

Early childhood education in Tanzania: Views and beliefs of stakeholders on its status and development

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Abstract

Globally, there is consensus among education stakeholders that early childhood education sets a foundation **for children's development, learning, and future life achievements**. While global perceptions of early childhood care and education (ECCE) have been broadly explored in other parts of the world, little is known about ECCE in Tanzania even though it is ideally a compulsory part of formal basic education for every child before joining grade one. This study investigated the status of early childhood education (ECE) in Tanzania by critically analyzing the views and beliefs of stakeholders on its status and development. The study recruited two policy makers, 14 ECE college principals, 34 preprimary college tutors, and three ECE academics using a homogeneous sampling technique. Employing a phenomenological research design, the study used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and documentary analyses in collecting the required data. Findings revealed that while in the policy and curriculum documents ECE holds equal status with other levels of education, it holds extremely low status among education stakeholders, resulting in ill-prepared preservice ECE teachers and limited parent-school engagement. To improve the quality of ECE in Tanzania, stakeholders suggested improvements in the quality and quantity of preservice teachers, including detachment of preprimary classes from primary schools and establishment of an integrated ECCE policy, guidelines, and practices to be completed by an ECCE joint taskforce. Further, in-service training for ECE college tutors and principals is critically important, as is concentration of limited resources in few selected teachers' colleges.

Keywords

early childhood care and education, Tanzania, preprimary education, ECE stakeholders' views, status of ECCE in Tanzania

1.0 Background of the study and its Context

In recent years, quality early childhood education (ECE) has been receiving unprecedented attention globally (UNESCO, 2007; UNICEF, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, and Tanzania in particular, the quality of ECE has been arguably low (Ndjuyeye & Rao, 2018; UNESCO, 2007; UNICEF, 2010). Tanzania is

among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in which the quality of ECE is very low due to under resourcing and inadequate infrastructure (Garcia, et al., 2008; Nsamenang, 2008; Young & Mustard, 2008). A report by UNICEF (2010) documented that children in Tanzania lack access to education and public health services, including vaccinations, clean water, and sanitation. UNICEF plays a critical

role in helping Tanzania move towards a vision of quality and equity education at all levels. This is particularly important given the many challenges that children face in schools.

UNICEF's support involves building partnerships and encouraging greater national investment in ECE, and improving the standards of preprimary education (PPE) by training teachers and other educational stakeholders (UNICEF, 2010). In this paper, the terms early childhood education, preschool, and preprimary education (PPE) are used interchangeably.

Early childhood education is considered to be imperative for the child as it is the first step towards entering the world of knowledge (Black, et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2003). The main purpose of ECE is to prepare children mentally, physically, and socio-emotionally for formal schooling and to prevent poor performance and early dropout (Hyson, 2003; Mligo, 2018; Smith, 2012; Sylva, et al., 2003). **Children's** participation in good quality ECE has long-term (Heckman, 2008; Sylva et al., 2003). Research suggests that ECE is a key for the development of young children before they enter primary school (Kaul, 2002; Young, 2002). Children who have attended ECE tend to learn more rapidly through an organized curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and interaction with fellow children.

Early childhood education has strong bearing on attendance and participation of young children once they enter primary school. It also helps older children, particularly girls, with school attendance, which frees them from the responsibility of sibling care. Research literature indicates that ECE helps children become more self-determining, confident, and it promotes their all-around development (Mligo, 2018; Mtahabwa, 2007). It is apparent from the aforementioned literature that more emphasis is needed to improve the quality of ECE, especially

for disadvantaged groups living in poor and inaccessible areas.

Early childhood education in Tanzania is provided by public schools and private centers and is coordinated by two ministries. While the care and education of children aged 0-4 is under the department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Health, Community Development Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDEC), the care and education of children aged 5 to 6 years is under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). The Education and Training Policy of 1995 directed each primary school to have an attached preprimary class. However, a study conducted by Kweka, et al., (2000) reported that most ECE centers were not registered and not attached to primary schools. Attaching ECE centers to primary schools is important because it may facilitate the smooth transition of children to primary schools as they experience similar environments and the same teachers (in some areas the Grade one teacher also teaches an ECE class in Tanzania).

