# Managing performance limitations in Tanzanian open schools: An eye on Lipsky's crow's nest

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**ABSTRACT**

Open schools in Tanzania are crucial for providing secondary education to adults and teenagers who are not enrolled in formal education but still face academic challenges. Prior research has mostly focused on individual (micro) teacher-client interactions, with little attention paid to organisational (meso) and national (macro) level factors. By combining micro-, meso-, and macro-level perspectives anchored on Lipsky's crow's nest, this study investigates how street-level bureaucrats address the performance constraints of open schools. As part of a qualitative case study approach, interviews were used to document experiences from selected cases. The findings indicate that inadequacy at various levels produces performance disincentives. To deal with the latter, street-level bureaucrats employ resource improvisation, peer-to-peer learning, flexible scheduling, ad hoc machinery, and informal coping mechanisms to sustain learning engagement. Although these changes support continuity in education, at some point, they compromise policy uniformity. Therefore, improving open school outcomes requires increasing the availability of resources, strengthening teacher capacity, and integrating adaptive practices into official policy.

**Keywords**: Crow's Nest Metaphor, Lipsky's Theory, Open Schools, Street-Level Bureaucrats, Tanzania

## I. INTRODUCTION

Open schools are becoming a more significant alternative route for increasing secondary education access for populations that are not able to attend formal schools because of personal, cultural, or socioeconomic reasons. Open schools, which are characterised as flexible, inclusive, and learner-centred educational systems, provide opportunities for adults, youth who are not enrolled in school and other marginalised groups that need flexible learning schedules and modes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2022). Due to strong policy frameworks, significant funding, digital infrastructure, and ongoing professional support for educators, nations in the Global North, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and Finland, exhibit strong performance in open education globally (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2023). Consistent learning outcomes, system-wide accountability, and inclusive enrolment are made possible by these requirements.

On the other hand, open education systems in the Global South, such as Tanzania, are still subject to firmly established limitations. For students who face early pregnancy, poverty, stigma, or geographic obstacles, Tanzania's open schools are essential in providing secondary education. However, systemic constraints like insufficient teaching staff, a lack of instructional resources, a poor digital infrastructure, irregular student attendance, and psychosocial issues like social exclusion and low learning motivation often impede performance (Mbunda, 2022; Rumble & Koul, 2007). Open schools face ongoing implementation challenges that have received little scholarly attention, especially outside of classroom-level interactions, despite their centrality to the nation's educational equity agenda.

According to the literature, the majority of research on adult education and open schooling focuses primarily on micro-level dynamics, the direct interactions between teachers and students, and the negotiation of immediate teaching challenges. However, in addition to macro-level policy priorities, planning, and resource allocation, meso-level organisational structures, administrative procedures, and leadership styles also influence performance outcomes in open schools (Gofen *et al*., 2018). These interrelated levels of influence necessitate a thorough analytical framework that can track the emergence of performance constraints and the strategies used by frontline actors to overcome them.

In order to close this gap, the current study uses Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory, which is enhanced by the Crow's Nest metaphor, as a multifaceted lens to comprehend how performance limitations in open schools are viewed, understood, and handled. The Crow's Nest metaphor serves as an example of how various actors occupy different positions within the hierarchy of education. At the macro level, policymakers and central quality assurers function similarly to observers in a ship's crow's nest, with limited visibility into the day-to-day operational difficulties but a broad, strategic perspective. Head teachers and district officials work closer to the "deck" at the meso level, mediating conflicting demands while converting national directives into institutional practices. Teachers and community-based facilitators work closely with students at the micro level, where they must deal with a lack of

resources, contextual limitations, and heavy workloads that call for creativity, improvisation, and unofficial problem-solving.

This correspondence between Lipsky's SLB theory and the Crow's Nest metaphor highlights how frontline bureaucrats' discretionary actions, which constantly reinterpret and modify mandates to fit resource-constrained environments, determine performance outcomes in addition to policies.

### 1.1 Research Objective:

Using Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy theory and the Crow's Nest metaphor, the main goal of this study is to analyse how performance limitations in Tanzanian open schools are identified, understood, and addressed at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The study specifically pursued three objectives: (i) to identify performance disincentives that impact education delivery at each administrative level; (ii) to record coping strategies used by national officials, teachers, and school administrators; and (iii) to investigate how these coping mechanisms affect policy implementation, either strengthening or weakening intended outcomes.

## II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

Open schools, street-level bureaucrats, and Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy and its Crow's Nest viewpoint as metaphor are briefly discussed and connected.

#### 2.1.1 Open Schools

Open schools are educational facilities created to give students who are unable to participate in traditional, campus-based education inclusive, flexible, and accessible learning opportunities. They mainly assist marginalised and underrepresented groups, such as working adults, out-of-school youth, girls in underprivileged environments, and students with disabilities. Important National frameworks like the Education and Training Policy (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2024), which emphasizes alternative learning pathways; the Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) Framework, which formalizes lifelong learning structures; and the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP, 2025/26-29/30), which prioritizes inclusive education and community-based delivery systems, serve as guidelines for the creation and operation of open schools in Tanzania. Open schools use a variety of open and distance learning (ODL) modalities, such as print materials, radio, television, digital platforms, and community learning centres, to reach a diverse student body. These approaches are in line with the National Information and Communication Technology Policy (ICT) (URT, 2016), which supports technology-enabled education and digital inclusion (Magembe, 2023; Jung & Zawacki-Richter, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). By easing restrictions on time, money, age, location, and prior academic experience, these modalities help Tanzania fulfil its obligations under the Education 2030 Agenda.

Numerous models from around the world demonstrate the benefits of open education. Flexible curricula aimed at expanding access are offered by African institutions like Nigeria's National Open University and Kenya's Institute of Open Learning. In Asia, remote and adult learners can access a wealth of distance learning resources from Japan's Open University and India's Indira Gandhi National Open University. To assist working students in the Americas, Escola Técnica Aberta in Brazil and Open High School in the United States combine online and community-based approaches. In a similar vein, fully remote degree programs focused on inclusivity and lifelong learning are offered by European establishments such as the UK Open University and Germany's FernUniversität in Hagen. For Tanzania's initiatives under the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) to improve its open schooling system, these international practices provide comparative insights.

