



**THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS'
COLLABORATIONS IN EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM
IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
IN TANGA REGION, TANZANIA**

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Abstract:

This paper intended to explore the role of English language teachers' collaborations in curriculum implementation in secondary schools in Tanga, Tanzania. Literatures revealed that availability of workshops and conferences alone in curriculum implementation have not proved to be fruitful in letting teachers change their teaching practices. The purpose of this study therefore was to examine the role of English language teachers' collaborations in the process of curriculum implementation in ordinary secondary schools. The study adopted a qualitative research design where in depth interviews were used for data collection. The study was guided by two research questions; what roles do English language teachers' collaborations play in curriculum implementation and in what ways are teacher collaborations important in curriculum implementation. The study was conducted within Tanga region in three (3) districts namely; Tanga municipal, Muheza and Korogwe respectively. The sample included eight (8) ordinary secondary school English language teachers who were selected using snowball sampling procedure. The criterion for participating in the study was ten (10) years teaching experience. Findings revealed that English language teachers' collaborations are important aspects in adhering to changes in the day to day teaching practice and effective curriculum implementation. Furthermore, most teachers are used to a bound collaboration which always ends within the department in a respective school. The study concluded that open collaborations are more important in the teaching career so that teachers become open minded and absorb new ways of teaching. The study recommends for school to school, district to district and region to region collaborations to enable teachers open up their minds and enhance their teaching career.

Keywords: collaborations, teacher collaborations, curriculum implementation

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1. Introduction

Many countries in the world have been reforming their education systems to concur with the changing world of globalization and letting its graduates be able to compete in the global market. The current labour market demands graduates who have adequate competences/skills that will enable them to perform effectively in the labour market. This led to changes in curricular in order to curb the employment gap by imparting graduates with appropriate skills which will enable them to be competitive in work areas. Changes in curricular entails changing teachers teaching practices and how they perceive the teaching and learning process (Stack, 2005).

Tanzania has been reforming its education systems for many years since its independence in 1961. All these reforms were geared towards enhancing its education quality and producing better and competitive graduates with appropriate skills. To achieve this, Tanzania changed its curriculum from teacher centred to students' centred curriculum. This was due to the fact that the old curriculum seemed to produce graduates who were unable to compete in the labour market.

Consequently, in 2005, Tanzania introduced a Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) in all secondary schools which demanded teachers to use participatory approach in teaching and learning. The new curriculum is more students centred where students should be active participants in the process of learning while teachers should be acting as guiders or facilitators (Paul, 2014). This needed teachers to change their ways of teaching. To achieve this target, the government conducted professional development workshops and in-service trainings with the intention of imparting teachers with expertise which will enable them to implement the intended curriculum effectively.

Fullan's study as cited in (Stack, 2005) argues that in order for curriculum implementation to be effective, some factors such as enough teachers' preparation time, teachers' interaction and in-service trainings must be taken care off. Nevertheless, teachers' learning in curriculum implementation is not limited to formal professional development and in-service trainings alone but also takes place in other areas such as in community of teachers (Voogt et al, 2011). By community of teachers, it implies that teachers can easily learn amongst themselves at peer or subject sharing levels. This study therefore, investigated the role of English language teachers' collaborations in the process of curriculum implementation.

1.1 Statement of the problem

In many curriculum implementation processes emphasis is mostly put in workshops and in-service trainings as key factors in updating teachers' skills. The problem of most workshops and in-service trainings is that they are unsuccessful in changing teachers teaching practices because they transmit concepts and evidence-based poorly hence treating teachers as passive listeners (Gulamhussein, 2013). According to Gulamhussein, teachers are like students in that they also learn better, when they actively participate in the learning process and make sense of the kind of information

provided to them. On the other hand, many curriculum implementation processes put much emphasis on an individual teacher alone neglecting the power of collaboration which may yield positive results (Fullan, 2016). This implies that teachers are not given an opportunity to improve their teaching practices by being observed by fellow teachers in their schools and given a chance to observe other teachers in other schools (Elmore's study cited in (Fullan, 2016). This entails that the power of collaboration is important in changing attitudes in teachers teaching practices rather than mere workshops where teachers are combined together regardless of their subject specialties. Most studies that were conducted in curriculum implementation in Tanzania have dwelt much on factors such as professional development workshops and in-service trainings (Paul, 2014; Kafyulilo et al, 2012; Timothy, 2011 and Banda, 2011) neglecting the important aspect of teachers' autonomy in collaborations. For that reason, this study sought to explore the role of English language teachers' collaborations in curriculum implementation within Tanga region in three districts of Tanga municipal, Korogwe and Muheza respectively.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of study

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of English language teachers' collaborations in the process of curriculum implementation in ordinary secondary schools. Specifically the study aimed at exploring the roles played by teachers' collaborations and the ways in which teachers' collaborations are important in curriculum implementation.