Available empirical evidence indicates that in Tanzania, ECE has not yet been given the importance it deserves (Mtahabwa, 2010; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). The government and other educational stakeholders have lowly prioritized ECE physical infrastructures and teaching and learning materials (Mtahabwa, 2010; Zuze & Reddy, 2016), leading to unqualified teachers and supervisory staff (Mligo, 2015; Mtahabwa, 2007). The authors also note that there is a serious shortage of well-trained teachers. As a result, the majority of ECE teachers adopt didactic teaching styles that give too much emphasis to literacy and numeracy skills and less emphasis to learning through play and discovery. International and local literature have shown that children in ECE need to be taught by the most qualified teachers (Kweka et al., 2000; Mitchell, et al., 2008). They need the

best trained teachers who are competent and specially trained in ECE because it is at this level of education that the foundation of learning for all subsequent levels is developed. To ensure the quality of preprimary schools, it is imperative to have well qualified and trained teachers.

Tanzania is blessed with a variety of natural resources that include areas of land, mountains, forests, national parks/wildlife, rivers, lakes, coastal zones, fisheries, minerals, coal, and natural gas (Tanzania Human Development Report (THDR), 2014). Some of the natural resources, such as fisheries and minerals, are being commercially exploited, which contributes **significantly to the country's** economic growth (THDR, 2014). Despite the rich resources, Tanzania is still a poor country with unsustainable harvesting of natural resources and many parents fail to enroll their children for preprimary education. Subsequently, only a small proportion of children actually enrolled at PPE level do attend school regularly. Most children from poor households cannot afford private preprimary schools which provide adequate teaching and learning resources and more qualified teachers. Although twenty-five years have passed since PPE was officially recognized as part of the formal education system, its quality is still very low. Preprimary classes are taught by teachers that lack specialized training in ECE. Parents and the community at large still lack understanding of PPE and its importance (Mligo, 2017; Mtahabwa, 2009). For instance, they do not perceive it as a program that one can pursue in a teacher college that leads to a career in teaching at the preprimary level. In Tanzania people have developed a notion that PPE is simply a class in a primary school that **doesn't** need serious attention.

1.1. The Formalization of Preprimary Education in Tanzania

The United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2012) follows the 1(2)-6-4-2-3+ formal educational model, which includes one (or two) years of PPE, 10 years of compulsory primary and lower secondary education, two years of upper/high secondary education, and three or more years of tertiary education. The system evolved from the inherited 4-4-4-4+ colonial education system. **With Tanzania's rapid** economic growth and social changes as well as technological advancements throughout the world, it became obvious in the early 2000s that **Tanzania's existing** education policy was not bringing the desired results. The Education and Training Policy (ETP) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995) aimed to increase access to education without compromising the quality thereof, and focus on issues related to inclusiveness, class size, improved teacher training, and attrition issues (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2014). As such, educational practitioners started to argue for changing the education policy to meet new demands.

The government of Tanzania acknowledged preprimary education for children ages 5 and 6 years under **Tanzania's ETP** in 1995 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995), and placed it under the direction of the Ministry of Education. However, it was formalized and made compulsory and free in the 2014 Education and Training Policy (MoEVT, 2014). The recognition of preprimary education was a response to the international policy statements which emphasized the rights of education for all children. The government of Tanzania agreed to provide ECE in partnerships with parents, community, and nongovernmental organizations (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). Apart from obligations to international policy

statements, changes in social and economic situations also raised society's **interest** in preschool education for their children before compulsory schooling (Ndijuye, 2017).

1.2 Structure of the Education System in Tanzania

Tanzania, as a former British protectorate, inherited an education system very similar to the English education system (Sifuna, 2007). The formal education system is hierarchical; it is composed of preprimary education, primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). The only formalized system for children before school age is the preprimary education system for the 5- and 6-year-olds, which was formalized in 1995 under the ETP, although in classrooms there are often children who are 4 years old. As a result, preprimary education was integrated within primary schools and included **in the country's formal** education structure.

Whereas the initial education structure comprised four levels (i.e., 7-4-2-3+), the new structure became five (i.e., 2-7-4-2-3+), consisting of two years of preprimary education (ages 4-5/6), seven years of primary education (ages 7-13), four years of Ordinary Certificate of Secondary Level Education (CLSE) (ages 14-17), two years of Advanced Certificate of Secondary Level Education (ACLSE) (ages 18 and 19), and three and above years of tertiary or higher education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995). After two years of preschool education, children attend compulsory primary school education, which they complete at the age 13, thereafter they proceed with other higher levels. However, the ETP of 2014 came up with another new structure (i.e., 1(2)-6-4-2-3+).