When considered collectively, the operational realities of open schools provide a crucial foundation for comprehending how performance constraints arise in these environments. Teachers, centre heads, and quality assurers navigate limited resources, conflicting expectations, and mismatches between policy formulation and implementation in open schools, which function as institutional arenas. These challenges align with the limitations noted in Tanzania's ANFE system and decentralisation initiatives under Decentralisation by Devolution (D-by-D). These frontline actors hold a strategic *crow's nest* position that allows them to identify issues early and create coping mechanisms to preserve functionality, drawing on Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy. Street-level bureaucrats serve as micro-level agents influencing educational delivery, open schools make up the meso-level organisational context, and Lipsky's theory serves as the macro-level lens in this study's conceptual model. When taken as a whole, these elements show how performance outcomes in Tanzanian open schools are influenced by institutional arrangements, policy pressures, and discretionary frontline practices.

### 2.1.2 Characteristics of Open Schools

Flexibility, accessibility, learner-centred pedagogy, media and technology integration, and official certification are the hallmarks of open schools. As demonstrated by Tanzania's IAE and India's NIOS, flexibility enables students to study at their own pace, location, and schedule, accommodating work, family obligations, or previous educational gaps (Magembe, 2023). Through initiatives like New Zealand's Correspondence School, which reaches students in remote areas, accessibility guarantees participation by underrepresented groups (Jung & Zawacki-Richter, 2023). As demonstrated by Namibia's NAMCOL, learner-centred approaches encourage self-directed study, mentorship, and peer learning. NIOS and IAE credentials are widely recognised for postsecondary education and employment, and certification and recognition offer avenues for social and economic mobility (Rumble & Koul, 2007). All things considered, open schools are a prime example of international initiatives to promote equity, democratize education, and address the educational needs of underrepresented and non-traditional students.

### 2.1.3 Street-level bureaucrats: Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels

In their day-to-day work, front-line public employees, also referred to as street-level bureaucrats (SLBs), interact directly with citizens and exercise considerable discretion in interpreting and implementing policy (Lipsky, 1980). They have a significant influence on how government services are eventually provided because of their position at the nexus of the state and society (Chang & Brewer, 2022; Lotta *et al.,* 2021; Kamugisha, 2021). Initially called "operators" (Simon, 1947) or "boundary-spanners" (Thompson, 1967), Michael Lipsky (1980) formalised the concept of SLBs to explain how policy is implemented on the front lines. Lipsky (1980) asserts that SLBs are typically linked to the following behaviours or traits: Frequent Direct Contact with Citizens: They engage with the general public every day. Discretionary Authority: They decide how to apply rules in specific circumstances. Resource Restrictions: They have limited resources, including money, time, and knowledge. State-citizen mediators: They implement laws. Moral and Ethical Judgments: Their choices are influenced by both personal and institutional values.

In a nutshell, SLBs function as individual practitioners, in this context, teachers at the micro level, influencing client experiences through their subjective decisions. When a teacher in an open-school setting adjusts a schedule or provides informal intervention to adult learners, an example of adaptive problem-solving in resource-constrained environments. However, excessive use of discretion and a lack of accountability can lead to inconsistency, partiality, or neglect (Kamugisha & Mchome, 2024; Akomondi, 2025; Hassan *et al*., 2023). Organisational leaders such as head teachers coordinate and mediate frontline work and central policy at the meso level. They can enhance frontline innovation by encouraging supportive supervision and institutional learning. According to Akomondi (2025) and Hassan *et al*. (2023), on the other hand, inflexible leadership and bureaucratic inertia can stifle discretion and solidify injustices. At the macro level, SLB behaviour is influenced by the larger institutional and policy environment: clear mandates, adequate resources, and well-designed decentralisation frameworks improve frontline responsiveness, while unclear policies, lax oversight, or insufficient funding compromise effective discretion (Akomondi, 2025; Hassan *et al.,* 2023). SLBs operate at the micro, meso, and macro levels, to sum up. Their discretionary role may either promote citizen-centred governance or perpetuate inequality, depending on institutional context, resource endowment, and accountability mechanisms. Understanding these layered dynamics is particularly crucial in Global South settings characterised by weak institutions, high citizen demand, and demanding frontline workloads (Chang & Brewer, 2022; Akomondi, 2025; Hassan *et al.,* 2023). Table 1 provides an overview of these levels and their functions for the purpose of clarity.

**Table 1**

*SLBs' Roles at Micro, Meso and Macro Levels*

| Level | Roles | Actors |
|---|---|---|
| **Micro** | Frontline implementers who engage with citizens directly. | **Classroom teachers**, Adult Education Tutors, School Counsellor / Guidance Teacher, Ward Education Officers, Community-Based Learning Volunteers |
| **Meso** | Frontline work is connected to policy directives by organisational supervisors and coordinators. | **Headteachers/school principals**, centre coordinators, district education officers (DEOs), District School Quality Assurer, Regional Education Officer |
| **Macro** | National or regional policy and decision-makers who plan, finance, and supervise execution. | **Executive Director, Institute of Adult Education (IAE)**, MPs, Minister for Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), Permanent Secretary (MoEST), Director of Policy and Planning (MoEST), and Parliamentary Committee on Education, Culture and Sports |

**Source:** synthesised from the Literature review 2025

### 2.1.4 Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory

Clarifying the Crow's Nest metaphor as used in this study is crucial before introducing the theory. The metaphor illustrates how various perspectives within an administrative hierarchy are used by policy actors. At the Macro level viewpoint, policymakers and central quality assurers are like observers in a ship's crow's nest: they have a broad, high-level view of policy objectives while remaining detached from the real-world limitations encountered during implementation. At the meso level, actors who are closer to the ground, like head teachers and district officials, interpret national directives and mediate institutional demands. Teachers and community-based officers are examples of frontline employees who work on the "deck" at the micro level. They deal directly with resource constraints, citizen expectations, and operational pressures that call for creativity and discretion.

This metaphor closely resembles Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory, which was developed in 1980 and provides a fundamental lens for comprehending how frontline public servants mediate interactions between the state and its citizens, particularly when formal policy intentions run into institutional flaws or a lack of resources. In the Global South, where informal practices, coping mechanisms, and discretionary decision-making are frequently essential for successful policy implementation, SLB theory has gained significant analytical relevance despite being developed in the Global North (Selestina & Kamugisha, 2023; Chang & Brewer, 2022; Gofen *et al.*, 2018; De Herdt & De Sardan, 2015).

## 2.2 Theory: Tenets and Conditions

At its core, SLB theory rests on several key assumptions (Lipsky, 1980): Frontline workers exercise discretion, allowing them to interpret, modify, or selectively implement policy in response to local conditions. They operate in resource-constrained environments, characterised by staff shortages, inadequate materials, and poor infrastructure. Policy ambiguity, common in many developing countries, creates space for subjective interpretation, while citizen demand frequently exceeds institutional capacity, forcing prioritisation and rationing of services.

