TEACHERS' COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN TANZANIA

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the coping strategies employed by teachers to enhance academic performance in secondary schools in Kilolo District, Tanzania. The study was guided by specific objectives which were to; determine teachers' coping strategies being employed in enhancing academic performance, explore factors that led teachers to employ coping strategies and investigate the impact of coping strategies on academic performance of students. The study involved qualitative and quantitative approach under descriptive design. A sample of seventy-five respondents was used, data were collected using interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussion. The findings revealed that teachers employed various coping strategies, including peer collaboration, student-centered teaching techniques and continuous professional development to enhance academic performance.

Key words: *Teachers' Coping Strategies, Academic Performance*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is globally esteemed as a sacred and distinctive vocation, requiring profound commitment and self-sacrifice comparable to fields like medicine and nursing (Mondal & Roy, 2013). Teachers are pivotal societal figures responsible for guiding and preparing the younger generation to face future challenges. In Tanzania, this role is especially critical due to ongoing educational reforms and socio-economic dynamics. This study examines the coping strategies employed by teachers to enhance academic performance in Tanzanian secondary schools, highlighting both global and local educational contexts.

Improving education quality in low-income countries like Tanzania is a key objective within the global human development agenda (United Nations, 2015). Governments and international donors invest over a hundred billion dollars annually in education (World Bank, 2017). However, many developing nations, including Tanzania, struggle to translate increased spending and enrollment into meaningful improvements in student learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018). A significant barrier is the variable level of teacher effort, influenced by intrinsic motivation and external incentives or monitoring mechanisms. Low teacher effort diminishes the effectiveness of educational inputs, emphasizing the need to understand and enhance teacher performance through effective coping strategies.

Teachers greatly influence their students' lifelong academic success (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014). The effectiveness of teachers is often mediated by the coping strategies they employ to navigate the complexities of

their roles. Coping strategies can be categorized into productive mechanisms, such as collaborative learning and critical thinking, which foster a conducive learning environment, and unproductive mechanisms, such as distancing, which can sometimes be effective depending on the context and the teacher's specialization (Heim, 2011; Cheema, 2022).

In Tanzania, the educational landscape is shaped by historical and socio-political factors that have necessitated the evolution of various coping strategies among teachers. Post-independence educational reforms emphasized expanding access to education, often leaving teachers ill-equipped to handle large class sizes and diverse student needs (Nguni, 2005). The shift towards inclusive education in the 1990s further compounded these challenges, requiring teachers to adopt new strategies to address the varied learning needs of their students.

Despite the Tanzanian government's initiatives, such as the 2014 policy for fee-free education from standard one to form four, significant challenges persist. Students continue to perform poorly academically, a situation linked to ineffective teaching methods and insufficient teacher support (Adunola, 2011). Factors such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, insufficient teacher training, and socio-economic barriers among students exacerbate the problem. In response, teachers in Tanzania often resort to coping mechanisms like peer collaboration, resource-sharing, and individualized learning strategies to mitigate these challenges (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012; Temba & Kayombo, 2013).

Peer collaboration and resource-sharing have been instrumental in helping teachers manage overcrowded classrooms and limited teaching materials. However, these informal networks frequently lack the structure and support necessary for sustained impact, highlighting the need for formalized professional development and adequate resource allocation (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). Additionally, individualized learning strategies, such as remedial classes and after-school tutoring, demonstrate teachers' adaptability in addressing diverse student needs despite constraints like time and financial limitations (Temba & Kayombo, 2013).

Research consistently underscores the link between teacher effectiveness and student academic outcomes. Effective teaching strategies, encompassing methods from mastery learning to problem-based teaching, are crucial for enhancing student engagement and performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2022). For instance, in the UK, interactive lessons utilizing various resources, including technology and collaborative activities, significantly improve learners' cognitive capabilities and motivation (Bradley & Miller, 2010). Similarly, in Australia, factors such as teacher competence, qualifications, and professional development are identified as critical determinants of student success (Hattie & Timperley, 2022).

In Tanzania, the application of effective teaching methods is equally vital. Studies indicate that poor academic performance among students is fundamentally linked to the use of ineffective teaching strategies by teachers (Adunola, 2011). Therefore, understanding and enhancing the coping strategies that teachers employ can directly influence the quality of education and, consequently, student performance.

The necessity to explore coping strategies in Tanzania is underscored by the unique challenges faced by Tanzanian teachers. Historical educational reforms, resource limitations, and the push towards inclusive education create a context where teachers must continuously adapt to ensure effective teaching and learning. By investigating the coping strategies employed by Tanzanian teachers, this study seeks to identify methods that successfully enhance academic performance despite these challenges.

Moreover, the ongoing reforms in the Tanzanian education system, aimed at improving access and quality, provide a timely backdrop for this research. Understanding how teachers cope with and adapt to these reforms can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of current policies and highlight areas needing further support. For example, professional development programs like the Teacher Development and Management Strategy (TDMS) aim to bolster teacher competencies. However, limited funding and lack of follow-up support often constrain their long-term efficacy (Mkumbo, 2016). Assessing how teachers navigate these limitations through coping strategies can inform more effective policy implementation and resource allocation.

