

Original Research Article
Examining the Contribution of Curricula Reforms on Graduates' Employability Across Various Educational Level in Tanzania

ABSTRACT

The study examined how curricula reforms address employability challenges among graduates in Tanzania. Adopting a mixed methods approach, the study included 243 participants, of whom 231 completed questionnaires, 12 took part in interviews lasting 20 to 30 minutes, and 6 documents were analysed. The study found that curriculum reform significantly improves the employability skills of graduates ($\beta = 0.801$, $p = 0.000$). It was also found that curriculum reform addresses graduates' employability skills by maintaining relevance, aligning practices to 21st century demands, promoting relevant skills, and fostering global awareness and interdisciplinary skills. Furthermore, since curriculum reform is built on an effective and useful needs assessment, it is essential for integrating practical skills into educational programmes. It is therefore recommended to prioritize curriculum reform as a crucial strategy to ensure flexibility and relevance, taking into account national priorities and evolving contexts. Further research is needed to understand the factors influencing the effectiveness of curriculum reforms in enhancing employability skills among Tanzanian graduates.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Curriculum Reform, Employability, Skills, Job market*

1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is the foundation of education, providing students with knowledge and skills for better living, serving as a guideline and roadmap for various levels of education [1, 2], however, if it is not reformed for long time lacks flexibility, innovation and relevance to societal needs [3]. Curricula reforms have been applied as a strategy to ensure that the knowledge, skills, and competencies of graduates remain relevant and effective in navigating the constantly evolving socio-economic environment [3-5]. UK, Finland, Russia and Japan have implemented curriculum reforms to enhance basic skills, create a skilled workforce, and enhance students' sustainable living skills in the 21st century [4, 6-9]. Likewise, Tanzania has reformed its curriculum in a number of editions, including in 1967, 1997, 2005, and the current edition of 2023, to address a variety of concerns including employability skills, leveraging competencies and skills relevant to the labour market [10-12]. However, Tanzanian curricula reforms haven't had much of an impact on graduates' employability skills at different levels [13-15]. In order to ensure that graduates have the necessary skills for the job market and to address graduate unemployment and global economic difficulties, curriculum reform is essential [16-18]. Research shows that curriculum reform is critically needed because of the growing skills gaps between what education and training can provide and what society and job market require [19]. This study aimed at examining how curricula reforms address employability challenges among graduates across different levels of education in Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Review

In this study, multidimensional View for Change serves as the theoretical guide of this study. It was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1976, as an approach to curriculum design and has been used to guide education reforms globally [3, 20]. The model suggests that curriculum reforms should be viewed as a multidimensional ecological system with multiple dimensions [21]. Basing on this model, it is obvious that, the role of curricula reforms on employability is a function of various dimensions. The applicability of the model in diverse countries, particularly in guiding the employability agenda, remains uncertain, as it's unclear if it effectively addresses specific needs and challenges, hence constituting a weakness. Nonetheless, as it is recommendable in guiding educational change practices, it was appropriate to this study that examines how curricula reforms address employability of graduates in Tanzania.

2.2. Empirical Review

Different studies have provided different views in relation to how curriculum reforms address employability. [22] examined the impact of curriculum design on the employability competency of Malaysian graduates and found that curriculum design significantly impacted on employability competency ($\beta = 0.337$, $p = 0.000$). The study is important by introducing the elements of curriculum and employability practices the same to this research study. It indicates curriculum processes directly influences the employability skills of graduates. However, the current research study differs from the former study in that the current study concentrates on curriculum reform in addressing employability, while the former study concentrates on curriculum development. [23] investigated the effect of implementing the standards aligned curriculum model on employability skills at Wisconsin International University College (WIUC) in Ghana and found a strong correlation between the adopted curriculum and the job responsibilities of graduates. Additionally, the findings indicated that graduates expressed satisfaction with the curriculum alignment with their professional roles. Further, the study conducted by [24] on the relevance of 21st century skills in the current job market from the perspectives of stakeholders revealed 63.3 percent of the participants indicated that the job skills taught in universities are not adequately meeting the demands of the contemporary job market. This suggests that there is a growing need for educational provision to be aligned with the evolving needs of job in order to enhance employability. Furthermore, [25] conducted a study on employability: a review of literature from 2012–2016 to comprehend different practices and policies with demonstrable positive impact on employment outcomes. In-depth review was done on 187 papers, and the results identified work-related practice as among the best practices with a demonstrable positive impact on students' employability outcomes. On the same note, the study by [26] explored the appropriate employability content to be integrated into curricula in Vietnamese universities.