2. Literature review

2.1 Defining Teachers' collaborations

The word teacher collaboration has been used synonymously with teachers' community, and teachers' peer coaching. Teacher Collaboration has been variously defined by different authors depending on different contexts. Mendez-Vilas (2006) for example, defined teacher collaboration in two ways, formal and informal. In his formal definition, teacher collaboration involves two or more teachers who share an array of practice, pedagogies and instruction in an effort to enhance students' learning and improves their teaching practice. On the other hand, informal teacher collaboration entails teachers who are concerned in unstructured sharing of communication, resources and tasks. All these communications are geared towards improvement in curriculum implementation hence improving students' outcomes. Bovbjerg et al, (2006) identified two types of teacher collaborations; some are about exchanging ideas where teachers meet to share challenges and find ways to solve them and others are about individualism where the teacher may have collaborations for his/her own work life. This study dealt with the second aspect of collaborations where English language teachers meet, share their challenges and together find ways to curb them.

2.2 Relationship between teachers' collaborations and effective curriculum implementation

Teachers' collaborations have been seen to have a direct relationship with the way curriculum implementation is enhanced. Various studies have been conducted to explain such a relationship. A study by Lock (2015) was conducted to see the relationship between teacher collaboration and teachers level of knowledge. The study found out that there is a positive relationship between elements of teacher collaborations and teacher's level of curriculum implementation. Similarly, Ronfeldt et al (2015) did a study on how high quality collaborations benefits teachers and students. It was revealed that when teachers are engaged in high quality collaboration there is both individual and collective benefit. The study found out that high collaboration is associated with increase in students' achievement and teacher performance hence effective curriculum implementation. Another study by Wimberley (2011) exposed that teachers who are allowed to work together in workshops or lesson planning perform better in standardized tests than those schools which do not allow such collaborations. Thus, collaboration often improves organizational communication and allows for more student-centred instruction which enhances effective curriculum implementation and improves students' performance (Shipley, 2009).

2.3 Teachers' collaborations and its impact in teachers' teaching practices

Teachers' collaborations have proved to be of importance in teachers' day to day teaching practices. Literatures have revealed that teachers benefit in different ways when they work together. For instance, Ronfeldt (2015) elucidated that there is an individual and collective benefits in teacher collaborations in which teachers perceive as extensive and helpful leading to positive influence on teacher's teaching practices. Moreover, teaching experience and practice preparation have been witnessed to have an influence on students' achievement whenever teachers are given an opportunity to learn from their peers (Berry et al, 2009). According to them, teacher support from peers is more effective for enhancing teachers' classroom practices. All these studies have been conducted in different contexts from Tanzania. Basing on literatures' findings, this study was conducted so as to explore the role played by teacher collaborations in Tanzanian contexts, investigating English language teachers in secondary schools within Tanga region.

2.4 Theoretical underpinnings

The current study is informed by two theories which in one way or the other have a direct link with teacher collaborations; these are Social Learning Theory and Social Interdependence Theory respectively.

2.4.1 Social Learning Theory

Collaborative learning has also been promoted by Vygotsky (1962) in his theory of Social Learning. Vygotsky described collaboration as any situation in which a person is

engaged in an interaction with another person in order to solve a certain problem. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities. According to him, learning stems from the exchange of ideas and interactions. This means that people learn through interactions and communication with others. The theory posits that people learn better in social contexts (learn from each other). Despite the fact that this theory is based on how educators should maximize students' learning, it can be applied to teachers as well because in the process of curriculum implementation teachers need to learn so that they can update their teaching skills. Thus, the implication of this theory is that collaborative dialogue helps individuals to internalize information and apply it in real social life. Therefore, when teachers collaborate they create a social learning environment which allows them to learn from other teachers. This theory was in line with the conducted study as it wanted to explore the role of English language teachers' collaborations in curriculum implementation.