With this in mind, the intention of this study was to gain knowledge and understanding

about the current status of preprimary education in Tanzania. The paper explored views and beliefs of various educational stakeholders based on PPE development, status, and benefits of early investment. Furthermore, the paper explored changes in relation to societal expectations, educational philosophies, and subsequent pedagogy and their impact on the beliefs and practices of preschool teachers and the training of preprimary teachers. The paper concludes with suggestions for areas for future research in ECE and suitable initial teacher preparation in Tanzania. The current research is therefore worthwhile, timely, and needed, particularly to explore the current status of preprimary education in Tanzania. The line of discussion focused on three priority areas as indicated in the study objectives below.

1.3. Objectives of the study

Specifically, the current study intends to:

- 1) Examine views of stakeholders on the status of PPE in Tanzania,
- 2) Explore the actual current status of preprimary education in Tanzania,
- 3) To explore alternative strategies to improve the status of PPE in Tanzania.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Participants

2.1.1 Sampling technique and sample selection

Given the special needs and circumstances of ECE in Tanzania, participants of the current study were selected during the Teachers Education Support Project (TESP) workshop which brought together preprimary teacher educators, college principals, ECE academics, and policy makers. These participants were selected using homogeneous sampling technique to obtain insights and

understanding of the current status, beliefs, and perceived future of ECE in Tanzania.

The sample of 53 individuals participating in the TESP project was purposively recruited for this study. It consisted of two policy makers, three ECE academics, 14 ECE **teachers' college principals**, and 34 preprimary college tutors from all over Tanzania. Given the objectives of the current study, the selected sample size was large enough to allow triangulation of data sources or informants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) and data collection methods (Patton, 2002), leading to saturation of analyzed data (Creswell, 2012). However, given the existing sociocultural and political diversities in Tanzania, the selected sample size was not large enough to allow generalization of findings across the country.

2.2. Study area and context

In 2019, there were 1,429,169 preprimary pupils enrolled in Tanzania, out of an eligible pool of 1,535,000 preprimary children. Among those enrolled, 63 percent were in urban areas, while the rest were living in rural or suburban centers. In the same year, there were 8,354 qualified teachers, making the teacher-pupil ratio 1:124 compared to a 1:25 international standard ratio (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), 2017). However, most qualified teachers preferred to reside and work in urban areas, resulting in unmanageable teacher-child ratios in rural preprimary schools (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2019).

2.3. Data collection tools

This study triangulated semi-structured interviews, semi-structured survey questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentary analyses in collecting the required data. Due to its flexibility and time-efficiency, semi-structured survey questionnaires were used with preprimary

college tutors. Policy makers and ECE academics were individually interviewed. College principals were engaged in FGD. Predominantly qualitative methods were used to reduce the risk of misinterpretation by informants. The techniques provided a chance to explain the purpose of the study and clarify queries raised during the course of discussion (Creswell, 2009). Also, these techniques facilitated rapport and cooperation between the authors and the informants. This was essential in enabling informants to reveal their views in their own words (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The process involved face-to-face conversations where information was noted down in the field notebook complimented by a tape recorder. The responses were later compared with responses of other groups in the study.

For this study, the targeted documents were existing preprimary education policy briefs and curriculum documents. The authors decided to use this method because these documents could be secured quickly and easily, and covered a wider geographical area and longer reference periods without much cost (Creswell, 2009; Punch, 2005). Further, the selected policy documents and briefs were selected based on the several criteria. Specifically, the documents (a) were government-issued and released for official or academic use, (b) addressed preprimary education or issues related to this level, and (c) contained information that highlighted the current status of ECE in general and preprimary education in particular.

2.4. Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were addressed by requesting permission from the TESP project consultant to include in the study and interview **teachers' college principals and tutors**. Consent to participate in the study was obtained. Further, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to conceal identity and ensure the confidentiality of collected data.

2.5. Data analyses

Data were subjected to interpretational analyses by implementing a systematic set of procedures to code and classify qualitative data to ensure that important constructs, themes, and patterns emerged. Specifically, the raw data obtained from semi-structured interviews and FGDs were coded to obtain relevant texts, repeating ideas, themes, theoretical constructs, research concerns, and theoretical narratives. It was from repeating ideas that themes and subthemes were developed. Themes were organized into abstract ideas or theoretical constructs and later developed into theoretical narratives which were used to bridge between **the concern of the author and participants'** subjective experiences using their own words. Further, qualitative data were descriptively analyzed to respond to some parts of the research question and concerns.