Moreover, the study by [27] indicated that global science education is experiencing a crisis, necessitating curriculum reform to clearly state its vision and mission to meet needs of students. It is also indicated that employability among students is greatly impacted when education is tailored to fit the needs of society and the job market [28]. Another study emphasizes that curriculum reform enhances instruction and learning effectiveness, enabling students to develop the necessary skills for job market success and enhanced employability [29]. Further, it was indicated that many governments have reformed the education to provide students the chance to acquire the necessary skills for success [21]. Automatically, curriculum reform is crucial for addressing the new role and goals of education, focusing on equipping students with skills and competences for sustainable living. Many countries have been required to redesign their curricula as a result of technological developments that require individuals to live and work in 21st century [30]. Some studies emphasized that employability skills should be treated and considered as a crucial agenda item in the 21st

century [31-34]. Quality student learning and teaching require 21st century skills beyond literacy and numeracy, which encompass essential competencies beyond literacy and numeracy [35]. The [5] shows that curriculum reforms are primarily aimed at addressing education challenges, particularly the lack of relevant skills for the labour market. The study by [36] indicates the importance of interdisciplinary curriculum in teaching 21st century competencies for solving complex global problems effectively and relevantly. Incorporating global issues and interdisciplinary skills into the curriculum improves students' knowledge integration and interdisciplinarity, fostering competence in synthesizing and applying knowledge from multiple disciplines [37, 38].

3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a mixed methods approach with convergent design, involving 243 respondents, with 231 responding to questionnaires and 12 participating in 20–30-minute interview and 12 document analysis. The researcher first got a letter of clearance from the university and then permits from the relevant research areas as part of ethical concerns. The research objectives were communicated to the respondents, and the data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In quantitative data analysis, the frequency and percentages presented in descriptive tables were analyzed. A simple regression analysis was then carried out to ascertain the statistical association between employability and curriculum modifications. To shed light on descriptive data, qualitative information from interviews and document analysis is employed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Background Information of Respondents

In (Table 1) results indicate that 55.97 percent were male while 44.03 percent female, with 90.13 percent having educational level ranging from bachelor to PhD. The majority of participants 57.25 percent acquired knowledge through multiple pathways, indicating a strong understanding of curriculum reforms. Moreover, it was revealed that the most significant share of respondents (55.97 percent) had experiences above 10 years. The majority of respondents (90.13 percent) possess high education qualifications and extensive curriculum experience, enabling them to provide reliable information [39, 21].

Table 1: Background Information of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	136	55.97
	Female	107	44.03
	Total	243	100
Educational qualification level	Certificate	13	5.35
	Diploma	11	4.53
	Bachelor' degree	76	31.28
	Masters	118	48.56
	PhD	25	10.29
	Total	243	100
	Sources of knowledge and skills of curricula issues	Cert	13
Dip		6	2.47
BA		69	28.40
P-Dip		1	0.41
Cert + Dip		5	2.06
Cert + Dip + BA		14	5.76
Cert + Dip + BA + MA		2	0.82
Cert + Dip +BA +MA + PhD		3	1.23
Cert + BA +MA		5	2.06
Dip + BA		33	13.58
Dip + BA + MA		20	8.23
Dip + BA +MA + PhD		5	2.06
BA + MA		37	15.23
BA + MA + PhD		3	1.23
Post-Dip + MA + PhD		4	1.65
BA + PhD		2	0.82
Seminars, workshops and research activities		14	5.76
Cert.+ BA	7	2.88	
Total	243	100.00	
Working experiences	Under five years	38	15.6
	5-10 years	69	28.4
	11-19 years	80	32.9
	20 years and above	56	23.0
	Total	243	100.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Note: Note: Cert= Certificate; Dip = Diploma; BA = Bachelor; P-Dip = Postgraduate Diploma; MA = Masters

