
**ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY REFORMS ON JOB
MARKET DEMANDS IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN
MBEYA CITY COUNCIL, TANZANIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed educational policy reforms and their alignment with job market demands in higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. The study was motivated by persistent concerns regarding graduate unemployability and mismatch between academic training and labour market expectations despite ongoing reforms in the education sector. A qualitative case study design was adopted, involving lecturers, students, and institutional administrators selected purposively and randomly. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review, and analysed thematically. Findings revealed that higher learning institutions have implemented reforms such as competence-based curricula, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial practical training aimed at enhancing employability. These reforms contributed to the development of key competencies including communication skills, teamwork, digital literacy, critical thinking, leadership, and entrepreneurship. However, implementation effectiveness was constrained by inadequate teaching resources, limited ICT infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient industrial collaboration, and limited lecturer professional development. The study further established that although stakeholders generally perceive educational reforms positively, there remains a persistent gap between policy intentions and actual labour market outcomes. Graduates were found to possess theoretical knowledge but limited practical experience required by employers. The study is guided by Human Capital Theory and Skills Mismatch Theory, which emphasize the importance of aligning education systems with labour market demands. It concludes that educational reforms have contributed significantly to employability skills development but are not fully effective due to structural and

institutional constraints. The study recommends strengthening institutional-industry collaboration, improving ICT infrastructure, expanding practical training opportunities, and enhancing continuous professional development for lecturers. These interventions are essential for improving graduate employability and ensuring sustainable alignment between higher education outputs and labour market needs in Tanzania.

KEYWORDS: Educational policy reforms, employability skills, higher education, labour market.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in shaping human capital and supporting national development through the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge, and competencies required for economic growth and social transformation. Human Capital Theory emphasizes that investment in education enhances productivity, innovation, and individual earning capacity, thereby contributing to national development (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). In Tanzania, higher learning institutions have increasingly implemented educational policy reforms aimed at strengthening graduate employability and ensuring responsiveness to evolving labour market demands. These reforms include competence-based curricula, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial training, all of which are intended to enhance practical learning and align academic programmes with workplace expectations (MoEST, 2023; OECD, 2020). Despite these policy efforts, concerns continue to emerge regarding a persistent mismatch between graduates' competencies and employer requirements, particularly in relation to practical skills, workplace readiness, and adaptability in dynamic professional environments (World Bank, 2022).

Competence-based curriculum reforms have been widely adopted as a strategy for improving the relevance of higher education to labour market needs. Such reforms emphasize learner-centred approaches, problem-solving, critical thinking, and application of knowledge in real-life contexts (UNESCO, 2015). According to OECD (2020), countries that integrate competence-based education systems tend to produce graduates who are better prepared for complex and changing workplace environments. In Tanzania, MoEST (2023) reports that curriculum reforms are intended to shift education from theoretical memorization toward practical skill development. However, empirical evidence suggests that implementation challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, and limited lecturer preparedness hinder full realization of these objectives (Aina & Olanipekun, 2022).

Consequently, while curriculum reforms have potential to improve employability, their effectiveness remains partially constrained in practice.

ICT integration is another critical reform aimed at enhancing digital literacy and preparing graduates for technology-driven workplaces. Digital competence has become a core employability requirement in the twenty-first century labour market (UNESCO, 2015; World Bank, 2022). Higher learning institutions in Tanzania have introduced ICT-based teaching, online learning platforms, and digital research tools to improve students' technological skills. According to OECD (2020), ICT integration enhances learner engagement, access to information, and independent learning abilities. However, studies in developing contexts show that inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient ICT training for lecturers limit effective implementation of digital learning reforms (UNESCO, 2021). In Mbeya City Council, similar challenges affect consistent development of students' digital competencies, thereby reducing the intended impact of ICT reforms on employability outcomes.

Entrepreneurship education has also been emphasized as a key reform for addressing graduate unemployment and promoting self-reliance among young people. ILO (2019) argues that entrepreneurship skills are essential in contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited. Through entrepreneurship training, students are expected to develop innovation skills, business planning abilities, financial literacy, and risk-taking attitudes necessary for self-employment and job creation. UNESCO (2015) further highlights that entrepreneurship education contributes to economic diversification and poverty reduction. In Tanzania, MoEST (2023) has integrated entrepreneurship modules into higher education curricula to encourage graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers. However, empirical studies indicate that limited access to mentorship, inadequate funding, and weak practical exposure hinder the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programmes in producing successful entrepreneurs (Boateng, 2021).

