

BK Frequently Asked Questions

August 2023

WHAT IS “BIBLE KNOWLEDGE” (BK)?

- It is a four year optional subject available in all Tanzanian secondary schools (in Forms 1 to 4), but is seldom offered due to a lack of teaching materials and skills.
- It is taught for two periods per week, 40 weeks per year (80 periods).
- The syllabus was developed collaboratively by evangelical Christian denominations and approved by the government. The official text book is the RSV Bible.
- The course covers selected books from the Old and New Testaments, including the complete books of Genesis, Exodus, the Gospel of Matthew (or alternatively Luke), and the Acts of the Apostles. It also touches on Numbers, Joshua and Judges.
- The government sets national exams for BK – same as for any other subject – in Form 2 and Form 4.
- The exam results count towards the Certificate of Secondary Education (O-level).

WHY IS BK IMPORTANT?

- It provides structured, in-depth, credible tuition for four years, covering a representative cross-section of the Bible. It leads to far better Biblical understanding than any other form of instruction widely available to teenagers in Tanzania.
- In Tanzania, 2 out of every 5 girls are married before the age of 18. For the vast majority of these girls, BK is the only opportunity they will get to study the Bible in depth.
- It purely covers the Bible, without any denominational traditions. Hence it is appropriate for all Christian students. Much of the material is also relevant to Muslims, some of whom study BK.
- It can be run by any secondary school in Tanzania, and can be studied by any student in such schools. Theoretically it could reach two million secondary students every year.
- It is studied at a formative stage in a teenager's development – when they are old enough to undertake a rigorous Bible course, yet they still have all their adult years ahead of them.
- Students who complete Bible Knowledge tend to be the more capable ones, because they have had to overcome many challenges to take an optional subject in an education system that is inadequate. Many of these students will end up in leadership roles, where their sound Biblical training will influence Tanzanian society. Some of these students will end up as teachers, and will teach Bible Knowledge to others, thus multiplying the benefits of the program.
- “Bible Knowledge is an important subject in preparing citizens with good moral and ethical conduct in day to day life. Therefore, all educational stakeholders, teachers, parents, guardians and religious leaders in various Christian communities should take necessary measures to improve the candidates’ performance in this subject.” (Tanzanian Ministry of Education)
https://onlinesys.necta.go.tz/cira/csee/2020/014_BIBLE_KNOWLEDGE.pdf

WHAT IS THE BK PROGRAM?

- It encourages and equips secondary schools to offer BK to students, free of charge.
- It started in 2016 with 17 schools in the Diocese of Kagera, Anglican Church of Tanzania.
- Now it is operating in four Anglican dioceses (Kagera, Lweru, Biharamulo, and Western Tanganyika), collectively covering the Kagera Region in north-west Tanzania (an area bigger than Rwanda or Burundi), as well as parts of the Geita Region and the Kigoma Region.

WHY IS THE BK PROGRAM NEEDED?

- Bible Knowledge is part of the Tanzanian curriculum for all secondary schools. This is an incredible opportunity to make the Bible well-known to millions of youth.
- But unfortunately the great majority of Tanzanian secondary schools do not have the expertise nor the funds to offer Bible Knowledge as a subject to their students.
- Hence there is a need to 'bridge this gap' by giving interested schools all the materials they need – including lessons ready to deliver – so that Christian teachers who are passionate about their faith are equipped to teach this subject.

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM PROGRAM GOALS?

- To involve as many secondary schools as possible in teaching Bible Knowledge throughout Tanzania;
- to as many students as possible; and
- to have the highest possible proportion of students passing their Bible Knowledge national exams.

HOW IS THE BK PROGRAM RUN?

- The Anglican Church of Tanzania – through the dioceses of Kagera, Lweru, Biharamulo and Western Tanganyika – has taken the initiative to foster the teaching of Bible Knowledge in local schools, in a combined area that is larger than Rwanda.
- Each diocese coordinates its own BK program within its diocesan boundary, but they all use the same text books and teaching materials specifically developed for this program.

ARE THERE ENOUGH GOVERNMENT TEACHERS WILLING TO TEACH BK?

- The Kagera Region has over 260 secondary schools with over 3,700 teachers.
- Tanzania's population is 60% Christian, and Kagera has a higher proportion of Christians.
- So each school has 14 teachers on average, of whom 9 are likely to be Christians.
- We only need one committed Christian teacher (preferably two) per school to teach BK.
- In practice we have found that more than 50% of schools are willing to do this, with the right support.

HOW IS THE BK PROGRAM FUNDED?

- In the first year or two, a number of individuals and organisations funded the establishment of the program including SparkLit, CMS-Australia, Anglican Aid (Sydney) and Tanzania Medical Aid.
- In the following years, SparkLit and Tanzania Medical Aid continued to provide ongoing funding. While this generous commitment is very much appreciated, at times it was not enough to cover all the expenses and some important activities had to be deferred (eg seminars for BK teachers). Also, funding shortages restricted our program growth.
- Fortunately, in 2022 we received additional grants from the Bible Society of Australia and from the Leon & Mildred Morris Foundation (Australia), and we more than doubled our coverage.
- Since the beginning of the program in 2016, fundraising has been undertaken by Andy Bennett, a former CMS-Australia missionary (now retired in Adelaide), who originally established the program.

WHY CAN'T IT BE SELF-FUNDING?

- About 90% of Tanzanian secondary students are in government schools. These schools are poorly resourced, and cannot afford enough books for core subjects, let alone for optional subjects like Bible Knowledge. So it's not feasible to fund the program by selling our books to schools.
- Similarly, over 80% of Tanzanians are very poor. Parents often cannot meet the essential expenses for their children's education such as uniforms, shoes and various fees. So it's not feasible to fund the program by selling our books to students.

HOW CAN ITS PERFORMANCE BE MEASURED?

- There are many aspects that would be nice to know, but not all are practical to measure. So we mainly focus on measuring things that can be readily verified from credible sources. The main source is the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA), which runs all the national exams for secondary schools, including for Bible Knowledge. Students take these exams at the end of Form 2 and Form 4, the latter being the Certificate of Secondary Education Exam (CSEE).
- We can get the Form 2 exam results at https://www.necta.go.tz/ftsee_results. Here we can look up schools in our program after they have been running BK for two years. We can see how many students sat BK in a given school, and what grades they got.
- We can get similar information for Form 4 at https://www.necta.go.tz/csee_results.
- So our main measures are the number of schools participating in our program, the number of students in these schools who sit Form 2 and Form 4 exams, and the percentage who pass.
- We can also estimate the total number of students studying BK in Forms 1 to 4 from the above.

WHAT RESULTS HAS IT PRODUCED SO FAR?

- Collectively we have gone from 17 schools in 2016 to 160 schools in 2023 with 10,000 BK students.
- In the 2022 national exams, 1371 of our students sat their BK Form 2 exam and 68% passed, while 728 of our students sat their BK Form 4 exam and 95% passed. These pass rates are better than for some core subjects. All these figures are significant improvements on the previous year.