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# Capability Approach to Valued Pedagogical Practices in Tanzania: An Alternative to Learner-Centred Pedagogy?

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## ABSTRACT

Pedagogy significantly affects children's learning and growth, but appropriate pedagogy in the Global South is still under-theorised and lacks empirical evidence. With the aim of proposing pedagogical approaches alternative to the dominant framework – the 'learner-centred pedagogy' currently implemented by international donors in a top-down manner – this research has explored locally-relevant pedagogy through a bottom-up process. By applying the capability approach, it has examined achievements and pedagogy valued by primary teachers in Tanzania. The analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews applied the critical realist concept of the 'four-planar social being'. This revealed the hegemonic power dynamics between the international, national and local players as well as those between the researcher and researched, plausibly shaping the teachers' valued pedagogies. The effort undertaken to appreciate people's values could intensify the ideological colonisation through pedagogy that learner-centred pedagogy has inherently imposed on the Global South.

## KEYWORDS

Learner-centred pedagogy; capability approach; critical realism; four-planar social being; Tanzania

## Introduction

What pedagogy – or forms of teaching and learning – to implement in schools in the Global South has been widely debated in both global policy circles and the academic community. International conventions enacted since the 1990s – such as Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – have recurrently endorsed learner-centred pedagogy (LCP) as a universal panacea for various educational challenges (Mundy et al. 2016). The on-going Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue to regard 'learner-centred, active and collaborative' approaches as a key pedagogy in achieving SDG4-Education 2030 (UNESCO 2016, 33). Following these international recommendations of LCP, governments of sub-Saharan Africa have

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moved towards adopting the concepts and practices of LCP in their educational programmes. Examples include popular movements toward curriculum changes in Botswana, Uganda and Senegal around 1990, all of which noted the importance of active learning (World Bank 2008). However, empirical evidence has revealed the ineffectiveness of LCP implementation in the Global South for various reasons, including material and human resource scarcity (Altinyelken 2010), a lack of qualified teachers (Vavrus 2009), and incompatible education systems and cultural values compared to LCP tenets (Sifuna and Kaime 2007).

Critics argue that LCP draws on human rights ideas inherent in Western values but alien to the lives of the people concerned (Tikly and Barrett 2013). LCP is said to be a Western-oriented pedagogy whose origin can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates and developed by educational philosophers and theorists in Europe including Rousseau, Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky (Moore 2012). Broadly based on the belief that knowledge is constructed according to one's developmental stages and sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky 1978), LCP presents an eclectic idea to advocate individualised learning (Rousseau 2007) and freedom of expression (Dewey 1916). If LCP principles continue to have a Western philosophical basis for pedagogy of 'best practice', pedagogical colonisation will persist (Tabulawa 2003, 2013).

Although scholars have put forward criticisms against LCP, there are few alternative forms of pedagogy suggested by existing research or underpinned by educational theories and/or empirical evidence. This paper examines a possible way to explore a pedagogy alternative to LCP through a bottom-up process via the capability approach and critical realism. The next section embeds the research within the available evidence on LCP implementation in the Global South, followed by explanations of the theoretical and analytical frameworks employed in this study. A section on the context of Tanzania follows, after which an explanation of the methodological and analytical approaches takes place. When presenting findings, a critical realist concept of the four-planar social being offers a structure to examine what the teachers in Tanzania have reason to value. The paper offers a conclusion on whether and how the capability approach can provide an alternative framework to LCP in low-income settings.

## **Studies on LCP Implementation in the Global South**

Despite the global endeavour to spread LCP throughout low-income countries, research shows the failure of its appropriation in local schools. In Mtika and Gates's (2010) qualitative research in Malawi, student teachers who underwent an LCP training programme indicated their understanding of the pedagogy at a theoretical level. They nevertheless lacked the opportunity to practise LCP in the classroom, resulting in their inadequate application of the pedagogy.

Similarly, ethnography carried out by Vavrus (2009) in Tanzania explored student teachers' practices and their views of constructivist pedagogy. Her participant observation and in-depth interviews uncovered the struggles that the student teachers had to overcome even if they understood the need to implement LCP. Vavrus emphasises the incompatibility of LCP with particular social and cultural expectations as well as with the teaching environment. A number of other researchers have also questioned the effectiveness and validity of LCP implementation in the Global South (Sifuna and Kaime 2007; Altinyelken 2010), leading Schweisfurth (2011) to conclude this policy effort to be the 'stories of failure grand and small' (425).