Note: These assumptions are especially relevant in Global South contexts, where the mismatch between policy design (often top-down and donor-driven) and implementation realities is stark. In such environments, street-level actors effectively co-produce policy outcomes through discretion, improvisation, and informal norms.

### 2.2.1 Application of the Theory

In Tanzania's open schools, quality assurers (macro level), headteachers (meso level), and teachers (micro level) negotiate the conflict between policy recommendations and local realities through the lens of Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory (Gofen *et al.*, 2018). By using the *Crow's Nest Metaphor*, it is possible to think of each actor as occupying a different vantage point. For example, teachers at the micro level are the ones closest to students' immediate needs, keeping an eye on everyday issues like resource scarcity, inconsistent attendance, and socioeconomic pressures. In response, they exercise discretionary judgment by improvising teaching aids, relying on peer-to-peer learning, and providing psychosocial support, tasks often beyond the scope of formal policy.

Head teachers and managers of community learning centres occupy an intermediate "deck" vantage point at the meso level, converting macro directives into practical institutional procedures. To maintain learning even in the face of erratic enrolment and attendance, they use flexible scheduling, form unofficial alliances with NGOs, and organise volunteer tutors. The highest Crow's Nest is occupied by quality assurers at the macro level, who survey systemic conditions like limited education budgets, decentralisation reforms, and disjointed policy frameworks under the Education and Training Policy (URT, 2024). Although gaps in resources and guidance frequently require lower-level actors to independently interpret and operationalise abstract mandates, their observations serve as a guide for broad policy adjustments.

The adaptive agency of street-level actors who act as active policy interpreters rather than passive implementers is highlighted by SLB theory through this lens. The crow's nest metaphor demonstrates how perspectives and discretion differ by level: actors who are closer to the students convert high-level policy into workable solutions, preserving educational equity and access despite ongoing structural and financial constraints. These optional practices are crucial for maintaining state functions in Tanzanian open schools within environments characterised by structural limitations.

### 2.2.2 Performance of Open Schools in Tanzania: Historical Narrative

In order to expand educational access for students unable to attend conventional schools, particularly in a difficult environment, Tanzania's open schools emerged in the 1960s. Programs at this time achieved enrolment gains despite limited teaching resources, reflecting the discretion exercised by teachers and administrators in adapting curriculum and teaching methods (Lipsky, 1980). Universal education was emphasised by the expansion of secondary-level open schools under socialist policies in the 1970s and 1980s, but irregular attendance, resource shortages, and minimal psychosocial support began to affect learner outcomes. Teachers and local administrators frequently improvised

with available materials and flexible scheduling, demonstrating SLB's notion that frontline bureaucrats influence policy through practice.

Decentralisation reforms gave local governments more authority to oversee schools, including open school initiatives, between the 1980s and the 2000s. Disparities in school performance were caused by persistent resource constraints and uneven local capacity, even though the goal was to improve governance. Lipsky's claim that discretion and adaptive strategies shape policy implementation at the street level is demonstrated by the fact that educators frequently had to balance national policy objectives with practical constraints, modifying instruction to meet learners' diverse needs (UNESCO, 2023; As-Siddiqi & El-Bukhary, 2025). All things considered, Tanzanian open schools' historical trajectory shows how SLB theory explains both the achievements and constraints of policy implementation in environments characterised by resource scarcity, learner diversity, and governance fissures.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

In order to thoroughly investigate how street-level bureaucrats, classroom teachers (micro level), headteachers (meso level), and quality assurers housed in the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) (macro level) deal with performance disincentives in Tanzanian open schools, this study used a qualitative case study design. Under the direction of Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory, the design allowed for a thorough investigation of the adaptive behaviours, coping mechanisms, and discretionary practices that arise when frontline actors interpret and carry out policy in limited circumstances. The fundamental tenet of this strategy is that frontline employees operate from a crow's nest vantage point, providing them with an elevated observational position from which they identify operational challenges, interpret policy in light of ground realities, and come up with creative solutions when institutional support is insufficient. The Morogoro Municipal Council and Dar es Salaam City Council (**I**lala, **K**inondoni, and **T**emeke) were chosen as the study sites because of their high concentration of open school centres, which provide a variety of institutional settings for documenting these experiences. The methodology closely aligns with the objectives of the study by emphasising participants' lived experiences and contextual adaptations. By analysing how Tanzanian open school actors modify, improvise, and interpret policy in the face of institutional and resource limitations, this methodological decision successfully operationalises the SLB framework. Additionally, it offers a sophisticated understanding of adaptive strategies, performance disincentives, and their consequences for educational equity and policy coherence.

### 3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Purposive and random sampling were used to select twenty participants in order to guarantee diversity and relevance. Because of their supervisory and policy oversight duties, headteachers (HT) and IAE quality assurers (QA) are positioned at crucial observation points within the educational hierarchy. The main frontline actors, classroom teachers (CT), were chosen at random to record a range of experiences with daily decision-making, resource use, and instructional delivery. Two classroom teachers, one male and one female, as well as a headteacher, were chosen from each learning centre (C1-C3), and two quality assurers were purposefully chosen from the IAE. This multi-level sampling approach improved cross-organisational triangulation and bolstered the validity of the results. Table 2 summarises the distribution of participants.

**Table 2**

*Participants at Various Levels*

| Study Areas | Micro | Sampling technique | Meso | Sampling technique | Macro | Sampling technique | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morogoro | C1 CT = 2 | Random | C1 HT = 1 | Purposive | IAE, quality assurer (QA) =1 | Purposive | 4 |
| | C2 CT = 2 | Random | C2 HT = 1 | Purposive | | Purposive | 3 |
| | C3 CT = 2 | Random | C3 HT = 1 | Purposive | | Purposive | 3 |
| **Subtotal** | **6** | | **3** | | **1** | | **10** |
| Dar es Salaam | C1 CT = 2 | Random | **I** C1 HT = 1 | Purposive | IAE, quality assurer (QA) =1 | Purposive | 4 |
| | C2 CT = 2 | Random | **K** C2 HT= 1 | Purposive | | | 3 |
| | C3 CT = 2 | Random | **T** C3 HT= 1 | Purposive | | | 3 |
| **Subtotal** | **6** | | **3** | | **1** | | **10** |
| **Total** | **12** | | **6** | | **2** | | **20** |

