



From curriculum intentions to classroom practice: Enactment of music curriculum in teaching and learning practices in Mwanza Region, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the enactment of music curriculum intentions in teaching and learning practices in Tanzania, focusing on how curriculum expectations are interpreted, translated, and adapted within actual classroom contexts. The study adopted the Context–Input–Process–Product (CIPP) model to support it. The study was guided by a qualitative phenomenological research design, which enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and perceptions of curriculum implementation. Purposive sampling was used to select 13 participants, comprising two vice college principals, three college students, one Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) official, five college tutors, and two quality assurance officials. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting 30–60 minutes and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's approach. The findings reveal a persistent disjuncture between curriculum intentions and classroom practice. Although tutors demonstrated awareness of learner-centred and competency-based curriculum expectations, enactment was constrained by uncertainty over current curriculum documents, continued reliance on older syllabi, language and translation ambiguities, inadequate musical instruments, limited practical pedagogical competence, large classes, insufficient instructional time, and demanding content. Consequently, teaching was predominantly theory-oriented, with lectures, handouts, note-taking, and examination preparation receiving greater emphasis than singing, instrumental performance, composition, improvisation, and other participatory activities. Assessment practices intensified this disjuncture because examination content largely emphasised theoretical knowledge, encouraging tutors to prioritise examinable material over practical musical competencies. The study critically demonstrated that the policy–practice gap cannot be explained simply by tutors' resistance or inadequate awareness; rather, curriculum enactment is a negotiated process shaped by institutional conditions, professional judgement, resource availability, assessment demands, and accountability structures. The findings therefore challenge the assumption that formally stated curriculum intentions automatically translate into classroom practice. The study concludes that meaningful music curriculum enactment requires alignment among curriculum policy, tutor preparation, teaching resources, classroom conditions, assessment practices, and quality assurance mechanisms. It recommends clearer curriculum communication, sustained music-specific professional development, improved access to instruments and specialised facilities, practical and performance-oriented assessment.

Key words: Curriculum Intentions, Classroom Practice, Learning, Music Curriculum, Teaching, Tanzania

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, education systems globally have advanced curriculum reforms with the aim of strengthening quality, relevance, equity, and effectiveness in learning outcomes (Eden et al., 2024). However, policy and curriculum intentions do not automatically translate into classroom realities. Empirical research consistently shows that even well-designed reforms may underperform when implementation processes fail to respond adequately to local institutional capacity and socio-cultural realities (Gouëdard et al., 2020). This means that understanding education reform requires more than examining curriculum documents; it requires studying how reforms are enacted by practitioners within everyday teaching and learning settings.

A central challenge in many systems is the policy–practice gap, an enduring mismatch between curriculum intentions and what actually happens in schools and colleges (Angrist & Dercon, 2024; Karim, 2020; Martin et al.,

2025). This gap is not purely technical; it reflects the complex, political, and interpretive nature of implementation. Policy is enacted through negotiation, interpretation, contestation, and adaptation among multiple actors situated in specific institutional and cultural contexts (Ozga, 2000, as cited in Hay, 2025). Therefore, curriculum intentions may be reworked during enactment, producing differences between reform designers' expectations and teachers' day-to-day instructional practices. As a result, policy–practice alignment becomes an important evaluative lens for determining whether curriculum directives are genuinely reflected in classroom routines and assessment practices (Harris & Jones, 2018).

Policy–practice alignment is increasingly treated as a framework for evaluating how intended reforms are realized in teaching and learning practices, moving beyond a view of curriculum as merely a formal written document (Harris & Jones, 2018; Walsh, 2024). Karim (2020) and Walsh (2024) argue that alignment is achieved when instructional practices and assessment approaches embody curriculum directives. Studies also suggest that achieving such alignment remains difficult for many teachers due to limited capacity, inadequate resources, and insufficient professional support (Walsh, 2024). These implementation dynamics are visible in subjects requiring practical, performance, and specialist pedagogies—such as music education, where successful curriculum enactment depends on contextual enabling conditions.

Music education provides a critical case for examining enactment because its effective delivery relies on specialist teaching, adequate facilities, and assessment systems that prioritise practical demonstration rather than rote memorisation (Biasutti et al., 2022). Research in creative arts education further indicates that student achievement in music is strongly mediated by infrastructure that enables practice-based learning (Biasutti et al., 2026). International evidence similarly suggests that well-intentioned policies fail without sustained investment in teacher preparation, material resources, and institutional implementation capacity (Hay, 2025). In contexts where music is marginalised or delivered by non-specialists, curriculum intentions may be enacted in ways that reduce the depth, frequency, and quality of practical music learning experiences—thereby widening the policy–practice gap.