Several researchers have articulated varied standpoints towards the global spread of LCP. Pointing out the epistemological dissonance between LCP and the teacher-led traditional style of teaching prevalent in African schools, Tabulawa (2003, 2013) contends that making a paradigm shift from one to the other would not be possible; the author calls for establishing an 'indigenous pedagogy' (2013, 157) within the cultural framework of the country concerned. Vavrus (2009) takes a different position to Tabulawa's in order to promote a culturally appropriate model of LCP. Coining the term 'contingent constructivism', she proposes combining traditional teaching in Tanzania with learner-centred elements. Schweisfurth similarly suggests 'the universal minimum standards' for LCP (Schweisfurth 2013) where each standard appreciates the core principle of LCP but leaves room for local interpretation and adaptation.

Whereas the approaches suggested by Vavrus and Schweisfurth have their philosophical basis in the constructivist learning theory, Tikly and Barrett (2013) divert from LCP beliefs. LCP draws on human rights ideas constructed remotely from the lives of the people concerned. Donor agencies set what, how and why rights should be valued and realised. The authors point out that the individualistic understanding of learners is deeply rooted in LCP but it is foreign in many non-Western contexts. As an alternative approach to quality education, Tikly and Barrett (2013) propose the social justice approach, in which the capability approach initiated by Amartya Sen provides a means to define education quality and to connect it to the larger concept of human development.

### **Capability Approach**

The capability approach (Sen 1999, 2009; Nussbaum 2011) provides a flexible conceptual framework through which to evaluate what people are able to do and to be (capabilities) and what they are actually achieving in terms of being and doing (functionings) (Robeyns 2017). As opposed to LCP with a top-down legislative endeavour for a pedagogical remodelling irrespective of context, the capability approach proposes a bottom-up process to engage with the local people to decide what, who and how best to educate children

(Tikly and Barrett 2013). In determining what people have reason to value, the capability approach prioritises public reasoning; hence discussions and dialogues with and among members of the public are integral.

Taking the participative approach, existing literature has explored what children and students value to achieve, providing a list of capabilities appreciated in a given context. Walker (2006), through interviews, inquired into the capabilities that female secondary students in South Africa valued. She produced a list of eight capabilities to achieve gender equity, ranging from autonomy through to knowledge and aspiration in addition to bodily integrity. Biggeri et al. (2006) conceptualised 14 capabilities from children's perspectives, whilst Terzi (2007) proposed an ideal list of capabilities to be nurtured through education. Hart (2014) and Schischka (2014) further enquired into how children and young people have gained some of these capabilities through educational programmes targeting underrepresented population. Their investigation revealed some characteristics of the programmes used to enhance young people's aspirations and future capabilities. Hart (2014) emphasises both positive and negative roles that educational professionals can play when it comes to communicating with young people and running such programmes. The author reminds us of the centrality of the teachers' role concerning children's capability expansion in the context of formal schooling.

Teachers are imperative to enable students to achieve the valued functionings and to expand their capabilities. Unterhalter (2017) highlights the crucial role that teachers play in conveying particular forms of knowledge and appropriating certain pedagogical practices. Warning of the lack of capability literature exploring capabilities of teachers compared to the attention paid to those of children, Buckler (2015) developed a list of professional capabilities valued by the rural female teachers across five sub-Saharan African countries. Tao (2013, 2016) also explored Tanzanian teachers' lived realities, demonstrating a number of constraints that the teachers faced in their personal and professional lives. Although the capability scholarship has accumulated empirical evidence as to what teachers value in their professional practices, little is known about what they value for their students, on the basis of which they may determine what pedagogical approaches to take. This paper explores what teachers value to be achieved by students through education, and through what kind of pedagogy they think that children can acquire the valued functionings and capabilities. By acknowledging the pedagogical approaches that local people consider valuable, this study can contribute to the slowing down or ceasing of the hegemonic policy transfer from donor organisations to the Global South.

