

Primary School Teachers' Preparation and Use of Lesson Plans in Igunga District, Tanzania

Remigius H. Halala

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8210-0934>

Chief School Quality Assurer, Igunga District Council, Tanzania

Email: remyhalala@gmail.com

***Abdallah Jacob Seni, PhD**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0904-5267>

Department of Educational Foundations and Continuing Education, University of Dodoma

Email: ajseni@gmail.com

***Corresponding Author:** ajseni@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study examined teachers' frequency of preparation and use of lesson plans. The study location was Igunga District of Tabora Region in Tanzania. Mixed approach and explanatory research design were used and a total of 69 respondents were sampled. Among them, 60 were teachers from four purposely selected primary schools, four were head teachers and five were school quality assurance officers. Data was collected through a questionnaire, an interview schedule and document. Analysis of data was done through the thematic approach and the descriptive statistics. The established that not all teachers prepared the lesson plans; there were those who prepared frequently, those who prepared occasionally and those who did not prepare at all. It is also concluded that not all teachers used the prepared lesson plans in the classrooms during teaching and learning process. There were those who used lesson plans frequently, those who used lesson plans occasionally and those who did not use the lesson plans at all in the teaching and learning process. The researchers therefore recommended that teachers should be given more in service training on the preparation of lesson plans and they should be closely capacitated for them to refrain from teaching without prerequisite guiding documents including lesson plans. Head teachers as internal quality assurers and the DSQAOs as external quality assurers should closely supervise teachers to fulfill this crucial role as professional teachers. Educational leaders at district and national levels should ensure effective preparation and use of lesson plans to teachers through close monitoring and facilitating teachers with all necessary tools for the preparation of lesson plans.

Keywords: Lesson plans, Primary School Teachers, Pupils' Academic Performance.

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Introduction

While quality education is a crucial factor for human success in life, pupils' academic performance is one of the determinants of quality education and it is influenced by the classroom practices. Lesson plan preparation is one of the appropriate practices for

promotion of education quality and pupils' academic performance (Jones, 1998). Effective lesson planning helps to improve teaching and guides teachers during the teaching process. Effective lesson planning also helps in developing knowledge of the content to be covered. It improves

the quality of instruction and the quality of interaction between teachers and students. Effective planning, further, ensures efficient use of lesson time, coordinates classroom resources and space, and it is useful in managing students' behavior. All these lead to improved student outcomes which are crucial for their future success (Coe, Alaisis, Higgins & Major, 2014).

The importance of lesson planning is emphasized in the education process of many countries. In China, for example Su, Qin and Huang (2005) and Shen, Poppink, Cui and Fan (2007) point out that lesson plans allow teachers to explore multiple aspects of pedagogical content knowledge and makes them have opportunities to think deeply about the subject matter, including the way the subject matter is presented in particular textbooks or in such aspects of the curriculum as standards and benchmarks.

In African countries, lesson planning is also crucial for quality educational outcomes. For example, Stella (2012) reports that quality of teaching is determined by teachers' preparation and use of lesson plans and that a teacher who plans well ahead of time ends up communicating effectively to his or her pupils. This suggests the importance of lesson planning on enhancing quality education. In Kenya, Kafu (2003) stated that lesson planning gives teachers confidence in the instructional processes. He argued that during planning, teachers should select the relevant content to the lesson to be taught and they should organize it in a functional way to help achieve the instructional objectives. It is quite obvious that without proper lesson planning, the intended instructional objectives and education aims cannot be achieved.

Tanzania, like other countries in the world, embraces quality education for her people. For this regard, teachers' preparation, both pre and in service training is given priority. Among other issues emphasized in teacher training are the skills in lesson plan preparation due to its importance in presenting instructional objectives, classroom management and pupils' academic evaluation. However, a study conducted in Mwanza and Morogoro regions of Tanzania by Mabagala and Shukia (2019) found that 60 percent of the teachers did not prepare lesson plans. Furthermore, despite some teachers having lesson plans, evidence on whether they followed their plans for every lesson with fidelity is largely lacking. In contrast, Pambas (2021) investigated the perspectives of grade one

and two teachers on the essential lesson preparation made and its usefulness in the teaching and learning process with a focus to Mufindi District Council and Mafinga Town Council in Iringa region and found that teachers prepared lesson plans to guide and boost efficiency in terms of achieving lesson competency. It can be argued that some teachers prepare lesson plans while others do not, implying the need for continued emphasis on this important practice.