4.2. How Curricula Reforms Address Employability Challenges

The study examined how curricula reforms address employability challenges among graduates. The questionnaires on this study comprised of statements describing different ways in which curricula reforms address employability such as maintaining relevance of education, aligning educational practices to the 21st century skills, developing relevant skills needed in the job market and promoting global awareness and interdisciplinary skills. The respondents were asked to show the extent to which curricula reforms play those roles in addressing employability challenge by rating the statements using the scale of 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. The results are as follows:

Table 2: Responses on how Curricula Reforms Address Employability

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Make education relevant to evolving demands of the labour Markets	7	3.0	23	10.0	28	12.1	94	40.7	79	34.2
2. Align educational practices to of 21 st century skills	4	1.7	19	8.2	30	13.0	105	45.5	73	31.6
3. Foster development of relevant skills needed in the job market	7	3.0	24	10.4	37	16.0	87	37.7	76	32.9
4. Promote global awareness and interdisciplinary skills	9	3.9	23	10.0	23	10.0	107	46.3	69	29.9

Source: Field data (2024)

Note: f= number of respondents within the category; %= percentage

4.2.1. Maintaining Relevance of Education

In (Table 2), the findings indicate 74.9 percent of respondents believe that curriculum reform is crucial for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of education in preparing students for employability in the labour market. Also, data from interviews indicates that curriculum reforms enhance employability by ensuring relevance in education, with respondents valuing the incorporation of recent innovations. One respondent had the following to express:

Curriculum reforms guarantee that the knowledge and skills taught in schools are current with trends since they adapt education to changes such as those in technology, which necessitate the development of new pedagogy, knowledge, and skills.

Another respondent had this to say:

Since society and needs are dynamic, curriculum reform is necessary to ensure that learning objectives and outcomes remain constantly relevant. Thus, curriculum reform is required in order to bring significant innovations in education that are pertinent to changing needs of the society.

Curriculum reforms enhance the relevance of education to adapt to societal and labour market dynamism, ensuring the quality and relevance of content and instructions. From the findings it can be inferred that, curriculum reform incorporates the latest and most applicable innovations in education, making it more relevant in adapting to current contexts and making graduates functional in the labour market. The findings are supported with previous research indicating that education tailored to society and the job market significantly enhances employability among students [28]. Curriculum reform improves instruction and learning effectiveness, enabling students to develop essential skills for job market success and increased employability [29]. Curricula reforms can help in tailoring the education to actual needs of the society, students and the labour markets by adjusting the objectives, contents and instructions to integrate employability skills aspects. This can be achieved by modifying the practices or incorporating the latest trends for better functionality. Further data indicates that curricula reforms improve education relevance through effective needs assessment practices as stated by one of the respondents:

Reforming curriculum makes education relevant in that any reform based on needs assessment determines the necessity for curriculum reform. One of the needs is the skills for functionalities of personnel or graduates, which touch directly on employment. Reform is driven by demands, which means that it affects graduates' employability

In reality, needs assessments help policymakers and decision-makers identify the actual labour market situations in comparison to the practices of education. With needs assessment, it is possible and easy to come up with kind of knowledge and skill sets for responding to the actual needs and demands in the market. This helps to prepare appropriate solutions and preparing students for future employment by enhancing their skills and competencies through practical learning. The finding corroborates with previous study which revealed that that needs assessment is a useful technique for determining the prerequisites as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the operation of the job market [40]. An effective needs assessment adapts education to current trends, ensuring relevance by providing evidence based on actual labour market demands. However, if the needs assessment determines the reforms and curriculum reforms should be linked to the needs assessment, it is unclear why curricula reforms in the country haven't contributed to alleviating the skills issues and leveraging employability skills among graduates. The argument was made that most Tanzanian curriculum reforms did not significantly affect employability skills.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that curriculum reforms make education responsive to the labour market and societal needs, improving employability among students and contributing to social development. The analysis of document data indicates that curriculum reforms increase the ability of education to adapt to societal and labour market demands. The Sector Development Plan 2016/17-2020/21 clearly outlines that:

Implement the national curriculum reform programme to enhance the relevance of basic education curricula, focusing on competency-based curricula that meet and respond to socio-economic development needs and labour market demands

The National Strategy for Inclusive Education (NSIE) 2021/22-2025/26 outlines the following:

To review curricula for pre-primary, primary, TVET, non-formal, and adult education to cater for educational the needs of learners.

