



Viewpoint Environmental Education Curriculum Policy in Tanzanian Schools

Eliwasayako Makundi
Tanzanian Institute of Education, Tanzania

Abstract

This viewpoint paper examines environmental education policy in practice in Tanzania in the context of the primary school curriculum. This policy review stretches back to the mid-1960s, when major curricula changes were effected, to the present. The paper highlights efforts during this period to provide relevant education and enhance development of environmental education skills as well as life skills for school candidates and community members. This paper provides background information and highlights several issues associated with current policies in operation, including interpretations of policy and implementation. It identifies some of the key achievements and makes recommendations for strengthening the implementation of policy in practice. A number of relevant documents were drawn on in this study, augmented by field observations. The study found that the school curriculum, which is the vehicle for translating policy into actions is not adequately implemented due to poor defining of environmental education in early policy documents.

Introduction

Tanzania is among 13 countries that form the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Tanzania, in common with other countries that were colonised, inherited the education system of her colonial masters, the British, after independence in 1961. Since independence, several new education policies and guidelines have emerged. The Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) policy produced in 1967 and the Musoma resolution produced in 1974 are among the new policy frameworks produced after independence (URT, 1995). The ESR philosophy was used as a guiding policy in planning educational activities. This policy emphasises the development of an 'enquiring mind', the ability to 'learn from others', the ability to 'contribute to the society', 'creation of a ujamaa/socialist outlook', and the ability to 'appreciate and develop national culture' (Nyerere, 1968).

A critical analysis of these ideas shows that ESR encourages a great deal of what is emphasised in environmental education for sustainable living. ESR ideas focus on enabling the learner to develop social and intellectual skills that can be applied in real-life situations. The major motive behind this policy is to prepare the learners to be good and responsible citizens.

To meet the self-reliance objectives, the policy proposed merging theory and practice in school curricula. Unfortunately, different conceptions of the policy ideals among contemporary educators made it difficult to agree on what and how to teach in schools. Some interpreted it to

mean a new subject that could make the school self-sufficient (Lutatenekwa, 1984). Practical work became over-emphasised in schools, as a result of which pupils grew to dislike self-reliance activities and all other practical activities. The expectations of the policy in terms of changing attitudes and teacher's roles, and in preparing learners to be good responsible citizens were therefore not realised.

Efforts Towards Change

In an attempt to redress this unsatisfactory situation, the 1981 Presidential Commission on Education was appointed to propose changes that could be effected by the government to improve the education system in preparation for the challenges of the 21st century (TIE, 2000:10). One of the Commission's recommendations concerned the need to develop and introduce new curricula packages for schools and teacher education. The intentions behind the proposed curricula were that they should be meaningful, relevant and able to promote survival and life skills among learners.

In addition, the Tanzanian Institute of Education (TIE), a parastatal organisation that develops school curricula under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), revisited the school curricula and updated them after conducting action research. At that time there were increasing global political movements encouraging pluralism and democracy. It was also the time when, during the Rio Earth Summit, recommendations were made on environmental education and training. The outcomes of the Summit proposed education as an agent of change; a device to enhance social change by developing a knowledgeable, skilled and active citizenry able to resolve environmental issues and contribute willingly to sustainable living (SADC-ELMS, 1999).

The TIE's approach to making changes in the school curricula took account of all these developments. The implementation of these changes led to major curriculum reforms, including the introduction of new subject disciplines such as Civics in 1992, and Social Studies and Unified Science in 1993 (URT, 1996).

Social Studies was adopted for the purpose of equipping primary school learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for tackling individual and societal problems. Environmental education aspects were introduced into Social Studies as a response to both international and national concerns. The national concerns included:

- Lack of moral values, proper knowledge and important skills.
- Growing unemployment, crime rates and environmental destruction. (WEU, 1992)

Environmental destruction was primarily focussed on nature, land degradation and water and air pollution. These aspects were also integrated in other subjects such as science and vocational skills as cross-curricular issues. The assumption was that equipping learners with these values, knowledge and skills would reduce unemployment and improve the skills of the youth. To date, no real change has been evident.

