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Enhancing Secondary School Performance through Effective Utilization of Examination Feedback Reports

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Abstract: *In order to help secondary schools improve their performance, the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA) provides reports called Candidates Items Response Analysis (CIRA). The endeavour is still not enough to improve the performance, which is crucial. Under the rubric of "Assessment bodies as stirrers for effective learning," this study examined the reports in question and was presented at the NECTA 50th anniversary conference. In particular, the study looked at how well secondary school students knew about candidates' items response analysis reports, how helpful those reports were, how easy it was to get your hands on those reports, and how much of an impact they had on students' maths achievement. A multiple regression model, feedback intervention theory, and sequential exploratory mixed techniques were the study's guiding principles. Interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather data from secondary school students and instructors. The majority of secondary school pupils in Tanzania are unaware of the National Examination Council of Tanzania's feedback reports on examiners' performance in mathematics, and as a consequence, they do not use them, according to the research. The study's findings highlight the critical need of mandating the efficient use of such reports to boost efficiency. Consequently, the research suggests that Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the Agency for the Development of Education Management (ADEM), which are professional training institutes for teachers, include feedback reports in their training programmes. Research on the efficacy of feedback reports as an intervention plan to raise academic achievement in secondary schools is warranted.*

Keywords: *Mathematics Performance, CIRA, CSEE, NECTA, Feedback Theory*

Introduction

Given the critical state of mathematics performance, which endangers the development of reasoning, critical thinking, and decision-making skills in students—the future workforce for sustainable development on a global,

regional, and national scale—this study examined the impact of Candidates Items Response Analysis reports on secondary school mathematics performance as part of the conference presentations for NECTA 50th anniversary, under the theme 'Assessment bodies as stirrers for effective learning' (Narayani, 2015). Around the world, students learn mathematics as a scientific discipline that focuses on working with numbers, computations, calculations, and solving problems (Yadav, 2019). In order to innovate in science, create technology, and run businesses in a way that promotes sustainable development, mathematical proficiency is crucial (Algani, 2022).

As a result, it is included in curricula across the board, from pre-K to university, in both industrialised and developing nations (Mazana et al., 2020; Mkenda, 2022). Ndume et al. (2020) found that students' performance in mathematics on the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (CSEE) is in a critical state, despite the subject's significance in human resource development. Richardson et al. (2020), Mullis, Martin, Foy, Kelly & Fishbein (2019), Hanushek, Peterson & Woessmann (2010), Bee & Kaur (20214), and Koul & Rahmawati (2015) all found that even in developed countries like Russia, China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and England, students perform poorly in mathematics. Poor nations like Rwanda (Mbarute & Ntivurugwa, 2022), Tanzania (Joseph, 2013; Kyaruzi, 2017; Kalla et al., 2023; Masele, 2018; Tvako eta al., 2019; Kyaruzi et al., 2019; Mazana et al., 2020; Mbedule, 2020), and Ghana (Ansah, Quansah & Migha, 2020) are even worse. Students' misunderstandings are linked to their low performance in mathematics subjects in Singapore (Bee & Kaur, 2014). According to Ansah et al. (2020), pupils' performance in mathematics is impacted by instructors' basic skills in the subject in Ghana.

The research conducted in Rwanda identified many reasons that contribute to students' failure in mathematics. These factors include a lack of resources, the distance from home to school, students' lack of interest in the topic, and the level of parental participation in their education (Mbarute & Ntivuguruzwa, 2022). The majority of Kenyan secondary school pupils (76.4%) had a negative outlook on mathematics, according to the survey (Njaggah, 2003). The national policy aims to improve academic performance in Mathematics subject as the Tanzania Development Vision is mostly dependent on the calibre of its workforce. According to recent research (Shahanga et al., 2021; Shahanga et al., 2021), there has been a significant change in the focus of education monitoring systems from school inspection to school quality assurance. Consequently, the efficient use of feedback reports is necessary to

address the low mathematical performance linked to ineffective pedagogy and learning environments (Michael, 2015).

