



Educational Stakeholders Perceptions on the Provision of Pre-Primary Education in Zanzibar

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Abstract: This study explored educational stakeholder's perceptions on the provision of PPE in Zanzibar, using the case study design. The target population was pre-primary school teachers, pre-primary school head teachers, quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and parents. A total number of 20 participants participated in the study: 6 pre-primary school teachers, 3 pre-primary school head teachers, 5 quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and 6 parents. The study employed the semi structured interviews which were conducted to PPE teachers, head teachers and quality assurance officers and Focus group discussions with teachers. The study established that PPE plays important roles to young children as it enables them to lay their educational foundation for future development, improving self-confidence and providing strong base for lifelong learning and cognitive, physical and social development. However, the quality between one PPE school to another differ in terms of teachers qualification, resources and facilities, school management and learning environment. The study recommends that professional development training for pre-primary school teachers be conducted and maintained. Such trainings should be handled by PPE experts. This would improve the knowledge, skills and performance of teachers on pedagogical skills to ensure the supportive teaching in PPE for better learning of children. Finally, Quality Assurance Officers should constantly monitor the quality of pre-primary education in order to ensure that schools meet the required standards for better teaching and learning in PPE.

Keywords: Pre-primary education; head teacher; quality assurance officer; stakeholders; perception.

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Introduction

Zanzibar is a semiautonomous part of the United Republic of Tanzania. It consists of two main Islands which are Unguja and Pemba. Zanzibar has the

autonomy to administer and manage its own internal affairs including the provision and financing of social services like education and health. Zanzibar has a population of 1.3 million inhabitants with a

growth rate of 3.1 percent per year (URT, 2012). Agriculture and tourism activities contribute significantly to the islands' economy. Enrollment in PPE increased from 14 percent of children under the age of six attending pre-primary school in 2015 to 21 percent in 2020 where enrollment in pre-primary school is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas (MoEVTZ, 2020). In Zanzibar, enrollment in PPE increased from 14 percent of children under the age of six attending pre-primary school in 2015 to 21 percent in 2020 where enrollment in pre-primary school is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas (MoEVTZ, 2020).

Zanzibar has clear policy directives on pre-primary school education (MoEVTZ, 2020 & Samuel, 2018). This policy drew from the Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty in Kiswahili known as *Mkakati wa Kukuza Uchumi Zanzibar I (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 ZEDP 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 universal access to pre-primary school education 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, poor developmental delays to children, learning problems and behavioral difficulties. This is believed to provide a strong base for lifelong learning and learning abilities including cognitive and social development (MoEVTZ, 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 the educational stakeholders in PPE so as to enhance social relationship and promote a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Samuel, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that both ZSGRP III and Education Policy of 2006 in Zanzibar have prioritized PPE.

At global level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set goals and targets that are required to be met by the member states through the localization approach. Among the goals that are important for young children include goal number 4 target 4.2 which stated 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" (UN, 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.

The perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding PPE have long and variously been addressed by different scholars. Durisic and Mila (2017) argued that parent's involvement in PPE is very significant because it helps to improve the learning of their children by exchanging ideas on the success and setbacks while at home and school. Thus, if parents follow up children's progress at school, communicate with teachers and attend various school programs, then children are encouraged to learn. In line with this, Choi (2017) commented that parents play various roles in children's learning activities; however some activities are out of the classroom activities. Furthermore, parents play their roles through helping in children's homework and studies, communicating with teachers, following up children's learning progress, picking up and dropping children to school and attending parent teacher meetings and various types of teacher meetings.

It was said by Nsamenang (2008) that both teachers and parents play roles in children's learning at home. Parents encourage their children in the study at home, provide opportunity to play, sing and dance and arrange study materials of their children before children go to school. Smetana (2017) noted that parental interest, approval and support on PPE create the right conditions for children's motivation to learn. PPE is a time when children learn critical social and emotional skills and as a result, partnership is formed between the child, their parents and teachers. Another study conducted in Tanzania by Ndijuye, Mligo and Machumu (2020) found that PPE has low status and quality compared to other levels of education because of being practiced by many teachers with low qualifications. This implies that there is need for employing skilled teachers in PPE for better provision and implementation of the PPE programs.