In analyzing documents, two issues guided the development of the themes: (a) how information was presented, and (b) the status of the policy brief/resolution/bylaw/decision. In order to maximize objectivity, communicability, transparency, and coherence, techniques were deployed (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Specifically, the authors triangulated data sources, data collection instruments, and bracketed all of their previous understandings, beliefs and assumptions during data analyses (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Further, the data analyses processes were jointly completed with the three authors.

2.6. Inter-rater reliabilities

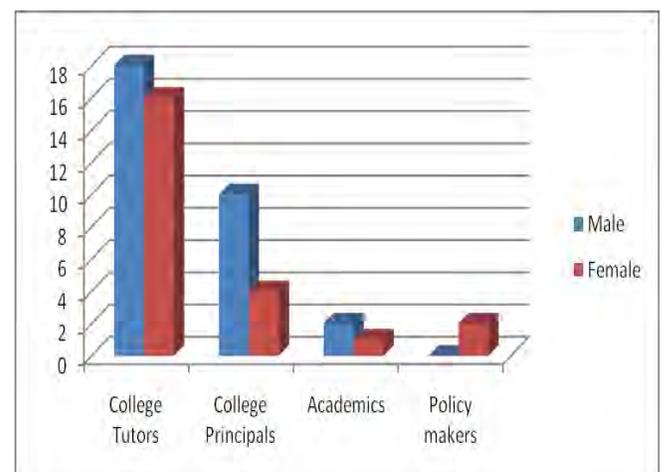
The three authors with doctorate (PhD) degrees in Early Childhood Education jointly collected and analyzed data. The first author coded the field notes to categorize patterns and **constructs of differences in the participants'** views. To ensure inter-rater reliability of the coding, the qualitative information was coded by

three researchers using NVivo 10 software, thereafter using a coding comparison query in NVivo to establish the Kappa Coefficient and inter-rater agreement. The Kappa Coefficient was 0.76 while the percentage agreement was 93.45. This indicates that there was substantial agreement between the three coders (Viera & Garrett, 2005). Grounded theory was used as a lens for framing this study, analyzing data, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions. Grounded theory (Saldaña, 2011) is a method for accurately analyzing qualitative data in order to understand human processes and construct **theory "from the ground up"** (p.15). In this article, grounded theory builds a critical stance to the shift from teacher-centered to child-centered learning. It works towards achieving a central category that theoretically represents what the study is about. This article therefore offers an original and grounded analysis of how participating ECE tutors understood their implementation of the preschool curriculum.

3.0. Findings

3.1. Informants' preliminary information

Figure 1
Informants' Distribution by Gender



Source: Field Data, (2019)

Informants' education levels ranged from Bachelors (60 percent) to Doctorate degrees (04 percent). It is important to note that more than half (56 percent) of college tutors and all college principals were not trained as ECE professionals. They held other education degrees such as Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Educational Psychology. Collective job experience ranged from 5 to 28 years. However, a huge segment of informants (62 percent) had less than 10 years of job experience. In other words, ECE profession in Tanzania is relatively young and new.

3.2. Current Status of Early childhood Education in Tanzania

This section focused on the overall status of preprimary education in Tanzania. It focused on the type of compensation that school teachers and college tutors received for any extra workload they completed; it also focuses on how the existing ECE documents and colleges equipped preservice teachers with skills in the following areas: parenting and community engagement, professional development, and language and curriculum. The findings revealed that all (100 percent) of the informants in this study did not receive payment for extra workload nor were they provided with meals during school hours or transport to the college. In terms of the skills that preservice teachers developed during their initial teacher training, tutors revealed that they equipped student-teachers with skills on how to effectively **facilitate parental engagement in children's** development and learning. One tutor revealed the following:

At our college we ensure that pre-service teachers are provided with information on how to facilitate and build close parental engagements by getting them to organize and participate in community meetings with specific agenda about early

childhood education, child development, and how to build parent-school partnership [Tutor/Interview/2019].

In this study, informants were also asked about the strategies they used to equip preservice teachers with skills on how to provide information to parents about parenting (e.g., how to engage, talk to, or play with children; nutrition or health; or how to manage child behavior). About 40 percent of tutors revealed that they taught the skills in the classroom just as they taught other skills. While 25 percent of the tutors reported the use of hands-on experiences to facilitate these skills, a staggering 35 percent of college tutors reported that they did not equip preservice teachers with such skills at all nor provide them the opportunity to receive hands-on experiences.

