“Our philosophy is education for self-reliance, but we don’t practice it”: Feedback on curriculum analysis in Tanzania
Introduction

As part of our Basic Education portfolio, Twaweza is undertaking a rigorous process of curriculum analysis in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. This work stems from what we hypothesized to be one of the core problems associated with low learning outcomes in the three countries: in public primary schools, the curriculum is often much ahead of children’s actual learning levels. Particularly in the early grades (Grades 1-3) the curriculum is overloaded with a range of subjects, rather than focusing on basic competencies as well as cognitive skills that children will need to master in order to thrive in the upper grades.

Curriculum reform is not new in East Africa, in fact, the three countries have undergone various reform processes in recent years. Tanzania’s first national vision for the curriculum was set out in 1967, based on the philosophy of “education for self-reliance.” Since then, several reviews and reforms of the curriculum were undertaken, variously influenced by political currents, as well as trends in international education (e.g. alignment with the international Education for All goals and Millennium Development Goals). Most recently, a new Education and Training Policy was released in 2014. At Twaweza, we wanted to bring a new approach to curriculum analysis, innovative for the Tanzanian context in four main ways:

1. based on rigorous, technical analysis using internationally-recognized methods of and tools for curriculum analysis
2. conducted through a participatory process including a range of education stakeholders
3. measuring not only the theoretical but also the applied curriculum – i.e. tracing the arch of what is planned to be taught in the curriculum, what is actually taught in classrooms, and also what is tested in the national exams
4. including a significant number of people at the front line of service delivery – the teachers and head teachers

The three countries are in various phases of implementation of the curriculum analysis, and this work is described elsewhere (Curriculum Efficiency Concept Note). This memo focuses on a feedback component conducted in Tanzania. We wished to know from the people involved in the curriculum analysis what they thought of the process itself, of their participation in it, whether it is meaningful to their own work and whether they perceive it to be meaningful to curriculum reform in Tanzania1.

---

1 The full report can be found on [here](#)
Methodology

This feedback exercise included interviews with education stakeholders who comprised the panel of experts for the review work and interviews with a sample of 40 teachers involved in the curriculum analysis process. From the panel of experts, 7 out of 8 individuals that composed the panel were interviewed. The experts came from schools (secondary and primary school teachers), university (college of education lecturers), and officials from key relevant government institutions – the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA). TIE is the government education institute that is solely responsible for developing national curricula for basic education (primary and secondary) as well as for teachers’ education. NECTA is responsible for basic education national examination preparations, administration, and marking. The experts from the two institutions are in decision making positions within their own institutes (responsible for review and evaluation of curriculum, and responsible for the research unit in the examination council).

The 40 teachers were sampled out of 433 teachers who participated in the analysis, from two districts: Mkuranga (144 teachers) and Ilala (289 teachers). Twenty (20) teachers per district were randomly selected from the list of participating teachers. The teachers taught different subjects ranging from Standards 3 to 7. There were slightly more female (12 Ilala, 11 Mkuranga) than male (8 Ilala, 9 Mkuranga) teachers.

All interviews were conducted in February 2017. Several experts were interviewed in person, while a few were interviewed over the phone. All teachers were interviewed over the phone.
Summary of insights

Panel of experts

1. Respondents all praised the thoroughness of the analysis process – from the review of documents, to training, to preparation of tools, to the analysis itself. There was also a sense of ownership among the experts, for example, certain aspects of the process were tailored to the Tanzanian context without jeopardizing the analytical integrity.

2. The lecturers saw direct benefits from the analytical process to their own teaching, since they teach curriculum analysis as a subject in their coursework.

3. Respondents overall highlighted two areas in particular as having emerged from the analytical work: (1) lack of alignment between the objectives of the curriculum and the assessment given to students, and (2) the tenuous relevance of the curriculum to “real life,” that is, enabling students to acquire higher order problem-solving skills to function in a competitive, complex world. The following quote from a government official illustrates the perceived impact of the analytical work to the technical alignment between curriculum and exams:

   “The process helped me to see the need for alignment between objectives and examinations, that is, how we set the objectives. This is very useful especially since we are going to review the secondary education curriculum. So I will contribute to that by ensuring that there is an alignment.”