The study highlights the importance of education in meeting the needs of the nation, the target population, and the labour market, with curriculum reform tailored to cater to the needs of the students for a sustainable life. The finding aligns with previous study which indicated that tailoring education to labour market demands enhances graduates' employability, bridges skill gaps, and increases workforce adaptability [41]. It is obvious that relevant education match with the market demands and accurately prepares workforce for the critical role in the labour market, making curriculum reform important strategy to make sure that education all the time matches with the demands of the market by addressing skills gaps. Data from document analysis reveals that curriculum becomes stagnant and lose relevance and innovation, negatively impacting workforce quality if they are not reformed over time. The lack of competent and skilled workers in line with national priorities was one of the rationales for the 2023 edition of the curriculum. The Education and Training Policy (2014) edition of 2023 states the following:

The demands of economic, social, scientific, and technological changes are not being met by the curricula at various levels of education, which results in graduates who lack the necessary skills to self-employed or being employed. As the results, necessitated the reforms of 2023 curricula so as to produce workforce with relevant skills and competences.

Curricula reforms are important for aligning education practices with societal and labour market dynamism, preparing the workforce for effective adaptability in a rapidly changing society. However, the ability of the curriculum to adapt to societal and labour market changes is diminished if it doesn't undergo frequent reforms, leading to an irrelevant and low-quality workforce. The finding corroborates previous research which indicates that curricula that have not been reformed lack innovation to adapt to changing societal and economic demands [42]. Reforms are crucial to maintain the relevance of education in accordance to the demands of the job market, addressing changes in social, scientific, and technological realms that may impact employability skills of graduates.

4.2.2. Aligning Educational Practices to the 21st Century Skills

In regard to this role, data in (Table 2) revealed that the sum of 178 (77.1 percent) principally agreed that curriculum reforms used as a strategy to align educational practices with the demands of 21st century skills. The findings underscore the significance of curriculum reform in aligning education to 21st century skills, thereby promoting students' happiness and success in the modern era. Accordingly, data from interviews support the descriptive data by revealing that contexts influence education, hence 21st century skills requirements shaping practices. It is curricula reforms that align education provision with these requirements, as stated by a respondent:

Good curriculum reform should consider the needed skills and competences based on the contexts leading to the job market. Therefore, curriculum reform should aim to inculcate the skills relevant to helping graduates thrive in 21st century contexts

Another respondent had the following to comment on:

The current demands for knowledge and skills are different from those of the past, so if we don't reform the curriculum, we won't be able to meet them. In order to make skills more relevant, we must align practices with the demands of current needs as guided by the requirements of 21st century skills

The requirements of the 21st century skills have driven a shift in curriculum and educational guidelines, emphasizing the need to adapt to the ever-changing world. This has led to a focus on reshaping curricula to align with 21st century skills. The finding above is consistent with various previous research studies such as [43] which evidences that curriculum reform in Brazil was done to align education practices with 21st century skills for students to effectively thrive in the labour market. [21] indicates that students need to develop skills in the 21st century to lead fulfilling and productive lives as global citizens. Many countries have been required to redesign their curricula as a result of technological developments that require individuals to live and work in 21st century [30]. Further, the data from interviews and document analysis reveal that the 21st century emphasizes the development of employability skills as a key theme for sustainable living, reflecting the significant changes in work and education around the world. One of the interviewees stated that:

The curriculum reform should enhance 21st skills like critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, communication, and digital skills

Likewise, the Education and Training Policy (2014) edition of 2023 emphasizes the 21st century as a key theme in education for students to thrive in the labour market. The policy clearly points that:

The reform aims to enhance the capacity of the country to produce graduates with 21st century skills like communication, collaboration, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, ethics, and patriotism.