### 3.3 Data Collection

The interviews centred on five thematic domains to gather data: (i) experiences of resource scarcity, workload pressures, and infrastructure constraints; (ii) discretionary actions and coping strategies; (iii) perceptions of gaps

between policy intent and practice; (iv) supervisory, accountability, and reporting arrangements; and (v) reflections based on respondents' *crow's nest* vantage points. These domains allowed participants to expound on context-specific experiences and practices shaped by their positions within the system while ensuring consistency across interviews.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, which included open coding, axial coding, and theme development, was used to analyse the data. In order to find important statements about resource limitations, discretionary behaviour, coping strategies, and policy and practice gaps, open coding started with multiple readings of the transcripts. Improvisation, resource shortages, and policy mismatch were identified in statements like *'we often improvise when materials run out*' and *'policy demands do not match what we have on the ground'.* Then, by recognising connections like causes, conditions, and consequences, axial coding rearranged these original codes into more general categories. While improvisation, selective compliance, and task prioritisation formed coping and discretionary practices, codes like resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and delayed funding formed the category of structural resource constraints. These classifications shed light on how frontline actors understand systemic issues and create flexible solutions from their elevated perspectives. Ultimately, these categories were combined to create broad themes that organised the findings, such as Managing Conflicting Demands, Working under Chronic Resource Scarcity, and Discretion as a Survival Tool. In addition to ensuring that themes accurately reflected participants' lived experiences within the open schooling system, triangulation across micro-, meso-, and macro-level perspectives strengthened credibility.

### 3.5 Ethical Consideration

Strict ethical guidelines were followed in this study to safeguard participants and guarantee the validity of the findings. Before data collection, participants gave their voluntary informed consent after being fully informed about the study's objectives, methods, possible risks, and advantages. Confidentiality and anonymity received extra consideration due to Tanzania's delicate political and institutional environment. No personal identifiers, including names or specific positions, were recorded because respondents were reluctant to disclose information about performance limitations. Rather, identities were protected by codes and pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to the safely stored data. At any point, participants were free to leave without facing any repercussions. In accordance with ethical research standards, these precautions guaranteed participants' autonomy, safety, and privacy.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Performance Disincentives Affecting Open Schools

The delivery of education, especially through open schools, continues to face difficulties in many parts of the Global South, according to a review of the literature. Effective open schooling systems are still hampered by a lack of funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of qualified staff (Tuan *et al.,* 2024; Kamugisha & Mwakasangula, 2023; Mukasa et al., 2021). However, open schools are essential for providing marginalised students who cannot attend traditional schools with inclusive, adaptable, and accessible learning opportunities. Despite their importance, their operational and policy dynamics have received little scholarly attention. Through interviews with teachers, headteachers, and quality assurers from the Institute of Adult Education, this study investigates how actors at micro, meso, and macro levels navigate institutional constraints affecting open schooling delivery in Tanzania, guided by Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory.

#### 4.1.1 Responses from Classroom Teachers at Open School Centres (micro level)

In this context, a large number of street-level bureaucrats interviewed classroom teachers (CT) displayed issues with staff training opportunities, self and student motivation, and the availability and allocation of resources.

*Inadequate Resources:* Lesson delivery is severely hampered by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of teaching materials, according to teachers interviewed at open school centres. Basic supplies like desks, chalkboards, textbooks, and ICT facilities are lacking in many centres. For instance, a teacher from the Morogoro Open School Centre observed that:

> *Many students share a few out-of-date textbooks, which makes it challenging to follow the syllabus. Additionally, classes are occasionally held under trees or in borrowed community halls, which interferes with learning in inclement weather* (interview with Morogoro classroom teacher, September 10, 2025*).*

This demonstrates that students in open schools have uneven and frequently subpar educational experiences in comparison to those in formal schools, which reduces the open schooling model's efficacy and inclusivity.

*Staff Motivation:* Interviewed street-level bureaucrats noted that low pay, lack of recognition, and excessive workloads lower teachers' morale in relation to issues with their own and students' motivation. A teacher from Ilala (Dar es Salaam) Open School Centre stated that:

> *Even though we put in extra time to support adult learners, we are paid little or nothing. Similar to this, a lot of students, many of whom are adults overwhelmed with juggling work and family responsibilities, find it difficult to stay motivated. For instance, some students come to class after a long day at work, which has an impact on their engagement and focus. Motivational talks, peer study groups, and flexible scheduling are some of the ways we try to keep students engaged, but institutional neglect and a lack of resources limit our efforts* (interview with Ilala centre classroom teacher, October 14, 2025).

As previously mentioned, the ensuing low motivation among educators and students erodes dedication and compromises the quality of education.

*Professional Training and Development Opportunities:* When asked about opportunities for professional training and development, classroom teachers from Dar es Salaam City Council and Morogoro Municipal Council acknowledged that few opportunities for professional development are specifically designed for open schooling. The majority must independently adjust to open schooling contexts because they were trained for formal education systems. The following was clarified by a Kinondoni Open School Centre teacher.

> *We learn by doing; there are no workshops or refresher courses on how to work with adult learners or incorporate flexible methods. To update our teaching methods, educators establish unofficial peer-learning networks and make use of online resources. To improve lesson delivery, we make use of free online tutorials and videos* (interview with classroom teacher at Kinondoni Centre, October 15, 2025*).*

This goes to show that teachers are left unsupported in the absence of organised training programs from the IAE or local education offices, which lowers learner performance and instructional quality.

### 4.1.2 Responses from Headteachers at Open School Centres (Meso Level)

Deterrents about institutional and administrative limitations, coordination issues with higher authorities, and the conflict between meeting government expectations and attending to the practical needs of teachers and students were the main concerns of many headteachers interviewed from selected centres.

*Institutional Capacity* Headteachers (HT) admitted that institutional and administrative barriers make it difficult to manage open schooling effectively. Recurring themes included insufficient funding, a lack of operational guidelines, and limited autonomy. The following was noted by a head teacher at the Morogoro municipality's Open School Centre.

> *There is little space for urgent needs like maintenance or educational materials because the majority of the budget is managed centrally. Further, the policy does not provide a room for supporting centres. Additionally, open schools, which are frequently affiliated with traditional secondary schools, are given less consideration when it comes to scheduling and resource distribution. Management is made more difficult by staff deployment and procurement approval delays* (interview with Morogoro headteacher, September 10, 2025).

*Coordination Limitations:* According to headteachers interviewed, there are still issues with coordination between open schools, the Ministry of Education, and local authorities because of bureaucratic inefficiencies and divided responsibilities. A headteacher from Temeke reported the following, highlighting the policy's shortcomings;

> *Materials or money arrive late, and policies are implemented without sufficient consultation. For instance, the Ministry promotes inclusive education, but the IAE, local governments, and schools have unclear responsibilities, which limit its actual implementation. Inequitable resource distribution persists; open schools rarely receive ICT resources or infrastructure grants* (interview with Temeke centre headteacher, October 16, 2025).