In Tanzania, the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 (revised in 2023) positions competency-based learning and holistic development, including aesthetic and creative education such as music (URT, 2023). Consistent with this policy, curriculum and syllabi updates developed by the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEST) emphasise practical, learner-centred music instruction, including singing, instrumental performance, composition, collaborative work, and continuous assessment (MoEST, 2025). Nevertheless, despite these curricular intentions, implementation challenges persist, particularly in areas such as teacher preparedness (especially in primary teacher education where music is included only within broader Arts and Sports rather than as a distinct field), limited access to instruments and rehearsal spaces, and constraints that can cause delivery to revert to theory-heavy or exam-focused approaches (Mgaiwa, 2018). This situation is consistent with NECTA indicators showing low participation and poor performance in CSEE music and the limited number of secondary schools offering the music exam, reflecting structural and institutional barriers to full curriculum institutionalization. The knowledge gap, therefore, lies in the lack of context-specific evidence on how, in Mwanza Region, music curriculum intentions are actually enacted in teaching and learning practices, and how factors such as teacher training coverage, resource availability, and institutional support shape or constrain the alignment between curriculum directives and classroom enactment.

1.1 Research Objective

This study intends to determine how music curriculum intentions are enacted in teaching and learning practices in Mwanza Region, Tanzania, and to identify the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder alignment between curriculum directives and classroom delivery.

1.2 Research Question

How are music curriculum intentions enacted in teaching and learning practices in Mwanza Region, Tanzania, and what contextual factors facilitate or hinder alignment between curriculum directives and classroom delivery?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Conceptual Model Underpinning the Study

This study is guided by the Context–Input–Process–Product (CIPP) model developed by Daniel Stufflebeam in the 1960s to support systematic evaluation of educational programmes and their implementation. In the context of the study titled “From Curriculum Intentions to Classroom Practice: Enactment of Music Curriculum in Teaching and Learning Practices in Mwanza Region, Tanzania,” the CIPP model provides a suitable framework for examining how curriculum intentions are translated into actual teaching and learning practices. The Context component focuses on the

educational environment in which the music curriculum is enacted, including national curriculum policies and guidelines, institutional expectations, school or college leadership, and the local conditions influencing music education in Mwanza Region. The Input component examines the resources and preparedness available for implementation, including qualified music teachers or tutors, musical instruments, teaching and learning materials, facilities, time allocation, and institutional support. The Process component is central to the study because it examines how curriculum intentions are enacted in actual classroom practices, including teaching methods, practical musical activities, learner participation, assessment approaches, and the extent to which teachers follow or adapt curriculum requirements. The Product component considers the outcomes of this enactment, particularly learners' acquisition of musical knowledge and practical competencies, creativity, participation, and achievement of the intended curriculum outcomes. The model guided the study in examining whether and how the intended music curriculum is reflected in classroom practice, what contextual conditions shape its enactment, and how teachers interpret curriculum directives.