Moreover, Kapur (2018) reported that the presence of poor academic performance in primary and secondary schools is caused by a number of factors, including poor implementation and management of lesson plans. This gives an alert on what should be done to rescue the situation so as to promote quality education and pupils' academic performance in Tanzania.

Literature indicates that lesson plan preparation and use eat up a lot of teachers' time. In Bangladesh teachers do not prepare lesson plan and some of the teachers say if they use lesson plan in classes, they will not complete syllabus in time (Alam et al., 2018). The notion that lesson plans consumes teachers' time does not hold water since it is a pre requisite for effective teaching. In fact anything good is likely to consume time and that may not be an excuse for one to enter into classroom and teach without a lesson plan. This is echoed by Cicek and Tok (2022) in Ahmad, Ismail and Halima Khanum, (2021) who view an effective teacher as an extremely good classroom manager via good time management during class time and that is possible only by effective implementation of a good lesson plan.

In Turkey, pre- service teachers did not prepare and use lesson plans simply because some of them did not have guide books (Taskin, 2017). In Indonesia, Nurtanto, Kholifah, N., Masek, A., Sudira and Samsudin (2021) investigated on crucial problems in arranging the lesson plan of vocational teacher and revealed that limited teacher and student handbooks, mental readiness of teachers that are not optimal impeded effective preparation and use of lesson plans. These obstacles are more on administrative planning. This is to say that some teachers may fail to prepare lesson plans due to lack of facilities for them to do so. However, teachers need to be proactive and creative rather than waiting for everything to be in place for them. Any teacher who has undergone a professional course in

teaching is expected to be knowledgeable on how to prepare lesson plans rather than relying heavily on the availability of a certain guide (Nurtanto et al., 2021).

In Saudi Arabia, a study by Alanazi (2019) on the pre-service trainee teachers' problems in designing lesson plans; nominated lack of skills on how to prepare lesson plans and laziness as some of the reasons why trainees teachers did not prepare and use lesson plans. Consequently, teachers are interested to take the readymade materials and lesson plans thereby reluctant to prepare their own. Several reasons such as class size, extra work load, lack of commitment and laziness have been distinguished as what make teachers not to prepare and use the lesson plan in teaching and learning processes.

This study aimed at establishing teachers' preparation and use of lesson plan in Igunga District, Tanzania. The study was guided by the following research questions. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the teachers' frequency on the preparation of lesson plans?
2. To what extent do teachers' use the prepared lesson plans in the classrooms?

Review of Related Literature

This part presents the theoretical framework namely Walberg's theory of educational productivity which guided the study. It also presents relevant empirical literature reviewed.

Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity

Walberg's theory of educational productivity explains the direct and indirect influences on student academic outcomes. This model was put forward in 1981 by Herbert J. Walberg and takes into account the characteristics of the learner, the learning environment and the quality of instruction the learner receives. In this context, the preparation of lesson plans and the subsequent effective use of the lesson plans in the classroom have high stake on the quality of instruction and so on pupils' academic performance (Walberg, Fraser & Welch, 1986). Thus, the frequency of lesson plan preparations and use are crucial in enhancing quality of instructions among teachers and thereby enhance pupils' academic performance. Lesson planning is very important and plays a very integral part in the actual teaching. Actually without lesson preparation, a teacher cannot perform. If any teacher can work

without a lesson plan, then it would not be called teaching, perhaps another term almost close to giving a public address could be rightful (Rangi, 2008).

Literature indicates that having a lesson plan that has been carefully constructed for every lesson boosts a teacher's confidence and maximizes the possibility of having purposeful learning sessions with students whenever the teacher enters the classroom. In Nigeria, students' academic performance entails teachers' effective lesson planning, teaching with consistency, commitment, dedication, and honesty to obtain good results from the learners (Innocent, 2021). Various studies report on the availability of a strong connection between teachers' preparation and use of lesson plans and students' academic performance. It is argued that teachers who prepares and use their lesson plans are guided in their teaching. Guided teaching contributes to excellent teaching which is the most significant factor that affects learners' academic performance and the development of the learner attributes.

