



Assessing the Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Preparation of Schemes of Work and Lesson Plans in Public Primary Schools in Busokelo District, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study investigated the instructional planning challenges faced by teachers in public primary schools within Busokelo District, Tanzania an area characterized by persistent academic underperformance employing a descriptive design and a mixed-methods approach. The research engaged 33 participants, including 20 teachers, 10 head teachers, and 3 Ward Education Officers. Findings revealed significant obstacles in the preparation of schemes of work and lesson plans, including acute shortages of teaching materials, limited planning competence, time constraints, and inconsistent administrative support. Despite universal recognition of the importance of structured instructional planning, only 15% of teachers felt adequately prepared to design these tools. The study contextualizes each challenge using recent empirical literature and concludes with targeted recommendations aimed at strengthening resource provision, professional development, collaborative planning, and instructional leadership.

Keywords: Lesson plan, Scheme of work, Public primary schools, Teachers

1.0 Introduction

Instructional planning specifically the preparation of schemes of work and lesson plans is foundational to quality teaching and learning in educational settings. These tools enable teachers to sequence content, define learning outcomes, manage classroom dynamics, and ensure curriculum coverage (Kapur, 2018; Jones, 2015). Coe et al. (2014) emphasize that structured planning improves the efficiency of instructional delivery, time management, and classroom interactions, ultimately enhancing student achievement.

Globally, lesson planning is seen as a pedagogical necessity, not an administrative formality. In China, Su, Qin, and Huang (2015) argue that effective lesson plans allow educators to critically engage with curricular content and pedagogical strategies. Similarly, studies from Bangladesh and South Africa reveal that challenges such as limited training, resource shortages, and misalignment with curriculum frameworks negatively impact lesson planning and teaching quality (Alam et al., 2018; Mamabolo, 2021).

In the African context, constraints including socioeconomic challenges and inadequate professional development further complicate instructional planning (Stella, 2015; Badugela, 2012). Research by Zulu (2024) highlights how resource limitations and institutional barriers hamper the consistent use of schemes of work and lesson plans, while Kihwele and Mwamakula (2023) found that time pressures and negative

perceptions affect the adoption of collaborative planning approaches in pre-service teacher education in Tanzania.

In the Tanzanian education system, instructional planning is emphasized during teacher training programs and embedded in national education policies. However, gaps persist, particularly in rural districts such as Busokelo in Mbeya region, where teachers face compounded challenges. Studies by Mabagala and Shukia (2019) and Pambas (2021) reveal that a significant percentage of Tanzanian teachers either do not prepare lesson plans or fail to follow them systematically, citing insufficient time, lack of support, and poor access to materials. Kinyunyu (2020) further notes that such constraints undermine classroom effectiveness and student performance.

Busokelo District is particularly marked by persistent academic underperformance in national examinations, high student-to-teacher ratios, and limited infrastructure for instructional support. Despite efforts to prioritize education quality, many public primary school teachers in the district struggle with the technical and practical aspects of instructional planning. This challenge is exacerbated by weak administrative oversight, scarce teaching materials, and limited structured collaboration among staff.

Against this backdrop, the current study aims to assess the challenges teachers face in preparing schemes of work and lesson plans in public primary schools across Busokelo District. By contextualizing these challenges using recent

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empirical literature and field-based insights, the study seeks to identify targeted interventions that could improve instructional planning and enhance the quality of education delivered to learners.

2.0 Methodological Perspectives

The study employed a descriptive design, examining ten public primary schools across Busokelo District. A mixed-methods approach was used, collecting quantitative data through questionnaires completed by 20 teachers and qualitative insights from interviews with 10 head teachers and 3 Ward Education Officers. Simple random sampling was applied to select teachers, while purposive sampling ensured inclusion of administrative officials with instructional oversight experience. Quantitative responses were analyzed with SPSS for frequency distribution, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to enrich the interpretation of findings.

3.0 Challenges Faced by Teachers in Instructional Planning

3.1 Resource Inadequacy

A majority of teachers (70%) reported lacking adequate materials for preparing schemes of work and lesson plans. Essential resources like syllabi, textbooks, reference books, and digital tools were either unavailable or inconsistently supplied. In many cases, textbook-to-student ratios exceeded 1:10, and teachers shared reference books in ratios as high as 1:15. Such constraints forced teachers to rely on outdated notes or verbal instruction, undermining instructional quality and learner engagement.