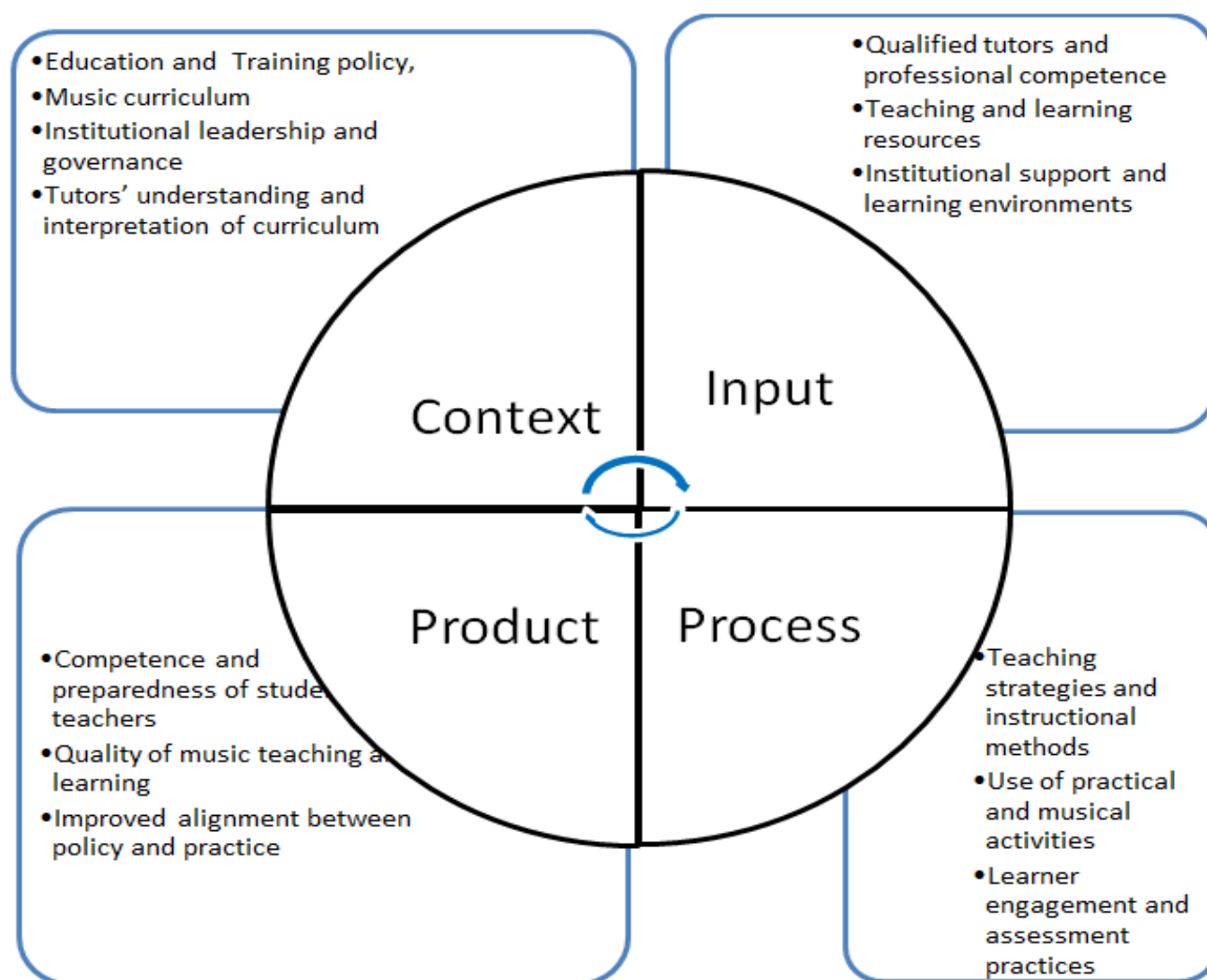


Figure 1
Conceptual Model Developed by the Researcher through Reviewed Literature

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical literature indicates that curriculum implementation is strongly influenced by the extent to which policy intentions are translated into actual classroom practices. Studies show that well-designed educational policies may fail to achieve their intended outcomes when implementation is weak, institutional capacity is limited, and teachers lack adequate pedagogical support. Evidence further suggests that alignment requires teacher preparedness, effective leadership, instructional resources, and appropriate monitoring systems. Kennedy and Robinson (2023), for example, found that teachers often experience difficulties aligning classroom practices with pedagogical reforms because of limited capacity, inadequate resources, and insufficient professional support. Similarly, research reviewed by Karim (2020) and Walsh (2024) indicates that curriculum alignment is evident when curriculum directives are reflected in teaching practices and assessment methods.

Empirical evidence from music education demonstrates that the implementation of curriculum intentions depends on specialised teachers, appropriate facilities, practical instructional resources, and assessment practices that emphasise demonstration and performance. Biasutti et al. (2022) found that effective music instruction requires specialist teachers, adequate facilities, and assessment systems that support practical learning, while Busobozi and Isabirye (2026) associate effective music learning with infrastructure that facilitates practice-based instruction. Evidence from Africa indicates that music is frequently marginalised, resulting in limited instructional time, inadequate facilities, insufficient teacher preparation, and reliance on non-specialist teachers. Consequently, classroom delivery differs from curriculum expectations, particularly where schools lack musical instruments, rehearsal spaces, and qualified educators.

In Tanzania, available evidence points to a persistent gap between the intentions of competency-based music curricula and their enactment in educational settings. Although the revised curriculum emphasises singing, instrumental performance, composition, collaborative activities, practical projects, continuous assessment, and experiential learning, teacher preparedness, infrastructure, instructional resources, and institutional support continue to constrain implementation. The literature indicates that teaching may consequently become theory-oriented and examination-focused rather than practical and learner-cantered. Omari (2021) and Sammut (2024) particularly indicate that competency-based curriculum intentions are often constrained by limited practical implementation, while NECTA evidence from 2018–2023 shows low participation and poor performance in music, alongside concerns about qualified teachers, resources, institutional support, and the marginalisation of music. However, the existing evidence does not sufficiently explain how curriculum intentions are actually enacted in classroom teaching and learning practices in Mwanza Region or how local contextual factors facilitate or hinder such alignment. This provides a clear empirical gap for the proposed study.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach guided by a phenomenological research design to explore how music curriculum intentions are translated into actual teaching and learning practices in Mwanza Region, Tanzania. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to obtain rich, contextualised accounts of how teachers and institutional leaders understand, interpret, and enact curriculum directives in their everyday educational practices rather than measuring implementation numerically.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design enabled the researcher to explore participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding the enactment of the music curriculum, including how curriculum expectations concerning learner-centred teaching, singing, instrumental performance, composition, practical activities, collaboration, and assessment are reflected in classroom practice. Practically, the approach enabled the study to examine the extent to which teachers follow, interpret, adapt, or depart from curriculum intentions and how contextual conditions such as teacher preparedness, availability of teaching and learning resources, institutional support, time allocation, and assessment requirements shape classroom delivery.