This demonstrates how ineffective coordination weakens accountability, delays implementation, and compromises efficient service delivery rather than resolving the problems.

*Navigate Stakeholders Tensions:* In terms of navigating tensions, headteachers who were interviewed stated that there is constant conflict between following government regulations and attending to local needs. It was noted that although the government requires adherence to enrolment and curriculum completion goals, it is still unable to provide open schools with the resources they require. An Ilala District headteacher made the following observation:

> *Opportunities for hands-on learning are severely limited by the lack of necessary facilities like classrooms, labs, and libraries, even though they must adhere to the same educational standards as formal schools.* (Interview with headteacher at Ilala Centre, October 14, 2025*).*

### 4.1.3 Responses from Quality Assurers (Macro Level)

A number of concerns were raised by quality assurers who were interviewed regarding institutional and administrative issues pertaining to open school management, coordination with higher authorities, and resolving conflicts between meeting government expectations and the needs of students and teachers.

*Institutional Capacity:* In terms of institutions, the quality assurer based in Morogoro stressed that operations related to quality assurance are severely limited by institutional capacity and financial resources:

> *We occasionally go months without making monitoring visits to open school centres because the institute's (IAE) supervision budget is insufficient. Timely evaluations are further hampered by bureaucratic delays in plan approvals and procurement. Roles and responsibilities are unclear due to the lack of a cohesive national policy framework for open schooling* (Interview with Morogoro quality assurer, September 12, 2025).

This demonstrates how the role of IAE is undermined and how quality assurance operations are frequently reactive, resolving problems only in times of emergency rather than through regular monitoring.

*Coordination Challenges:* In addition to institutional issues, the quality assurer revealed during an interview that there is a coordination problem between the Ministry of Education, Local Authorities, and the IAE by pointing out that:

> *Duplication and inefficiency result from overlapping mandates and poor communication. The Ministry issues policy directives, but the IAE is responsible for carrying them out without the necessary funding. Open schools are frequently given less priority by local government representatives in favour of formal education initiatives. Consequently, disparities in service delivery are sustained as open schools receive fewer resources, funding, and infrastructure support.* (Interview with quality assurer based in Dar, October 20, 2025).

*Navigate Stakeholders Tensions:* In an interview, quality assurers acknowledged a recurring conflict between reporting positive outcomes and confronting actual conditions in centres when it comes to navigating the tension between meeting government expectations and addressing the practical needs of teachers and learners in open schools. They pointed out the following:

> *Even though many centres lack classrooms and qualified and permanent tutors, we are expected to demonstrate progress. We might be forced to use discretion and informal problem-solving in this case, advising educators and suggesting regional innovations like teaching with community resources* (interview with quality assurer based in Dar es Salaam, October 20, 2025).

These initiatives certainly show flexibility, but they also reveal structural flaws in the way that governmental goals are matched with real-world circumstances. In summing up, a complex web of performance disincentives affecting Tanzanian open schools is revealed by the findings of classroom teachers, headteachers, and quality assurers. Effective service delivery is hampered at all levels by a lack of resources, ineffective administration, poor coordination, and irrational policy expectations. Education actors use creativity and discretion to deal with institutional constraints, which is consistent with Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory. However, these individual initiatives cannot replace structural reforms. Therefore, increasing the effectiveness and sustainability of Tanzania's open schooling systems requires strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing coordination, and guaranteeing targeted resource allocation.

### 4.2 Coping Strategies Adopted by SLBs to Sustain Learning Outcomes

#### 4.2.1 Response from Class Room Teachers at Open School Centres (Micro Level)

Interviewed classroom teachers, who work as street-level bureaucrats or frontline implementers in Tanzania's open school system, provided micro-level insights that highlight the challenging realities of teaching in environments with limited resources. Three interrelated themes emerged from their responses: inadequate resources, low teacher and student motivation, and restricted access to professional development. In line with the presumptions of Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory, these experiences highlight how educators use discretion, improvisation, and informal strategies to maintain educational continuity.

**(a) Coping with Resource Inadequacy**

Teachers from selected open school centres in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam reported severe deficiencies in infrastructure, educational technology, and instructional materials. Many reported being taught in settings with inadequate desks, chalk, and textbooks. A Morogoro teacher recalled:

> *During the rainy season, classes held under trees must cease, and we lose valuable time. Further, we are in a situation where ten students frequently share a single textbook.* (Interview with classroom teacher, September 10, 2025).

In order to cope, teachers conduct lessons in community halls or churches, use students most of whom are adults' mobile phones for digital access, and borrow materials from local formal schools. These improvisational actions exemplify Lipsky's concept of bureaucratic discretion, in which frontline actors modify policies to suit local circumstances in order to maintain service continuity. However, the differences in educational quality between open and formal schooling systems are frequently exacerbated by such adaptive practices.

(b) Addressing Motivation and Engagement Challenges

Due to their long hours, inadequate pay, and lack of recognition, teachers also expressed low motivation. An instructor from the Ilala Open School Centre explained:

> *I use storytelling and group quizzes to keep adult students motivated. We work overtime to support learners who come after work, but we receive no extra allowance.* (Interview with Ilala classroom teacher, October 14, 2025).

In a similar vein, generally, the experience shows that students frequently struggle with conflicting family and financial responsibilities, which results in inconsistent attendance. In response, teachers create peer-study groups, modify schedules, and hold motivational sessions, actions that, although outside of official guidelines, demonstrate discretionary problem-solving intended to maintain learner engagement.

**(c) Navigating Limited Professional Development**

The majority of open school instructors during an interview stated that they had not received any official training in adult learning techniques or open schooling pedagogy. Based on that, one Kinondoni teacher pointed out.

> *We have never participated in open schooling-specific workshops. For assistance, I turn to teacher WhatsApp groups and YouTube tutorials.* (Interview with Kinondoni classroom teacher, October 15, 2025).

As a result, educators create unofficial professional networks where they exchange lesson plans and digital resources. In the absence of formal institutional support, this self-organised learning process exhibits professionalism and independence at the grassroots level.

**(d) Discretionary Practices and Implications**

The discretionary space described by Lipsky (1980) is exemplified by teachers' adaptive actions, flexible schedules, peer mentoring, and creative resource mobilisation. As one of the Morogoro educators put it.

