

Teacher Professional Development: Study Leave Criteria as a Barrier to Qualification Upgrading for Public Primary School Teachers in Tanzania

Agustino Mbunda¹, Ibrahimu Nzima² & Aurelia Kimaro³

^{1,2&3}School of Education, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Corresponding author¹: agusmbus@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study examined the barriers to teacher professional development (TPD) arising from study leave criteria for public primary school teachers seeking qualification upgrades in Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach and multiple-case design and was conducted in Kondoa and Chemba districts. 12 Head Teachers (HTs), 2 District Education Officers (DEOs), and 36 teachers were involved. Data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions and analysed thematically. The findings indicated that DEOs and HTs used criteria that acted as barriers to TPD because of increasing restrictions in granting study leave. Such criteria include number of teachers available in schools, self-sponsorship, job experience, nature of the course, teachers' educational levels and readiness for TPD. The study concludes that most study leave criteria contradicted the Government Standing Order for Public Service 2009 and National Framework for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers 2020. The study recommends training for HTs and DEOs regarding TPD guidelines.

Keywords: study leave criteria, public primary school teachers, upgrading professional qualifications, Grade IIIA teachers

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ped.v42i2.8>

Introduction

Teacher professional development (TPD) encompasses all educational opportunities that equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to adapt to changes in the education system and support student learning (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). Recognising its importance, many countries, including Tanzania, consider TPD a mandatory requirement for all teachers (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2020a; 2023a). To facilitate effective professional growth, teachers require an enabling environment free from barriers that hinder access to professional development programmes. However, research indicates that teachers seeking study leave to pursue further education often face significant challenges due to restrictive eligibility criteria. These barriers limit their participation in professional development (Kuuyelleh et al., 2014; Mackenzie & Kaegon, 2020).

The issue is particularly critical for long-term courses designed to upgrade teachers' qualifications.

In India, for instance, study leave is restricted based on years remaining until retirement, with teachers having five or fewer years left ineligible for leave. This policy prevents older teachers from advancing their careers despite their professional aspirations, contradicting the notion that teaching is a lifelong learning process (Polz, 2020). Similarly, in Ghana, Kuuyelleh et al. (2014) found that accessing study leave with pay is difficult due to bureaucratic hurdles, administrative inefficiencies, and subject-area restrictions, leaving many teachers unable to benefit from paid leave. In Nigeria, Mackenzie and Kaegon (2020) reported that certain employer-imposed criteria prevent public senior secondary school teachers in Abia State from obtaining study leave and financial support, ultimately hindering career advancement. A similar trend is observed in Sierra Leone, where study leave policies favour science teachers over others. Science teachers qualify after three years of service, while non-science teachers must wait five years (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019). This disparity limits career development opportunities for non-science teachers unless such policies are revised.

In Tanzania, while previous studies have explored various aspects of teacher professional development (TPD), there is limited research on how study leave criteria affect TPD, particularly for primary school teachers seeking to upgrade their qualifications. The need to support these teachers in furthering their education has become more pressing following the revision of the *Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014* in 2023, which raised the minimum qualification for primary school teachers from Grade IIIA certification to a diploma in primary education (URT, 2023b). Notably, the structure of teacher education in Tanzania categorises teachers based on their qualifications, ranging from certificate (Grade IIIA) to diploma, bachelor's, master's, and PhD levels. Traditionally, diploma and bachelor's degree programmes were designed for advanced secondary school graduates (Form Six) who train for two and three years, respectively, to teach in secondary schools. In contrast, the Grade IIIA certificate programme was used to prepare primary school teachers through a two-year course open to ordinary secondary school graduates (Form Four) (URT, 2014). This makes the Grade IIIA certificate the lowest level of teacher education in Tanzania. One of the key policy shifts in the 2023 revision of the *ETP* was the requirement that all primary school teachers hold at least a diploma in primary education (URT, 2023a, 2023b). Consequently, primary school teachers need a supportive environment, including fair and accessible study leave policies, to facilitate their professional upgrading in line with the new policy requirements.

This study focuses on public rather than private primary school teachers due to the significant disparity in qualification levels between the two sectors. As of 2021,

only 27.85% of the 171,993 public primary school teachers in Tanzania held at least a diploma, compared to 59.7% of the 25,926 teachers in private primary schools (URT, 2021). This indicates that a substantial proportion of public primary school teachers do not meet the revised minimum qualification despite the availability of various upgrading programmes offered by institutions such as the *Open University of Tanzania (OUT)*, the *Institute of Adult Education (IAE)*, and the *Agency for the Development of Education Management (ADEM)* (OUT, 2020). However, there is considerable variation in the rate of primary school teachers seeking to upgrade their professional qualifications across different councils. For instance, while 57% of primary school teachers in Iringa Municipality had pursued qualification upgrading, only 16.1% had done so in Chemba District (URT, 2020b). This suggests that variations in study leave criteria applied by Head Teachers (HTs) and District Education Officers (DEOs) across councils may contribute to disparities in teachers' professional development nationwide.