3.3 Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted in Mwanza Region, located in northwestern Tanzania along the southern shores of Lake Victoria. Mwanza was selected because it provides an appropriate context for examining the relationship between formal music curriculum intentions and their enactment in educational settings, while reflecting diverse institutional and contextual conditions that may influence curriculum delivery. The study focused on College A, where music education is implemented through teaching and learning activities involving both theoretical and practical components. The site was considered relevant because it provided an opportunity to examine curriculum enactment directly among educators responsible for translating curriculum requirements into instructional practices. The target population for the study was the college vice principle, TIE official, college students, college graduates and college tutors, who were purposively selected.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants who had direct experience and professional responsibilities related to music curriculum implementation. The study involved six participants, comprising four music tutors and two college principals. Music tutors were selected because they directly interpret curriculum requirements, prepare lessons, conduct classroom and practical activities, engage learners, and assess learning outcomes. College principals were included because of their responsibilities for institutional leadership, curriculum supervision, planning, resource allocation, and creating conditions that support curriculum implementation.

Their perspectives complemented tutors' accounts by providing institutional-level explanations of factors influencing the translation of curriculum intentions into practice.

3.5 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the six participants, each lasting approximately 30–60 minutes. This method was appropriate because it enabled participants to describe in detail their experiences of interpreting and implementing music curriculum requirements in actual teaching and learning situations. In practical application, the interviews explored how curriculum intentions are translated into lesson planning, teaching methods, practical music activities, learner participation, assessment, and the use of available resources. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to probe emerging issues concerning the extent of alignment between curriculum directives and classroom practices, teachers' adaptations of curriculum requirements, institutional support, teacher preparedness, and contextual factors that facilitate or hinder effective curriculum enactment (Knott et al., 2022).

3.6 Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analysed thematically following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012). The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts to familiarise the researcher with participants' accounts, followed by systematic coding of meaningful statements related to curriculum intentions, classroom practices, and contextual influences. Similar codes were compared and grouped into broader categories and themes representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences. In practical terms, thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify how music curriculum intentions are enacted in teaching and learning, areas where classroom practices align or diverge from curriculum expectations, and the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder such alignment. The analysis therefore moved beyond simply identifying resource challenges to explaining the process through which curriculum intentions are interpreted and transformed into actual classroom practices.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study to protect participants and maintain the integrity of the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant academic research authority before data collection, while permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant education authorities and the administration of College A in Mwanza Region. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, interview procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw before providing informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning identification codes rather than using participants' real names and by removing identifying information from interview transcripts and the final report. These procedures were particularly important because the study involved a small number of participants within a single institution, where individual participants could otherwise be easily identifiable.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Enactment of Music Curriculum Intentions in Teaching and Learning Practices

Curriculum enactment in music education is shaped by interacting institutional, classroom, organisational, and resource-related factors. Tutors' interpretations of curriculum policies and the conditions within Teachers' Colleges influence how curriculum intentions are translated into practice, resulting in variations across institutions. This section therefore examines how national music curriculum intentions are interpreted and enacted by institutional actors and how these interpretations shape teaching practices, learners' experiences, and assessment processes within Teachers' Colleges.

Music curriculum awareness and interpretations among implementers: The findings show a clear gap between national music curriculum policy and its implementation in Teachers' Colleges, characterised by limited awareness, outdated curriculum documents, and uncertainty about the officially approved syllabus. While policymakers were familiar with recent reforms, many tutors continued using older syllabi because they considered them more comprehensive and practical. Consequently, tutors relied heavily on their professional judgement to interpret, adapt, or selectively implement curriculum requirements. This indicates that curriculum implementation is not uniform or automatic but involves negotiation and adaptation shaped by teachers' experiences and perceived instructional needs. The findings therefore highlight the need for clearer policy dissemination, regular tutor training, updated and practical curriculum materials, and greater involvement of teachers in curriculum development and reform. Moreover, institutional leadership confirmed this contested curriculum landscape. The Vice Principal of College A noted:

The curriculum exists but is contested. There is confusion between the curriculum and the syllabus. The music curriculum is embedded in a broader teacher-training document that covers arts, sports, and sciences. However, a standalone music syllabus was developed in 2013 to align with other subjects, yet tutors reject it and instead adhere to the 1980s certificate-level syllabus". (Interview with the Vice-principal College A on the 17th of April 2024).

