

## Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Implementing the Pre-Primary Education in Zanzibar

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**Abstract:** This study examined challenges experienced by teachers while implementing PPE in Zanzibar. The study employed qualitative methodology and a case study design. A total number of 18 respondents participated in the study where by nine were pre-primary school teachers, six were pre-primary school head teachers and three were quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education. Data was collected by using a focus group discussion, semi structured interviews and documents. The study concluded that inadequate teaching and learning materials, low parental involvement, in-adequate training, shortage of qualified teachers, low parental economic status, shortage of play grounds, learners' disciplinary and behavioral issues and overcrowded classrooms were key challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of the PPE curriculum. The study recommends that government authorities that oversee PPE in Zanzibar should provide in-service training opportunities for teachers to be well prepared to handle the PPE more effectively. Relevant authorities should ensure construction of more classrooms to match with the enrollment ratios. Furthermore, there is a need to sensitize parents to get involved in their children's school affairs for better outcomes to be realized.

**Keywords:** Preprimary education; PPE; PPE teachers; PPE school head; Quality Assurance Officer.

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### Introduction

Pre-Primary Education (PPE) in Zanzibar started before independence (Mbise, 1996; Mtahabwa, 2007). Missionaries established pre-primary schools in Tanzania called Bush Schools where they taught secular and Biblical truth to young children (Mbise, 1996). Madrassa schools were also established

along the coastal areas of Tanga, Dar es salaam, Pwani, Mtwara, Lindi, Kilwa and Zanzibar for teaching Qur-an together with reading and writing the Arabic scripts. According to Kweka, Binagi and Kainamula (2000), during colonial period, few children were enrolled; services and education provided to learners were very poor. This was

mainly because of the lack of adequate colonial government intervention and coordination.

The curriculum content and methodology among pre-primary schools differed greatly and were often unsuitable for young children because they did not consider the Zanzibar culture (Samuel, 2018). This is supported by Yang and Li (2020) who argued that PPE curriculum content should be culturally relevant to learners. Again, there were no properly organized training programs for the teachers, no written policy documents governing the pre-primary school education existed, no nationally agreed standards for PPE, and the majority of teachers were untrained (Mtahabwa, 2007).

Soon after independence, pre-primary school education in Tanzania expanded country wide (Kweka, Binagi and Kainamula, 2000; Mbise, 1996; Mtahabwa, 2007; Mligo, 2015). Tanzania adopted an open door policy where various stakeholders were invited to establish PPE centers including private sectors, religious organizations and communities (Mtahabwa, 2007). The intention was to enable so many Tanzanian young children to have an access to PPE and attain the goal of education for all. The development of Ujamaa village, growth of towns and increase of working mothers also promoted the expansion of pre-primary school education in Tanzania (Kweka, Binagi & Kainamula 2000).

Zanzibar has clear policy directive on pre-primary school education (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Zanziba, 2006; Samuel, 2018). This policy drew on the Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty commonly known as Mkakati wa Kupunguza Umasikini Zanzibar (MKUZA) I development strategy (2007-2010) which acknowledged the critical importance of early childhood care and development and the need to holistic approaches to cover care, nutrition, health and education. Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty I (MKUZA I) set a target for an increase in pre-primary school enrollment. To achieve this end, the Zanzibar Economic Development Plan (ZEDP) 2017/2018-2021/2022 called for partnership with communities and NGOs to establish pre-primary schools especially in rural areas. The subsequent MKUZA II in 2010 called for speeding up this process with a universal access to pre-primary school education and with the development of the minimum standards for a

conducive learning environment which is gender sensitive and child friendly.

Currently, Zanzibar Government is determined to ensure that the young children in the Islands acquire necessary and basic education so that they can address the issues of dropout rates among primary school pupils, learning problems and behavioral difficulties (Zanzibar Education Development Plan II, 2018). This is believed to provide a strong base for lifelong learning and learning abilities including cognitive and social development (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Zanziba, 2006). This situation has been stipulated clearly in the Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (ZSGRP III) commonly known as MKUZA III. The strategy indicated that in order to enhance children's early experiences which affect their future, emotional and social development, teachers, caregivers and educators should understand the need to invest in young children and create a more positive experience which supports learning and helps children to perform better.

