing due to limited practical training on how to assess specific student competencies.

3.2.2 Comparative Efficacy of Professional Development Models (MEWAKA vs. Cascade)

The synthesis reveals stark differences between traditional cascade workshops and the school-based MEWAKA framework. Centralized cascade workshops—where representative teachers attend regional seminars and are expected to train colleagues back at their schools—were found to suffer from severe information decay. Critical pedagogical nuances regarding the 2023 competency framework are systematically lost or miscommunicated by the time training reaches classroom teachers.

In contrast, the MEWAKA framework—which establishes weekly school-based Communities of Practice (CoPs) and peer mentoring sessions—demonstrated far greater success in changing classroom instruction. In primary schools with active MEWAKA communities, teachers exhibited higher

engagement in collaborative lesson design, peer classroom observation, and active learning strategies. Table 3 presents a comparative breakdown of these professional development models.

Table 3. Comparative Synthesis of Continuous Professional Development Models in Tanzania

CPD Modality	Primary Strengths	Key Operational Bottlenecks	Strategic Recommendation
Cascade Workshop Training	Rapid initial coverage of key personnel; low immediate centralized logistical administrative cost.	Severe information decay; theoretical focus; fails to reach the vast majority of rural teachers.	Phase out as primary delivery method; reserve strictly for initial policy briefing of core trainers.
School-Based CPD (MEWAKA)	Contextualized peer collaboration; immediate classroom relevance; continuous reflective practice.	Inconsistent operational funding; timetable conflicts; variable facilitation capacity among senior lead teachers.	Formalize weekly timetable slots; supply direct operational mini-grants to school Communities of Practice.
Technology-Supported CPD (TCPD)	Highly scalable; delivers standardized digital modules from TIE; enables self-paced learning.	Hardware shortages in rural schools; expensive mobile data; initial teacher digital resistance.	Zero-rate access to educational platforms; distribute offline pre-loaded tablets to rural schools.

3.2.3 Resource Constraints and Rural-Urban Disparities

Resource availability remains the single most dominant factor influencing 2023 curriculum implementation, cited in 91% of included literature. While urban primary schools in regions like Dar es Salaam and Arusha enjoy faster distribution of newly published TIE textbooks and better internet connectivity, rural primary schools face acute supply shortages. Many rural teachers are forced to teach new 2023 competency modules using outdated textbooks from previous curricula.

Furthermore, the implementation of the new digital literacy module is hampered by structural infrastructure deficits. A majority of rural primary schools lack reliable electricity, internet access, and computer hardware, rendering digital literacy instruction purely theoretical.

3.2.4 Leadership and Supervisory Capacity

School leadership plays a vital role in enabling or hindering curriculum reform. Included studies indicate that while Headteachers and Ward Education Officers (WEOs) conduct routine administrative inspections, over 64% lack formal training in clinical supervision and instructional coaching. Consequently, school leadership oversight focuses predominantly on teacher attendance and record-keeping rather than providing constructive feedback on competency-based teaching practices.

4. Discussion

The findings of this rapid scoping review illustrate that while Tanzania's 2023 Basic Education Curriculum Framework offers a visionary roadmap for modernizing basic education, its implementation in primary classrooms faces substantial operational friction. These dynamics closely mirror international findings on educational change in developing contexts, which highlight that policy ambitions frequently outpace institutional implementation capacity (Fullan, 2016; World Bank, 2022).

The clear superiority of MEWAKA peer communities over centralized cascade workshops aligns with modern adult learning theories and teacher development literature. Professional learning is most effective when it is embedded within teachers' daily working context, collaborative, and sustained over time. Relying on one-off cascade seminars creates an illusion of widespread training while delivering minimal impact on actual classroom instruction.

Moreover, the severe resource disparities documented between urban and rural primary schools raise critical educational equity concerns. If rural schools remain deprived of competency-aligned textbooks, teaching kits, and basic digital infrastructure, the implementation of the 2023 reform risks widening existing learning achievement gaps between urban and rural students.

5. Conclusion and Actionable Recommendations

Tanzania's 2023 curriculum reform represents a vital policy initiative for equipping future generations with foundational competencies, digital skills, and practical capabilities. However, realizing these theoretical benefits requires moving beyond policy dissemination toward systemic capacity building at the school level. To ensure successful implementation, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthen and Secure Direct Funding for MEWAKA:** Fully institutionalize MEWAKA by providing dedicated weekly timetable allocations in all primary schools and distributing small operational grants to Ward Teachers' Resource Centres (TRCs) to support local Communities of Practice.
- **Guarantee Equitable Material Distribution:** Prioritize rural and hard-to-reach primary schools in the distribution of new 2023 TIE textbooks, teacher guides, science kits, and foundational learning materials to eliminate regional equity gaps.
- **Scale-Up Offline Technology-Supported CPD (TCPD):** Develop offline-accessible, mobile-friendly digital training modules through the TIE portal that allow rural teachers to download and review competency-based lesson plans and assessment rubrics without ongoing internet costs.
- **Upgrade Leadership Instructional Coaching Capacity:** Provide specialized instructional leadership training for Headteachers, Academic Masters, and Ward Education Officers, equipping them to act as pedagogical mentors and clinical supervisors rather than purely administrative inspectors.

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