2.4.2 Social Interdependence Theory

Social interdependence theory was propounded by Johnson and Johnson (2009). The theory posits that social interdependence occurs when the outcomes are affected by individual's own or other people's actions. The premise of this theory is that the structure of participants' objective is determined by the way these participants interact and their interaction patterns predict the outcomes of the situation at hand. Johnson and Johnson distinguished two types of social interdependence theory as positive and negative social interdependence. According to them, positive social interdependence (cooperation) happens when individual's actions support and achieve common goals. On the other hand, negative interdependence is when the actions of an individual hamper or prevent the achievement of other's goals. This means individuals believe that they can achieve their goals if other competitive individual fail to attain their goals. This study is directly related with positive social interdependence which results in Promotive interaction. Promotive interaction refers to individuals' encouragement and facilitation with each other to complete a task in order to meet the group's objectives. Promotive interaction consists of various variables such as mutual help and assistance, exchange of needed resources, effective communication, mutual influence, trust and constructive management of conflict. Therefore, positive interdependence promotes individual contributions to the overall objective. Through positive interdependence, teachers are accountable and responsible for common goals of the school and group. The influence of responsibility is increased when there is group and individual accountability.

3. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design with in depth interviews as data collection tools. The target population included English language secondary school teachers within Tanga region specifically in Tanga municipality, Korogwe and Muheza

districts respectively. The schools were randomly selected and teachers were selected using snow ball sampling. The study included a sample of eight (8) English language teachers from four (4) ordinary secondary schools. The criterion for teachers' selection in the study was 8 years experience in teaching English language subject.

4. Findings and discussion

The current study explored on the role of teachers' collaborations in effective curriculum implementation and the ways in which teacher collaborations have been important in enhancing teachers' teaching practices. To achieve its objectives, the researcher carried out in depth interviews with eight (8) English language secondary school teachers in Tanga region. The in depth interviews emerged with the following themes; identification of challenges in implementing curriculum, improving teachers' day to day teaching practice, self-adjustment and correction in current pedagogy and harmonization of pedagogical preferences and assessments to suit the curriculum demands.

4.1 Identification of challenges in implementing curriculum

Findings revealed that teachers' collaborations have been effective in identifying various challenges with regard to curriculum implementation. Most teachers confirmed that collaborations have helped them to sit as a team and identify what challenges they encounter in the process of implementing the demanding curriculum. One teacher explained;

"We normally communicate in our department where we always meet once in a month. In our meetings, the head of departments ask us to present challenges that we met when teaching English language in the whole month. Every one mentions the challenges if they are there and then together we find ways of overcoming those challenges. If we meet challenges that are beyond the department level, the head of department contacts the management for further assistance."

In the same vein another teacher added;

"In our school we normally meet whenever any important issue concerning English language teaching arises. For example, last year we discovered that some books are missing some important contents that are demanded to be taught in the English language syllabus. This was a problem to us English language teachers because we have to use the old book which have been forbidden to be used in schools so as to teach the topics and cover the syllabus."

4.2 Improving teachers' day to day teaching practices

Findings in the study also revealed the importance of teachers' collaborations in improving teachers' teaching practices. Most teachers exhibited that through these collaborations their day to day classroom practices have been improved. Emphasizing on this one teacher said;

"You know, working in isolation is sometimes not healthy in the process of teaching and learning. Collaborations have created a healthy mind to me and made me be active in my teaching career. When I came from the professional training workshop on implementing new curriculum, I wondered how I will be able to do it. The first classroom teaching days were very tough to me. Later our department head told us that if we encounter any problem we should tell him in our departmental meetings. From there I felt relieved of the burden. I did not feel shy to tell my fellow teachers that I cannot do this or that and they helped me. Now, I have at least changed in the way I teach."

Another teacher reiterated;

"I really thank my school specifically my English language department for introducing a session on how to go about implementing the new curriculum in English subject. The school head always tells us that English is the key language for students teaching and learning thus it is us English language teachers who should put more efforts in teaching the language effectively. So the head of department introduced a session specifically for orienting ourselves with how we implement the curriculum. The session is done at the end of the week where we sit together, select a topic and do demonstration. Then you get feedback from your fellow teachers on where you did well and where you did not. Together we discuss how to teach the topic better."

The findings concur with those of Reeves et al (2017) and Ronfeldt (2015) findings which revealed that teachers who are allowed to participate in collaborations show a greater improvement in their day to day teaching practices than those who do not.