Empirical Literatures

Empirical Literature shows that lesson planning is a professional practice that is at the heart of effective teaching (Dorgu, 2016; Lika, 2017; Nesari & Heidari, 2014). For example, Dorgu (2016) contended that lesson planning enhances more learning as it enables the teacher to reflect on what needs to be done to bring about desired changes in the learners. According to Nesari and Heidari (2014), teachers should not go to class without a lesson plan since it is a pre-requisite and roadmap for effective teaching. Lika (2017) observes that lesson planning helps in aligning teaching with curriculum goals and objectives, ensuring that every learner's needs are met with maximum confidence.

Stella (2012) conducted a study in Mosoch Division of Kisii District, Kenya which aimed to investigate the attitudes of chemistry teachers towards the use of lesson plan in the teaching process. The study revealed that the majority of teachers had positive attitude towards lesson planning in the teaching process. The study revealed that some chemistry teachers had prepared and used the lesson plans and that while most teachers understood the importance of the lesson plans; some were completely unable to use the lesson plan. It could be argued that having positive attitude towards lesson planning was good but insufficient by itself if at all

the positive attitude did not culminate into the preparation and effective use of the prepared lesson plans in the classrooms.

Furthermore, the study by Heidari, Azizifar, Gowhary and Abbasi (2015) aimed at investigating teachers' views towards lesson planning based on their gender and revealed that female teachers were more likely to use lesson plans as compared to male teachers. The reason for female teachers preference of using lesson plans was based on their belief that lesson planning positively affects the quality of their classes. The variation and discrepancy on preparing and using lesson plans in the classrooms could suggest the fact that females were more likely to comply with rules and regulation than males.

Moreover, a study conducted in Shiraz-Iran by Bazrafkan and Shokrpour (2005) showed that teachers were very positive with lesson plan preparation though their activeness in implementing the lesson plans was very minimal. It could be argued that teachers prepared lesson plans but failed to use them in the classroom. Failure to use lesson plans in the classrooms could suggest that teachers had not yet understood the rationales for using the lesson plans in actual teaching or other reasons may be at play such as class size, extra work load, laziness and so forth.

Research suggests that teachers with smaller classes have higher morale than do those with larger classes in part because they are better able to complete daily lesson plans. In fact, the impacts of class size have been debated in academic literature for over a century, dating back to the early 1900s (Laitsch, Nguyen and Younghusband, 2010).

Nesari and Heidari (2014) conducted a study in Iran which explored teachers' opinions towards the use of lesson plan in the class. They found that majority of English teachers preferred the use of lesson plans. The study was delimited to English Language teachers at secondary schools. Other subject teachers were not covered by their study. On the other hand, Moradan and Pourasadollah (2014) found that in Iran there was less use of lesson plan to most of older and experienced teachers as compared to younger and novice teachers who gained class confidence through the use of lesson plan.

Fattah, Jalili, Alizadeh and Adhami (2009) concluded that most of the teachers at Kerman University of

Medical Science in Iran did not have positive attitudes toward preparing and use of lesson plan in teaching and learning process mainly due to ones' education level, experience and rank. Those with higher education and rank had positive attitude and prepared while the rest including those with long term experience did not. In the same vein, Jones (1998) argues that most of experienced teachers in the United Kingdom did not write their lesson plans but rather their experience guides them in the teaching process. It could be said that teachers' attitude may contribute to their preference to prepare and use lesson plans. If someone has negative attitude towards preparation and use of lesson plan, the chances of preparing and using them could be minimal. Further, there are teachers who could prepare lesson plans to impress internal and external quality assurers rather than having commitment to their profession.

Lesson Plan and Pupils' Academic Performance

Lesson planning is the most crucial part of teaching and improving pupils' academic performance. The relationship between lesson plan and pupils' performance bases on the fact that lesson plan, as teacher's working tool, provides opportunities to plan instructional activities for effective attainment of students' learning needs (Kibret, 2016). Lesson plan, further, guides instruction delivered by the teachers and enables students to benefit from the lesson. Through planning, the teacher organizes and structures concrete instructional activities of students to enhance the cognitive activation of students (Oser & Baeriswyl (2001).

The processes of lesson planning is, however, a complex activity as such demands the teachers to (1) design lessons for activating learning by taking into account both learners prior knowledge and learners motivation; (2) anticipate the kind of mental activities to take place when students learn the planned lesson, (3) plan different kinds and levels of supporting individual students in their learning, and (4) plan how to assess the outcomes of implemented instructional plans (Oser & Baeriswyl, 2001).