Additionally, the National Framework for Basic and Teacher Education (NFBTE) (2019) outlines the following:

The development of curricula at various levels of education should focus on ensuring all students acquire 21st century skills.

The above findings clearly indicate that sustainable living in the 21st century requires relevant skills, necessitating curriculum reforms in education systems to enhance these skills. The finding is consistent with previous research that highlights employability skills as a crucial theme in the 21st century. The studies emphasized that employability skills should be treated and considered as a crucial agenda item in the 21st century [31-34]. Curriculum reforms have been recommended as a strategy to foster graduates' employability in the 21st century. The 21st century has significantly impacted instructional practices. The NFBTE (2019) highlights the evolving nature of the teaching and learning process in the contexts of 21st century, stating that teaching and learning processes aim to equip students with skills to navigate the complex life and work environment of the 21st century. This shows that the 21st century demands curriculum reform to align teaching and learning process with the needs of the 21st century, preparing students for the 21st century workforce. Also, subject matter should

be tailored to meet the demands of the 21st century to equip students with the necessary skills and competences needed to thrive in this era. The finding aligns with the previous study which revealed that quality student learning and teaching require 21st century skills beyond literacy and numeracy, which encompass essential competencies beyond literacy and numeracy [35]. Therefore, curricula reforms can help align educational practices with 21st century demands, enabling graduates to thrive sustainably in the demanding contexts of the 21st century.

4.2.3. Developing Relevant Skills Needed in the Job Market

The results in (Table 2) revealed that the total of 163 (70.6 percent) cumulatively agreed that curriculum reform helps students in acquiring the relevant skills for success in the labour market. Curriculum reforms are crucial for creating graduates who can adapt easily to the rapidly changing job requirements, ensuring they possess the relevant skills for the job. Curricula reforms incorporate functional skills in education that are adaptable to the existing contexts. The finding consistently aligns with previous study which revealed that competency-based curriculum reform in Russia was a strategy to enhance a contemporary set of skills among students [9]. Another previous study shows that curriculum reforms are primarily aimed at addressing education challenges, particularly the lack of relevant skills for the labour market [5]. Also, another previous study found that curriculum reforms help graduates in developing employability skills by aligning their skills with the needs of the labour market [41]. Qualitative data from interviews and document analysis comprehensively support the quantitative data, revealing that curricula reforms enhance students' skills and adaptability in the labour market. One of the respondents stated that:

Curricula reforms fill the gaps identified during the needs assessment because gaps are the foundation of all reforms. Consequently, filling the gaps involves skills relevant to employability

Another respondent noted that:

Curriculum reform depends on assessed needs, whether constant or changing over time. If there is a need for change, the curriculum must adapt to urgently required skills

The study amplifies the significance of curriculum reform in addressing identified gaps, enhancing skills for a competitive labour market, and thereby improving employability. The findings are consistent with previous study which indicated that university job-specific skills are insufficient for graduates to meet contemporary job market demands, necessitating curriculum reform [24]. It is noted that curriculum reform is the strategy used to update the skill sets to meet societal and job needs, making them relevant and adaptable. The finding further indicates that curriculum reforms effectively align essential skills with national goals and aspirations. Students are connected to national goals and aspirations through curriculum reforms, ensuring they contribute to achieving these goals and transforming education into a reality. The respondent explains that the national goals and plans necessitate curriculum reforms that:

The national goals and mission for the future are fulfilled through the curricula reforms. For instance, America reformed curriculum to meet knowledge and skills required for the lunar mission when initially intended to send people to the moon

Likewise, interviews, document analysis data also reveal the potential role of curriculum reforms in aligning skills with national goals and mission. The Tanzania Development Vision

2025 emphasizes curriculum reform as a crucial skill development strategy that education should be restructured and transformed qualitatively and quantitatively, with a focus on promoting creativity and problem solving in line with national development. The National Employment Policy (2008) mandates education institutions to regularly adapt their curricula on the dynamic needs of works, ensuring that skills remain relevant and functional. The study reveals the importance of aligning education curricula with national goals and mission to ensure graduates possess relevant skills for achieving these objectives and enhancing the country's economic development.