4. One respondent noted how the analytical process made clear that the curriculum does not teach the higher-order skills that are needed for problem-solving. This is an important effect of the curriculum analysis process. However, he also suggested that recognizing this problem is just the first step in addressing it.

   “Our philosophy is education for self-reliance, but we don’t practice it. Our children finish Form Four but are not self-reliant. The analysis showed the weakness in our curriculum. You have to teach all life aspects – cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. Our pedagogy and
examinations do not reflect aspects of life learning. Twaweza curriculum analysis showed us the weakness, but that is not adequate on its own.”

5. Critical voices among the panel of experts noted that the analysis is quite theoretical and complex, and that it should be simplified for wide use and applicability. They also noted that the analysis exposes the problem of curriculum not teaching higher-order skills (i.e., being relevant to “real life), but does not offer solutions as to what Tanzanian students should be taught to be competent and prepared for the future.

6. Another critical comment was that the analysis process itself is quite protracted and that in order to have impact at the national level, the findings need to be brought out into the public as well as with specialized audiences as the basis of policy engagement. It was noted that the curriculum in Tanzania has recently undergone a reform (though it is still in various phases of implementation), and that this analytical process needs to find a space within that reform dialogue if it is going to be effective.

Teachers

1. For nearly all teachers this exercise was the first time they had a chance to speak openly in a group of peers not only about the curriculum, but also about their experiences with the current curriculum, their teaching practices and the challenges that they face. As a result, teachers were very appreciative of the participatory nature of the analytical exercise. Many also noted that the exercise created a free and confidential space where they could express their views and opinions, and in which they felt valued.

2. The teachers also talked about a renewed sense of empowerment and motivation to teach as a result of participating in this exercise – although the curriculum analysis itself didn’t have their motivation as an objective.

3. The respondents were quite critical as to the current processes by which they are expected to deliver the curriculum. They noted that teachers simply get informed when there is a new curriculum to implement, but that they routinely lack training, teaching materials, guidelines and relevant books to deliver the curriculum effectively.

4. Many commented that the analysis exercise reminded them of various training that they received in teachers’ college, but were never able to put into practice (such as class discussion and group work). A number also noted that the curriculum analysis could be helpful to them in developing better assessments for their pupils (tests and exams), more closely tied to what they were taught.
Points for discussion

Four main points arise from this brief feedback exercise, for Twaweza and education stakeholders to consider.

- The teachers are on the receiving end (and the front-line service providers) of curriculum reform, but are not enabled to implement it successfully. It is noteworthy that the teachers in this sample did not ask to be included in the reform crafting process, they simply asked to be given the right tools and training to implement the reforms. This should be fairly low-hanging fruit for Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government.

- The sense of not being listened to, consulted, or valued also came through strongly among the teachers. For many, this was their first opportunity to get together with peers and discuss their work and their challenges in confidence. Perhaps in parallel with various initiatives to better monitor teachers which are currently under way (such as state of the art information systems), teachers might benefit from peer exchange and peer support groups and networks. Besides technical skills, the most significant benefits might be related to teacher motivation, and there is plenty international as well as Tanzania-specific evidence which directly links teacher motivation with teacher effort, and consequently with improved learning outcomes.

- The experts praised the rigorous process of the analysis, but also commented that it is long and complex, and therefore difficult to apply widely. Nevertheless, the participants all noted the effect of this process on their own work. The lecturers saw the link directly to their own academic teaching, while the TIE and NECTA officials spoke about the needed coordination between the two bodies for alignment between the curriculum and examinations, as well as about the more fundamental question of whether the curriculum equips Tanzanian children for real life problems – indeed, whether it produces self-reliant citizens.

- The experts were also clear that the results need to be communicated effectively in order to influence policy. There was a concern that the curriculum reforms were recently completed and that the results of this rigorous analysis might have missed a critical, earlier, opportunity to influence the reform. This last point is an essential one for Twaweza together with the TIE and NECTA partners to engage with. In one scenario, a lot of sophisticated technical work has been done but it has missed the real-life opportunity to be applied or is it perhaps that even though the official reform has been completed, there is still room for improvement, given the slow roll-out and implementation? And what are the opportunities to do so?