The strategy also insists on the conducive teaching environment which enables children to extend the learning experience from the class to actual activities happening in their surroundings. The strategy emphasizes the need to involve educational stakeholders in PPE so as to help to enhance social relationship and promote a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore, both ZSGRP III and Education Policy of 2006 in Zanzibar prioritized the PPE that enables young children to get early experiences.

At global level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) had set goals and targets that are required to be met by the member states through the localization approach. The goals that are important for young children include goal number 4 target 4.2 which states that "By 2030, countries should ensure that all young girls and boys have access to quality PPE and development so that they are ready for primary education" (United Nations, 2016). SDG goal 4 which aims at ensuring equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities is more relevant under this context. This implies that member states are required to ensure that they initiate and implement interventions that at the end will enable children and other target groups to develop their skills and hence increase opportunities for quality education. Therefore, it is important to

examine challenges experienced by teachers in implementing PPE in Zanzibar.

Studies on pre-primary education have it that, teachers as key players have an important role to play in the implementation of PPE programs (Ndijuye, Mligo & Machumu, 2020, Ntumi, 2016; Paul & Suzane, 2020). This includes providing appropriate child guidance, effective teaching, care and support and encouraging self-discipline. Despite these notable and valuable roles played by teachers during this important period of young children, studies reported that teachers are faced with diverse challenges which hinder their effective implementation of PPE programs. For instance, in the study of Katherine (2019), it was revealed that in-service training that teachers receive is not related with PPE.

Another study by Mligo (2017) in Tanzania revealed that teachers had problems in implementing PPE due to the fact that parents perceived PPE as a just playing ground place for their children and not as a learning setting. This belief caused low contact between schools and homes. Consequently, low parental involvement and collaboration in the studies of their children is observed. Durisic (2017) supports Mligo's findings that keeping parents close to the everyday learning of their children is one of key challenges in PPE which need measures to be taken to improve the provision and implementation of PPE.

Another challenge was identified by Edelman (2017) that facilities available in PPE schools are not enough to effectively facilitate the implementation of PPE curriculum. This agreed with the findings of Epstein and Saunders (2002) that infrastructures available in many PPE centers affect the teaching and learning. Furthermore, Majoni (2007) in Zimbabwe and Mathias (2018) in Kenya argued that handling a classroom full of children with limited number of teachers in PPE classes is not an easy task and is very exhausted. This is because every child in a class has different needs which make it difficult for limited number of teachers to manage.

Tandika and Kamburu (2018) revealed that PPE teachers struggle to teach the lessons while managing many children in a single class at once. Radhika (2015) in India found that PPE teachers are paid low salary which does not cope with the workload and living standards. As a result, the uneven balance between the pay and the amount of workload marked another challenge for PPE

teachers. Therefore, this study sought to establish challenges experienced by teachers among pre-primary schools in Zanzibar.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The study used a case study design. Case study design refers to a form of interpretive research which focuses on providing detailed description of one or more cases (Merriam, 2002). The study used case study design since it allowed the researchers to provide detailed description of the challenges encountered by teachers while implementing the PPE.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study was conducted in Zanzibar and specifically in Mjini Magharibi Region. The target population of this study was pre-primary school teachers, pre-primary school head teachers and quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample. A total number of 18 individuals participated in the study where by 9 were pre-primary school teachers, 6 were pre-primary school head teachers and 3 were quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education. The selection of these participants was primarily based on their knowledge, participation and experiences in PPE as advised by Merriam (2002).

### **Data Collection Method**

The study employed the qualitative research method. Data was collected through interview, focus group discussion and documentary review. Semi structured interviews were conducted to PPE teachers, head teachers and quality assurance officers while the Focus Group Discussion was conducted to teachers. The proceedings of group discussion and interviews were recorded by using a tape recorder. Data was analysed by using the thematic analysis framework.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers obtained research clearance letters from relevant authorities. Secondly, they prepared a consent form and requested participants to sign showing their willingness to participate after assuring them that the information provided was for research purposes only. Thirdly, the participants were assured of confidentiality to be maintained during and after the data collection and analysis period.

## Results and Discussion

Results are presented through four sub-themes namely policy based challenges, community based challenges, school based challenges and learner based challenges.