> *"We fill the gaps with creativity and goodwill; the system provides us with policies but not the means".* (Interview with Morogoro classroom teacher, September 10, 2025).

Because success depends on individual initiative, local cooperation, and community support, these initiatives maintain inclusivity and learning while also producing uneven results across centres. As a result, teachers' discretion becomes both a strength and a limitation, influencing the open education system's delicate yet resilient character.

**4.2.2 Responses from Headteachers at Open School Centres (Meso Level)**

At the meso level, headteachers navigate the challenging realities of running open school centres in underfunded and bureaucratically inflexible settings by acting as a liaison between legislators and frontline educators. Three main themes emerge from their responses: conflicts between operational realities and government expectations, coordination and policy inconsistencies, and institutional and administrative obstacles. These results are consistent with Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory, which highlights how middle-level managers use their discretion to balance competing demands while maintaining service delivery.

**(a) Institutional and Administrative Barriers**

It was revealed through interviews that open school management is severely hampered by limited institutional autonomy, insufficient funding, and unclear operational frameworks, according to headteachers' repeated reports. Because budgets are managed centrally, there is little opportunity to address pressing issues like staff welfare, instructional materials, or infrastructure upkeep. A Morogoro Municipality Open School Centre headteacher made the following observation.

> *Open schools, which are frequently connected to traditional secondary schools, are marginalised in resource allocation and scheduling because the majority of the budget is centrally controlled, leaving little room to address urgent needs. Management is made more difficult by delays in staff deployment and procurement approvals.* (Interview with headteachers, September 10, 2025).

The insights above indicate that headteachers use discretionary tactics to deal with the situation, such as engaging the community to mobilise resources, negotiating informally with district education officers, and putting immediate operational needs ahead of formal procedures. These methods demonstrate the adaptive problem-solving that SLB theory emphasises, enabling service continuity in spite of structural constraints.

**(b) Coordination and Policy Inconsistencies**

One significant issue was the lack of coordination between open school centres, the Ministry of Education, the Institute of Adult Education (IAE), and local authorities. Timely decision-making is frequently hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, overlapping mandates, and delayed communication. The Temeke District headteacher made the following observation.

> *Open schools rarely receive infrastructure grants or ICT resources; policies are introduced without sufficient consultation, and materials or funds arrive late. Resource allocation remains unequal.* (Interview, October 16, 2025).

These disjointed interactions force headteachers to put short-term instructions ahead of long-term strategic objectives, demonstrating how discretionary decisions redefine policy implementation at the school level.

**(c) Navigating the Tension between Standards and Reality**

Results from interviews indicate that headteachers constantly struggle to balance meeting local operational realities with meeting government-mandated curriculum, enrolment, and quality standards. This is what an Ilala District head teacher said:

> *We are expected to meet the same standards as formal schools, but we don't have adequate classrooms, labs, or libraries, which makes practical learning extremely challenging.* (Interview, October 14, 2025).

Rearranging classes, making use of borrowed spaces, and establishing unofficial alliances with neighbourhood organisations are examples of adaptive tactics for helping students. By taking these steps, headteachers can pragmatically align policy with local constraints while maintaining operational stability.

**(d) Implications for Governance and Policy Implementation**

The discretionary tactics used by headteachers demonstrate the crucial governance role they play in maintaining open education. Despite institutional neglect, they maintain learning continuity through resource negotiations, local coordination, and operational process modifications. However, because results are largely dependent on personal initiative and contextual support rather than systematic institutional backing, these practices may exacerbate inequality. The conflict between Tanzanian open schools' practical realities and policy intentions is highlighted by this duality.

**4.2.3 Responses from Quality Assurers at the Institute of Adult Education**

Quality assurers at the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) hold a strategic oversight role at the macro level, connecting institutional implementation with national education policy. Their viewpoints highlight the political, administrative, and structural difficulties in managing open school initiatives in Tanzania. Three interrelated themes emerged from the interviews: managing the conflict between practical realities and governmental expectations, coordination and policy fragmentation, and institutional and administrative constraints. These results support Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory by demonstrating how macro-level actors use discretionary practices to maintain policy implementation in resource-constrained contexts.

**(a) Institutional and Administrative Constraints**

Based on interviews, quality assurance procedures in open schooling are severely hampered by insufficient funding and institutional capacity. Due to ongoing budget deficits and bureaucratic hold-ups, monitoring is frequently reactive. One Morogoro quality assurer pointed out:

> *We occasionally go months without making monitoring visits because the institute's supervision budget is too meagre. Timely evaluations are further hampered by bureaucratic delays in plan approvals and procurement. This is the outcome of unclear roles and responsibilities caused by the lack of a cohesive national policy framework for open schooling.* (Interview with quality assurer, September 12, 2025).

The above insights reveal that assurers use their discretion to deal with the situation by giving priority to critical centres, using remote supervision, and combining open school oversight with other adult education programs. These flexible tactics enable quality assurance to continue in spite of institutional flaws by reflecting the improvisational and problem-solving traits of SLB actors.

**(b) Coordination and Policy Fragmentation**

One of the main concerns raised through an interview was the difficulties in coordinating with the Ministry of Education, Local Government Authorities, and the IAE. An assurer based in Dar es Salaam noted that fragmented responsibilities, poor communication, and overlapping mandates resulted in inefficiencies and unequal resource distribution. As one assurer noted:

> *The Ministry issues policy directives, but the IAE is responsible for carrying them out without funding. Open schools are frequently given less priority by local government representatives in favour of formal programs. As a result, open schools get less financial support, fewer resources, and little infrastructure.* (Interview with quality assurer, October 20, 2025).

In order to effectively manage these fissures, quality assurers use ad hoc meetings, informal networks, and discretionary communication channels. This is an example of bureaucratic negotiation that makes up for systemic inefficiencies.

**(c) Navigating the Tension between Government Expectations and Practical Realities**

Insights from interviews show that in spite of poor operating conditions, assurers also face pressure to report positive performance outcomes. They use discretion to strike a balance between contextual realities and policy expectations, offering schools practical solutions like converting community halls into classrooms or enlisting local craftspeople for vocational training. While attending to local needs, this constructive discretion guarantees that performance indicators appear to be in line with policy.

**(d) Implications for Macro-Level Governance**

Through interviews, the coping strategies used by quality assurers highlight Tanzania's open school governance's vulnerability. While local problem-solving, informal coordination, and discretion maintain minimal functionality, they conceal more serious structural flaws like poor interagency accountability, insufficient funding, and a lack of a cohesive policy framework. These tactics highlight the significance of systemic changes that improve institutional capacity, make mandates clearer, and guarantee fair resource distribution in order to support the long-term viability and high standards of open education.