Methodology

This section presents the methodological considerations adopted in this study.

Design

This study employed the mixed research method, whereby both qualitative and quantitative

approaches were used in order to examine in detail teachers' preparations and use of lesson plans. Explanatory research design was used in order to get in-depth details in response to research questions that guided the study.

Population and Sampling

This study was conducted in Igunga District Council which is among the eight District Councils in Tabora Region. Other Districts Councils include Urambo, Sikonge, Uyui, Kaliua, Nzega District Council, Nzega Town Council and Tabora Municipality. The rationale of selecting Igunga as the study location was that academically, the district has been performing poorly in the primary school leaving examination (EQUIP – Tanzania, 2015). In the academic year 2019, for instance, Igunga ranked 176 out of 186 districts of Tanzania (URT, 2019). Furthermore, another reason for selecting Igunga out of many districts in the region was based on the fact that it had 142(17.2%) primary schools in which 135(16.8%) were government and 7(28%) were non-government. These schools were comparatively many than those in other districts.

The population of the study included Head Teachers (HTs), teachers and School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs). The study sample involved respondents from four primary schools and from the district level. A total of 69 respondents were sampled comprising of four (4) HTs, sixty (60) teachers, and five (5) SQAOs. Purposive sampling was used to get a list of four poorly performing primary schools so as to obtain respondents who were knowledgeable on the issues under investigation. Simple random sampling technique was employed to obtain a sample of teachers where all respondents had equal chance of being included in the study. In this regard, the names of teachers were written on small pieces of paper which were folded and mixed up. Only 15 pieces of papers from each school were picked.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

In depth interviews were used to tap data from HTs and SQAOs while a structured questionnaire was used to collect information from teachers. Documentary review was used to capture data on frequency of teachers' preparation and use of lesson plans in the teaching and learning process. Documents, mainly lesson plans were reviewed to strengthen the obtained information from interviews and questionnaires.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, research instruments were examined by the two researchers whereby some items from these instruments were restructured and others were deleted. Validity which refers to the extent to which the instrument measures the concept in question accurately (De Vos, Delport, Fouché & Strydom, 2005) was thus maintained through the judgment criterion. According to Rubin and Babbie (2001), content validity is established based on judgements; that is, researchers or other experts who judge about whether the measure covers the universe of facets that make up the concept. On this basis, the questionnaire was created and shared with the other three experts for further examination before it was administered to the participants. Experts were able to provide their opinions.

In ensuring the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was run to test the internal consistency. The researchers further triangulated data collection methods to capture multiple responses from the respondents. A pilot study was conducted in one primary school in Igunga District. Software Package for Statistical Analysis (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data and generate frequencies and percentages which were in turn presented in tables. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data thus field data was reduced and organized into themes as per research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Before accessing the research sites, the researchers obtained written permission from the administration of university of Dodoma (research clearance) and introduction letter from Igunga district education officer. Among other ethical considerations, confidentiality of information was assured whereby names of schools and respondents were not mentioned. School A, B, C and D were used to protect actual names of schools under investigation.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study.

Research Question 1: How is the teachers' frequency on the preparation of lesson plans?

Data from this research question was collected through the use of a questionnaire, interview and documentary review. The respondents under this

research question were teachers, head teachers and school quality assurance officers.

The researchers explored how often teachers prepared lesson plans. The findings show that 22 (36.7%) of teachers prepared lesson plans frequently while 20 (33.3%) occasionally prepared and 18 (30%) did not prepare lesson plans at all as presented in table 1.

The fact that only 22 (36.7%) teachers prepared the lesson plans while the rest occasionally or did not prepare at all raises a number of concerns as far as quality teaching is concerned since lesson plans preparation and use is a prerequisite in enhancing the quality teaching and consequently better academic performance among pupils.

In this case, one of the interviewed head teachers from school A had this to share: “Most of the teachers do not prepare lesson plans frequently and

those who prepare do that for record keeping and evidence to the school quality assurance officers that they work properly.”