4.3 Teachers' self-adjustment and correction in current demanded pedagogy

Findings revealed that, through frequent teachers' collaborations, teachers have gained a habit of adjusting themselves in the current demanded pedagogy. Most teachers elucidated that collaboration have helped them to be able to adjust from the old method of teaching to the student centred approach which is currently used. Most teachers seem to silently refute to use the new curriculum. Some teachers planned their lessons as required in their schemes of work and syllabus but when they are in class they practice the old teaching approach. One teacher explained;

"I started teaching before this curriculum was introduced so I am a teacher-based oriented curriculum. When I went to the college, I was also oriented on the same. Now

when the new curriculum was introduced I willingly said that I cannot use it because at first it was brought to us before we were not taught anything about it. Later when we were given a seminar on it, I started to catch up slowly. It was difficult to abruptly agree to change because I was not sure if I will be able to do it. But after frequent communications with my fellow teachers in the department, I have started to change to go with the new one. I even think that before I was mistreating my students by spoon feeding them."

This finding concurred with what Shipley (2009) said that often when teachers are engaged in collaborations it helps them to improve inside communication and allows for more student-centred instruction which enhances effective curriculum implementation.

4.4 Harmonization of pedagogical preferences and assessments to suit the new curriculum demands

Findings have also exposed that frequent teachers' collaborations have an impact in harmonizing which pedagogical approaches and assessment procedures should be dominant to align with the new curriculum. Most teachers uncovered that collaborations with other teachers have helped them to harmonize their pedagogic and assessment measures in the process of teaching. This was revealed when one teacher responded in an interview;

"You know by the time the curriculum was introduced we teachers did not receive it well. Every teacher was not happy with the new curriculum because it demanded us to change our ways of teaching. Myself I was silently saying I will not apply this in my class it is difficult. Luckily, we had a strong head of department who called all English teachers and asked us to share on our way forward in how we are going to implement the curriculum. We shared our ideas, at the end we agreed that we will be doing teaching practices according to the topics in our syllabus. We agreed that every Friday we should meet and demonstrate. Each one of us is given a topic before so that he or she can use the whole week preparing him or herself. Together we agreed that this should be the approach we teach a certain topic."

On assessment procedures one teacher said;

"I was once assessing my students using writing exercises soon after I finished teaching a certain topic. When we discussed how to teach we also set an agreement on how we should evaluate our lessons in the classroom. We agreed that giving our students written exercise alone does not make our students active because they always use the notes that have taken to respond to the questions. We decided that we should also be checking their understanding orally, by asking oral questions while we keep on teaching and reflecting at the end of the lesson."

Findings have revealed that teachers' collaborations have a very important role to play in the way teachers implement the curriculum. It has been observed that collaborations have helped teachers to identify various challenges that they encounter in the teaching process and find solutions to overcome them. It has been discovered that when teachers collaborate professionally, they build upon their distinctive experiences, pedagogies and content (Goddard and Goddard, 2007; Christianakis, 2010). Moreover, with collaborations teachers have been able to leave away the stereotype that they cannot change their old teaching ways to the modern ones as well as the way they assess their students. Furthermore, teachers have come into an agreement on a common approach that they can use in teaching certain topics rather than having inconsistencies in the process. Generally, isolation is one of the greatest impediments to day to day teaching practices as it limits teachers' ability to work on the little knowledge they have (Burton, 2015).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study concluded that it is important to give teachers freedom to practice collaborations whenever they have ample time to do so, because cooperation creates a healthy mind. The study disagrees with the notion of leaving teachers in isolation after attending a major workshop on implementing a curriculum. According to the findings and the theories that support it, social interactions are more important in the day to day teaching process because they allow teachers to have diverse knowledge on the issues at hand and have right decisions as per agreement with other teachers. However, the study discovered that teachers in the study area are bound to collaborations within their own departments. The study revealed that all teachers who were interviewed have ended up giving responses that are departmental bounded. Although those types of collaborations have shown to have important roles to play in the way teachers implement curriculum, the researcher feels that teachers' collaborations should be opened outside the school environment. This means that teachers can have a common understanding in their department alone, but it is healthily recommended that such collaborations should be extended to other departments within the school and to other schools in the district or region levels. This would enable teachers to have a wider understanding and agreements in common between subjects teaching approaches in schools within the district or region levels.

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