### 4.3 The Manner Coping Strategies Shape or Impede Policy Implementation

#### 4.3.1 Effects of Classroom Teachers' Coping Strategies on Policy Implementation

Based on interview results, classroom teachers' coping mechanisms at open school centres have two effects on how policies are implemented. On the plus side, they uphold the government's goals of learning continuity and educational inclusion. By fostering informal practices outside of formal policy frameworks and producing uneven learning outcomes, they negatively distort policy intentions. This section examines how these tactics affect policy implementation in both positive and negative ways, guided by Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory.

**(a) Coping with Resource Inadequacy**

Interview insights accord that by maintaining continuity in the face of limited resources, teachers' improvisations, such as borrowing instructional materials, using adult students' mobile phones for digital access, or holding classes in community halls, positively support the policy goal of inclusive education. The Education and Training Policy (2014) goals of accessibility and lifelong learning are reflected in these practices. However, these innovations create inconsistent learning experiences and jeopardise national quality standards because they vary across centres. Additionally, the use of shared textbooks and temporary classrooms could normalise resource shortages, undermining systemic improvement and long-term accountability.

**(b) Addressing Motivation and Engagement Challenges**

The policy goal of lowering dropout rates is advanced by teachers' efforts to engage students through storytelling, group tests, and flexible class schedules. They exemplify learner-centred pedagogy by matching instruction to students' socioeconomic realities. However, curriculum integrity and standard progression requirements may be jeopardised by schedule flexibility and informal assessments, leading to more nominal than substantive policy compliance.

**(c) Navigating Limited Training and Professional Development**

In situations where institutional training is lacking, teachers' pedagogical capacity is strengthened, and quality is maintained through informal peer-learning circles, online tutorials, and digital material exchanges. These programs support the policy goal of ongoing teacher development and close an institutional gap. However, these networks run the risk of adopting unproven pedagogical approaches, eroding national curriculum standards, and inconsistent instructional quality in the absence of standardised oversight.

**(d) Discretionary Practices and Broader Implications**

By demonstrating resilience and adaptability, teachers' discretionary problem-solving, such as flexible scheduling and community partnerships, bridges the gap between policy design and practice. Excessive discretion, however, can lead to personality-driven rather than system-driven results and diminish accountability. This undermines the quality assurance and monitoring systems that are necessary for the implementation of cogent policies.

Summing it all up, teachers' coping strategies both help and impede the successful execution of policies. These tactics encourage inclusivity and maintain learning in the face of resource limitations, but they also lead to unofficial and uneven practices. Lipsky's (1980) claim that frontline actors actively shape policy during implementation, thereby exposing structural gaps between policy intentions and classroom realities, is supported by this duality. In order to institutionalise teacher support, guarantee fair resource distribution, and encourage ongoing professional development, systemic reforms are therefore necessary.

### 4.3.2 Effects of Headteachers' Coping Strategies on Policy Implementation

Insights from selected schools indicate that headteachers are essential intermediaries between legislators and frontline educators at the meso level, converting policy directives into practical application. Their coping mechanisms demonstrate how coordination issues, administrative bottlenecks, and institutional limitations affect the application of open schooling policies. In line with Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory, which holds that middle-level managers strike a balance between accountability and contextual pragmatism, they manage systemic rigidity to maintain service delivery through discretionary adaptation.

#### (a) Coping with Institutional and Administrative Barriers

In order to maintain school operations, headteachers who deal with a lack of autonomy, delayed funding, and limited budget control frequently use unofficial and flexible tactics. To acquire supplies, fix infrastructure, or improve employee welfare, some negotiate locally with district education officers or organise community support. By preserving functional learning environments in spite of systemic underfunding, these practices have a positive impact on policy implementation. They do, however, also show a move away from formal governance and toward ad hoc management, which can erode institutional accountability and sustain disparities between centres. Resource allocation becomes erratic and disconnected from policy standards when decisions are made primarily based on local discretion.

#### (b) Managing Coordination and Policy Inconsistencies

Headteachers frequently establish unofficial communication networks in response to inadequate coordination between the Ministry of Education, IAE, and local authorities in order to speed up decision-making and obtain resources that have been delayed. At the local level, this kind of improvisation promotes operational efficiency and guarantees policy continuity. However, headteachers are forced to put immediate compliance ahead of strategic planning due to conflicting mandates and inconsistent instructions, which undermines long-term policy coherence. This pragmatic discretion encourages fragmented policy execution while also aiding in the short-term resolution of problems.

#### (c) Reconciling Standards with Local Realities

Head teachers reorganise schedules, share facilities with formal schools, and collaborate with community organisations for learner support in order to address unreasonable performance expectations. These flexible tactics support learning continuity and inclusivity, favourably upholding the goals of the equitable access policy. However, because implementation flexibility results in uneven quality outcomes, such practices may also distort national standards. As a result, individual initiative is more important for open school performance than systemic support.

#### (d) Implications for Policy Governance

Overall, the coping strategies used by headteachers show how resilient and delicate meso-level policy implementation can be. By bridging the gap between policy intent and practice, their discretionary governance ensures functionality under limited circumstances. But depending more on individual ingenuity than on institutional frameworks runs the risk of solidifying uneven service delivery and inconsistent policy. In order to improve policy fidelity in Tanzania's open schooling system, this duality emphasises the necessity of decentralised decision-making authority, sufficient funding, and cogent coordination structures.

### 4.3.3 Effects of Quality Assurers' Coping Strategies on Policy Implementation

Quality assurers have a crucial oversight role that connects institutional practice to national policy at the macro level. Their coping strategies are a reflection of adaptive governance and strategic discretion meant to maintain open education in the face of scarce resources and unclear policy. According to Lipsky's (1980) theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy, these actors use adaptability and unofficial coordination to strike a balance between practical limitations and accountability requirements.

#### (a) Coping with Institutional and Administrative Constraints

In order to maintain monitoring functions in the face of insufficient funding and bureaucratic rigidity, quality assurers employ creative supervision techniques and discretionary prioritisation. They frequently use remote monitoring tools like phone consultations and virtual check-ins, concentrate on high-need centres, and integrate supervision activities with other adult education programs. By preserving oversight continuity in the face of resource constraints, these tactics have a positive impact on policy implementation. However, they also undermine the policy's commitment to fair and methodical evaluation by encouraging selective supervision and uneven enforcement of quality standards. These inconsistencies are made worse by the lack of a comprehensive national open schooling policy, which makes quality assurance reactive rather than proactive.