Industrial training and internship programmes represent another important reform aimed at bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical workplace experience. Experiential learning theory suggests that students learn effectively when they engage directly with real-world tasks and professional environments (Kolb, 1984; OECD, 2020). In this regard, industrial attachments allow students to acquire workplace skills, understand organizational culture, and develop professional confidence. According to World Bank

(2022), strong school-industry linkages significantly improve graduate employability by enhancing practical competence. However, in Tanzania, limited availability of placement opportunities and weak collaboration between institutions and industries reduce the effectiveness of industrial training programmes (Nkunya & Mwila, 2024). As a result, many graduates complete their studies with insufficient practical exposure.

Despite the implementation of these reforms, the issue of graduate employability remains a major concern in Tanzania and other developing countries. Skills Mismatch Theory explains that discrepancies between education systems and labour market demands lead to unemployment and underemployment among graduates (ILO, 2018). Employers often report that graduates lack essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities required in modern workplaces (Tomlinson, 2017). Similarly, OECD (2020) notes that labour markets increasingly demand a combination of technical and transferable skills, which are not always adequately developed through traditional academic programmes. In Mbeya City Council, this mismatch is evident despite ongoing reforms, suggesting that structural and implementation challenges continue to limit reform effectiveness.

This study therefore examines how educational reforms influence the development of employability skills among graduates in higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council. It specifically focuses on the effectiveness of curriculum reforms, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial training in preparing students for contemporary labour market demands. The study further explores how these reforms contribute to socio-economic participation, innovation, and self-employment opportunities among graduates in Tanzania. By assessing both achievements and limitations, the study contributes to understanding the extent to which higher education institutions are equipping graduates with relevant competencies required in modern workplaces and increasingly competitive economic environments (World Bank, 2022; MoEST, 2023).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

This study is guided by Human Capital Theory, which posits that education is a form of investment that enhances individual productivity, skills, and economic value in the labour market (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). According to this theory, the more individuals invest in education and skill acquisition, the higher their chances of employability and economic

contribution. In relation to this study, educational reforms in higher learning institutions are viewed as strategic investments aimed at producing skilled graduates who can meet labour market demands and contribute to national development (World Bank, 2022).

The theory further explains that employability is not determined solely by academic qualifications but also by the quality and relevance of skills acquired during training. Therefore, competence-based education, ICT integration, and industrial training are considered essential components of human capital formation (OECD, 2020). However, when education systems fail to align with labour market needs, a skills mismatch occurs, leading to unemployment or underemployment among graduates (ILO, 2018). This theoretical perspective therefore provides a foundation for analyzing how educational reforms influence employability skills development in higher learning institutions.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies show that competence-based education reforms are widely adopted to improve graduate employability by emphasizing practical skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking. UNESCO (2015) argues that learner-centred and competence-based approaches enhance students' ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. Similarly, OECD (2020) reports that education systems that prioritize applied learning produce graduates who are more adaptable to labour market changes and workplace demands. However, Aina and Olanipekun (2022) note that in many developing countries, including Tanzania, implementation challenges such as inadequate teaching resources and limited lecturer training reduce the effectiveness of these reforms.

ICT integration has also been widely recognized as a key driver of employability in modern education systems. World Bank (2022) emphasizes that digital literacy is essential for participation in today's technology-driven labour market. ICT-enhanced learning improves access to information, communication skills, and independent learning abilities (UNESCO, 2021). However, studies in developing countries indicate persistent barriers such as poor infrastructure, limited internet connectivity, and lack of ICT competencies among educators, which hinder effective implementation of digital learning reforms (OECD, 2020). These challenges are also evident in Tanzanian higher learning institutions.

Entrepreneurship education has been identified as a strategic response to rising graduate unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019),

entrepreneurship education equips graduates with skills for innovation, business creation, and self-employment. UNESCO (2015) further argues that entrepreneurship contributes to economic empowerment and job creation, especially in contexts with limited formal employment opportunities. In Tanzania, MoEST (2023) has integrated entrepreneurship training into curricula to promote self-reliance among graduates. However, Boateng (2021) observes that limited practical exposure, mentorship, and financial support weaken the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in producing successful entrepreneurs.

Industrial training and experiential learning are also essential components of employability development. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes that learning occurs effectively through direct experience, reflection, and application in real-world contexts (Kolb, 1984). OECD (2020) notes that internships and industrial attachments improve students' transition from education to employment by enhancing workplace skills and professional confidence. Similarly, World Bank (2022) highlights that strong institutional-industry linkages significantly improve graduate employability. However, Nkunya and Mwila (2024) report that weak collaboration between institutions and industries in Tanzania limits students' access to meaningful practical experiences.