According to several studies (Mazana et al., 2020; Mbedule, 2020; Kyaruzi et al., 2019; Masele, 2018; Kalla et al., 2023), these reports are crucial because they discuss issues like digital literacy, students' negative attitudes towards the subject, parents' lack of involvement, and the lack of responsibility and accountability among students, teachers, and school administration. Feedback for intervention improvement should be provided via the mathematics assessment performance reports (Hattie & Tmperley, 2007). As a result, students and instructors will be able to work together to clear up misunderstandings and boost precision in solving problems and performing numerical operations (Barana et al., 2021). In mathematics, it allows for instructors and students to tackle problems together (Stovner, 2021). In mathematics, students benefit greatly from constructive criticism when instructors also provide clear direction on how to carry out mathematical operations (Koskinen & Pitkaniemi, 2022). The crisis of failure may be overcome by the proper use of examination feedback, which bridges skills gaps through proposed development measures and leads to high performance (Yusoff, 2013). It points in the right way to achieve peak performance by following the provided advice (UCL, 2017). Everybody involved with the school—students, instructors, parents, and administration—needs to be able to scale, fund, and handle the proposed solutions (Grayson, 2018). In order to better prepare for upcoming exams, students—who are the intended recipients of learning assessments—need to understand the "which," "why," and "how" behind the marking of each item answer (OECD, 2011). Because it lays out the steps to take from where they are now to where they want to be in the future, feedback may serve as a valuable tool for management, instructors, and students (Yusoff, 2013). To overcome performance issues, one must constantly reflect, use cooperation tactics, and take intervention steps (Santos & Pinto, 2010).

In addition to informing management and educators about areas of pedagogical failure, feedback inspires students to build on their strengths while addressing their areas of weakness in order to achieve a set academic objective (Pearson, 2016). But research out of South Africa shows that maths teachers and students aren't making the most of constructive criticism, which is leading to persistently low grades (Naroth, 2010). The National Examination Council (NECTA) in Tanzania provides recommendations to students, teachers, and school administration on intervention measures to improve

academic performance in Mathematics and other examined subjects through reports that analyse candidate responses to items (NECTA, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021). The mathematics pass percentage has been dismally low for the last five years running, despite several suggestions for improvement: 19.19% in 2017, 20.02% in 2018, 20.03% in 2019, 20.12% in 2020, and 19.54% in 2021. In addition, from 2012 to 2022, the pass rate was below 25% (Mkenda, 2022). Due diligence is required since this condition casts doubt on the reliability of analysis reports based on candidates' item replies. Consequently, the purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between mathematics performance in Tanzanian secondary schools and the feedback reports provided by examiners. The research used a theory of feedback intervention proposed by Kluger and DeNisi in 1996. This theory postulates that the attainment of performance goals is affected by both relevant feedback information and human efforts. Examining students' familiarity with candidates' item response analysis reports and their perceptions of their usefulness formed the particular goals of the research. There are a few more that need to be taken care of; they include checking if candidates' item analysis reports are readily available, checking whether students have easy access to them, and checking whether they have any effect on students' performance in mathematics in secondary school. These goals were attained by testing the following different theories in the research:

1. Students’ awareness about CIRA contributes to improvement of Mathematics performance
2. Students perception about CIRA contributes to improvement of Mathematics performance
3. The availability of CIRA in schools contributes to improvement of Mathematics performance
4. Students’ access of CIRA contributes to improvement of Mmathematics performance
5. Students’ use of CIRA contributes to improvement of Mathematics performance

Methodology

Data were gathered by questionnaires and in-person semi-structured interviews as part of the sequential exploratory mixed methods design of the project. Five mathematics educators were interviewed and 252 pupils were given questionnaires. Five public secondary schools in the Nyamagana City - Mwanza area were used to pick 252 pupils using simple random selection. In

the same way, the five schools were chosen at random. Nyamagana City was chosen on purpose because of its advantageous central position in the area. Because of exposure and resource availability, schools in more populous locations were predicted to have more access to and make better use of such information to improve students' mathematical performance. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software was used to create frequency, percentages, and coefficients using a multiple regression model after the quantitative data was categorised into themes. According to Cresswell and Plano-Clark (2018), themes and subthemes emerged naturally throughout the content analysis of the qualitative data.