While a growing body of literature addresses TPD in Tanzania, there remains a paucity of research on how study leave policies affect public primary school teachers seeking qualification upgrades. Existing studies highlight various challenges affecting TPD, including the lack of motivation among teachers (Mirunde, 2015), limited expert support (Kapinga & Kimaro, 2019; Kinyota et al., 2019), the lack of awareness among TPD stakeholders (Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019), the budgetary constraints (Kitta, 2015), the absence of an explicit TPD policy and ineffective programme coordination (Dachi, 2018), and poor management of TPD programmes (Anangisye, 2011; Mbuli & Zhang, 2020). However, these studies provide little insight into how study leave criteria impact TPD, particularly for primary school teachers seeking to upgrade their qualifications.

Against this background, this study investigates barriers to TPD arising from study leave practices for public primary school teachers in Tanzania. Specifically, it examines how the criteria used by HTs and DEOs in approving study leave hinder Grade IIIA teachers seeking to upgrade their professional qualifications. Given the recent policy change requiring all primary school teachers to hold a diploma, this study provides critical insights into how existing study leave criteria influence qualification upgrading and offers recommendations for improving access to professional development opportunities for teachers in Tanzania.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literature review

Some criteria associated with teachers' study leave and their drawbacks

Essentially, study leave is time given to an employee inside or outside of the

workplace for formal learning that meets the requirements of the curriculum and personalised training objectives (McKenna, 2018). Study leave is aimed at enabling teachers, as educators, to dedicate time to completing course requirements within a specified timeframe. Study leave can be with pay or without pay, depending on terms agreed between a teacher and an employer (Mackenzie & Kaegon, 2020). In most countries, study leave for teachers is associated with different criteria. One of the criteria is the number of years in service after employment or after completing the previous long course. In Ghana, for instance, for a teacher to qualify for study leave must serve a minimum of 3 years after employment. In Uganda, a teacher must serve for a minimum of 3 years after completing the previous long course before applying for the next study leave. In this case, all teachers who proceed with future studies without meeting such conditions are assumed to have abandoned duty and must be removed from the payroll (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010). Although this criterion aims to ensure that those granted study leave have saved their employers before benefiting from their study leave, the criterion can affect teachers' motivation to develop their careers, especially when the minimum number of years is big. In other words, employers need to reduce the minimum number of years for teachers to qualify for their study leave.

Along with other criteria, the relevance of the programme to the future of the employees or employers' priority is observed. Since teachers are expected to excel in their careers, some criteria for study leave are set to ensure that teachers do not change from their careers. For example, in Uganda, teachers' study leave is limited to courses relevant to the curriculum of primary, secondary, or post-secondary institutions (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010). The same criterion is applied in India whereby once study leave has been granted to a teacher, they are not allowed to alter the programme of study unless by permission from the executive council/governing board (Miranda House, 2022). The relevance of the programme to be studied is also connected to employers' priorities in their organisations. Some employers have specific objectives to be achieved within a particular time. This implies that some criteria for teachers' study leave are designed for this purpose. In Siera Leone, for instance, study leave for teachers is prioritised to promote science subjects in schools rather than other subjects (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019). As a result, most teachers benefiting from study leave are science teachers rather than other teachers. This implies that when priorities for teachers' study leave are set, it is important to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of those priorities to ensure all teachers benefit from study leave.

Correspondingly, the issue of financial budget is another criterion observed in approving teachers' study leave. The criterion is most applicable when teachers need study leave with pay. Mackenzie and Kaegon (2020) argue that teachers' study leave must consider whether or not the budget of the education institution

can handle the cost of the programme. This suggests that when there is a limited budget to support the professional development of teachers, this criterion acts as a barrier because most teachers cannot afford their study costs. In Ghana, for example, Kuuyelleh et al. (2014) found that 119 (70%) teachers who requested study leave with pay agreed that they had limited income to afford their study costs.

Besides, some criteria for teachers' study leave consider one's motivation for their professional development. In the Republic of Malta, for instance, one of the criteria used for evaluating the eligibility of teachers' study leave by pay is a motivation statement. The statement should explain why the teacher is motivated to pursue a certain programme for their professional development. This criterion helps an employer know why a teacher is interested in the programme they wish to pursue. However, taking into account that TPD is regarded as compulsory for all teachers, the criterion might increase a professional gap between teachers who are not motivated and those who are motivated for their professional development.

Moreover, some educational institutions calculate the workload that needs to be compensated by other teachers after the study leave is granted to a teacher. In Uganda, for instance, heads of institutions/schools are required to indicate how the workload of the applicant will be handled in their absence (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010). In this case, the one applying for study leave can be accepted or rejected based on the analysed workload. This implies that in most schools where the number of teachers is small, their study leave is likely to be rejected compared to teachers teaching in schools with a big number of teachers.