## Critical Realism as an Analytical Framework

The capability approach is not an explanatory theory but a normative theory. Robeyns (2017) asserts the need for an additional theory if we are to explain why a phenomenon is observed. The critical realist theory of causation can offer a useful framework (Tao 2013) to seek an explanation as to why teachers value certain pedagogies, functionings and capabilities for their students.

Critical realism provides an ontological and epistemological lens in order to investigate a phenomenon to specifically seek out an underlying causal mechanism. It is derived from a critique of positivism and interpretivism for falling into an 'epistemic fallacy' or a tendency to reduce being (ontology) into knowing (epistemology) (Bhaskar 1998, 2008). To overcome the epistemic fallacy, critical realism proposes for research to occur at three levels: the empirical, the actual and the real. The empirical level involves the researchers' observations and experiences, whereas the actual level attends to the objects that exist and the events that occur. The real level searches for causes and effects in unseen structures and the mechanisms that are shown only in terms of their effect at the empirical level (Alderson 2013).

Critical realism considers the world as open, laminated systems where different forces constantly interact, change and compete with one another (Olvitt 2017). To better investigate the unseen, deeper mechanism in open systems, Bhaskar (1993) proposed the concept of the 'four-planar social being' which this research has adopted. The planar examines the following four dimensions:

1. Material transactions with nature;
2. Interpersonal subjective relationships on a small scale;
3. Relations with broader structures, mechanisms and power dynamics; and
4. Embodied personalities and the inner being of agents and ideas about the good life and society.

In this research, the capability approach with an emphasis on local voices offers a broad, overarching approach to explore valued pedagogies from teachers' perspectives; within this approach critical realism provides a framework for data analysis to provide 'explanatory potential' (Tao 2016, 45) to the capability approach.

## Research Context: Tanzania

Tanzania provides a rich and relevant setting in the exploration of valued capabilities. From its earliest period after its independence in 1961, the country's first president, Julius Nyerere, adopted a political spirit surprisingly analogous

to the capability approach (ESRF, UNDP, and MOF 2015). At the core of *ujamaa* exists the value of equality and freedom (Ibhawoh and Dibua 2003). He would have agreed with Sen who argues that to evaluate the success of society, 'substantive individual freedoms are taken to be critical' (1999, 18). Another concept that forms the basis of Nyerere's political thoughts includes equality. For Nyerere, the term 'development' cannot be reduced to just an economic increase, as he posited that 'human dignity and social equality' should be prioritised over 'the amassing of riches' (Nyerere 1968, 316).

These ideologies constitute the philosophy of *ujamaa*, and Nyerere as a former teacher of secondary school believed in the power of education to transform the nation. Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) enacted in 1967 endeavoured to nurture and spread the idea of *ujamaa*. It intended to strengthen village cooperation to work towards the common good and egalitarian society through the connection between the curriculum and local lives of the people as well as through 'learning by doing'. The democratisation of learning also constituted a major theme in ESR, defining the purpose of education as 'prepar[ing] people for their responsibilities as free workers and citizens in a free and democratic society' (1967, 388).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the arguably consonant basis of *ujamaa*/ESR with LCP, they were criticised to be idealistic and not feasible at that time (Cameron 1980; Urch 1989). The school system of Tanzania could only maintain the educational structure and processes inherited from the British (Bartlett and Vavrus 2013), and the fact-based examinations and authoritarianism in the classroom continued (Mosha 1990). Only seven years after the enactment of ESR Nyerere admitted to this reality in the Musoma Resolution: '[W]e must accept that most of our objectives have not been achieved' (Nyerere 2006, 102).

Albeit revealed to be unrealistic, decades later international agencies took similar principles of ESR to Tanzania within the global policy architecture of LCP. The country has espoused the concept and use of LCP and explicitly states its commitment to international schemes and a pro-LCP approach. For example, the Primary Education Development Programme aspired to meet the targets of the EFA and MDGs, emphasising 'a variety of inquiring methods, problem-solving, critical thinking and practical learning' (MoEVT 2006, 27). The embracing of LCP has continued, and currently the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology places an emphasis on the pedagogy. It facilitates 'improv[ing] the quality of teacher training to promote a more learner-centred approach' with an expected result that 'teacher trainers acquire and transmit pedagogical skills for learner-centred teaching' (MoEST 2017, 8). In the midst of LCP promotion among the global and national governments, this research sought a way to frame a locally appropriate pedagogy

beyond LCP through the capability approach and critical realism. The following research questions were asked:

1. What functionings and capabilities do primary teachers in Tanzania value for their students to achieve through education, and why?
2. What kind of pedagogical approach(es) do the teachers think will lead to the valued functionings and capabilities, and why?