Ward Education Officers said that *“One of our persistent challenges is the irregular supply of teaching and learning materials from the district level. Although there are efforts to support schools, the allocations are not always timely or proportional to the actual needs. For instance, some schools still lack basic textbooks for core subjects like Mathematics and Science, which makes lesson planning and delivery very difficult for teachers. This has a direct impact on the quality of scheme of work and lesson plans and learners’ engagement.”* (Ward education Officer, 14th April 2025 **Time: 10:20 AM**)

Supporting literature corroborates these findings. Kasulwa *et al.* (2023) highlighted that Tanzanian schools often suffer from delayed textbook distribution and insufficient resource allocation. UNESCO (2014) emphasized the link between instructional resource availability and teacher motivation, while Lyimo *et al.* (2017) found that schools with poor access to materials delivered less coherent instruction. Theall (2004) noted that reference materials are essential for bridging theory with classroom practice without them, planning becomes improvisational rather than strategic.

3.2 Low Teacher Planning Competence

Only 15% of teachers indicated they could effectively prepare schemes of work and lesson plans, while 85% lacked confidence or ability. This reflects a major planning capacity gap, likely stemming from inadequate pre-service training and

limited in-service support. Interviews revealed reliance on rigid templates, shallow understanding of curriculum objectives, and minimal use of instructional frameworks like Bloom’s Taxonomy or learner-centered principles.

One Head Teacher was asked what is the major challenges facing contemporary teachers in preparation of lesson plan he said,

“The changing curriculum is a challenge. Teachers find it difficult to adjust lesson plans quickly when updates are made.” (Head Teacher, 10th April 2025 **Time: 09:45 AM**)

The other Head Teacher was also asked on the issue of overcrowded classroom he said that,

“Overcrowded classrooms make lesson planning difficult. Teachers have a hard time creating engaging and individualized learning experiences.” (Head Teacher, 14th April 2025 **Time: 02:30 PM**)

However, the Ward Education Officer said,

“Collaboration among teachers is weak, making it difficult to ensure consistency in lesson planning.” (Ward education Officer, 14th April 2025 **Time: 10:15 AM**)

These findings align with Nombo *et al.* (2024), whose research in Songea District revealed poor lesson planning competence among teachers, especially regarding SMART objective formulation and instructional alignment. Ushie and Daniel (2023) found that teachers with weak planning skills often delivered fragmented lessons with minimal learning impact. In contrast, Ali and Juanda (2025) observed improved delivery and engagement among educators who received targeted training in instructional planning. This demonstrates that competence is trainable and must be systematically supported through structured professional development.

3.3 Time Constraints

Over half of the teachers (55%) reported insufficient time allocated for planning. Factors such as overloaded timetables, extra duties, and large class sizes prevented meaningful engagement with lesson design. Teachers often reused outdated plans or rushed preparation, resulting in compromised delivery and limited responsiveness to student needs.

The Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (2016) documented how administrative burden and extended teaching hours reduce educators’ planning effectiveness. Hardman *et al.* (2018) emphasized that dedicated instructional preparation time within school schedules improves lesson coherence and curriculum alignment. Moh’d and Mwalongo (2021) reported that Tanzanian teachers often plan outside working hours, leading to fatigue and reduced innovation. These studies affirm that time constraints are not just logistical they are pedagogical obstacles.

Moreover, effective planning is not just about writing a lesson outline; it includes sourcing teaching aids, aligning with the syllabus, adapting to learners’ needs, and integrating formative assessment. Hardman *et al.* (2012) argue that time constraints often lead teachers to reuse outdated lesson plans,

hindering adaptation to shifting curricular priorities or student abilities.

Fifteen percent of teachers who reported that enhanced time allocation is unnecessary in schools where structured planning time is already integrated into the schedule, or they may have mastered quick-turnaround planning practices. However, UNESCO (2020) notes that even experienced teachers benefit from structured planning periods to refine objectives, integrate cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, environment), and share strategies with peers.

Vangrieken *et al.* (2015) also observed that scheduling time for collaborative planning not only improves individual lesson quality but also strengthens school-wide instructional coherence. When teachers are given structured time blocks for joint reflection, resource creation, and formative assessment planning, the entire teaching ecosystem benefits.

In addition, schools that fail to allocate such time may inadvertently reinforce a “teach-as-you-go” culture, where short-term delivery takes precedence over long-term curriculum integration. In the Tanzanian Education and Training Policy (2014), lesson preparation must be treated as an integral aspect of a teacher’s workload not an extra burden after hours.