General terms and criteria guiding teachers' study leave in Tanzania

The National Framework for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers (NF-CPDT) 2020 and the revised ETP 2014, the 2023 edition, collectively recognise TPD as compulsory for all teachers at different levels (URT, 2020a, 2023a). This signifies that teachers have the right to their professional development. According to the Government Standing Order for Public Service (GSOPS) 2009, which is the document guiding all issues related to training for public servants, teachers in particular, in section G.4, it identifies all courses for professional development that need study leave such as certificates, ordinary diplomas, higher education, and postgraduate courses. The document further instructs that study leave should be granted to a public servant after completing two years in the service (URT, 2009). Along with other criteria, in section G.7b, there are four criteria guiding responsible officials in public organisations to approve study leave. First, in the case of the employer's higher education staff development programme, a public servant shall be given leave with pay. Second, in the case of higher education, which is not part of the employer's staff development programme, leave without pay shall be given to a public servant, provided that he or she has completed two years in the service. Third, in the case of

other courses other than higher education, the public servant shall be given a special leave of absence with pay. Fourth, when the public servant is absent from duty and attends the course for less than twelve months, the special study leave shall not count in any way against his normal leave entitlement (URT, 2009, pp.145-146).

Furthermore, in conjunction with mentioning the criteria guiding study leave, the GSOPS 2009 emphasises that employers should encourage public servants to develop themselves through appropriate correspondence or part-time courses (URT, 2009, p.45). Also, it maintains that where a public servant is admitted to attend a local in-service course of more than twelve months in duration, any course fees, e.g., tuition, subsistence allowance, and related charges, shall be met by the sponsoring organisation or the public servant's employer (URT, 2009, p.45). Importantly, subject to the availability of funds, a public servant who is selected to attend an in-service course shall be sponsored by his employer, parent ministry, higher education students' loans board, or any other donor (URT, 2009, p.147).

Based on the above-reviewed NF-CPDT 2020 and GSOPS 2009, four important observations can be made regarding criteria guiding public servants and teachers in a particular study. First, participating in professional development is a right and mandatory for all teachers. Second, employers are responsible for developing teachers professionally. Third, whether a study leave is offered with pay or without pay, it shall be given to a teacher provided that they have completed two years of service. Fourth, a main determinant of granting teachers' study leave with pay or without pay is the availability of funds that employers need to have.

Theoretical basis of the study

This study was informed by institutional theory. In 1956, Parsons was reported as the first scholar to apply the term an institution to theorise how the social system of an organisation can be integrated with other organisational activities to achieve organisational goals. In contemporary perspectives, the key assumption of the theory is based on an argument stating that an institution comprises regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaningful social life (Scott, 2008, p. 48). Regulative elements, referred to as legitimacy, take a major account in explaining the success and survival of an organisation (Kazungu, 2016). Regulations provide directives about decision-making when enforcing actions in an organisation and guide all practices at the micro, meso, and meta levels within the organisation (Bhasin, 2020).

On the other hand, normative elements deal with the role of values and norms in creating expectations (Kazungu, 2016). They define organisational goals, specify the roles and responsibilities of actors, and show what to do and not to do and how

to assess performance based on established standards to accomplish organisational goals (Scott, 2008). Cultural-cognitive elements refer to all actions performed by social actors according to the meaning of their actions. Arguably, organisations are social actors embedded with a network of cultural beliefs and schemes (Baer, 2013). On this basis, Kazungu (2016) asserts that organisational opportunities and challenges might differ from one institution to another depending on regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements in an organisation.

Different criteria used by HTs and DEOs in approving teachers' study leave fall under regulative and normative elements of the institutional theory because the two aspects are connected to rules and regulations guiding all practices in an organisation. In this study, we argue that since TPD in Tanzania is guided by different rules and regulations (regulative and normative elements) such as those articulated in the revised ETP 2014, NF-CPDT 2020 and GSOPS 2009, there is a need for investigating to see whether the criteria used by HTs and DEOs to approve study leave align with rules and regulations guiding TPD in Tanzania. In this regard, the theory was deemed relevant to this study as it enabled researchers to investigate various criteria that guided DEOs and HTs in approving teachers' study leave and how those criteria acted as barriers to grade IIIA upgrading professional qualifications. Moreover, the theory was used to guide the discussion of findings and draw conclusions from the study.

Research Methodology

Research approach and design

Since this study aimed to gather in-depth information from different participants with varying experiences regarding barriers to TPD emanating from study leave criteria for public primary school teachers upgrading their qualifications, a qualitative research approach was used to accomplish the research objective. This research approach was deemed appropriate because it acknowledges the subjectivity of reality and allows for a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014). As noted by previous studies, the qualitative research approach is particularly effective in exploring complex social issues, capturing lived experiences, and providing rich descriptive data that might be overlooked in quantitative research (Pesambili, 2020a, 2020b; Pesambili & Novelli, 2021; Pesambili, 2024).

The study employed a multiple-case design since it enables the researcher to examine more than one case, allowing for a broader understanding of the phenomenon while utilising multiple sources of data collection to obtain in-depth insights (Ary et al., 2010). Previous studies have effectively used case study research to explore complex social and cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) in Tarime District, Tanzania (Pesambili, 2013; Pesambili & Mkumbo, 2018, 2024). This demons-

trates the effectiveness of case study research in investigating sensitive and context-specific issues by providing a holistic analysis of participants' experiences and perspectives. In this study, the selected approach and design enabled the researchers to employ various research methods that facilitated direct interaction with participants. This approach provided participants with the freedom to share their experiences regarding the challenges associated with study leave criteria and their impact on TPD, thereby enriching the study's findings with nuanced and contextually grounded insights.