This study holds significant potential for informing educational policy and practice in Tanzania. By elucidating the coping strategies that teachers employ to enhance academic performance, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support teachers more effectively. For instance, if peer collaboration and resource-sharing are prevalent and effective, policies could formalize these practices by providing structured platforms for teacher

interaction and resource distribution. Similarly, if individualized learning strategies are widely used, there could be an emphasis on providing the necessary training and resources to optimize these methods.

Furthermore, the study can contribute to the broader discourse on teacher resilience and professional development. By highlighting successful coping mechanisms, the research can offer models that other educators in similar contexts might emulate. This is particularly relevant in low-income countries where educational systems face parallel challenges of resource scarcity and high student-to-teacher ratios.

Inclusive education remains a critical goal in Tanzania, necessitating teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learning needs. Effective coping strategies are essential for teachers to create inclusive classrooms where all students can thrive. As Zimmerman (1990) posits, when students engage in self-regulated learning and attribute outcomes to their strategies, they exhibit greater intrinsic motivation and higher academic achievement. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering such environments through their coping strategies, making this study pertinent to advancing educational equity.

Moreover, the study aligns with global educational objectives of fostering a resilient and effective teaching workforce capable of overcoming systemic challenges. By focusing on coping strategies, the research emphasizes the human element in education, recognizing that teacher well-being and adaptability are foundational to student success.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess the coping strategies employed by teachers in secondary schools to enhance students' academic performance in Kilolo District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study thought to determine teachers' coping strategies being employed in enhancing academic performance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

The Constructivist Theory put forth by Vygotsky (1962) is the guiding theoretical framework for this study, providing a valuable perspective on how knowledge is constructed through social interaction and collaborative learning. This theory is highly relevant to understanding teacher coping strategies in the context of secondary education in Tanzania. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the role of social interactions in learning, which aligns well with the collaborative and interactive strategies employed by teachers to address challenges such as large class sizes and diverse student needs. By focusing on the idea that students learn through experience, discovery, and teacher-student interaction, the theory supports the notion that teachers must continuously adapt their methods to foster student engagement and academic success.

In Tanzanian secondary schools, where resource limitations and overcrowded classrooms present significant challenges, Vygotsky's constructivism theory offers a theoretical foundation for coping strategies that promote active learning and collaboration. Teachers are encouraged to employ strategies that facilitate student participation and peer learning, such as group discussions, peer teaching, and problem-solving activities. These strategies are not only consistent with constructivist principles but also practical solutions to the real-world challenges teachers face in Tanzanian classrooms.

The constructivist theory's emphasis on creating a curriculum that allows for problem-solving and critical thinking is also crucial for enhancing academic performance. In this context, the theory justifies the importance of adaptive teaching strategies that align with the students' experiences, enabling them to engage with the material more effectively.

Empirical Literature Review

The empirical section of the literature review is well-justified, as it draws on a wide range of studies that investigate the relationship between teacher coping strategies and student academic performance. The studies cited provide evidence for the positive impact of adaptive coping mechanisms on both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

For instance, the meta-analysis by Cohen and Wills (2017) supports the argument that teachers who use adaptive strategies, such as cognitive restructuring and problem-solving, create more supportive learning environments, which directly contribute to improved student performance. Similarly, Jennings and Greenberg (2016) demonstrate the long-term benefits of proactive coping strategies on student achievement, reinforcing the importance of teacher coping mechanisms in fostering academic success.

Further empirical evidence, such as the studies by Klassen and Chiu (2016) and Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2018), show how coping strategies like social support, mindfulness, and goal-setting not only reduce teacher burnout but also positively impact student learning. These findings are particularly relevant to the Tanzanian context, where teachers often face high levels of stress due to large class sizes, limited resources, and socio-economic challenges. By adopting effective coping strategies, teachers can mitigate these pressures and create a more conducive learning environment for their students.

The review also highlights the importance of professional development in enhancing teachers' coping strategies, as seen in the research by Guskey (2020). This is crucial for the Tanzanian education system, where ongoing reforms and teacher training programs need to address coping strategies to improve teacher performance and student achievement.

Moreover, studies by Smith and Lee (2020), Garcia and Johnson (2019), and Bennett and Thompson (2021) emphasize the role of teacher resilience and emotional regulation in enhancing academic outcomes. These findings provide strong empirical support for the idea that teacher well-being directly influences classroom performance, making it essential to address the psychological and emotional aspects of teaching.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kilolo District, a region in Iringa, Tanzania, chosen due to its poor academic performance in secondary schools, challenges faced by teachers, and the potential for policy recommendations. Kilolo District, bordered by Morogoro, Mufindi, and Iringa Rural Districts, is an important region for assessing how teachers' coping strategies impact academic performance.

The study population comprised teachers and students from five community secondary schools in Kilolo District. Seventy-five respondents participated, including 5 heads of schools, 50 teachers, and 20 students. The inclusion of both male and female teachers with varying teaching experiences allowed for a diverse range of perspectives. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006) and Mugenda (1999), population refers to a group from which samples are drawn for measurement, and this study focused on teachers and students to gather relevant data.