Similarly, another participant highlighted;

We have undergone about five changes and are now transitioning to a sixth. This inconsistency makes it difficult to fully achieve the set objectives" (Interview with a tutor of College C, on the 29th^{of} April 2024).

The findings indicate that music curriculum awareness and interpretation among implementers are characterised by confusion, contestation, and inconsistent understanding of curriculum documents. Institutional leaders and tutors recognised that several curriculum reforms had been introduced, but differences between the broader teacher-training curriculum and the standalone music syllabus created uncertainty about which document should guide teaching. The continued use of the 1980s syllabus, despite the development of a 2013 music syllabus, further demonstrates that tutors interpreted curriculum reforms according to their professional experiences and perceptions of relevance. Frequent curriculum changes also contributed to uncertainty and made it difficult for implementers to maintain a clear understanding of current requirements. Overall, the findings suggest that limited and inconsistent awareness of curriculum reforms influences how tutors interpret and enact the music curriculum in practice.

Effective classroom instructional practices in music education: The findings indicate that teacher-centred and theory-based instruction was the dominant strategy for enacting music curriculum intentions in teaching and learning practices in Tanzanian Teachers' Colleges. Although the curriculum emphasises practical, learner-centred, and competency-based learning through performance, composition, listening, and improvisation, tutors mainly relied on lectures, handouts, and group discussions, with limited practical musical activities. This practice was partly associated with tutors' limited performance skills and confidence, leading them to emphasise theoretical content over practical demonstration. Consequently, there was a notable gap between the intended competency-based music curriculum and its classroom enactment, suggesting the need for more practical teaching approaches, tutor professional development, and stronger emphasis on music-specific pedagogical skills. From the students' perspective, the participants from College A stated:

Our teachers focus more on the theoretical side of music. We spend most of our time writing notes and reading from books. We rarely get to play instruments or sing during class. Sometimes we go through a whole term without touching any instrument. (FGD with student teachers, College A, on the 15th of April 2024).

Similarly, another student in the FGD revealed that:

For example, a student might be told that mwafaka (harmony) means two or more voices singing simultaneously, but without demonstration, they won't understand how to sing it. Similarly, many tutors cannot demonstrate how to play basic instruments like the flute or even how to hold a Kinubi (violin) while playing. These gaps are major reasons students fail (FGD with Student-teachers of College C on the 29th of April 2024).

Again, a graduate teacher from college C stated that:

Regarding the second subtopic, there are significant translation issues across language versions, particularly in sentence structure in the Swahili syllabus and in content discrepancies. A problematic heading in the Swahili version is "UpigajiwaAlasahihizaMuziki" ("Playing proper musical instruments"). This phrase contains structural flaws. The ambiguity stems from the adjective "sahihi" (proper) in the Swahili syllabus heading. Grammatically, "sahihi" should modify the immediately following noun "Ala" (instruments), but its placement after "Upigaji" (playing) creates syntactic confusion: does it emphasise proper technique (the manner of playing) or proper instruments (their quality/type)? This unnecessary complexity could be resolved by simplifying the phrase to "UpigajiwaalazaMuziki" (Playing musical instruments), which would convey the intended meaning without ambiguity (Interview with a graduate teacher from School C on the 30th of April 2024).

Further corroboration was provided by a key informant from the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), who stated:

In most colleges, students do not have access to real musical instruments. Tutors show students the photographs of instruments, or sometimes images from mobile phones, and explain how to play them. Students never get to handle the instruments themselves (Interview with a TIE official on the 10th of May 2024).

The findings indicate that limited practical exposure, inadequate tutor pedagogical skills, language and translation ambiguities, and shortages of musical instruments constrain the effective enactment of music curriculum intentions. Students reported that instruction was largely theoretical, with few opportunities to sing, play instruments, or experience practical demonstrations, while some tutors lacked the skills to demonstrate basic musical techniques. In

addition, inconsistencies and ambiguities between Swahili and English curriculum versions made some content difficult to interpret and teach effectively. The lack of actual musical instruments further weakened practical learning, as students often relied on photographs or mobile-phone images instead of handling and playing instruments. Overall, these challenges limit the implementation of competency-based and practical music learning envisioned in the curriculum.

Using effective assessment practices in music teaching: Effective assessment practices in music teaching are important because they help measure learners' theoretical knowledge, practical skills, creativity, performance, and musical understanding. They also provide feedback to improve teaching and learning and ensure that assessment reflects the competency-based intentions of the music curriculum. This dynamic was further confirmed through examination review observations, which showed repeated patterns of questions focusing on definitions such as harmony, rhythm, and notation rather than performance-based or creative tasks. Consequently, tutors reported adapting their teaching to align with examinable content, reinforcing a cycle where theoretical instruction dominates classroom practice. On this regard, one of the student-teachers explained:

We focus mostly on what NECTA examines. Since the exam is theory-based, practical music activities receive little attention. Teachers often focus more on theory than practice, making it very difficult for students to grasp a subject like music without hands-on learning (FGD with Student-teachers at College C, 29th April, 2024).