Area of study and target population

The study was conducted in Kondoa Town Council and Chemba District Council, focusing on public primary school teachers, DEOs, and HTs. Chemba was selected because it had the lowest percentage (16.1%) of primary school teachers with at least a diploma in education (URT, 2020b). In contrast, Kondoa, despite being in the same region and a neighbouring district, had the highest percentage (42.4%). By selecting districts with differing TPD statuses, the study captured diverse experiences related to barriers arising from study leave criteria, providing a deeper understanding of the issue. However, it is important to note that the study did not aim to compare findings between the two districts.

Sample size and sampling

The study involved 50 participants, including 12 Head Teachers (HTs) (6 from each district), 2 District Education Officers (DEOs) (1 from each district), and 36 public primary school teachers (18 from each district). Among 36 selected public primary school teachers, 18 were upgraded teachers and 18 were nonupgraded teachers. HTs and DEOs were chosen in this study because, according to the National Framework for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers (NF-CPDT) 2020, these are key responsible actors in enforcing the implementations of all TPD programmes in Tanzania, including approving teachers' study leave at the school and district levels, respectively (URT, 2020a). Hence, they were assumed to have rich information regarding the study object. On the other hand, the study involved upgraded and nonupgraded teachers because they are victims of study, leaving when various criteria are used on them. In this regard, the two categories of teachers were deemed relevant participants, for they could provide pertinent information needed to accomplish the research objectives.

All participants were selected purposively based on researchers' established criteria such as educational levels, work experience, sex, and education leadership positions. For instance, through the educational levels, the study was able to select upgraded (teachers with a diploma in education and above) and nonupgraded teachers (Grade IIIA teachers). Through experience, the study was able to select

junior and senior teachers. Through education leadership positions, HTs and DEOs were selected, and regarding sex, both female and male teachers were selected. The advantages of this range of experience are the richness of data obtained and the multiple perspectives illuminating the study object. See the summary of sample selection criteria and the distribution of the sample size in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Sample Size Per Sampling Criteria

CRITERIA FOR SAMPLE SELECTION	DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS		
	Groups of Participants	Frequency	Percent (%)
i. Sex	Male	22	44
	Female	28	56
ii. Job experience in years	3-5	1	2
	6-10	7	14
	11-15	14	28
	16-20	12	24
	20+	16	32
iii. Education leadership	3+ years	14	100
iv. Educational levels	Grade IIIA Teachers	20	40
	Diploma	24	48
	Bachelor Degree	4	8
	Post Graduate	2	4

Source: Field data, 2023

Data collection methods

This study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for data collection, with interviews being the primary method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with District Education Officers (DEOs), Head Teachers (HTs), and selected public primary school teachers, while FGDs were conducted exclusively with public primary school teachers who were not interviewed. Given that some information required privacy, individual interviews were used to facilitate open and candid discussions. Conversely, FGDs were deliberately employed to capture collective perspectives on the study topic. Participant selection for either method was based on their willingness to participate.

In line with Ary et al. (2010), using both methods allowed for data triangulation, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the study findings. To ensure effective communication, all interview and FGD questions were translated from English to Swahili with the assistance of language experts, as participants preferred using

Swahili. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, while FGDs ranged from 60 to 80 minutes. All conversations were recorded verbatim using an audio recorder and supplemented with written notes to prevent data loss. The recordings were then transcribed in Swahili to preserve participants' exact words. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, transcripts were coded and securely stored on a password-protected computer. Finally, the transcribed data was translated from Swahili to English by language experts.

Data analysis

Data were analysed following a three-step thematic analysis framework suggested by Alhojailan (2012), in which themes were identified and illustrated using participants' quotes. The three steps involved data reduction, data display, and interpretation and conclusion drawing. For instance, in the data reduction stage, the interview and FGD transcripts were read iteratively to identify relevant texts, which were then summarised and displayed in a table during the data display stage. The summarised data were read repeatedly to determine the frequency of criteria that the participants mentioned and to understand how the criteria acted as barriers to public primary school teachers when upgrading professional qualifications. The criteria were then developed into themes and illustrated using participants' quotes, as presented in the following section of findings and discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Study leave criteria as a barrier to grade IIIA teachers' qualification upgrading

This section presents and discusses the findings regarding how HTs and DEOs use various criteria in approving teachers' study leave to act as barriers to grade IIIA teachers upgrading their professional qualifications in Tanzania. Our presentation focuses on seven themes generated based on criteria used by HTs and DEOs in approving teachers' study leave. Table 2 summarises the themes to be presented and discussed in the section.