College tutors and principals were asked how they support preservice teachers' efforts with community members (not parents in the neighborhood or village) whom they encourage to participate in making decisions about the preprimary program and whom they also encourage to assume an overall greater level of involvement. The findings revealed that about 20 percent of them encouraged preservice teachers to facilitate community engagement. The focus of the engagement was on how work with parents will occur (36 percent), and the budget of the program and how it is spent (64 percent). None of the participants reported a focus on the quality of preprimary teachers or what is taught in and out of the classroom.

On professional development experiences, ECE college tutors revealed that in the past 12 months, only 36 percent of them had once attended in-service training on child development; forty percent of them had been once or twice observed in their classroom teaching as part of supervision, monitoring,

and/or training. Interestingly, about 90 percent of college tutors revealed to have been twice visited by quality assurers or other relevant authorities. And about 75 percent of them revealed that the feedback received ranged between somewhat useful to quite useful.

On language and curriculum, the focus was on language of instruction (LoI), proportion of time to teach LoI, areas for curriculum improvements, and disciplinary issues. Findings revealed that while the LoI in public preprimary schools in Tanzania is Kiswahili, college tutors and principals are aware of barriers associated with using Kiswahili as a LoI in rural preprimary schools. They reported that they equip preservice teachers with code-switching and code-mixing skills. While the existing preprimary curriculum in Tanzania dictates that languages and emerging early literacy should be taught for at least one third of a typical school day, 30 percent of informants revealed to spend less than quarter teaching Kiswahili—the official LoI in Tanzania. The remaining 70 percent reported to spend between a quarter to half of the allocated time. Further, most of the informants (62 percent) suggested between two and four areas for curriculum improvements. These areas include play (22 percent), music (16 percent), language (15 percent), and science (09 percent).

3.3. Views of Stakeholders on the Status of Pre-primary Education in Tanzania

On this research question, three subthemes were developed: (i) Reflections from the policy and curriculum documents, (ii) views of the college principals and tutors, and (iii) views of the ECE policy-makers and academics.

(i) Reflections from the policy and curriculum documents

Analyses of documents indicated that in 2019 there were 17,771

preprimary classes attached to nearby public and private primary schools in Tanzania (MEST, 2019). In the same year, there were 1,429,169 pupils enrolled in those schools (MEST, 2019). There were 12,333 preprimary teachers, out of whom, 3567 (28.9%) were trained and qualified preprimary teachers with teaching certificates.

The 2014 Education and Training Policy (ETP) established compulsory free basic education from preprimary to lower secondary level. For the first time in the history of education in Tanzania, preprimary education was made free and compulsory. This move may potentially enable pupils from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds to access educational skills, knowledge, and attitudes that may enable them to build a foundation to break the vicious, intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Furthermore, the analysis of Teacher Education Curriculum and **Tutor's** Guide indicated weaknesses in the observed documents. Curriculum documents were too formal and detailed with many subject learning activities. The wording of the curriculum and the **tutors' guide documents promote a** structured learning, based around the subjects found in primary school. Hence, it is probable that the intended Teacher Education Curriculum was not properly attained in the field because prospective preprimary teachers seemed to be taught in the same ways as primary school teachers.

The findings from college tutors indicated that there was a mismatch between the Teacher Education curriculum and what was taught to

prospective preprimary teachers. Tutors used only the **tutor's guide to teach** student teachers. And it was revealed that the guide was too congested with many activities that did not detail a good plan on how to implement them. For example, one tutor shared her views as follows:

The problem is that the teacher education curriculum does not match with the **tutor's guide**. What we teach prospective pre-primary teachers is different from what is in the curriculum, We asked our principle what we can do he said the curriculum developers acknowledged the mismatch and the curriculum is under review to suit the need, so it confuses us and we do not understand it. It was good to have curriculum expert to orient us on how to go through, so I and my fellow tutors we use only a **tutors' guide** which is also too detailed and structured [College Tutor /Interview, 2019]

It was reported that the Teacher Education Curriculum document was not available at the colleges and when tutors demanded it, the curriculum developers repeatedly noted that it was under review.

(ii) Views of the college principals and tutors

In this subtheme, it was revealed that though there were some gradual improvements, the status of preprimary education in Tanzania remains relatively low. For example, preprimary school teachers were selected without appropriate professional training in early childhood education during their initial preservice training. Even colleges preparing teachers for preprimary schools lacked specialized training in ECE. College principals revealed that it was just recently, less than eight

years ago, that few college tutors were selected to join a short in-service teacher training in preprimary education.