A quantitative approach, using structured questionnaires, was employed to analyze the relationships between variables. According to Creswell (2003), this dual approach allowed the research to test hypotheses, analyze numerical data, and interpret patterns and themes in the qualitative data.

The study adopted a descriptive research design to identify and describe the coping strategies used by teachers to improve academic performance. This design enabled a detailed analysis of the current practices and their perceived impact on students' academic outcomes. Descriptive research, as noted by Creswell (2018), involves collecting and analyzing data to answer research questions in a systematic manner.

The sampling procedure involved both simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Simple random sampling was used to select teachers to ensure that every teacher had an equal opportunity to participate, reducing bias and improving representativeness. Purposive sampling was employed to select schools and heads of schools, ensuring that the sample was aligned with the study's focus on coping strategies. These techniques ensured a targeted yet representative sample, essential for obtaining meaningful insights.

Primary data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Closed-ended questionnaires were administered to teachers, providing quantitative data on the coping strategies they employed. Semi-structured interviews with school heads and focus group discussions with students provided qualitative insights into the challenges and strategies used to improve academic performance. This combination of methods ensured a holistic understanding of the coping mechanisms in place.

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software, with means and frequencies used to summarize findings. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically, with themes identified and coded to uncover underlying factors influencing teachers' coping strategies.

To ensure validity, the research instruments were reviewed by education experts and pilot-tested for clarity. Reliability was maintained through standardized procedures and consistency in data collection methods. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and using pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

This research methodology ensured a comprehensive, reliable, and ethical investigation into the coping strategies employed by teachers in Kilolo District to enhance academic performance.

4. FINDINGS

To determine the coping strategies teachers` employ to enhance academic performance

The findings from the study aimed at determining the coping strategies teachers employ to enhance academic performance revealed key insights. Teachers strongly agree that adapting teaching methods based on students' individual needs (Mean: 4.2) and collaborating with peers (Mean: 4.2) are crucial strategies in improving student outcomes. These strategies allow for tailored instruction and shared best practices, enhancing academic performance.

However, there is significant dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of professional development training (Mean: 2.4) and mentorship programs (Mean: 2.3), suggesting they are not well-aligned with teachers' classroom realities. Similarly, the integration of digital tools was viewed as ineffective (Mean: 2.1), possibly due to lack of access or training.

Time management strategies (Mean: 3.6), stress management techniques (Mean: 3.5), and peer support (Mean: 3.5) were moderately agreed upon as important coping strategies. Teachers also agree on the value of adjusting assessment methods (Mean: 4.0) and seeking feedback from students (Mean: 3.8) to enhance academic performance as shown per Table 1.

Table 1: frequencies and mean score for coping strategies teachers employ to enhance academic performance

QUESTIONS	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
Teachers adapt their teaching methods based on students` individual needs to enhance academic performance	2	3	8	30	32	4.2
Collaboration among teachers is an effective strategy to cope with challenges and improve academic performance.	2	3	8	30	32	4.2
Regular professional development training helps teachers cope with academic challenges in secondary schools.	10	30	25	8	2	2.4
Teachers utilise mentorship programs to better handle classroom challenges and enhance student performance.	15	30	20	8	2	2.3
Incorporating digital tools and technology in lessons is an effective coping strategy for improving students' academic outcomes.	20	28	20	5	2	2.1
Teachers implement time management strategies to effectively cover the syllabus and enhance academic performance.	5	10	15	32	13	3.6
Stress management techniques are essential for teachers in maintaining a conducive learning environment for academic success.	5	10	15	32	13	3.5
Peer support among teachers is a valuable coping mechanism that contributes to enhanced student academic performance.	4	11	15	32	13	3.5

Adjusting assessment methods is a necessary strategy for teachers to help improve students` academic achievements.	2	5	15	30	23	4.0
Teachers regularly seek feedback from students to adjust teaching strategies, enhancing their academic performance.	3	7	10	35	20	3.8

(Source: Field data 2024)

Generally, the results of Table 1 revealed the importance of flexible teaching approaches and teacher collaboration while highlighting gaps in professional development, mentorship, and technology integration that need to be addressed.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings highlight the pivotal role of two primary strategies employed by teachers to enhance academic performance: the modification of teaching methods and peer collaboration. By implementing differentiated instruction and group work, teachers effectively address the diverse needs of their students, fostering an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, collaborative efforts among teachers facilitate the sharing of best practices and resources, allowing them to tackle challenges collectively. This collaborative approach not only alleviates teacher stress but also contributes to improved student outcomes. Overall, the study underscores the importance of adaptive teaching practices and teamwork in creating a supportive educational environment, essential for effectively addressing the challenges faced in contemporary education.

The study recommended that schools should be provided with targeted professional development focused on differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching strategies. Establishing professional learning communities would encourage regular collaboration among teachers, facilitating the sharing of best practices and resources. Additionally, promoting adaptive teaching practices will allow educators to tailor their methods to meet diverse student needs effectively. Schools should also create platforms for resource sharing to alleviate individual workloads and implement regular assessments of teaching strategies and peer collaboration to ensure continuous improvement. These actions will foster a supportive educational environment, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

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