Looking at lesson plans as tools to impress SQAOs and not as a tool to guide classroom instruction is a drawback towards realization of effective teaching and good pupils’ academic performance. Furthermore, the findings that most teachers did not prepare lesson plans reinforce less attachment and commitment placed on this practice which is regarded as a guide to effective teaching. It was variously reported by informants in this study that teaching without preparing lesson plans jeopardized the teaching process and contributed to poor academic performance among pupils. These findings were in line with those by Jones (1998) who found that most of experienced teachers do not write their lesson plan but rather use their experience to guide them in the teaching process.

Table 1: Teacher’s Responses towards Preparing Lesson Plans

SN	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	I Frequently prepare	22	36.7
2	I Occasionally prepare	20	33.3
3	I Do not Prepare	18	30
	TOTAL	60	100

Table 2: The Extent to which Teachers Use Lesson Plans in the Classrooms

SN	Responses	Frequency	Percent
1	I Frequently use lesson plans	12	18.8
2	I Occasionally Use lesson plans	10	15.6
3	I Do not Use lesson plans	42	65.6
	TOTAL	64	100.0

Research Question 2: To what extent do teachers’ use the prepared lesson plans in the classrooms?

In determining the teachers’ frequency in using the prepared lesson plans in the teaching process, results showed that the majority 42 (60.9%) of teachers did not use the prepared lesson plans in the actual teaching as reflected in table 2.

The findings showed that majority 42 (65.6%) of teachers did not use lesson plans in classrooms. This was further reported by one of the interviewed SQAQO:

Teachers may prepare very nice lesson plans for impressing us as SQAQOs and impressing the HTs but in fact they do not use them in the actual classroom as required. You can find that teachers have all needed teaching documents such as schemes of work, lesson plans, lesson notes and subjects log book but the documents are not fully utilized to

guide and improve the classroom interaction and so to improve pupils’ academic performance. We established that when we undertake classroom assessment, teachers ask students where they ended in the previous lessons.

The findings validate the fact that despite the importance of lesson plans in teaching and learning process, some teachers prepare lesson plans but they do not use them in classrooms. Therefore, this could affect teaching performance as in reference with the findings of Nesari and Heidari (2014) who pointed out that the use of lesson plan help to provide direction to materials to be taught to students and how to teach them. The findings are also in contrast from those by Naimie et al. (2012) who argued that teaching and learning styles should be compatible with effective preparation of lesson plans due to the fact that “well planned is half done”.

On the other side, the findings that there were few teachers who could prepare and use lesson plans but did not effectively follow teaching stages presented in lesson plans is in line with Cicek (2013) who explained that majority of teachers prepare lesson plans effectively and preciously but they fail to present during the teaching process.

Similarly, despite the insistence from Victoria (2005) who said that in order to realize quality teaching and learning in our classrooms, schools and other educational system should ensure continuous improvement to teachers on lesson plans which they are using, it had been evident that majority of teachers had limited knowledge towards lesson plan preparation and use for pupils' subject mastery and good academic performance. These findings further contradict with the tenets of the Walberg's theory of educational productivity which advocates the quality of instructions for a good productivity.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that not all teachers prepared the lesson plans; there were those who prepared frequently, those who prepared occasionally and those who did not prepare at all. It is also concluded that not all teachers used the prepared lesson plans in the classrooms during teaching and learning process. There were those who used lesson plans frequently, those who used lesson plans occasionally and those who did not use the lesson plans at all in the teaching and learning process. A number of reasons such as low knowledge on the preparation of lesson plans, lack of commitment to some teachers, laziness, class size and extra work load were the identified for teachers not preparing and using lesson plans in the classroom during teaching and learning process.

Recommendations

The researchers came up with the following recommendations:

First; teachers should be given more in service training on the preparation of lesson plans and they should be closely capacitated for them to refrain from teaching without prerequisite guiding documents including lesson plans.

Second, on lack of commitment and laziness to some teachers, it is recommended that head teachers as internal quality assurers officers and the DSQAOs as external quality assurers should closely

supervise teachers to fulfill this crucial role as professional teachers. Educational leaders at district and national levels should ensure effective preparation and use of lesson plans to teachers through close monitoring and facilitating teachers with all necessary tools for the preparation of lesson plans.

Third; class size and extra work load should be worked upon by the government employing more teachers so that teacher-student ratio is to the required standard. This will motivate teachers and make them get sufficient time for preparations including writing their lesson plans.

Fourth, since the study included only government primary schools, there is a need to undertake a study for comparing the preparation and use of lesson plans in government and private primary schools.

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