College tutors shared the same views. However, they differed on the question of preprimary teacher quality vis-à-vis curriculum. They revealed that while the existing 2016 preprimary curriculum seem to be of high **quality and focuses on holistic children's** development, the quality of teachers to implement the said curriculum is considered to be low. One of the tutors reported that:

Most of the pre-service teacher trainees are not the best cream of our high school graduates. Normally, the best of the high school graduate go to university to do various degree programs not even education. Majority of those admitted for education degree specialize in various programs apart from ECE on the belief that bachelor of education in ECE is for less intelligent female teachers [Tutor/Interview/2019].

(iii) Views of the ECE policy makers and academics

Though they acknowledged that preprimary education in Tanzania is relatively new and young, the interviewed policy-makers believed that it is on track. They cited the ETP which formalized preprimary education as part of basic education. The policy made it free and compulsory hence broadening access, and with time, improve quality of services accrued to young children. One of them revealed the following:

Compared to other neighboring countries in our region, per-primary education in Tanzania is not only on track, but also moving very fast. Enrollment at this level has dramatically increased. The number of pre-service teachers admitted in

various teachers colleges and universities has quadrupled since 2016, and we already have a curriculum in place. In the meantime, we are working to prepare an integrated early childhood education policy which will focus on holistic child development in Tanzania [Policy Maker/ Interview/ 2019].

While there was some consensus between the interviewed ECE academics and policy makers in Tanzania, the academics revealed that broadening access at the expense of quality preprimary services would disadvantage the children and bright future of Tanzania. They were quick to point out that quantitative improvement would ultimately lead to improvement of quality. Further, interviewed academics reported limited empirical evidence to support policy and program decisions and practices. This was attributed to the limited number of world-class ECE experts and professionals at various levels within and outside the education system in Tanzania. One academic captured the above sentiment in the statement below:

Unlike other levels of basic education, pre-primary education is a level of education which requires systematic and well documented empirical evidences to improve practices and make sound and effective policy decisions. Very unfortunately, **in Tanzania we don't** have such a solid research base. As such, to improve quantity and quality at pre-primary level is an uphill task which requires a lot of human and financial investment [Academician/Interview/2019].

3.4 Suggested strategies to improve the status of preprimary education in Tanzania

On this theme, informants aired the following views: (i) improving preprimary teacher quality; (ii) detaching preprimary class from primary schools in terms of administration and budget; (iii) employment of qualified preprimary teachers (iv) need for integrated early childhood education policy.

About 86 percent of college principals believed that compared to privately-owned colleges, in public colleges; preprimary school teachers are not prepared to the required level of quality. They cited the example of a privately-owned Montessori College in Mtwara region which has adequate teaching and learning facilities and faculty members who demonstrate appropriate use of effective teaching methods to develop required competences. It was revealed that while private colleges have abundant teaching and learning materials and facilities, public colleges face acute shortages of such amenities. As such, college principals were under impression that preprimary education is not prioritized in the country. One of them reported the following:

As stakeholders of public education, I think we need to improve pre-primary teacher quality by establishing good and systematic procedure for preparing pre-primary education teachers. This can be successfully done by building special colleges designed for preparing pre-primary school teachers only [College Principal 1/ FGD/ 2019].

Another college principal said the following:

My recommendation is that we should earmark or set apart certain colleges that will be solely responsible for preparation of pre-

primary education teachers. This will not only reduce costs associated with tutor transfers, but also may help address the problem of tutor-student ratio as tutors with specialized training in pre-primary education will no longer be transferred and concentrated in few selected colleges [College Principal 2/ FGD/2019].

Currently, the available few tutors with specialized training in preprimary education are transferred periodically because schools that offer preprimary education are unevenly located **in the widely scattered teachers' colleges all over the country.**

About 72 percent of college principals and 84 percent of college tutors suggested strategies to improve preprimary education in Tanzania, one of which was to detach preprimary classes from their nearby primary schools. College principals considered the association to be too demeaning to preprimary education. One of them expanded on this issue:

this 'big brother-young brother' thing should come to an end. Pre-primary schools should be independent with their own school principals and teachers. Such a pre-primary schools should not depend on primary school for anything such as own budget and infrastructures [College Principal 3 /FGD/2019].