Table 2

Criteria Used by DEOs and HTs in Approving Teachers' Study Leave

Themes representing criteria	Frequency of individuals mentioned criteria in their responses (N=50)	%
i. Number of teachers available in a school	47	94
ii. Teachers' commitments to self-sponsorship	45	90

iii. Pursuing a course related to education	41	82
iv. Teachers' job experience	40	80
v. Teachers' educational levels	9	18
vi. Earlier submission of letters	9	18
vii. Teachers' readiness for TPD and leaders' wisdom	7	14

Source: Field data, 2023

Table 1 indicates seven themes representing criteria used by DEOs and HTs to approve study leave for teachers upgrading professional qualifications. Based on Table 1, one would realise that the first four criteria were mentioned by many participants in their responses (more than 80%). This implies that the criteria were used by most DEOs and HTs in their institutions. On the other hand, a minority of the participants mentioned the last three themes, meaning that a few HTs and DEOs used the criteria. Undoubtedly, this suggests that there was no uniformity among DEOs and HTs in approving teachers' study leave due to the variation in the criteria.

Number of teachers available in schools

The study found that due to the shortage of teachers in most public primary schools, DEOs and HTs increased restrictions on granting teachers' study leave due to two reasons. First, study leave seems to be a burden to a few teachers remaining in schools. As a result, some teachers were rejected from their study leave, although they deserved it. One participant explained:

In our council, we have a scarcity of 71 teachers. In this case, we are forced to approve study leave in shifts because when more teachers are given a study leave, the workload will increase to few teachers remaining in schools... (Interview with DEO-Council A, 25th January 2023).

The same issue was supported by members of FGD, who had the following to share:

...In our schools, we have been instructed by head teachers to wait for our fellow teachers to complete their studies before we apply for study leave. This is based on the fact that most schools have a few teachers to teach in all classes... (FGD with nonupgraded teachers – council B, 28th January 2023).

Second, the findings revealed that some HTs experience a very hard time when study leave is granted to competent teachers in their schools. As a result, students' learning is negatively affected, especially when a school has no other competent teacher to cover the gap. In this case, some study leaves are rejected to rescue the

situation. One participant narrated:

Sometimes, it happens in a school that the only competent teacher applies for a study leave... As a head teacher, I don't support such kind of study leave... This affects students' learning because it takes more time to cover the gap left by competent teachers (Interview with HT 2-Council A, 16th January 2023).

Concerning the above quotes, it is more obvious to argue that those teachers who work in schools with few teachers have limited opportunities to upgrade their professional qualifications. Conversely, those who work in schools with either a satisfactory or a large number of teachers are likely to benefit from this criterion. This suggests that, possibly, the gap in the percentage of upgraded and nonupgraded teachers between Council A and Council B in this study was attributed to the number of teachers available in schools. For example, at the time of this study, the teacher-student ratio was 1:68 and 1:90 for Council A and B, respectively. These findings are in line with those of Eroglu and Donmus (2021) in Turkey, who reported that teachers' workload is one of the factors preventing them from participating in their professional development. As for Tanzania, using the number of teachers in schools as one of the main criteria for approving teachers' study leave is not fair because the one who is responsible for employing and distributing more teachers in schools is an employer, not a teacher (URT, 2020a). These findings suggest whether DEOs and HTs who used this criterion were unaware of their responsibilities as guided by the NF-CPDT 2020 or intentionally ignored those guidelines. Therefore, these findings are contrary to institutional theory because HTs and DEOs deny some regulative and normative elements guiding TPD in Tanzania.

Teachers' commitments to self-sponsorship

The findings show that at the time of this study, all teachers interested in upgrading their professional qualifications were required to commit to self-sponsorship because their employers (DEDs) had no financial budget to support them. Consequently, most teachers could not afford their study costs because of their limited incomes compared to their family responsibilities. In the voice of one participant, the following experience was shared:

In the request letter, every teacher who needs study leave is required to commit themselves to being ready to pay for all study costs. Failure to do so will result in no study leave being accepted because we have been told that the employer has no training fund to support those upgrading professional qualifications... (Interview with HT1 – Council B, 23rd January 2023).

In addressing the consequences of teachers' commitments to self-sponsorship, members of FGDs had the following to share in common:

A financial problem is one of the obstacles to upgrading our qualifications due to many family responsibilities. ...we have limited income to afford our study costs ...The challenge can be solved only if there are funds to support primary school teachers in upgrading their qualifications in public schools... (FGD with upgraded teachers – Council A, 21st January 2023).

It can be inferred from the excerpts above that employers were distancing themselves from supporting TPD activities, which are recognised as one of the employee rights in Tanzania (URT, 2009). For example, the NF-CPDT 2020 directs the government through the Ministry of Education and Science (MoEST) and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) to finance TPD programmes by allocating a sizeable portion of the educational budget every year (URT, 2020, p.35). However, the situation on the ground brings some contradictions between theory and practice. In this regard, these findings are contrary to the institutional theory, which emphasises the actual implementation of established rules and regulations to enforce organisational goals (Kazungu, 2016). This connotes that more efforts are needed in Tanzania to finance different TPD programmes, including those for upgrading teachers.