Model specifications

$$IMP = \beta 0 + \beta 1WMC + \beta 2PMC + \beta 3VMC + \beta 4AMC + \beta 5UMC\, \acute{\varepsilon}$$

Whereby:

IMP= Improved Mathematics Performance
WMC = Students Awareness of Mathematics' CIRA in Secondary Schools
PMC =Perceived Usefulness of Mathematics' CIRA among Secondary School Students
VMC = Availability of Mathematics' CIRA in Secondary Schools
AMC= Students Access of Mathematics' CIRA in Secondary Schools
UMC= Students Use of Mathematics' CIRA in Secondary Schools
β0, β1, β2, β3, β4, β5 = Coefficients of variables used in the study
ε= Error term.

Findings and Discussions

The purpose of the statistical tests was to see if the item response analysis reports helped the applicants improve their performance in mathematics. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.65 is a trustworthy and adequate measure of internal consistence, as indicated in the reliability test findings (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Thus, it is safe to generalise from these data and outcomes.

Candidates' item response analysis reports were used to assess the study of relationships among independent factors. This study found that among secondary school students, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for CIRA knowledge, perceived utility, and availability was 1. With no evidence of multicollinearity, these findings rule out the need for redundancy among the

explanatory variables: students' knowledge, perceptions of CIRA's utility, accessibility, and availability (Shrestha, 2020).

Table 1: Multicollinearity Table

Variables	VIF	1/VIF
Students' awareness of CIRA	1.06	0.93
Perceived usefulness of CIRA	1.01	0.98
Availability of CIRA in schools	1.15	0.86
Students access of CIRA in schools	2.97	0.33
Students use of CIRA in schools	2.97	0.33
Mean (VIF, 1/VIF)	**1.83**	**0.69**

Diagnostic Tests Results

With an R-squared value of 76% and an adjusted R-Squared value of 76%, the multiple regression model used in this investigation produced statistically significant and appropriately fitting findings. The results show that out of all the factors considered, 76% were able to explain the changes in the dependent variable, while just 24% were unable. According to Beer and Swanepoel (1988), the Durbin-Watson test found no autocorrelations among the study's variables with a value of 1.81.

Regression Results

The purpose of this research was to determine if secondary school students' CIRA reports are predictive of their maths grades. Students' knowledge, perceptions of CIRA's value, accessibility, availability, and use in secondary schools were the five metrics used to test the hypothesis. The students' success in the mathematics subject was strongly predicted by one of the five measures, which was based on the perceived utility of candidates' items response analysis reports (CIRA) ($\beta = 0.982$, $p < .000$). Students' awareness ($\beta = 0.008$, $p < .391$) and access to CIRA ($\beta = 0.004$, $p < .806$) were among the other characteristics that predicted students' performance in Mathematics courses, but they were not statistically significant. In addition, students' performance in Mathematics was adversely and insignificantly predicted by the availability of CIRA non secondary schools ($\beta = -0.006$, $p < .616$) and by the usage of CIRA among students in secondary schools ($\beta = -0.001$, $p < .942$). This indicates that the item analysis reports provided by

examiners to applicants did not significantly improve their performance in mathematics in secondary school. This implies that the suggestions made by examiners in these reports to enhance mathematics education, student achievement, and classroom practice are never implemented. Consequently, there is little evidence of yearly progress in test scores. Contrary to feedback intervention theory, which states that feedback should be used to implement methods for intervention aimed at improving performance (Luger & DeNis, 1996), this outcome is unexpected. A number of prior research have shown that students' performance in mathematics improved when feedback reports were easily available, accessible, and used effectively (Sambell et al., 2018; UCL, 2017; Stovner, 2021; Yusoff, 2013).