Further, college principals believed **that there is a need for teachers'** colleges and universities to establish a typical preprimary classroom to serve as an exemplary class for preservice student teachers, in-service teachers, and parents with limited or no understanding of preprimary education. This will not only improve classroom practices, but also raise awareness

among preprimary education stakeholders. One of them said the following:

pre-primary class is likened to a garden. It is different from other classes. The pre-primary classroom should be the best classroom in a school served with all necessary teaching and learning facilities. Perhaps, I need to hear from you experts from universities. Can we find an exemplary pre-primary classroom at your universities where graduates can learn what a typical classroom for pre-primary school children ought to be? [College Principal 4/FGD/2019]

Most of the college principals (80 percent) and all of the policy makers (100 percent) revealed that since 2015, when preprimary education was formalized in Tanzania, the government has not employed any trained preprimary teachers. As a result, the upper-grade teachers are selected and sent for short in-service training to teach at this level.

One policy-maker said the following:

the mainly problem that exists is when it comes to employment pre-primary school teachers. Until today, in the streets we have an estimated number of more than 5000 teachers recently graduated with diplomas and bachelor degrees in pre-primary education, but have not been employed. So, it is like we plan one thing, and implement a different thing [Policy Maker/Interview/2019].

One of the most interesting findings of this study was that there is consensus among participants for the need of an Integrated Early Childhood Education Policy. The formulation of this policy should be as inclusive and bottom-up as possible. Various ministries and stakeholders

working in the interests of young children (0 to 7 years) should be involved in the formulation and implementation of this policy. One of the college tutors put it very well as follows:

the truth is that the existing education and training policy is very general regarding the pre-primary education. There is no specific provision in the policy that stipulates how pre-primary education should be provided. For example, in terms of teacher qualifications, the policy stipulates qualifications of primary school teachers but deadly silent for pre-primary teachers. In the current policy, there is a deafening silence about the educational needs of children aged between 0-4 years. In other words, the current policy does not effectively serve the interests of our children [Tutor/ Interview/2019]

4.0. Discussion

4.1. **Stakeholders' views and beliefs on the on the status of ECE in Tanzania**

The first objective of this study explored education **stakeholders'** views and beliefs on the status of ECE in Tanzania. The findings revealed that the all participants viewed ECE as having low status compared to other levels of education in Tanzania and compared to the status of ECE in other countries. Their views and beliefs could be explained by the fact that the importance and benefits of ECE education in Tanzania are yet to be understood by the majority of policy makers and community members. It is for this reason that teachers of preprimary classes in Tanzania are not selected on the basis of their specialized training in ECE. Likewise, the ECE education subsector in Tanzania is perceived to be a field of academic failures with teachers that missed qualification to teach classes at other levels of education. Deploying teachers without

specialized training to teach pre-primary education contradicts the existing research evidence which shows that teacher experience and professional knowledge are associated with better classroom practices and improved **students' academic learning outcomes** (Burroughs et al., 2019).

In terms of stakeholders' beliefs about the future status of ECE, the findings revealed mixed feelings. While all policy makers were very optimistic about the future of ECE and cited the 2014 ETP as opening the door for the development of ECE in Tanzania, most academics were anxious about the future status of ECE and cited the lack of ECE policy and the **government's low priority on ECE** as sources of their pessimism about its future. Indeed, the lack of ECE policy raises serious questions regarding quality improvement at this level of education. This is supported by available research evidence. The Office of Child Development (OCD), (2017), for example, states that quality teaching is almost always the centerpiece of policy initiative aimed at making sure that preschool children are ready to learn ; it also aims to improve the experiences they encounter in early grades.

4.2. *The current actual status of ECE in Tanzania*

The second objective of this study sought to establish the current status of ECE in Tanzania. The findings have revealed that the majority of tutors who train ECE teachers lack specialized training in ECE. This suggests that student teachers are not adequately trained to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for working with children in ECE programs. Literature indicates that at the ECE level, teacher qualification has a great influence **on children's learning** (Williston, et al., 2005). This is supported by Blank (2010) who reports that ECE is a unique level of education that

requires special preparation for teachers. Similarly, Williston et al., (2005) note that ECE teacher education has a positive impact on teachers and teaching. This suggests that unless teacher preparation colleges are able to equip student teachers with the necessary competencies, ECE programs will not prepare children who are ready for primary school, or enable them to develop skills for their later learning and development.

While the majority of educators in **teachers' colleges lack specialized training** in ECE, professional development programs would have enabled educators to improve their content and pedagogical knowledge in ECE. However, the findings of this study revealed that educators **in teachers' colleges** have limited opportunities for in-service training. One implication of this finding is the need for to develop in-service training programs for school teachers and college tutors to enable them update their content and pedagogical knowledge.