Teachers' job experience

The findings indicated that HTs and DEOs considered two things regarding the work experience of teachers. First, study leave could be granted to a teacher with at least not less than three years of work experience. Second, when the number of teachers demanded study leave was bigger than those recommended at the school or district level in the same academic year, another criterion of work experience could be added concerning who was more senior than another. For example, members of FGD confirmed:

Study leave in our council considers seniority among teachers...Most teachers with long working experience are given priority compared to those with short experience because junior teachers still have time to upgrade their professional qualifications...This helps most senior teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications... (FGD with nonupgraded teachers – Council B, 28th January 2023).

Similarly, the same point was asserted by another participant:

In 2020, my friend was given a study leave because she had four years of job experience, but I was excluded from a list of study leave applicants

because I had three years of job experience by then... Indeed, I have lost the motivation to upgrade my professional qualifications completely... (Interview with nonupgraded teacher – Council B, 23rd January 2023).

The voices above indicate that though HTs and DEOs considered teachers' work experience as among the important criteria in approving study leave, they contradicted some documents guiding study leave criteria for public servants in Tanzania, including teachers. For example, while HTs and DEOs are not considered to have less than three years of work experience, the GSOPS 2009 directs employers to consider two years of employees' work experience (URT, 2009). These findings support Komba and Mwakabenga (2019), who found that a lack of awareness among TPD actors is one of the challenges that TPD faces in Tanzania. Undeniably, the findings call for more training for educational leaders about their responsibilities.

Pursuing a course related to education only

In this study, it was revealed that no study leave was given to any teacher who was interested in learning other courses outside of education. In fact, the criterion is only good when it is used as a strategy for retaining teachers in their profession. However, the criterion denies the individual interests of some teachers who might need to study other courses, taking into account that individual interests may change over time. Speaking about restrictions on courses related to education, one participant elaborated:

Of course! A study leave is only granted to a teacher who is ready to develop within their career... We don't allow any teacher to study a programme outside of the teaching profession because it is like a misuse of resources. (Interview with DEO – Council B, 26th January 2023).

Another participant confirmed:

After my DEO realised that I was admitted to study a course out of education (Diploma of Procurement and Chain Supply Management), my salary was pinned. I suffered for almost sixteen months without a salary until I graduated in 2020 and came back to work... (Interview with upgraded teacher 4 – Council B, 27th January 2023).

According to the above quotes, teachers had limited room to change their careers for what was claimed to be a misuse of resources. These findings correspond to what is happening in other countries like Uganda and India, where teachers are restricted to studying courses related to education only (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010). On the other side, although this criterion is aimed at retaining teachers in their careers, it affects teachers to learn different things of their interests, thus refuting the intrinsic motivation of teachers, which is very

important in their professional development (Kea et al., 2019).

Teachers' educational levels

This criterion was commonly used when more than one teacher needed study leave in the same school. It was found that in some schools, there were teachers who had already upgraded their professional qualifications from grade III A teachers to diploma teachers. Still, they needed further career development, such as bachelor's degrees and postgraduate studies. In this case, the priority was given to teachers with lower levels rather than those interested in further studies. This criterion acted as a barrier to TPD since teachers have no limit to their professional development as they need to learn new things every day. One participant confirmed:

...in 2019, my study leave was rejected because I was told that my education was enough... By then, I had graduated with a diploma in early childhood from Arusha University. Therefore, if I were granted study leave, I would have pursued a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood as the area of my specialisation. (Interview with upgraded teacher 8 – Council A, 18th January 2023).

The quote suggests that some teachers need further studies for their professional development. In Tanzania, the use of some criteria for study leave, like teachers' educational levels, is not only a barrier to their professional development but also prohibits teachers from getting other benefits associated with their further studies, such as promotion and re-categorisation as per the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) of Tanzania (URT, 2017b). In addition, the criterion conflicts with the NF-CPDT 2020, which advocates for the right to professional development of all teachers regardless of their professional levels (URT, 2020a).

Earlier submission of letters

The findings indicated that some DEOs and HTs restricted the submission of study leave application letters to a specific period. Startlingly, it was revealed that although this criterion aimed to ensure all teachers submit their application letters on time, some teachers were not well informed about when to submit their letters. As a result, those late applicants were rejected from getting study leave, as one participant blamed:

Every year, things are changed in our district, but they don't inform us about the new changes... In 2018, I was among teachers who were rejected from getting study leave because I was treated as a late applicant who couldn't deserve study leave... (Interview with nonupgraded teacher 4 – Council A, 17th January 2023).

A similar challenge was also reported by another participant who clarified:

I have an experience from three teachers, including myself, who were rejected from getting study leave due to late submission of our application letters...The problem I see is the awareness of most teachers about the time recommended for submitting their letters...For sure, most of us are not aware of it... (Interview with nonupgraded teacher 3 – Council B, 23rd January 2023).

The above voices suggest that some teachers were punished by their educational leaders without being informed about what to do in relation to study leave criteria. This is contrary to the NF-CPDT 2020, which directs educational leaders to raise teachers' awareness of their professional development (URT, 2020). These findings concur with Geldenhuys and Oosthuizen (2015) and Sprott (2019), who collectively reported that poor management support in some educational institutions contributes to the failure of teachers to participate in their professional development.