Table 2: Regression Table

Variables	**Coefficients**	**t-statistic**	**Sig**	**Decision**
(Constant)	.035	.520	.603	
Students' awareness of CIRA	.008	.858	.391	Rejected
Perceived Usefulness of CIRA	.982	.78.32	.000	Acceptable
Availability of CIRA in schools	.-.006	-.502	.616	Rejected
Students access of CIRA in	.004	.246	.806	Rejected
Students use of CIRA	-.001	-.073	.942	Rejected
Diagnostic Tests				
R-Squared	76%			
Adjusted R-squared	76%			
F-statistics	1035.624			
Prob(F-statistics)	0.00000			
Durbin-Watson Test	1.814			

Thus, the multiple regression model of this study is:
IMP= 0.008SWC+0.982PIC – 0.006ACS+0.004SAC-0.001UCS+ έ

The model meets the study's requirements because the Prob F-Statistics value is 0.0000, which is below the threshold of 0.5.

Table 3: Descriptive Results on the Effects of Candidates' Items Response Analysis Report on Improving Mathematics Performance in Secondary Schools

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Students who are aware of candidates' items response analysis reports in secondary schools	39	16
Students' who perceive candidates' items response analysis reports as important in Secondary Schools	153	61
Students who noted the availability of candidates' items response analysis reports in Secondary Schools	21	8
Students who accessed candidates' items response analysis reports in secondary schools	15	6
Students who used candidates' items response analysis reports in secondary schools	11	4

Source: Field data (October, 2023).

Students' Awareness of Candidates' item Response Analysis Reports

As far as the candidates' item response analysis reports were concerned, the students indicated their level of familiarity with them. Just 39 out of 252 students (16%) said they were acquainted with these types of feedback reports; the remaining 213 students (84%), however, were not. When questioned why they were unaware of these reports, the majority of students said that they had never seen them. To further validate this data, we interviewed math educators. "Are your students aware of the candidates' item response analysis reports?" was asked of teachers. Among them, one made a comment:

> *We normally receive such reports every year. However, a single copy of the report for a class of 250 students is not enough. Since it is a single copy provided, it is retained by the teacher himself* (Mathematic teacher school A: October, 2023).

This indicates that the majority of secondary school form four pupils (84%), were unaware of the item response analysis reports given to the applicants. Their inability to take use of them to boost their performance is

likely due to a lack of knowledge about them. This finding contradicts the feedback intervention paradigm, according to which students need to be aware of feedback in order to formulate plans for intervention (Luger & DeNisi, 1996).

Students' Perception on the usefulness of Candidates' Item Response Analysis Reports

The students shared their thoughts on how the item response analysis reports helped the candidates do better in mathematics class. Of the 252 students surveyed, 153 (or 61% of the total) found the item answer analysis reports from the candidates to be helpful in enhancing their mathematical skills. When questioned about their reasoning, the majority of students cited the importance of these reports in helping them recognise and prevent typical errors in mathematical procedures. In addition, they may assist individuals in developing abilities to solve mathematical problems and in making appropriate arrangements for their job. We questioned maths educators, "What are your views on the usefulness of candidates' item response analysis reports on improving performance in Mathematics subjects?" to get a triangulated picture of their thoughts on the matter. I saw that one of them:

> *The reports indicate the best answers, moderate, and the worst students attempt. Thus, they may enable students to learn the best ways of sketching, drawing and calculations. They enable students in solving past papers as they serve the role of marking schemes* (Mathematics teacher, school B: October, 2023).

This shows that students consider these reports of criticism to be crucial in helping them do better in class. One may make the case that pupils can benefit from such reports if they are made aware of them. In keeping with other research (Naroth, 2010; Peason, 2016), this demonstrates the critical role that feedback reports have in enhancing performance. Students in this study see feedback reports as helpful, but they don't really utilise them because of a lack of knowledge, the reports' unavailability, and their accessibility (Bee & Kur, 2014). This is in contrast to previous studies where students believe feedback is useful and use it to correct their own misconceptions. There has to be action to encourage the real use of those reports since this discovery shows that seeing value without really using it does not provide good outcomes.