The findings have also indicated that the quality of ECE in terms of infrastructure is very poor compared to other levels. The findings have, for example, shown that children in public ECE centers and preprimary schools have learned in low-quality classrooms with inadequate teaching and learning materials. Low quality infrastructure in ECE is largely attributed to low priority on ECE. Although the government provides capitation grants to schools, little or no funds at all are dedicated to improving the quality of ECE. Research already shows that the care and education provided in these types of low-quality centers and classrooms do not **lay a foundation for children's** later learning and development (Saracho & Spodek, 2006). Sylva et al., (2003) cautions that unqualified early childhood teachers cannot provide children with intellectual skills and support their social, emotional, and behavioral development.

While findings of the current study indicated bias against play and active engagement in ECE in Tanzania, the efficacy of these methods are well documented in the literature elsewhere in the world (Jing & Li, 2015; Namie **2011**; O'gorman & Ailwood, 2012). In Tanzania, though the existing curriculum insists that play be an important part of ECE teaching and learning, it is not used in the classrooms due to parental beliefs and expectations (Ndijuye, 2020) and lack of clear curriculum guidelines related to play in ECE.

4.3. Alternative strategies to improve the status of pre-primary education in Tanzania

The third objective of this study sought to identify alternative strategies that can be used to improve the status of ECE in Tanzania. The results of this study have revealed various strategies. First the findings have indicated that improving the quality of the ECE workforce could improve the status of ECE in Tanzania. This finding is consonant with the findings of the study by Rice, (2003) who asserts that initial teacher education and professional development are essential aspects which contribute to improving pedagogical quality, which is eventually associated with better child learning and development outcomes. This finding holds implications for employment of highly qualified ECE tutors in colleges, ECE centers, and preprimary schools.

The results of this study have also indicated that detaching the management and budget aspects of preprimary education from primary school can help improve ECE provision. Detachment of preprimary from primary school is not a new phenomenon globally (Jing & LI, 2015), or in the sub-Saharan region specifically (Matafwali & Nunsaka, 2011). This necessitates that relevant authorities in Tanzania develop a separate ECE policy that could offer clear

guidelines on how ECE could be conducted, specifying the need for teacher education curriculum development and teacher preparation.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

Tanzania has four main education levels of preprimary, primary, secondary, and tertiary. The foundation of all the levels of education is preprimary. As such, future educational and life achievements solely depend on what happens at the preprimary foundation level. Given its economic and early stimulation significance, substantial investment at this level of education is crucial. To make a wise and productive investment in ECCE, broad involvement of various educational and child development stakeholders is key to success.

While this study focused on the views of policy makers, academics, ECE college principals, and tutors, it did not include views and beliefs of parents, members of non-government organizations, and local government authorities. Further, it did not focus on the quality of ECCE services rendered to children across urbanities, family socioeconomic status, and social groups. Given that Tanzania is a diverse country encompassing different geographic regions, ethnic, and social groups, there is a need to understand these dimensions to clearly understand the status of ECCE in the country.

This study recommends formation of a joint commission that involves the participation of several stakeholders, including officials from the ministries for education, community development, justice, local government, and international and national nongovernmental organizations; it should also include, researchers, teachers, and parents tasked to review the existing ECCE policies, guidelines, and practices. The commission should be tasked to develop a more inclusive and comprehensive ECCE policy and guidelines which will set a foundation for better classroom and home practices.

Equally important, this study recommends deliberate efforts to sensitize the masses on the

importance of ECCE on children's development and learning. This will raise the status of ECCE as a critical cornerstone for future academic and life successes. Also, public understanding and acceptance of ECCE will encourage the best and brightest of our male and female students to join the ECCE teaching force. This will erase the biased assumption that the Bachelor of Education in ECCE is for less intelligent female teachers.

It is clearly indicated throughout this paper that in Tanzania ECE has not received the attention and priority that it has achieved, at least in the literature, globally. As a subsector of education, it is underfunded, and the probable source of underfunding is its connection to primary schools. Because preprimary education fulfills the critical roles of establishing a foundation for learning and fostering early stimulation, Tanzania may need to consider separating preprimary from primary level education.

And the study recommends in-service training for ECE college tutors and principals as often as possible to equip them with the most recent and cutting-edge ECCE knowledge and skills. This will assist them in preparing pre- and in-service ECCE teachers. Given that Tanzania is a huge and diverse country, this study recommends that instead of scattering ECCE resources across the existing **teachers' colleges, there should be two or three** colleges established specifically to train high-quality ECCE teachers. As such, the available few college tutors trained in ECCE should be concentrated in specific selected colleges to maximize use of available human and fiscal resources for the betterment of **Tanzania's young children.**

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