Teachers' readiness for professional development and leaders' wisdom

Taking into account that not all teachers might be ready to upgrade their professional qualifications due to various reasons or challenges, some DEOs and HTs use it as an advantage of not granting teachers study leave. The main idea here is that educational leaders are responsible for motivating teachers to participate in their professional development but not discouraging them. This criterion was sometimes associated with a leader's wisdom about whether to accept or reject study leave. Speaking about teachers' readiness, a DEO said:

Not all teachers are willing to upgrade their professional qualifications. Others are just testing to see how my office will respond to them... In this case, I treat them according to their readiness and seriousness. The experience indicates that those who are serious about study leave are stubborn, and they don't give up... (Interview with DEO – Council A, 25th January 2023).

Similarly, another participant shared an experience about the use of wisdom in handling cases related to study leave, as the participant whispered:

Sometimes, I use my wisdom to approve study leave... For example, one of my female teachers called... had a conflict with her husband, and she was in a critical situation. I decided to convince my DEO to approve her study leave without considering other criteria, although her husband did not like it (Interview with HT 6 – Council B, 24th January 2023).

Based on the above voices on teachers' readiness for professional development and leaders' wisdom as a criterion for approving teachers' study leave, it is obvious to argue that when teachers are not ready for their professional development, it is a relief to some educational leaders who are not prepared to support TPD in their institutions. These findings support Anangisye (2011) and Mbuli and Zhang (2020), who reported that some education management officials in Tanzania are obstacles to TPD as they are not committed to promoting professional development activities in their institutions. On the other hand, the findings are contrary to the NF-CPDT 2020, which directs educational leaders at different levels to promote TPD in their institutions (URT, 2020a). Likewise, for some educational leaders, depending much on their wisdom rather than established guidelines to approve teachers' study leave is another barrier to upgrading teachers for two reasons. First, the criterion attracts double standards in decision-making because every leader might have different decisions. Second, there are some possibilities of what is called wise to be unwise. The question is, how the wisdom is evaluated before coming to a decision? Undoubtedly, training for educational leaders is of great importance for their capacity building in the implementation of education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has shown several criteria used by HTs and DEOs in approving teachers' study leave for grade IIIA teachers upgrading professional qualifications. The findings indicated that those criteria acted as barriers to grade IIIA upgrading professional qualifications because of increased restrictions in granting teachers' study leave. Some of the criteria used by the majority of HTs and DEOs include the number of teachers available in a school, teachers' commitments to self-sponsorship, pursuing a course related to education, and teachers' job experience. On the other hand, some criteria were used by a few HTs and DEOs, including teachers' educational levels, earlier submission of letters, TPD readiness, and leader wisdom. Generally, most criteria used by HTs and DEOs were based on their own decisions rather than regulative and normative guidelines for TPD in Tanzania as stipulated in the Government Standing Order for Public Service 2009, National Framework for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers 2020, and Revised Education and Training Policy 2014. This study has the following recommendations:

- i. Teachers' employers should allocate sufficient funds to support teachers in upgrading their professional qualifications.
- ii. The MoEST, in collaboration with teacher education colleges and universities, should launch more distance learning centres near teachers' workplaces, especially the use of clusters to encourage most teachers to upgrade their professional qualifications.

- iii. More teachers should be employed to avoid restrictions associated with the provision of teachers' study leave due to the inadequate number of teachers in most public primary schools.
- iv. Different educational leaders responsible for promoting TPD, such as DEOs and HTs, should be given more education about TPD guidelines.
- v. The current study was delimited to two district councils only and involved a relatively small sample. Quantitative research is recommended to cover a large sample size from different councils and regions in Tanzania for generalisation of the findings.

References

- Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: a critical review of its process and evaluation. *West East Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1), 39-47.
- Anangisy, W. A. (2011). *Developing quality teacher professionals: A reflective inquiry on the practices and challenges in Tanzania*. <https://cice.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/publications/series/4-2/4-2-11.pdf>.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L., & Sorensen, C. (2010). *Introduction to education research* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Baer, M. (2013). Theoretical assumptions. In: *International Corporations as Actors in Global Governance* (pp. 66-100). Globale Gesellschaft und Internationale Beziehungen. Springer VS, Wiesbaden.
- Bhasin, S. (2020). *Institutional theory the logic of institutions*. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316474609_Institutional_theory_the_logic_of_institutions/citation/download.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dachi, H. (2018). Reflecting on five decades of teacher professional development in Tanzania: the missing dimensions. *Paper in Education and Development*, 36, 185-214.
- Eroglu, M., & Donmus, K. V. (2021). Professional development barriers of teachers: qualitative research. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 13(2), 1896-1922.
- Geldenhuys, J. L., & Oosthuizen, L. C. (2015). Challenges influencing teachers' involvement in continuous professional development: a South African perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 203-212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.06.010>.
- Government of Sierra Leone. (2019). *National teacher policy for Sierra Leone*. Winmat Publishers Limited.
- Kapinga, B. B., & Kimaro, A. R. (2019). Teachers' professional development in Tanzania: policy and practice. *Journal of Adult Education JAET*, 22, 79-89.
- Kazungu, J. D. (2016). *Physical education policy and policy and practice: Issues and controversies in Tanzania secondary schools* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Linnaeus University Press.
- Kea, Z., Yin, H., & Huang, S. (2019). Teacher participation in a school-based professional. *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(7), 821-836.