### **Case Selection and Methods**

This study took place following my doctoral research investigating students' schooling experiences with LCP implementation in Tanzania (Author). Before and during my PhD study, I visited and stayed in the country several times as a volunteer, intern and researcher. As a foreign researcher from the Global North, together with a UK-based funding source, it meant that the research process may well have entailed particular power relations between myself and the research participants. This will be reflected on later in this paper.

The participants were selected through existing contacts from my doctoral fieldwork carried out in 2015. In the doctoral research, Dar es Salaam and Kigoma were selected as the top-performing and bottom-performing regions respectively based on the Primary School Leaving Examination results in line with the focus of the study. In the two regions, I spoke with district education officers to select 13 schools, from which 17 teachers participated in my previous research.

The current study adopted purposive sampling drawing from the above participants. I first contacted the Headteachers and teachers who had participated in my doctoral study. Five public schools out of the 13 expressed an interest and the willingness to take part in the present research. Additionally, some of the Headteachers in the five schools introduced me to their colleagues in nearby public schools. In total, 30 teachers in four schools in Dar es Salaam and five in Kigoma participated in the present research. Two research assistants helped me throughout data collection, especially as interpreters between Swahili and English during the interviews. Both research assistants were found through my personal contacts that I knew from my doctoral study, and they were reimbursed for their time and work.

Upon my arrival at the school, I first explained the research purpose and procedures to each of the Headteachers as the gatekeeper and to the teachers as potential participants. With the teachers' written and oral consent, the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder. The interviews explored topics including: what the teachers thought their students should achieve as a result of schooling; in order to help students have valued achievements, what kind of teaching and learning should take place in the classroom; and what successes and challenges were related to implementing the desired teaching and learning in the classroom. This research focused on the teachers' views and values and it



was not intended to compare these with their practices. Future research may juxtapose the two in order to tease out whether or not what teachers say agrees with what they do.

After transcribing the data, I thematically coded the texts first in an inductive manner without any framework in mind. This generated 45 codes, which were then classified hierarchically into 14 themes. They were further grouped into three bigger themes related to the capability approach, namely ‘capabilities/ achievements’, ‘constraints’ and ‘pedagogies’. In parallel with this coding but separately from it, the 45 individual codes were also put into the categories of critical realism’s four-planar social being. It eventually became clear that the categories under the capability approach and critical realism roughly corresponded to each other, albeit with overlaps and discrepancies for some codes. Specifically, what the teachers valued for their students came under the 4th plane whereas what pedagogy the teachers thought can fulfil their value for their students fell into the 2nd plane. The 1st and 3rd planes indicated material constraints and broader social mechanisms that appear to have shaped the teachers’ everyday teaching and their values respectively. The following sections will present findings in this order. All names are pseudonyms for anonymity.

#### **4th Plane: What the Teachers Valued for Their Students**

In the 4th dimension of exploring their inner beings, the transition to secondary school and subsequent further education is revealed to be the prevalent option that the teachers wished for their students to pursue. Secondary education was ‘the only opportunity’ that three female teachers in Kamari and Bunge could think of. The teacher in Bunge went on to say that ‘the main focus for the students is to get them into secondary school’.

Expectedly, the Primary School Leaving Examination has become teachers’ main focus. They seemed to feel a substantial responsibility related to preparing their students for the exam. A maths teacher in Green stressed:

The achievement of the pupils is to understand the formula given in the class. That’s a good achievement. They can apply the formula to questions in the exam so then they can pass the national examination.

Their perceived responsibility was to the extent that some teachers internalised their students’ successes and failures in the examination as if they were their own. A male teacher in Mzuzi said:

I am passionate about teaching because I want my students to succeed in their studies. [...] I see success when the students are able to perform in the exam – the national exam, the school exam. When they pass these exams, to me that is a success.