### Policy based Challenges

The results show that shortage of PPE qualified teachers and low payments to teachers were major policy based challenges that faced teachers while implementing the PPE in Zanzibar. During the interview, it was revealed that shortage of qualified PPE teachers in the schools hindered the effective implementation of curriculum. The lack of qualified teachers caused overcrowded classrooms. Some schools opted to use form six leavers who are untrained as part time teachers to minimize the scarcity of teachers. One school head had this to say:

I have two teachers in my school which is supposed to have four teachers. One teacher has certificate in teaching and the other is just a Form Six leaver. The two teachers have not undergone any in-service training to enhance their skills in teaching PPE classes (School Head/ Interview/June 2021).

Adding on the shortage of qualified teachers, another head teacher had this to say: "I have only three teachers in my school. One was trained during pre-service course. The remaining two had attended an in-service training for teaching 3Rs. Shortage of teachers hinders effective teaching and delivery to young children" (Head mistress/ Interview/May, 2021). One of quality assurance officers had this to say regarding the scarcity of qualified teachers: "A large number of teachers I have inspected have attended neither pre-service nor in-service training for teaching 3Rs. While few of them attended pre-service training, many teach by only following teacher's guide and text books" (Quality assurance officer/interview/ July, 2021).

Low payment to PPE teachers was another policy based challenge that emerged. Some teachers complained that their monthly payment is not enough to meet basic needs. One teacher, for instance, said,

My salary is very low to meet family needs. I now think of finding other alternatives like doing business to save the situation. I have a big family that depends on me such that

my salary is not enough. I only spend it in buying food (Teacher/FGD/May, 2021).

One of school heads revealed that "some teachers from Zanzibar left the teaching profession because of poor payment which is insufficient to cope with living standards (Head teacher /Interview/ June, 2021). One Quality Assurance Officer revealed that "some teachers have left the teaching job to other good paying professions. This caused some schools to experience shortage of teachers which resulted into employing unqualified and unskilled teachers."

The findings of this study concur with the findings of a study conducted by Edelman (2017) in Philippines who found out that whatever input is made into the PPE in respect to management, facilities and instructional materials will be of little effect if there is a shortage of teachers and if the present ones are unskilled and are poorly trained. This implies that whatever interventions are made to improve PPE will be of little effect if there is a shortage of teachers and if teachers are not given opportunities for professional development. Another study with similar findings, conducted by Ndijuye, Mligo and Machumu (2020) in Tanzania found that a shortage of teachers is a major challenge leading to poor implementation of educational programs.

A study by Katete and Nyangarika (2019) in South Africa reports that PPE teachers were paid low salaries compared to their living cost. The situation affects teachers' concentration in teaching as some engage in economic activities during class time. Similar views were made by a study conducted by Lymo (2014) in Tanzania which revealed that some teachers engaged in other economic activities during class hours in order to earn extra income. This could be interpreted that some teachers might fail to cover the syllabus because of spending much time out of the class by engaging in other activities. Furthermore, the study findings concur with those by Evans, Filmer and Yuan (2020) who revealed that majority of teachers in developing countries, Zanzibar in particular as a part of Tanzania have poor living conditions due to low salary. Lymo (2014) in Tanzania added that teachers who are insecure about financial security for their families are in poor conditions to demonstrate their highest level of proficiency in teaching. This implies that low salary demoralizes teachers, hence affecting their performance. According to Radhika (2015) who conducted a study in India, motivation for teaching comes from good payment. This can lead into an

argument that better salary helps teachers to meet their basic needs and make them to concentrate on teaching activities. On the other hand, low salary discourages teachers to teach effectively, hence may affect learning.

### **Community based Challenges**

The study identified low parental involvement and low parental economic status as community based challenges that affected the learning of pupils in PPE. During the interview, it was revealed that low parental involvement is the obstacles that affected the teaching and learning process. One respondent from school F reported that:

Parents do not participate in school meeting even if you send a letter to them. As a result, they do not know the progress of their children in school. Also, they lack opportunity to share ideas with teachers on how to help their children (Teacher/Interview/ July, 2021).

One of school heads further commented that “here is poor attendance of parents in school meetings. The school took various efforts to keep the parents close to the school. But, they are very busy. This makes schools to lack important contributions from parents”(Head mistress/Interview/ June, 2021).

Furthermore, the study found that some pupils come to school without having uniforms, exercise books and pencils because of low economic status of their parents. In this respect, one of teachers had the view that “some pupils come to school with no uniforms, exercise books and pencils. When we asked their parents, they told us they don’t have money to buy all the school needs of their children” (Teacher/FGD/ June, 2021).