The Impact of Social Studies Learning in Primary Schools

The introduction of Social Studies as a subject in primary schools was mainly intended to achieve the following objectives:

- To enable the learner to explore the relationship between people and their environment, and to identify how a person understands, manages and uses the environment rationally.
- To understand how the environment affects people and the measures taken by people to discourage destructive behaviour. (URT, 1995)

These objectives were partially translated and implemented through an environmental education pilot project within Social Studies. This piloting exercise took place from 1995 to 1997 (TIE, 2000). More national environmental issues were added to the content. Teaching and learning materials were made available and teachers were trained.

Makundi (2000), on assessing the impact of the Social Studies curriculum among primary school leavers in mainland Tanzania, noted that when pupils became involved in economic activities in the community they lost focus on environmental issues. These pupils were influenced by people in the community with experience and skills relating to economic survival activities, but who were inexperienced in environmental issues. Responsible guardians monitored these pupils closely.

In the same study, when comparing learners who had been exposed to environmental education in the school curriculum, and a group who had not received environmental education, it was found that there was no apparent difference in the ways in which they approached an environmental problem (Makundi, 2000). After being given a problem-solving task, it was found that learners who had been exposed to the environmental education programme were unable to apply knowledge and skills gained from this programme to general problem solving activities (such as assisting another learner with a headache).

These two observations appear to indicate that environmental education processes are not having the desired effects and are not meeting the needs of the Tanzanian curriculum, or the learners and society more broadly. This has implications for policy revision.

Environmental Education Policy in Tanzania

Environmental education policy practices in Tanzania developed out of the recommendations made in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21 provided important frameworks to guide policy development. In particular, Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 provided guidance for the formulation of an effective policy (SADC-ELMS, 1999). The model proposed in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 favours integration across sectors, where decisions consider inter-sectoral effects to improve inter-sectoral coordination and therefore address the environment holistically. The conference outcomes led to formulation of environmental education statements in the Tanzanian Education and Training Policy (ETP) (URT, 1995) and construction of the National Environmental Policy (NEP) (URT, 1997). With the exception of the education sector, specific objectives on environment concerns for each sector are listed in the NEP. So far there is no single document that is known as an Environmental Education Policy in Tanzania.

Unfortunately, the Education and Training Policy (ETP) explicitly articulates environmental concerns in only one out of eight general objectives, namely: 'to enable a rational use, management and conservation of the environment' (URT, 1995:IV). This objective of the education and training policy concentrates on the biophysical dimension of the environment. The Education and Training Policy, however, critically differs from other sectoral policies as it addresses the environment holistically through the remaining seven general objectives, given that the other objectives cover the social, political and economic dimensions substantially. Other sectoral policies do not provide any clarity on environmental education processes.

Policy implementation

What is taught in the formal schooling system in Tanzania is stipulated in the 1995 ETP implementation of this policy, however, required interpretation and translation into simple implementable programmes. In order to develop effective school curricula, curriculum developers translated the policy into cross-curricular activities for use in the subject disciplines. Two of the major curriculum components are:

- Activities, where the various teaching and learning processes are described.
- Assessments, where the techniques by which attainment of the intended objectives are measured and monitored are described. (URT, 1995)

School curricula, based on the ETP, have been developed and implemented in order to realise the stated general and specific objectives of education in Tanzania. The two components above have the potential to provide important action skills and appropriate approaches to learning, but are not adequately addressed at present. Other than in the general objectives, environmental education is not well defined in the ETP. As a result, it is featured only in a few subjects, as shown in Table 1.

The curriculum developers drew on these subject statements, together with the general objectives discussed earlier, to translate the policy into the school curriculum. They did this by identifying environmental education possibilities by broadening from three to seven carrier subjects, including Social Studies. In earlier curriculum descriptions, the main thrust of environmental education remained narrowly focussed on the biophysical aspect of the environment. It is not surprising that the biophysical environment is still degrading, because the approaches and methodologies used to disseminate these educational goals emphasised creation of awareness only (Makundi, 2000).

Recently the TIE has undertaken a series of activities to support the translation of the ETP into more appropriate implementable plans, and the following strategic documents have been produced: Basic Education, Secondary Education and Teacher Training Master Plans. The Basic Education Master Plan (URT, 2001), for example, clearly outlines the type of education that is envisaged for sustainable development. It calls for urgent raising of the standards of education so as to restore lost public confidence in Tanzania's primary education system. The document suggests working practical actions that can be fruitful to learners, teachers and the learning environment (URT, 2001).