Conversely, if students were unsuccessful to pass the test, another teacher in Mzuzi could get himself down, explaining that ‘When they [students] fail to

go on to secondary school, when I see my students fail, it makes me sad. I feel sad if they are not given the choice to go to secondary school'. Such an intense focus on the examination led some teachers to recognise the uselessness of education in real society. A female teacher in Green did not think that the teaching content would contribute to students' future: 'For what I'm teaching them now, I don't think it'll help them [students] in their coming life. I think that I'm teaching them to help them answer the final examination', she revealed. Interestingly, despite the polar examination results between Dar es Salaam and Kigoma, the teachers' emphasis on examinations and secondary schools was prominent regardless of the regional differences.

Another domain that the teachers hoped for their students to achieve in is being able to sustain themselves economically. Due to limited employment opportunities in the formal sector in the country, self-employment and entrepreneurship have become two of the major options that people pursue, the teachers revealed. A female teacher in Green stated that their students should 'be able to know how to get capital to employ themselves'. Her colleague followed a similar line of thought:

They should be able to self-employ themselves, and not just to wait for someone to employ them. You know, the unemployment rate in Tanzania is high, very high. So they should be able to employ themselves, for example, in agriculture.

According to the teachers in Dar es Salaam, common sectors of self-employment included carpentry, tailoring, fishing, agriculture and running small shops, whereas the palm tree business, cattle and chicken keeping, soap making and tailoring were popular in Kigoma. A male teacher in Green gave examples of some of the choices found in employment:

One of them is small business, for example, running a shop like that one (the teacher pointed out a nearby shop). Also sports. They should be able to get themselves into sports. Then collective activities like agriculture, fishing, repairing and assembling bicycles.

Some interview narratives exemplify Sen's (1999) emphasis that education has both intrinsic and instrumental roles, in that it is not only the end itself but it also acts as a means to other opportunities and achievements. Some teachers highlighted the instrumental personal economic role of education (Robeyns 2017), particularly in relation to self-reliance as one desired achievement. 'Good education should prepare these pupils to be able to move away from poverty to a more prosperous life for their economic development,' said a male teacher in Green. Another teacher in Umoja defined good education as 'one that makes a person be self-reliant ... a person to be able to employ themselves'. A male teacher in Mzuzi elaborated on this point:

Teacher: Education that enables you to live your own life and to help others to live their lives, to me, is quality education.

Me: What do you mean by 'living their life'?

Teacher: Having an independent life without depending on others or depending on your parents. This comes from self-reliance because at school, we teach how to live your own life without depending on others.

Based on the narratives epitomising the importance of one's economic independence, it is reasonable to consider vocational training as another possible choice apart from going to secondary school, which 22 out of 30 teachers mentioned. One teacher in Green noted that vocational training centres offered skills-based education where students 'can learn and sharpen their hands-on skills'. Likewise, during her interview a female teacher in Kanene repeated the idea that primary graduates can and should 'go on to vocational training' to obtain skills in construction, electrical engineering and other professions. Although these teachers spoke of the value of vocational training, the recent Education Sector Development Plan in Tanzania augments its emphasis on universal basic education and demands that every primary graduate progresses to secondary school (MoEST 2017, 53–54). Nowadays, very few primary school leavers went on to vocational training, according to the male teacher in Mzuzi. A few teachers in Kamari and Kwanza lamented the abandoning of vocational training, as this limited the choices that students could have after primary school.

## 2nd Plane: What Pedagogical Approaches the Teachers Value

What pedagogical approaches, then, can help students make a successful transition to further education and to sustain themselves economically? The interviewed teachers predominantly underscored two forms of teaching and learning: participatory methods (*ufundishaji shirikishi*) and learning by doing (*kujifunza kwa vitendo*). Analysis through the 2nd plane of the social being illustrates what the teachers meant by these pedagogies. The teachers explained them particularly in terms of social interactions between the teachers and students, and their respective roles in the classroom (Olvitt 2017). Student involvement – where 'students are engaged in doing, learning and teaching (a male teacher in Mzuzi) – characterises the participatory methods. There, teachers become a catalyst, as a teacher in Siha described:

A catalyst is when you [teachers] start something but you leave others to do it. That's a catalyst. So you give the students a topic and allow them to start their learning. You only help when there is a need but you let them decide which direction their learning is going to take.