One of quality assurance officers was quoted saying that “some parents think that free education cover everything. They don’t care in buying school materials for their children including uniforms, exercise books and shoes” (Quality assurance officers/Interview/June, 2021).

The findings were similar to that of Mligo (2018) in Tanzania which reported that parents and community at large have low involvement in school affairs, which is triggered by their negative attitude toward early investment. Mligo’s findings are supported by Epstein (2011) whose findings revealed that low parental involvement is a result of the variation of parental understanding and perceptions toward PPE. They also argued that

there is a link between parental involvement and pupils’ school success.

### **School based Challenges**

The results show that the teaching and learning environments in the schools were not supportive and conducive and as a result, teachers experienced various challenges in the teaching and learning process. For instance, shortage of teaching and learning materials, shortage of play grounds and shortage of classrooms were found to be obstacles that teachers faced while implementing the PPE.

PPE teachers relied mostly on text books as the main resources in teaching and learning. Also, the study found the shortage of manila sheets, manila cards, charts, pictures, audio and visual materials including radio and Television. One of teachers had this to comment about the shortage of teaching and learning materials: “there is a shortage of teaching and learning materials in our school especially the charts showing alphabets, letters and pictures. Sometimes teachers spent their own money to buy instructional resources (Teacher/Interview/ June, 2021). One school head added:

I have many textbooks compared to the number of pupils. The only problem in my school is shortage of charts, play materials and manila cards. For example, one of my classes has sixty six pupils. But, there are ninety three text books and only one chart written on alphabet, letter and numbers. I am obliged to borrow more charts from the nearest schools. Sometimes I request relevant authorities to bring the resources but, it takes long time (Head mistress/Interview/May, 2021).

Furthermore, the study found that many classes used for teaching in PPE were small, poorly ventilated and overcrowded. This situation limits effective teaching and learning as teachers had no opportunity to move and control the class. One of teacher commented that:

There are sixty three pupils in my class. I cannot move in the class due to improper arrangement of chairs caused by lack of enough space in our class. I fail to interact with pupils at the middle and back of the class. So, it is difficult to teach in such a class (Teacher/Interview/May, 2021).

Shortage of play grounds was another challenge that was revealed. Findings indicate that PPE

schools had no enough space for playing. This led academic activities in schools to be given more priority than play based activities.

There was limited time for pupils to play in schools. In this regard, one of teachers had this to comment: There is no enough space in our school for pupils to play. As a result, teachers concentrate more on academic activities in the class and pupils are given lesser time to play (Teacher/FGD/ June, 2021).

Additionally, one school head reported: The playground of our school is small and is not friendly to pupils because of being near to the road. Since, play is a part of learning, when children miss to play they experience poor development in learning (Head teacher/Interview/June, 2021).

### **Learner based Challenges**

There were learner based challenges that teachers faced in curriculum implementation. The learners' over crowdedness mentioned before, yielded another challenge which is learner based. As teachers failed to control the classes due to high number of learners, some learners developed behavioral problems and poor discipline. One teacher said: "I have more than sixty pupils in my class. It is difficult to control, teach and achieve the intended goals." (Teacher/Interview/ July, 2021).

Additionally, one school head reported: "Due to many pupils in one class, teachers are not able to manage and control the behaviors of all pupils at a time. This causes some pupils to develop poor behaviors like the use of abusive language" (Head teacher/Interview/June, 2021).

Results of the study are in harmony with those by Mabagala and Shukia (2019) which revealed out that it is difficult for PPE teachers to control and manage pupils' behaviors and discipline in classes with many pupils at a time. Some pupils use abusive language while others make noise by talking out of tune. Furthermore, Askoy (2020) in Turkey found that many pupils in one class resulted into poor discipline among pupils. Therefore, large classes are key contributors for disciplinary issues in schools.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that inadequate teaching and learning materials, low parental involvement, in-adequate training, shortage of qualified teachers, low parental economic status, shortage of play grounds, learners'

disciplinary and behavioral issues and overcrowded classrooms were challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of the PPE curriculum.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that government authorities that oversee PPE in Zanzibar should provide in-service training opportunities for teachers to be well prepared to handle the PPE more effectively. Relevant authorities should ensure construction of more classrooms to match with the enrollment ratios and improve the provision and distribution of teaching and learning resources in schools that offer PPE. Furthermore, there is a need to sensitize parents to get involved in their children's school affairs for better outcomes to be realized.

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