Similarly, a Vice Principal explained this institutional constraint, as he had this to say:

Our success is judged by examination results. Naturally, tutors prioritise what contributes to those results, even when the curriculum suggests more practical engagement. It becomes difficult to balance when assessment does not fully reflect practice" (Interview with the Vice Principal of College B on the 14th of May 2024).

In connection to this, one officer stated:

Very few QA officers specialise in music, so inspections mainly focus on general issues rather than subject-specific practice... I am not sure if we have even up to four officers with nationwide expertise in music" (Interview with the QA Officer, on the 25th of August 2024).

The findings indicate that assessment practices strongly influence how music is taught, with greater emphasis placed on theoretical knowledge than practical skills, creativity, and performance. Examination reviews showed that assessments mainly focused on definitions and concepts such as harmony, rhythm, and notation, encouraging tutors to prioritise examinable content at the expense of hands-on musical activities. Institutional pressure to achieve good examination results further reinforced this tendency, while the limited availability of quality-assurance officers with specialised music expertise reduced effective monitoring of subject-specific assessment and teaching practices. Consequently, the mismatch between assessment practices and the competency-based intentions of the music curriculum contributes to the continued dominance of theory-oriented instruction.

Policy-practice alignment gaps in the curriculum enactment: Policy-practice alignment is important because it ensures that curriculum intentions, teaching practices, assessment, and learning outcomes are consistent. It helps identify gaps between what education policies prescribe and what is actually implemented in classrooms, supporting effective curriculum implementation, improved teaching quality, and achievement of intended learning competencies. Understanding the extent to which curriculum policy intentions align with actual classroom practices in Music Education at Tanzania's Teachers' Colleges, with particular attention to the gaps that arise during implementation. The interview data revealed that tutors generally had a sound awareness of the curriculum policy expectations. Rather than reflecting ignorance of policy intent, the gap between knowledge and practice appears to stem from the tension between policy ideals and the material conditions of teaching. Pertaining to this dynamic, one tutor explained it directly:

The curriculum aims to involve students in their learning. However, this can be hard to achieve because there is often not enough time, and the syllabus is demanding. As a result, tutors usually rely on lectures to cover all the material, making it difficult to use more student-focused, participatory teaching methods. (Interview with a Tutor of College B on the 25th August 2024).

Similarly, another tutor voiced a related dimension of this adaptive logic:

Sometimes you know what the policy expects, but when you are teaching music, the classroom situation forces you to adjust. The curriculum calls for us to involve students in practical activities such as singing, playing instruments, composing, and performing, but that is not always possible. We often have only a few instruments, limited resources, and not enough time to give every student practical experience. Students also vary in their levels of musical knowledge and skills. Because of these challenges, we sometimes simplify lessons and spend more time explaining ideas rather than doing practical music activities. In these cases, we do what we can to complete the syllabus and ensure that students understand the basics. (Interview with a Tutor of College A, on the 28th of August 2024).

Again, a tutor from College C explained this tension:

In training, we are introduced to learner-centred methods, and we understand them well in theory. However, when we go into real teaching situations, especially with large classes and limited resources, it becomes very difficult to apply them as demonstrated. In most cases, we end up simplifying and relying more on lecture-based methods because that is manageable in practice (Interview with a Tutor of College C on the 28th of August 2024).

Likewise, a Quality Assurance (QA) official also supported this view and took it further, showing that the problem was not just about training but it was accepted at the institutional level:

We expect tutors to demonstrate learner-centred pedagogy during teaching practice observations, but we also recognise that implementation is often constrained by contextual realities such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials, and time pressure. In many cases, tutors are aware of what is expected but struggle to consistently enact it (Interview with the QA Officer on the 25th of August 2024).

The findings show that policy-practice gaps in music curriculum enactment arise mainly from contextual and institutional constraints rather than lack of policy awareness. Although tutors generally understood the curriculum's expectations for learner-centred and practical teaching, large classes, limited instruments and teaching materials, demanding syllabi, and insufficient time made consistent implementation difficult. Consequently, tutors often adapted the curriculum by simplifying content and relying on lecture-based methods to complete the syllabus. Overall, the findings indicate that effective curriculum implementation requires not only clear policy understanding but also adequate resources, manageable class sizes, sufficient time, and institutional support to translate policy intentions into classroom practice.