Another strategic document, the 'Education Sector Development Program' (ESDP) (URT, 2001) has recently been developed, and is currently being used to guide practice. The ESDP

Table 1. Environment considerations in the ETP

	Specific subjects	Statement	Comments
Science and Technology	Mathematics, science and technical subjects (including computer studies).	In order to survive man has to interact with the environment through science and technology.	This general statement does not stress environmental education practices.
Humanities	History, geography, general studies, social and environmental studies, civics, economics, commerce, accountancy, music, fine and performing arts, games and sports.	Humanities help to form the citizen and promote understanding of the self, society and its culture, civic rights and obligations, government, international peace and understanding, and the environment.	Social and environmental studies form subjects in this section, but there is no guarantee of the inclusion of environmental education practices.
Life skills	Carpentry, crop and livestock husbandry, pottery making, smithing, masonry, painting, home economics and technical skills.	Such skills fall into five categories of: environmental skills, personal health skills, job creation skills, and social or community and family skills.	Still the environmental education elements are not clear but only implied, depending on the understanding and orientation of the translator (the teacher).

Source: URT (1995: 51–54).

document defines the following requirements for the primary education sector:

- Comprehensive efforts to improve the quality of education.
- An increase and improvement in access and equity for all children.
- Decentralisation of management structures.
- Devolution of authority to local levels.
- Broadening of the financial base which supports the education system. (URT, 2001)

The ESDP is responding to international demands that require 'Education for All' and respect for human rights in terms of appropriate learning and teaching environments. A critical analysis of the document shows that it is also responding to environmental concerns.

The 2001 Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) was based on, and succeeded the ESDP. The PEDP is known as a start-up plan for achieving the education targets that are expressed in the ESDP and other previous policy documents. Another key document, recently developed, is a document entitled *Vision 2025*. This document defines the role of education in transforming people's thinking and understanding and capacitating them in meeting life's challenges (URT, 1999:4).

The PEDP clearly defines the environmental education dimensions, competencies and skills that need to be developed by primary school learners. It suggests appropriate teaching and learning techniques that encourage active participation to enhance development of the intended skills, knowledge and values. It describes the required quality of individual learning outcomes, a suitable learning environment for quality education and expected qualitative change. This document simplifies curriculum developers' work of translating, in appropriate ways, the ETP into implementable actions by school communities.

These recent developments are beginning to provide some guidance as to what should be done to systematically improve the Tanzanian education system; and how environmental education processes articulate within these policy frameworks. It is hoped that the end result will be development of appropriate environmental education skills, values and knowledge.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Early interpretations of environmental education policy in the context of the ETP of 1995 (URT, 1995) were focussed on the biophysical, although this policy, through its other objectives, addressed environmental issues holistically. Since then there have been numerous attempts to refine and clarify the meaning of the objectives of the ETP (URT, 1995) in the context of school curricula. Bearing in mind that policy experts and educational planners are still working on the practical implementation of the ETP (URT, 1995), it may still be too early to pass fair judgement on environmental education practices in the context of this policy framework. This is despite the fact that eight years have passed since the ETP (URT, 1995) was first developed.

The recently developed Primary Education Development Plan (URT 2001), appears to have succeeded in translating the ETP (URT, 1995), showing clearly how, through environmental education, particular skills and competencies can be promoted amongst both teachers and learners. It is easier now for curriculum developers to do their work, given that the policy framework is clearer.

Tanzania does not have a specific Environmental Education Policy, as discussed above. Eco-school policy (or school environmental policies) could serve as specific environmental education policy for schools, if the system of education was not centralised.

This paper makes the following recommendations to strengthen the implementation of environmental learning in schools:

- Training of curriculum developers and teachers on policy analysis skills, dissemination, monitoring and evaluating the curriculum.
- Formulation of National Environmental Education guidelines.
- Equipping curriculum developers and teachers with effective learning approaches and methodologies.
- The production of curriculum guides for environmental education.

These recommendations could strengthen the work that has been done over the past eight years to clarify and focus the environmental education components of the curriculum in Tanzania.

Notes on the Contributor

Eliwasayako F. Makundi is a Senior Curriculum Developer, working with the TIE. She is responsible for the development of school and teacher education curricula, teaching and learning materials. She also conducts teachers' seminars as well as monitoring and evaluation of teaching/learning processes. Her interests are in curriculum issues. Email: eliwasayako@excite.com.

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