Beach (2016) and Thornton, Habitch, Mussa and Koba (2019) asserted that PPE impact positively on pupils academic performance as it is more effective in preparing children for academic competencies in reading, writing and building mathematics and science skills. On the same track, a study by Fauziya and Sarika (2017) adds that PPE programs make children to establish good habit of eating, having more regular routine, learn more knowledge and become more polite to others. Another study by Daniel, Derrick, Margaret, Ebenezer & Sophia (2013) researched on Perceptions of Educational Stakeholders toward PPE in Ghana and found out that PPE contributes significantly to the educational development of children in terms of reading, writing, language and mathematical development. The study adds that parent's involvement in PPE has great impact in their children's educational activities including school decision making. The study recommended that active participation of parents in the implementation of PPE activities would help to promote PPE provision so that solid foundation could be laid for children to have high quality education.

Nma, Olugbenga, Osita and Oluwafeni (2014) researched on the implementation of PPE in Nigeria and the findings depicted that PPE has positive influence on children's rich educational background later in life. The study recommended that the national PPE policy statements should be implemented to achieve and maintain its objectives and goals. In so doing, governments should provide adequate facilities and funds to support teacher

training programs for PPE. A study conducted by Daniel, Derrick, Margaret, Ebenezer and Sophia (2013) about the Mission and Vision of PPE in Nigeria perceive PPE as bedrock upon which other levels of education rest. The author argued that skills developed in PPE forms the basis for future learning and labor market success.

In the light of the above studies, it can be said that there is need for parents and pre-primary school teachers to join their hands in the administration and management of PPE so as to ensure effective implementation of PPE programs. Therefore, this study explored educational stakeholder's perceptions on the provision of PPE in Zanzibar. Particularly, the study focused on stakeholder's perception on the importance of PPE and stakeholders' perception on the quality of PPE.

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Methodology

This section presents the methodology that guided the study. The section is broken into subunits for a clear clarification of how the study was conducted.

Design

The study used the case study design. Case study design refers to a form of interpretive research which focuses on providing detailed information of one or more cases (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, this design was used so as to get detailed information about educational stakeholder's perceptions on the provision of pre-primary education.

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, quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and parents. A total number of 20 participants participated in the study: 6 pre-primary school teachers, 3 pre-primary school head teachers, 5 quality assurance officers from the Ministry of Education and 6 parents. The sample was selected through purposive sampling.

The selection of these participants was primarily based on their knowledge, participation and experiences in PPE as recommended by Cresswell (2009) and Merriam (2002) that in qualitative study, researchers should consider selecting

knowledgeable individuals as participants. The study selected three PPE schools, one from each district found in Mjini Magharini Region so as to get a representation of the entire region.

Data Collection Methods

Interview, focus Group Discussion and documentary review were used to collect data. Semi structured interviews were conducted to PPE teachers, head teachers and quality assurance officers. Focus group discussion was conducted with teachers. The proceedings of group discussion and interviews were recorded by using a tape recorder. Data was analyzed by using the thematic analysis approach.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical issues and fundamental principles. First, the researchers obtained research clearance letters from the concerned authorities. Secondly, the researchers prepared a consent form and requested participants to sign for accepting their participation after assuring them that the information used would be treated confidentially.

Results and Discussion

Results are presented in the following two sub-themes: educational stakeholder's perception on the importance of PPE and educational stakeholder's perception on the quality of PPE.

Stakeholder's Perception on the Importance of PPE

Parents

Educated parents were more aware of the importance of PPE and as a result, they sent their children to different pre-primary schools to receive education. Some parents reported that during their time in early age, they didn't attend PPE but they were successful in primary school, yet they appreciated the learning of their children in PPE schools. One of parents had this to comment: "before joining PPE, my child was very lazy. But, after joining PPE, She became active in learning, charming and she became talkative. I am very happy with such achievement and indeed it helps to lay good education foundation to my child (Parent-3/ Interview/June, 2021). Another parent had the view that;

I didn't attend PPE. I think my parents didn't realize the importance of it at that time. No need to blame them. But, I appreciate PPE because my child has five years now and the

child is able to read, write and sing different songs. What is amazing, my child has many friends at school who interact with her during play and singing. The interaction with fellow children strengthens children's language and physical development (Parent-5/Interview/ June, 2021).