For students to lead their learning, teachers needed to understand them and know their prior knowledge. One female teacher in Kamari illustrated that a characteristic of a good teacher was to 'know their students, their character

and way of life'. Communication between the teachers and students and among the students through questions and answers (Q&A) and discussions helped this process. One male teacher in Umoja believed that students were not empty-headed and that it was the teachers' task to introduce a topic and to give them opportunities to discuss and brainstorm. Another male teacher in Mzuzi had 'permanent discussion groups' in his class with a Chair and a Secretary. Similar to the teacher in Mwamini, he gave each group questions, then allowed them to discuss and reach a conclusion. These teachers' willingness to let students lead their learning may present a tension concerning their exclusive focus on secondary schools and exams. A future study comparing teachers' accounts with their behaviour can help unpack which functionings they prioritise and why.

In addition to participatory methods, learning by doing was described as another 'best method' by some teachers. One female teacher in Mwamini noted, 'The best method is learning by doing. I use real-life examples like our national flag when I teach the symbols of different colours'. Likewise, a male teacher in Kanene embraced teaching and learning through 'songs, drawing, collecting things, meaning learning by doing'. Another male teacher in Green gave a specific example of learning by doing that could help his students to employ themselves:

When teaching about small business, it's nice to take the students to a local market and to let them see how small business activities are going on. How are they conducted? How are they making profits? How is profit obtained? How do you redact it from your capital? Something like that.

This teacher had the largest number of students up to 400 among the interviewed teachers. Because it would be difficult to take them to the market all at once, he told to make this activity an assignment instead. The students were asked to go to the market on a weekend and to observe what happened. 'When they came back on Monday, they shared what they saw. From there, we learned together'.

Such a way of learning by doing or practical teaching would lead students to self-employment which eventually will help them to become self-reliant, as elaborated on by a male teacher in Kwanza:

Practical education is most important for our students to live in society. If they are taught practically, that's a good education. [...] The curriculum should be designed to include entrepreneurship so then the students are able to employ themselves. If entrepreneurship is taught, then it will make the students be self-reliant.

Thus in order to realise the achievements that these teachers valued for their students as presented in the 4th plane, the 2nd dimension highlights the teachers' valued teaching and learning approaches through interactions between teachers and students. Participatory methods encourage students to exchange

their ideas with their peers through discussions. The teachers also stressed the importance of communication between the two agents to learn of students' prior knowledge. Through learning by doing, the teachers got students 'do' the activities themselves. Practical teaching through singing, observing businesses and using real-life materials could enhance their self-employability after education, according to the teachers.

### **1st Plane: Material and Physical Constraints**

Albeit ideal, it was not easy for the teachers to practise participatory methods or learning by doing. The 1st aspect of the four-planar social being, the material relations with nature, explains the various constraints to appropriate these pedagogies. Of the three groups of conversion factors that Robeyns (2017, 46) articulates – namely the personal, social and environmental conversion factors – the teachers have raised issues significantly related to the third factor. They characterised the environmental conversion factors as constraints rather than enablers for appropriating participatory methods and learning by doing.

Two most cited constraints include large classes and a lack of teaching materials and facilities. One male teacher in Kwanza complained that a crowded classroom coupled with a shortage of teaching aids did not allow him to execute even basic teaching and learning:

In my class, there are 195 students but there is only one English book that is used by me. Now, what kind of teaching and learning can take place in such a class? There should be only 45 students in one class according to the policy.

The teacher continued to reveal that he gave up on participatory methods but employed lectures. He usually wrote things on the blackboard which his students copied. He also avoided giving them a lot of homework but gave them only a few questions as an assignment because he could not mark all of the students' answers. Another teacher in Green had a similar coping strategy:

Good teaching can depend on the number of pupils. If you have a large number of pupils in your class, then a good method of teaching is to teach them through lectures. Because there are too many students, how many groups can you make in the class? You can make many groups but it is not easy to reach each group. So you have to use the lecture method. It is a good way.