**(b) Managing Coordination and Policy Fragmentation**

Ad hoc inter-agency meetings and informal communication networks are often used by quality assurers to address inadequate coordination between the IAE, the Ministry of Education, and local authorities. These improvisational efforts support the goals of inclusivity and efficiency in policy by improving responsiveness and facilitating problem-solving. However, by avoiding formal accountability frameworks, these coping mechanisms exacerbate policy incoherence and fragmentation. In the end, uniform policy realisation across regions is hampered by the reliance on personal networks rather than institutionalised systems, which leads to inconsistent policy interpretation and weak institutional accountability.

**(c) Reconciling Government Expectations and Field Realities**

By focusing on small steps forward and encouraging regional innovations, quality assurers manage the pressure to show positive results while facing resource shortages. For example, they urge schools to use community halls as classrooms or hire local professionals to teach vocational skills. By emphasising symbolic compliance over substantive improvement, these practices distort policy fidelity while upholding government goals for access and skill development. By doing this, quality assurers serve as policy intermediaries, blurring the distinction between formal implementation and practical adaptation by reinterpreting national targets to fit local realities.

**(d) Implications for Policy and Governance**

In general, the coping mechanisms used by IAE quality assurers demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of macro-level policy execution. Their adaptive practices conceal structural flaws like inadequate funding, dispersed authority, and irrational performance expectations while maintaining institutional functionality and guaranteeing some policy continuity. Lipsky's (1980) claim that bureaucrats "make policy" through discretion when institutional frameworks are insufficient is supported by this duality. To improve systemic policy effectiveness and lessen reliance on unofficial coping mechanisms, Tanzania's open schooling system needs integrated accountability mechanisms, coherent policy frameworks, and enhanced institutional capacity for long-term reform.

**4.4 Discussion**

Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory is used in this section to analyse the study's findings. The *Crow's Nest* metaphor is used to show how actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels monitor, interpret, and manage performance incentives in Tanzanian open schools. Within this framework, frontline bureaucrats serve as watchdogs, monitoring obstacles from their individual perspectives and making prompt decisions to guarantee the system keeps working in spite of scarce resources, unclear policies, and demanding workloads. The results support Lipsky's claim that discretion is essential to maintaining service delivery, but that discretion also modifies policy in practice, leading to variations in implementation across contexts.

The lookout posts that are closest to students are occupied by classroom teachers at the micro level. Despite inadequate infrastructure, delayed materials, and little supervision, they use local creativity and improvisation to sustain instructional continuity. Teachers in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam, for example, frequently use community halls or official school classrooms to accommodate students. They create peer-learning networks and use digital learning strategies like radio lessons or WhatsApp groups to reach students who are unable to attend on a daily basis. The paradox of discretion is best illustrated by these adaptive tactics, which maintain the inclusive goal of open education while causing variations in the calibre of instruction.

As intermediary *crow's nest officers,* head teachers work at the meso level, assessing both the expectations of national policymakers and the realities on the front lines. Their function exemplifies Lipsky's idea of "bureaucratic negotiation," in which demands for accountability are weighed against practical viability. The study demonstrates how head teachers navigate limited financial autonomy, disjointed policy directives, and unclear institutional mandates by mobilising community support, negotiating informally with district officers, and reinterpreting performance indicators to reflect local constraints. While this adaptive governance guarantees ongoing operations, it also highlights flaws in administrative frameworks and equitable resource distribution.

Quality assurers mediate policy implementation across several centres at the macro level by serving as strategic observers in the higher crow's nest. Despite limited funds and competing mandates, they exercise discretion by giving priority to important centres, incorporating open schooling into more comprehensive adult education programs, and offering teachers unofficial advice. This flexibility maintains system functionality while hiding more significant structural injustices and resource disparities.

Overall, the results imply that discretion serves as a survival strategy and a tool for governance in Tanzanian open schools. Although these adaptive behaviours show resilience, they also strengthen reliance on personal initiative as opposed to structural change. Strengthening institutional capacity, clarifying mandates, improving coordination, and

increasing funding are all necessary to convert these coping mechanisms into sustainable, equitable policy implementation.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

According to the study's findings, street-level bureaucrats, such as head teachers, classroom teachers, and quality assurers, are essential to Tanzanian open schools' operation because they manage institutional, administrative, and resource limitations to sustain service delivery. The results show that these actors occupy an elevated vantage point from which they observe systemic challenges, interpret policy in the context of ground realities, and use discretion to adapt practices. This is in line with Lipsky's (1980) Street-Level Bureaucracy theory, especially his concept of the *crow's nest*. Thus, discretion bridges the gap between policy intent and implementation by serving as both a governance and adaptive mechanism. But depending too much on individual initiative runs the risk of sustaining systemic injustices and uneven service quality.

Proactive institutional changes, such as sufficient funding, explicit mandates, and cogent policy coordination, are required to strengthen open schools. To guarantee educational quality and equity across centres, sustainable improvement should also place a high priority on capacity building, fair resource distribution, and organised support systems. This study's focus on urban areas and comparatively small sample size, which may restrict generalizability, are among its limitations. In order to investigate correlations between resources, discretionary practices, and educational outcomes from the *crow's nest* perspective, future research could look at rural open schools, use quantitative methods, or adopt larger samples.

### 5.2 Recommendations

First, building on the Education and Training Policy (URT, 2024) and the Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) Framework, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) should create a specific National Open Schooling Policy to standardise quality assurance, define roles, and formalise structures. Second, in order to effectively address local needs, open school centres should be given more administrative and financial autonomy in accordance with the decentralisation principles found in the Local Government (District Authorities) Act of 1982 and the Decentralisation by Devolution (D-by-D) Policy. Third, in line with the Tanzania Digital Economy Framework (2023), the National ICT Policy (2016), and the ESDP 2025/26-29/30, investments in digital and communication infrastructure, radio, mobile technologies, and e-learning are necessary to strengthen open schooling.

Fourth, the Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (TCPD) Framework (2017) and the National Open and Distance Learning Strategy under the Institute of Adult Education (IAE) should guide ongoing professional development to improve the competencies of teachers, headteachers, and quality assurers. Fifth, as required by the Education Inspectorate Regulations and the IAE Act (1975), coordination between the IAE, LGAs, and MoEST should be improved. Lastly, in accordance with the Education Fund Act (2001), the Capitation Grant Guidelines, and the Education 2030 Agenda, sufficient funding and infrastructure for open schools are necessary to ensure equity.

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