The Availability of Candidates' Item Response Analysis Reports in Secondary Schools

The accessibility of candidate items' response analysis reports in students' schools was inquired about. Only 21(8%) of the 252 students who participated in the survey mentioned having access to such reports at school. The location of these reports in respective schools was the subject of a follow-up inquiry. Among the locations named were the academic office, the second master's office, the school library, and the NECTA website. After collecting all of this data, we asked the maths instructors, "Are candidates' item response analysis reports available in your school?" A consensus among educators was that "Yes, they are available." In response to a follow-up query concerning their whereabouts, they, like their pupils, gave conflicting accounts of being in the library, the second master's office, or the academic office. The next step was to have them find a report; however, they were unable to do so and provided several justifications. The lack of clarity on their location among both students and instructors is indicative of ineffective reporting procedures in educational institutions (Yusoff, 2013; Garyson, 2018; Santos & Pinto, 2010). It may be argued that, given these results, it is necessary to compile these reports in one location, like the school library, so that both students and instructors have easy access to them.

The Accessibility of Candidates' Item Response Analysis Reports in Secondary Schools

As a class, we wanted to know if any of you had ever looked at the item response analysis reports that the applicants had submitted. Just 15 out of 252 pupils (or 6% of the total) reported having access to such reports at their school. To supplement this data, we polled maths educators by asking, "Do your students access the candidates' item response analysis reports?" In a remark made by one of the educators:

> *In most cases, students do not access print reports because reports are few compared to the number of students. Therefore, we identify key issues from the reports and communicate them to students in classes* (Mathematic teacher, School D, October, 2023).

Based on the findings, it seems that fourth graders in secondary schools have limited access to reports detailing their criticism. It is difficult to use such feedback to achieve the intended performance when such a document is not readily available. In contrast to previous research (Barana et al., 2021; Halthe & Tmperley, 2007), this one concludes that all possible stakeholders may easily get the input they need to implement intervention strategies. Therefore, the reports are useless and fail to achieve their intended purpose if recipients do not access them, even if they are accessible in schools and on NECTA's websites.

The use of Candidates' Item Response Analysis Reports in Secondary Schools

A question on whether or not students had ever made use of the results of the applicants' item response analysis to boost their own performance was posed to them. Just eleven (25% of the total) of the twenty-five students who took the survey admitted to have ever made use of candidate item response analysis reports in the classroom. One question asked of math educators was, "Do you use the results of the candidates' item response analysis reports to help students do better in math class?" An educator made the observation that:

> *In our school with 32 streams, we are only two Mathematics teachers; the teaching load is too huge to engage with such reports. I just struggle to accomplish the syllabus* (Mathematics teacher from school B, October, 2023).

This data reveals that secondary school educators do not exert sufficient influence on their pupils to ensure that they use feedback reports effectively. This finding runs counter to the feedback intervention theory's insistence on doing something after hearing criticism. Thus, criticism that does not lead to enhanced performance is meaningless and a misapplication of resources (Luger & DeNisi, 1996). Furthermore, the findings contrast from earlier research that focused on feedback as an alternative (Stovner, 2021; Koskinen & Pitkanieni, 2022). So, it's a waste of time and money to develop and publish reports if they aren't used to boost performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although NECTA distributes printed copies to schools and makes them available online via their website, the majority of secondary school students in this research were unaware of candidates' item answer analysis reports. Furthermore, students' ignorance of their availability at school and on NECTA's website hinders their usage and accessibility, leading to little improvement in mathematics performance. There is an immediate need for an intervention mechanism as this finding indicates that NECTA's input has not been adequately used to enhance performance in the mathematics course. Research concludes that in-service teachers would benefit from CIRA if the Tanzania Institute of Education (T.I.E.) and the Agency for the Development of Education Management (ADEM) would include them in their training programmes. Training programmes for school administrators, educators, and students on how to make the most of examiners' comments to boost grades might be the result of future research.

Implication of the Study

The results of this survey might provide the National Examination Council of Tanzania with useful information on how their product or service is being used. This study's results could help education ministries intervene so that schools make better use of their resources for teaching and learning. Training need assessment reports like this one are sent out to organisations like the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and the Agency for the Development of Education Management (ADEM) to help with teacher professional development.

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