Such a desperate situation is not new but it has persisted for some decades (Barrett 2007; Vavrus 2009). Rather than being improved, it seems to have gotten worse. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2017) has re-emphasised free primary education since 2016. This has contributed to the exponential increase of the enrolment rate by 14.8% between 2015 and 2017 (MoEST 2017, 20), despite the recommended number of students per class being 45 (ibid 54). The participating schools had a class size ranging from 74

in Mwamini up to 400 in Green, with more than half of the teachers teaching over 100 students at once. Without increasing the number of trained teachers, classrooms and adequate teaching materials, these teachers will continue to face acute environmental constraints.

Another difficulty that the teachers encountered in their everyday teaching and learning pertained to a personal conversion factor related to students' health. Some students came to school without eating breakfast, and others had only two meals per day. Their hunger prohibited their learning; as one male teacher in Mzuzi remarked, due to their lack of energy, students did not participate in class activities even if the teacher tried to make them active. In Bunge, students would go even for up to two days without food; one teacher observed children fainted during her class.

Thus the 1st plane demonstrates the prevalence of environmental and personal conversion factors that seemed to limit the teachers' application of their valued pedagogies. This begs the question of why they valued participatory methods and learning by doing in such a circumstance. The next section interrogates this by situating the teachers' accounts within the larger social and economic structures, mechanisms and power dynamics.

### **3rd Plane: Why Teachers Valued Participatory Methods and Learning by Doing**

The policy diffusion of LCP has been prominent in Tanzania's national policies for the past two decades as discussed in the introduction. A few of the interviewed teachers recognised the increased priority placed on LCP-related activities by the government. One female teacher in Kamari stated that 'the syllabus nowadays encourages learning by doing'. Another teacher in Mzuzi also pointed out the effect of the recent policy change:

The participatory method has been taught in teachers colleges in the past. Recently, this has been emphasised in every school. When the new curriculum was introduced in 2017, the participatory method became key in that curriculum. Today, when inspectors come to monitor us, even if there are too many students in the classroom, we must show how the participatory method is implemented in the classroom.

This excerpt demonstrates the power relations that drive the teacher's preference towards participatory methods to some extent. He was aware of the policy emphasis on LCP and seemed willing to apply the approach for the sake of school inspections. This example epitomises Bartlett and Vavrus's point (2017) that power dynamics at play between the global, national and local policy actors affect the social norms of the locales regarding what is 'appropriate' within a given context.

At the same time, under the global policy architecture of LCP diffusion, teachers in Tanzania are also required to adhere to the national policy agenda that may diverge from LCP principles. Several authors have pointed out the dominance of factual knowledge tested in the official examinations in Tanzania (Bartlett and Vavrus 2013). The exams weigh the memorisation of information rather than the ability to think critically or to solve problems through peer discussions or hands-on learning. A thorough analysis of secondary exams by Bartlett and Vavrus (2013) revealed the prevalence of test items with ‘multiple-choice, matching, true or false and sentence-completion’ (98) which require one ‘correct’ answer based on factual knowledge.

To answer my question of why participatory methods and learning by doing were seen of as ‘good teaching’, several teachers cited their contribution to memorisation. One male teacher in Kwanza asserted that participatory methods would help students to remember because they would not forget the information easily if they draw pictures in their notebooks. Likewise, a teacher in Mzuzi thought that ‘By practising by hand, it makes them memorise what they have learned. Memory is very important. Students can’t understand without memorising’.

The teachers’ purpose of employing participatory methods seems to disagree with the normative understanding of LCP policies which encourage student engagement through ‘the active development of knowledge rather than its mere transfer and/or passive learning experiences’ (Barth 2015 cited in UNESCO 2017, 55). The teachers in this study might have held their immediate interest in educating students due to the fact that ‘all teachers expect his or her students to pass exams’ (a male teacher in Siha). With the memorisation-based testing culture prevalent in the country, their understanding of participatory methods and learning by doing may have been altered from the original intention of the globalised LCP. This exemplifies the embeddedness of pedagogy within the international and national policy architecture, in that the local, national and global ideals interact to produce a unique understanding of a policy diverged from the original expectations and meanings.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this research may present similar consequences to those observed by earlier research undertaken in Tanzania. Teacher participants in Barrett’s (2007) study espoused the word ‘participation’ (*ushirikishaji*), which the author claims to have become a buzzword. Student teachers in Vavrus’s (2009) study showed an understanding of the LCP principles after a series of teaching sessions on constructivist pedagogy; however, they did not execute their knowledge in the real world of the classroom. What the present research brings in new insights into existing knowledge pertains to the approach that it has taken. This research utilised the capability approach to find out what the