3.4 Administrative Support

While 75% of teachers reported receiving administrative support, its quality was inconsistent. Some described strong mentorship and feedback loops, while others experienced purely supervisory interactions. The remaining 25% cited lack of engagement from school heads, unclear planning expectations, and absence of instructional guidance all of which weakened the planning environment.

However, the Ward Education Officer said,

"Collaboration among teachers is weak, making it difficult to ensure consistency in lesson planning." (Ward education Officer, 14th April 2025 **Time:** 10:15 AM)

Research by Samiano and Baluyos (2022) found that strong administrative support enhances teachers’ resilience and instructional performance. Shen *et al.* (2007) noted that integration of planning into professional development improves collaboration and content quality. Deepthi *et al.* (2023) warned that administrative overload without pedagogical support leads to burnout and reduced instructional depth. These findings underscore the need for leadership that is both managerial and instructional.

3.5 Curriculum and Institutional Constraints

Changing curriculum frameworks posed challenges, with teachers struggling to adjust schemes to new guidelines. Curriculum updates were often delayed or poorly communicated, leading to confusion and misalignment. Additionally, institutional challenges overcrowded classrooms, insufficient duplication facilities, and weak peer collaboration exacerbated planning barriers.

One Head Teacher was asked what is the major challenges facing contemporary teachers in preparation of lesson plan he said,

"The changing curriculum is a challenge. Teachers find it difficult to adjust lesson plans quickly when updates are made." (Head Teacher, 10th April 2025 **Time:** 09:45 AM)

Studies by Makunja (2016) and Ngussa & Waiswa (2020) highlight how curriculum miscommunication results in misaligned lesson planning and inconsistent learning experiences. UNESCO (2015) argues that curriculum fidelity depends on teacher access to updated guidelines and structured implementation training. Kelchtermans (2006) adds that institutional factors like resource sharing and teacher collaboration directly affect lesson clarity and coherence. Together, these studies point to the importance of system-wide planning infrastructure.

4.0 Conclusion

Teachers in Busokelo District recognize the importance of schemes of work and lesson plans in improving instructional delivery and student achievement. However, planning capacity is obstructed by resource scarcity, limited training, time pressure, and weak institutional support. These constraints reinforce fragmented, outdated, or improvised instruction, ultimately compromising learning outcomes. The challenges identified are not unique to Busokelo but reflect broader systemic gaps that require coordinated, contextualized solutions.

5.0 Recommendations

Improving instructional planning in public primary schools within Busokelo District requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses systemic and pedagogical constraints. First, educational authorities must prioritize the provision of essential teaching materials. Most schools operate with severe deficits in textbooks, reference guides, and syllabuses, which significantly impairs teachers’ ability to design structured schemes of work and lesson plans. Strengthening the resource supply chain including the integration of digital tools such as projectors, shared computers, and online planning platforms will create a more responsive and modern planning environment aligned with 21st-century learning goals.

Equally important is the implementation of targeted, context-relevant professional development programs. Since all interviewed teachers expressed the need for lesson planning training, workshops should emphasize practical instructional strategies such as curriculum alignment, content sequencing, inclusive pedagogy, and formative assessment design. These sessions must go beyond theory, providing classroom-ready techniques and subject-specific guidance tailored to the challenges teachers face daily.

Time allocation is another critical factor. School leaders should restructure schedules to include protected instructional planning periods. These periods should not be compromised by administrative duties or extracurricular tasks. When teachers have consistent, dedicated time for reflective and

collaborative lesson development, both the quality and creativity of instructional delivery improve.

Administrative support must also be strengthened to foster a planning-friendly culture. Instructional leadership should move beyond oversight to include pedagogical mentorship, regular feedback, and capacity-building activities. Empowering head teachers to lead curriculum dialogue and facilitate team-based lesson design will encourage consistency, innovation, and accountability across classrooms.

Furthermore, collaboration should be institutionalized. Establishing formal planning teams, department panels, and inter-school professional learning communities will enable peer mentoring and resource sharing. This shift from informal cooperation to structured teamwork will standardize planning practices and build collective instructional capacity. Leveraging digital collaboration platforms can further amplify these benefits, especially in remote or under-resourced settings.

Finally, district education offices must introduce robust monitoring frameworks that assess the quality and coherence of instructional planning. Teacher feedback should be actively solicited to refine planning expectations and support tools. Partnerships with NGOs, faith-based organizations, and community networks can enhance funding streams and resource mobilization, ensuring sustainability and equity in instructional development. These coordinated efforts will provide a foundation for resilient teaching practices and improved learning outcomes district-wide.

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