One more parent commented that "since my child enrolled in PPE, he greets and respects people in the house and outside. He is also very thankful to every good action done to him and he says sorry to any bad action he performs" (Parent-4/Interview/ June, 2021).

PPE Teachers

PPE teachers perceived that PPE helps to build good starts in children's education and prepares them to become good citizens. Teachers reported that during classes, children gain the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development which helps to brighten their future. It was further narrated that during teaching, teachers linked the knowledge, skills and attitudes about the environment so as to prepare children to have good respect, personality, commitment, socialization and cooperation in doing works. This helps to prepare good leaders and citizens in the society. One teacher had this to say:

What we teach children INCLUDE respect, love and corporation through different activities like play, songs and drama. In so doing, it helps to improve children's good attitude TOWARD learning. Many parents are very thankful to the school administration and teachers for their efforts in building good morals to their children (Teacher-1/Interview/May, 2021).

Another teacher emphasized that:

Children in PPE are taught socialization which helps to improve their cooperation which build confidence, love, dignity, respect other' opinions and listening. We try our level best to ensure this goal is achieved. As a result, some parents appreciate the hard work done by teachers in our school (Teacher-2/ FGD / June, 2021).

School Heads

School heads perceived that PPE many benefits to children. One school head argued that "PPE helps in brain development through plays, storytelling and group discussion. This makes children to love learning and develop logical skills. Indeed, PPE

promotes socialization among children and equips them with life skills including respect, reading, writing and love” (Head teacher-4/ /Interview/ June, 2021). Another school head emphasized that “children who passed in PPE BEHAVE WELL AND have high confidence and self-esteem in learning through interaction with others. This increases their passion in learning (Head mistress-2/Interview/ July, 2021).

Quality Assurance Officers

Quality assurance officers perceived that PPE helps to develop the holistic development of the children. It also helps children to have a strong educational foundation which improves their personality through interaction with teachers and fellow learners in different learning activities. One QAO said that “engagement of pupils in different learning activities like role play, storytelling, reading, writing, jumping and doing school exercises like homework instills confidence and commitment skills in children” (QAO-1/ Interview/June, 202). Another QAO had this to say:

Children are taught different things in PPE including how to handle their emotions. This induces them with the patience and love among others as PPE guidelines directed teachers to induce these skills to young children so that they can grow into good mannered and behaved wayS. (QAO-2/Interview/ June, 2021).

These findings concur with those by Annonciata and Nadege (2020) who established that parents expect their children to learn different skills in life at schools including reading, writing, communication skills, cooperation, confident, respect, love and dignity. This holds an implication that parents are conscious on the vital role of PPE in the education and development of their children. Similarly, Mligo (2018) and Mtahabwa (2007) found that PPE help pupils to become more self-determined, confident and promotes their all-round development in life. Li (2004) in China observed that social skills and values that children learn in PPE help to stimulate their adult age personalities and relationships.

Stakeholders’ Perception on the Quality of PPE Parents

Results from the interview with parents show that some PPE schools provide quality learning because of having teachers who are qualified and trained in teaching compared to other schools. Furthermore, some teachers both in public and private schools are

not qualified. Some of private PPE schools don’t care on the quality of teachers but only care on cheap salary they provide to teachers so as to make more income. In this regard, one parent said:

Now days, there is a tendency of some schools especially private schools to employ personnel from other fields like administration to teach in PPE. THIS IS BECAUSE private employers want to make money. This is very unfortunate because such teachers do not have enough knowledge and skills in teaching PPE (Parent-2/Interview/June, 2021).