teachers value in terms of the children's achievements and related pedagogies, instead of setting LCP as an *a priori* framework for exploring valued pedagogies. Even with this attempt, this study has similar results to the other studies examining how and to what extent teachers have appropriated the globally-embraced LCP in low-income countries.

The analysis of the valued functionings, capabilities and pedagogies illuminates the layered and complex reality that interacts on the four planes between the empirical, actual and real levels, and across time and space. The findings imply that the teachers seemed to value pedagogies consonant with LCP tenets, indicating some effect resulting from the global endeavour of pedagogical remodelling. The teachers' understanding of participatory methods and learning by doing also seemed to be affected by the structure of the country's assessment system, leading them to regard memorisation as a notable goal of the teaching and learning approaches. These findings indicate that national and international education policies influence what the teachers believe they have reason to value, which may not be in accordance with what they genuinely value. In a laminated open system, structure and agency dialectically interact across time and space (Alderson 2013). Critical realism recognises that powerful, enduring structures pre-exist and outlast agents, which human agency is thrown into. Archer (2003) highlights the process of how agency is constrained by larger structures, other agents and material conditions. The unseen global and national structure, mechanisms and power dynamics play out to shape and reshape local teachers' values, agency, will and choices.

The capability approach promotes public discussions and dialogues in search of what people have reason to value. The application of critical realism in this research poses a significant implication for the way that the dialogue is carried out. On one hand, the findings highlighted adaptive preferences in that people may express their desires and preferences based on their circumstances and the social norms surrounding them (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011). These norms may not be just or good. Donor organisations and their accompanying education policies are so influential that this enduring structure may well affect people's reasons to value particular functionings and capabilities.

On the other hand, the current study also underscores one particular methodological consequence over the course of conducting discussions and dialogues. As a foreign researcher from the Global North, I remained an outsider throughout data gathering. Although I had somewhat lasting relationships with a few of the teacher participants from my previous research, my visits to the schools were for only one to three day(s). Coupled with the necessary translation between Swahili and English, it did not provide enough time and space to build close and natural relationships with most of the teacher participants. This might have resulted in some teachers perceiving me as a person attached to either the international or national government. In fact, one female teacher at Green refused to provide an answer to my query on the role of government in



overcoming barriers to teaching and learning. She explicitly stated, ‘I cannot comment anything [on that because] with the current government, if I say something, I’ll be taken very very far away from my family’. This may typify a certain research relationship that might shape what and how the participants communicated with me. A researcher’s positionality and researcher-researched relationships can affect the dialogical process and what people say they have reason to value.

Taken together, the existing power dynamics between different policy levels and between the research participants and researcher can intensify the hegemonic power that has persisted over time. Even the very endeavour of appreciating the pedagogy that people have reason to value may not overcome the ideological colonisation through the pedagogy attached to LCP implementation (Tabulawa 2003, 2013). The integration of the capability approach and critical realist analysis has elucidated potential restrictions that the reproduction of power might impose on a dialogical process. How to examine the genuine choice of what, how and why related to pedagogy in the Global South requires further research.

Although this research has centred on teachers’ viewpoints, Sen (2009) argues that capabilities and functionings are subject to what the individual and groups value. Schools are socially situated within communities, cultural values and physical settings. Different social groups construct reality differently (Hart 2014). Thus elucidating the valued functionings, capabilities and pedagogies that other educational stakeholders – including children, parents and communities who might experience less of an influence related to hegemonic policies – have reason to value is also a necessity when seeking for locally relevant pedagogy in a given context.

## Notes on contributors

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## Note

1. Whether and how present-day teachers in Tanzania accept the philosophy of *ujamaa*/ESR, and the possibility of exploring a connection between *ujamaa*/ESR, LCP and teachers' understanding of 'good pedagogy', is discussed elsewhere (Author).

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