4.2.4. Promoting Global Awareness and Interdisciplinary Skills

The results revealed that more than three quarter i.e. 76.2 percent cumulatively agreed that curricula reforms address employability by promoting global awareness and interdisciplinary skills among graduates. Interdisciplinary skills are believed to improve graduates' employability skills by broadening their understanding of various subjects and better adapting to the ever-changing job market. Qualitative data clearly revealed that curriculum reforms can enhance graduates' exposure to international markets by incorporating global knowledge and interdisciplinary skills, crucial for the dynamic and complex workforce environment of the 21st century. In the 21st century's rapidly changing job market, students must develop a diverse range of skills applicable across various disciplines. The respondent provided an explanation that:

Knowledge of global economic development trends becomes increasingly important, as it is vital for their employment that they exhibit global perspectives

Further another respondent had this to comment:

Curriculum reform based on comparative perspectives enables the creation of a global workforce that thrives both internally and internationally by analyzing various global curriculums

The modern workforce demands global skills like adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which can be made part of education through curriculum reforms with diverse subjects in education. The finding aligns with previous research which demonstrated that interdisciplinary thematic learning enhances creative thinking among students [44]. Another previous research found that interdisciplinary skills help students develop a comprehensive understanding of their field and apply interdisciplinary skills to tackle complex global issues [45]. Also, [46] found that a thematic interdisciplinary approach to curriculum design was effective in developing analytic, critical thinking, and international awareness skills among students. Further, [36] indicate the importance of interdisciplinary curriculum in teaching 21st century competencies for solving complex global problems effectively and relevantly.

4.3. Regression Results

The study finally examined the effect of curricula reforms on graduates' employability skills using simple linear regression. The results are indicated as follows:

Table 3: Model Summary for Curriculum Reform and Employability

<i>Model Summary^b</i>				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.819 ^a	.671	.669	.55917

a. Predictors: (Constant), Curriculum reform

b. Dependent Variable: Employability skills

Source: field data (2024)

Table 4: Simple Regression Coefficients for Curriculum Reform on Employability Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.485	.168		2.888	.004
Curriculum reform	.875	.042	.819	20.624	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employability skills

Source: Field data (2024)

Results in (Table 3) show that there is a positive correlation ($R^2 = 0.671$) between employability skills and curriculum reform. This indicates that the curricula reforms account for 67.1 percent of the variation in employability skills. Accordingly, results in (Table 4) reveal that there is positive connection between employability skills and curricula reforms, with a value of ($\beta=0.819$, $p=0.000$). The results indicates that curricula reforms significantly address employability skills of graduates. The regression results provide strong evidence that curricula reforms significantly impact employability skills by accounting to large proportion of the variability in employability skills. The findings are consistent with [22] who found a significant correlation ($\beta = 0.337$, $p = 0.000$) between employability competency and curriculum design. The study found that the effect size of curricula reforms ($\beta = 0.801$) is significantly larger than the effect size of curriculum design ($\beta=0.337$). This implies that curricula reforms have a significant impact on graduates' employability, showing that curriculum reform is vital for addressing employment needs of graduates making them ready for employability. The findings also align with some researches [e.g., 5, 47], which indicated that, countries have been implementing curricula reforms at varying rates and using varying approaches in recent years to equip students with skills for a world that is changing rapidly.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has found that curriculum reform significantly enhances graduates' employability skills. This effect is achieved by maintaining the relevance of education, aligning educational practices to 21st century demands, which guide job requirements and educational operations, promoting relevant skills, and fostering global awareness and interdisciplinary skills. Curriculum reform is crucial for incorporating practical skills into educational programmes, as it is based on an effective and functional needs assessment. Therefore, it is worth to prioritize curriculum reform as a key strategy to maintain flexibility and relevance, considering national priorities and contextual changes over time. The curriculum should be regularly updated to keep pace with societal, technological, and economic changes.

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