4.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the enactment of music curriculum intentions is better understood as a process of interpretation and recontextualisation than as straightforward implementation of policy. The evidence of uncertainty over current syllabi, continued use of older curriculum documents, and tutors' reliance on professional judgement strongly supports the policy enactment perspective of Ball et al (2011), who argue that policies are interpreted and translated differently according to institutional contexts and the resources available to policy actors. Similarly, Singh (2024), and Msimango (2023) support the finding that teachers and music educators actively mediate curriculum policy rather than simply reproduce it. However, the findings extend this literature by showing that curriculum interpretation in Tanzanian Teachers' Colleges is shaped not only by professional judgement but also by ambiguity in policy documents, frequent curriculum reforms, translation problems, and unequal access to official materials. This challenges interpretations that might attribute implementation differences primarily to teacher attitudes or resistance. The continued use of older syllabi can be interpreted as selective adaptation, but it also raises concerns about curriculum governance because tutors' professional autonomy may unintentionally weaken national consistency when there is no clear institutional mechanism for reconciling competing curriculum versions. Fullan's (2012) theory of educational change further supports this interpretation by emphasising that reforms require clarity, capacity, support, and continuity. Thus, the findings suggest that inconsistent curriculum enactment is partly a consequence of weaknesses in the reform process itself rather than simply a failure by tutors to comply.

The findings on classroom instructional practices provide strong evidence of a persistent contradiction between the competency-based intentions of music education and the pedagogical realities of classroom practice. Although the curriculum promotes learner-centred, practical, creative, and performance-based learning, observations and participant accounts revealed a predominance of lectures, note-taking, theoretical explanations, and recall questions. This supports the arguments of Ball et al. (2011) that policy intentions are transformed when they encounter institutional and material realities. It also corresponds with Mwakalinga (2026), who associate teacher-centred practices in Tanzania with large classes, limited resources, examination pressure, and inadequate preparation for competency-based teaching. The findings also support Fullan's (2012) who emphasises the importance of teachers being capable of modelling musical practice, and the evidence from Addaquay (2025), which links limited teacher competence and resources with weak practical music instruction. Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as proving that lecture-based teaching is inherently inappropriate. As the literature cautions against a rigid teacher-centred/learner-centred binary, lectures can contribute to conceptual understanding when combined with demonstration, practice, feedback, and participatory activities. The critical issue, therefore, is not the existence of lectures but their dominance at the expense of the practical experiences required by the music curriculum. In this respect, the findings reveal a deeper pedagogical problem: tutors may understand learner-centred pedagogy conceptually but lack the practical capacity and conditions necessary to enact it meaningfully.

The assessment findings reveal an even stronger mechanism through which curriculum intentions are reshaped in practice. The dominance of written examinations focusing on theoretical knowledge, together with institutional emphasis on examination performance, creates a form of assessment-driven curriculum enactment in which tutors teach what is most likely to be examined. This finding strongly supports washback arguments advanced by Cheng and Curtis

(2004), who explain how high-stakes assessment can influence instructional priorities and narrow curriculum coverage. It also agrees with Plastow (2022), and recent music education literature such as Zhang et al. (2023), which emphasises the importance of formative assessment for developing practical and progressive musical competencies. However, the present findings add an important institutional dimension: assessment pressure is not generated by tutors alone but is reinforced by administrators, students, and quality-assurance mechanisms that define success largely through examination results. The shortage of music-specialist quality-assurance officers further complicates the situation because practical musical competencies may receive less systematic scrutiny than easily measurable theoretical outcomes. This suggests that the problem is not simply poor assessment practice but a broader failure of constructive alignment between the intended, implemented, and assessed curricula. While Ji and O'Neill (2022) demonstrate that assessment can effectively support musical skill development when it is aligned with learning goals, the present findings indicate that such alignment is weakened when national examinations privilege recall over performance. Consequently, improving classroom pedagogy without reforming assessment may have limited effect because tutors remain institutionally incentivised to prioritise examinable knowledge.

The findings concerning policy-practice alignment further demonstrate that the observed implementation gap is largely structural rather than simply attitudinal. Tutors generally understood the expectations of learner-centred and practical teaching but reported adapting these expectations because of large classes, inadequate instruments, limited teaching materials, demanding syllabi, and insufficient instructional time. This strongly supports Ball et al. (2011) view that policy enactment is shaped by material contexts and institutional pressures, as well as Lipsky's (2010) argument that frontline actors exercise discretion when translating formal policy into practical action. The findings are also consistent with Kennedy and Robinson (2023), who demonstrate that structural conditions can constrain the implementation of learner-centred reforms in African educational settings. Fullan (2007) similarly provides support by emphasising that sustainable educational change requires institutional capacity and adequate support. Nevertheless, the findings complicate the assumption that providing resources alone will automatically produce learner-centred practice. The evidence of limited practical expertise among some tutors, ambiguous curriculum language, and weak subject-specific quality assurance indicates that material resources must be accompanied by music-specific professional development, clear curriculum guidance, mentoring, and appropriate accountability mechanisms. Thus, the findings support the view that policy implementation is context-dependent while also demonstrating that context itself can be changed through deliberate institutional intervention. The implication is that tutors should not be treated simply as the source of implementation failure; they operate within conditions that shape the choices available to them.