Despite these reforms, Skills Mismatch Theory explains the persistent gap between education outcomes and labour market expectations. According to ILO (2018), mismatch occurs when graduates lack the skills required by employers, leading to unemployment and underemployment. Tomlinson (2017) further notes that employers increasingly demand soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, which are often underdeveloped in academic settings. OECD (2020) confirms that this mismatch remains a global challenge, particularly in developing economies where education systems struggle to keep pace with labour market changes.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of educational policy reforms and their influence on employability skills development in higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council, Tanzania. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding curriculum reforms, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial training. According to Creswell and Poth (2018),

qualitative inquiry is suitable for studies that seek to understand complex social phenomena within their natural settings. In this study, the approach enabled the researcher to capture rich contextual data on how educational reforms are implemented and experienced in real academic environments.

3.2 Research Design

A descriptive case study design was employed to examine the implementation of educational policy reforms in selected higher learning institutions. This design was chosen because it allows detailed investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly where boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). The case study approach enabled the researcher to explore how institutional practices, curriculum structures, and teaching strategies influence employability skills development. It further facilitated triangulation of data sources, thereby enhancing validity and providing a holistic understanding of the relationship between educational reforms and labour market preparedness among graduates.

3.3 Area of Study

The study was conducted in Mbeya City Council, located in the southern highlands of Tanzania. The area was selected due to the presence of higher learning institutions that have implemented various educational reforms aimed at improving graduate employability. These institutions operate within a dynamic socio-economic environment characterized by increasing demand for skilled graduates and limited formal employment opportunities. The context therefore provides a relevant setting for examining how curriculum reforms, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial training influence employability outcomes. Additionally, Mbeya City offers a mix of public and private institutions, making it suitable for comparative insights.

3.4 Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The target population comprised lecturers, students, and institutional administrators from selected higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council. Purposive sampling was used to select lecturers and administrators based on their involvement in curriculum implementation and policy execution, while simple random sampling was used to select students to ensure representativeness. The combination of sampling techniques ensured inclusion of participants with relevant experience and diverse perspectives. The sample size was determined based on data saturation principles, ensuring that sufficient qualitative information was collected to

support meaningful interpretation of educational reforms and employability skills development.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review. Interviews were conducted with lecturers and administrators to gather in-depth information on curriculum reforms, institutional practices, and implementation challenges. Focus group discussions were held with students to capture shared experiences regarding employability skills development, ICT use, and industrial training exposure. Documentary review included examination of curricula, policy documents, training manuals, and institutional reports. This multi-method approach ensured triangulation, improving the credibility, dependability, and richness of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorization, and identification of emerging themes related to employability skills development, educational reforms, and institutional challenges. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to interpret patterns across different data sources and link them with theoretical frameworks. The Human Capital Theory guided interpretation by explaining how education contributes to skills acquisition and productivity, while the Skills Mismatch Theory helped to analyse gaps between graduate competencies and labour market expectations (Becker, 1964; ILO, 2018). The integration of theories enhanced the analytical depth of the study.

3.7 Validity, Reliability and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of data sources and methods, while transferability was supported by thick description of the study context. Dependability was ensured through consistent data collection procedures, and confirmability was achieved by maintaining neutrality during data interpretation. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and securing permission from relevant institutional authorities. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw voluntarily, and all data were securely stored to protect privacy and integrity of information.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Educational Reforms and Employability Skills Development

4.1.1 Development of Key Employability Skills

Findings revealed that educational reforms significantly contributed to the development of employability skills among students in higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council. The most frequently reported competencies included communication skills, teamwork, digital literacy, leadership, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Participants explained that learner-centred teaching approaches, ICT integration, entrepreneurship education, and industrial training enhanced students' active participation and practical engagement in learning processes. For example, one participant noted that "students become more confident when they present ideas and work in groups during class activities." These findings suggest that reforms have strengthened both cognitive and soft skills required in modern labour markets.

These results align with global literature emphasizing the importance of employability skills in the 21st century. UNESCO (2015) and OECD (2020) argue that education systems must prioritize transferable skills such as communication, collaboration, and digital competence to improve labour market readiness. Similarly, World Bank (2018) highlights that competency-based education enhances students' ability to apply knowledge in real-life contexts. However, as Fullan (2016) and Hattie (2012) argue, curriculum reforms alone are insufficient unless supported by effective implementation structures and institutional readiness.

4.1.2 Effectiveness of Curriculum Reforms, ICT Integration and Industrial Training

The study further found that curriculum reforms, ICT integration, and industrial training collectively improved students' engagement and practical learning experiences. Participants indicated that competency-based curricula encouraged active learning through group discussions, presentations, and problem-solving tasks. ICT integration enabled students to access digital learning materials and improve technological skills, while industrial training provided exposure to real workplace environments. One lecturer observed that "students who go for industrial training return with better understanding of workplace expectations and communication skills."