Another parent emphasized that:

PPE schools need to be taught by knowledgeable and skilled personnel. This can help to impact BETTER skills to our young children. I am not satisfied with trends in some schools to use unqualified teachers in teaching young children. If possible, I advised the government to allocate enough budgets to train PPE teachers. THE unqualified personnel used in PPE as a teachers need to undertake short courses to equip them with necessary skills for teaching in PPE (Parent-6/Interview/June, 2021).

PPE Teachers

PPE teachers perceived that quality in PPE is influenced by physical environment of the school and materials, teachers’ competence, number of children in the classroom, the child-teacher ratio and teacher child interaction. On the contrary, one of teachers said:

In our school, there is lack of teaching and learning materials. There are so many pupils in one class and many parents do not participate in school meeting to discuss about the learning of their children. Also, teachers do not attend in-service training. In that sense, teachers are only teaching to make children able to read and write, but the issue of quality is a dream in our school (Teacher-1/Interview/ June 2021).

Furthermore, PPE teachers perceived that quality of PPE can be improved not only by upgrading the physical conditions of the schools and teachers qualification but also by having a good and stable school administration. In this regard, one teacher said:

Good administration is a major determinant of quality education in PPE. The school administration

knows all workers, their strengths and weaknesses as well as what is missing and what is needed in schools. Every good thing in school depends on the accurate decision made by the school administration. But our school administration favors some teachers and isolates others in making decision of the school and even in planning school activities. I don't know when we can achieve good education quality in such situation (Techer-4/I FGD / June, 2021).

School Heads

School heads perceived that quality PPE can be achieved not only by upgrading the physical conditions of the schools and teachers qualifications but also by taking into consideration all areas of children's development including cognitive, social, emotional, intellectual and moral developments in a conducive learning environment. Such environments should provide opportunity for children to know and discover nature, interact freely with others and express their views. This may enable children to become socialized and in that way improve their creativity. In this regard one school head said:

Pupils need to be equipped with skills on how to interact and live with others, how to control their emotions, how to solve their problems and how to be faithful to others. All of these can be achieved by having conducive learning environments which enable children to interact freely with teachers, express their views and discover things in their environment. However, due to higher number of pupil in our PPE classes, it is very difficult to achieve all areas of children's development (Head mistress-5/Interview/May, 2021).

Quality Assurance Officers

Quality assurance officers perceived that teacher's qualification and physical infrastructures are poor, hence PPE is appraised in low quality. Shortage of qualified PPE teachers, shortage of teaching and learning materials as well as shortage of professional development to PPE teachers hinders the provision of effective teaching and learning to young children. This leads the quality of PPE to be perceived in low quality. One quality Assurance Officer commented that:

There is a shortage of qualified PPE teachers, lack of play grounds, shortage of teaching and learning materials as well as shortage of

professional development to the teachers in Zanzibar pre-primary schools. This draws back the effective PPE teaching and learning in our schools. Consequently, teachers are only teaching the 3rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and are defeated to meet some areas of children's development including cognitive, social, emotional, intellectual and moral developments.

Findings of this study are in line with previous study findings conducted in Tanzania by Ndijuye, Mligo and Machumu (2020) who found that PPE has low status and quality compared to other levels of education. This is because the importance and benefits of PPE are yet to be understood by policy makers. Consequently teachers in PPE are not selected on the basis of their specialization and the PPE subsector is considered to be a field of academic failures with teachers that missed qualification to teach in PPE. The study findings are in harmony with another study by Melhuish and Qi (2016) who emphasizes that initial teacher education and professional development are very important aspects which contribute to the improvement of pedagogical quality associated with better child learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that PPE plays important roles to young children as it enabled them to lay their educational foundation for future development. Secondly, quality between one PPE school to another differ in terms of teachers qualification, resources and facilities, school management as well as learning environment of the school including classroom settings and play grounds.

The study recommends that professional development training for pre-primary school teachers be conducted and maintained. Secondly, there is need to improve the school learning environment so as to maintain the quality standards among schools offered PPE for effective provision and implementation. Finally, Quality Assurance Officers should constantly monitor the quality of pre-primary education in order to ensure that schools meet the required standards for better teaching and learning in PPE.

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