Overall, the convergence of documentary analysis, interviews, FGDs, and classroom observations indicates that the central problem is a systemic misalignment among curriculum intentions, curriculum interpretation, teaching practices, and assessment. The findings support Policy Enactment Theory because tutors actively interpret, negotiate, and adapt curriculum expectations according to their professional judgement and institutional circumstances (Ball et al., 2011). They also support Fullan's (2012) argument that curriculum reforms cannot be sustained without adequate capacity, resources, and institutional support. At the same time, the findings challenge explanations that portray teachers primarily as resistant to curriculum reform. Instead, tutors appear to negotiate between policy ideals and practical constraints, often selecting approaches that they consider manageable within existing conditions. This interpretation is consistent with Clarke et al. (2015), and Lotta and Meira (2025), who view policy implementation as an active and negotiated process. However, the study also reveals the limits of excessive local adaptation: when tutors use outdated syllabi, practical activities are omitted, and assessment remains predominantly theoretical, institutional variation can undermine the coherence and equity of national curriculum implementation. Therefore, the critical issue is not simply whether tutors understand the curriculum, but whether the education system provides the policy clarity, practical resources, professional competence, assessment alignment, and institutional support necessary to translate that understanding into meaningful music-making. The findings consequently suggest that sustainable curriculum reform requires simultaneous attention to curriculum communication, tutor capacity, learning resources, classroom conditions, assessment reform, and subject-specific quality assurance rather than relying on policy revision or teacher training alone.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the enactment of music curriculum intentions in Teachers' Colleges in Mwanza Region is characterised by a persistent gap between what the curriculum intends and what is practically enacted in teaching and learning. Although tutors generally demonstrated awareness of the curriculum's emphasis on learner-centred, competency-based and practical music education, these intentions were frequently reinterpreted and adapted to fit local institutional realities. Classroom practice remained largely theory-oriented, with lectures, note-taking and examination preparation receiving greater attention than singing, instrumental performance, composition, improvisation and ensemble activities. This situation was influenced by limited access to current curriculum documents, ambiguity in

curriculum and syllabus provisions, inadequate musical instruments and specialised facilities, large classes, limited instructional time, variations in tutors' practical competencies, and strong examination pressures. Assessment practices further reinforced the gap because written and theory-based examinations encouraged tutors and student-teachers to prioritise examinable knowledge over practical musical competencies. The findings therefore suggest that the policy–practice gap is not simply a result of tutors' resistance or lack of awareness, but reflects the interaction between policy interpretation, professional judgement, institutional conditions, material resources, assessment practices and accountability systems. From the perspective of curriculum enactment, tutors function as active policy actors who translate and negotiate curriculum intentions within the realities of their teaching contexts. Consequently, effective implementation of the music curriculum requires more than the formulation of appropriate curriculum intentions; it requires sustained institutional, professional, material and assessment support that enables those intentions to become meaningful classroom practices.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry responsible for education, Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE), Teachers' Colleges and other relevant educational authorities strengthen the conditions necessary for effective enactment of the music curriculum. First, current music curriculum and syllabus documents should be clearly communicated, consistently updated and made readily accessible to tutors and student-teachers to reduce confusion arising from multiple or unclear curriculum versions. Second, Teachers' Colleges should provide continuous professional development focusing not only on curriculum interpretation but also on practical music pedagogy, including singing, instrumental performance, composition, improvisation, ensemble teaching and learner-centred assessment. Third, adequate musical instruments, teaching materials, specialised music rooms and appropriate learning spaces should be provided so that practical activities can be implemented rather than replaced by theoretical explanations. Fourth, class sizes, instructional time and tutors' workloads should be considered when designing expectations for practical and learner-centred music teaching. Fifth, music assessment should be reviewed to include meaningful practical, creative and performance-based components alongside theoretical knowledge so that classroom teaching is not narrowly driven by written examinations. Finally, quality assurance mechanisms should strengthen subject-specific monitoring by involving adequately trained music specialists who can assess actual teaching and learning practices rather than relying mainly on administrative compliance. Together, these measures would help reduce the gap between curriculum intentions and classroom practice and create conditions in which the intended practical, competency-based and learner-centred aims of music education can be more consistently enacted in Teachers' Colleges in Mwanza Region.

Declaration of Interest

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