These findings are consistent with Tomlinson (2017), who emphasizes that employer engagement and practical exposure improve graduate employability. OECD (2020) also notes that internships and apprenticeship programmes strengthen the transition from education to

work. However, similar to findings by Badjadi (2020) and Bremner (2022), effectiveness of these reforms depends heavily on contextual conditions such as resources, class size, and institutional support systems.

4.1.3 Challenges Affecting Implementation of Educational Reforms

Despite positive outcomes, the study revealed several challenges affecting implementation of educational reforms. These included inadequate teaching and learning resources, limited ICT infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, weak institutional-industry collaboration, and insufficient funding. Participants explained that such constraints limited the ability of institutions to fully implement practical and learner-centred approaches. For instance, one respondent stated that “we know the reforms are good, but we lack computers and laboratories to fully apply them.”

These findings correspond with UNESCO (2021), which reports that many developing countries face infrastructural and financial barriers that hinder effective curriculum implementation. Similarly, World Bank (2022) highlights that limited resources reduce the quality of skills development in higher education systems. In the Tanzanian context, MoEST (2023) also acknowledges persistent resource gaps affecting competency-based education implementation.

4.1.4 Skills Mismatch and Labour Market Gaps

The study further found that despite reforms, a gap still exists between graduate competencies and employer expectations. Employers continue to report that some graduates lack sufficient practical experience, workplace readiness, and problem-solving abilities. Participants explained that theoretical knowledge often outweighs practical exposure, limiting graduates’ ability to perform effectively in real work environments.

These findings support the Skills Mismatch Theory (ILO, 2018), which argues that misalignment between education systems and labour market needs contributes to unemployment and underemployment. OECD (2020) similarly notes that curriculum reforms do not automatically eliminate skills gaps unless supported by strong institutional linkages with industry. In Tanzania, Nkunya and Mwila (2024) also report continued concerns regarding graduate preparedness, particularly in communication and practical competencies.

4.1.5 Stakeholder Perceptions and Institutional-Industry Collaboration

Findings indicated generally positive stakeholder perceptions towards educational reforms. Lecturers, students, and administrators acknowledged that reforms have improved learning experiences and employability skills development. However, participants emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between institutions and industries to enhance curriculum relevance and practical training opportunities. One participant noted that “if industries were more involved, students would graduate with better workplace experience.”

These findings align with OECD (2020) and European Commission (2018), which emphasize that employer involvement improves curriculum relevance and graduate employability. Similarly, World Bank (2022) argues that weak institutional-industry linkages contribute significantly to skills mismatch in developing countries. In Tanzania, MoEST (2023) also highlights the need for stronger partnerships between higher learning institutions and employers.

4.1.6 Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

The findings are well explained by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that education increases productivity and employability through skills development. Educational reforms in Mbeya City Council have contributed to human capital formation by enhancing students’ competencies in communication, ICT, and entrepreneurship. However, Skills Mismatch Theory (ILO, 2018) explains the persistent gap between training outcomes and labour market demands, particularly due to weak institutional-industry collaboration and inadequate practical exposure.

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory also helps explain the interaction between cognition, behaviour, and environment. While students and lecturers demonstrate positive attitudes and awareness of reforms, environmental constraints such as limited resources and infrastructure hinder effective implementation. This explains why positive perceptions do not always translate into optimal employability outcomes.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that educational policy reforms in higher learning institutions in Mbeya City Council have positively contributed to development of employability skills among graduates. Reforms enhanced communication, teamwork, digital literacy, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship competencies. However, their effectiveness is limited by structural and

institutional challenges such as inadequate resources, weak industry collaboration, insufficient ICT infrastructure, and limited practical training opportunities. Consequently, a gap remains between graduates' competencies and labour market expectations. The study emphasizes that successful implementation of reforms requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, institutions, lecturers, and employers to ensure alignment between education systems and labour market demands.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher learning institutions and policymakers should strengthen institutional-industry collaboration to enhance practical training and internship opportunities for students. Investment in ICT infrastructure and digital learning systems is necessary to improve technological competencies. Continuous curriculum review should ensure alignment with labour market needs, emphasizing practical skills and entrepreneurship. Institutions should also prioritize professional development programs for lecturers to improve pedagogical competence and implementation of learner-centred approaches. Additionally, adequate funding should be allocated to support teaching resources and practical learning activities. These measures will improve graduate employability and strengthen alignment between educational outcomes and labour market expectations in Tanzania.

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