- Kinyota, M. K., Patrick, S., & Mwakabenga, R. J. (2019). Promoting teacher professional learning in Tanzanian schools: lessons from Chinese school-based professional learning communities. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Sciences*, 8(1), 47-63.
- Kitta, S. (2015). Development of mathematics teachers: experience from Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 8(1), 165-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2015.11917602>.
- Komba, S.C., & Mwakabenga, R. J. (2019). Teacher professional development in Tanzania: Challenges and opportunities. *Intech Open Series*. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/70566>.
- Kuuyelleh, E. N., Ansoglaenang, G., & Nkuah, J. K. (2014). Financing human resource development in the Ghana education service: prospects and challenges of the study leave with pay scheme. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(30), 75-94.
- Mackenzie, C. P., & Kaegon, L. E. (2020). Educational leave with pay and salary as correlates of teachers' commitment in public senior secondary schools in Abia State. *International Journal of Innovative Education Research*, 8(3), 121-128.
- McKenna, G., Alamri, A., & Whitfield, P. (2018). Perceptions of study leave amongst neurosurgical trainees. *MedEdPublish*, 7(118), 67-73.
- Mbuli, R., & Zhang, J. (2020). Analysis of teacher professional development in Tanzania: viewpoint school management practice. *Journal of Social Sciences Advancement*, 1(1), 30-37.
- Miranda House. (2022). *Rules of study leave for teachers*. <https://www.mirandahouse.ac.in/files/notice/813/MH-notice-813-2022-01-25-20-44-56-PM.pdf>.
- Mirunde, A. (2015). *Training and professional development needs for effective secondary school management in Nachingwea district* [Unpublished master's dissertation]. The Open University of Tanzania.
- Open University of Tanzania. (2020). *Diploma in primary teacher education*. Open University of Tanzania. <https://www.out.ac.tz/dpte>.
- Pesambili, J. C. (2013). Consequences of female genital mutilation on girls' schooling in Tarime, Tanzania: voices of the uncircumcised girls on the experiences, problems and coping strategies. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(16), 109-119.
- Pesambili, J. C. (2020a). An exploration into the encounter between Indigenous and Western education at Noonkodin School in Eluwai, Monduli, Tanzania. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(1), 56-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1733390>.

- Pesambili, J. C. (2020b). Exploring the responses to and perspectives on formal education among the Maasai pastoralists in Monduli, Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 78, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102267>.
- Pesambili, J. C. (2024). Reimagining quality education for pastoralists through Maasai elders' eyes in Monduli, Tanzania. *Quality Education for All*, 1(1), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QEA-03-2024-0022>.
- Pesambili, J. C., & Mkumbo, K. A. K. (2018). Implications of female genital mutilation on girls' education and psychological wellbeing in Tarime, Tanzania. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(8), 1111–1126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1450969>.
- Pesambili, J. C., & Mkumbo, K. A. K. (2024). Beyond the surface: unpacking the methodological and ethical challenges of researching into a sensitive female genital mutilation practice. *SN Social Sciences*, 4(22), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-023-00822-4>.
- Pesambili, J. C., & Novelli, M. (2021). Maasai students' encounter with formal education: Their experiences with and perceptions of schooling processes in Monduli, Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 2, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2021.100044>.
- Polz, E. (2020). Being a teacher – a lifelong learning process. *R & E-Source*, 14(14), 1–9.
- Scott, W. (2008). *Institution and organisations. ideas and interests*. SAGE Publications, Inc
- Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports. (2010). *Handbook on teacher/instructor/ tutor education and training policies: Acts, policy guidelines and regulations*. <https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Policy-Handbook-FINAL.pdf>.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2009). *Standing orders for the public service 2009*. United Republic of Tanzania.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2014). *Education and training policy*. Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2017b). *Re-categorisation*. Teachers Service Commission. <http://www.tsc.go.tz/kubadilisha-cheo-walimu-waliojiendeleza-kielimu>
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2020a). *National framework for teachers' continuous professional development*. Ministry of education, science and technology.

- United Republic of Tanzania. (2020b). *Pre- primary, primary, secondary, adult and nonformal education statistics 2020*. President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2021). *Pre-primary, primary, secondary, adult and nonformal education statistics 2021*. President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2023a). *Sera ya Elimu na Mafunzo 2014, Toleo la 2023*. Wizara ya Elimu Sayansi na Teknolojia.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2023b). *Walaka wa Elimu elimu namaba 5 wa 2023 kuhusu utekelezaji wa mitaala iliyoboreshwa*. Wizara ya Elimu Sayansi na Teknolojia.