

Quality Primary Education in Tanzania: A Dream or Reality?

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Abstract

The government of Tanzania has made a significant effort to improve the educational system to the extent that has been awarded and recognized for the attainment of the millennium development goals before the time frame of 2015. This incredible job on universal primary education enrollment has been due to the eradication of school fees for primary education in 2000 and primary school enrolment expanded to 95% in 2009. Pre-primary and secondary educations have also achieved steady expansions. Even though more classrooms have been built and the enrollment number reached 100%, many people claim that the quality of education in primary school is still poor and that pupils are not learning fundamental skills they need to find work prosper in their society and contribute to the national economic development. Tanzania is the only country in the world that needs to be recognized and is supposed to be in the Guinness book of having two thirds of primary school leavers who are unable to read and write well. They also lack basic numerical skills and 85% neither are unable to neither construct nor speak correct English sentences. Over 80% are selected to join secondary education or any other forms of further education. This paper discusses what went wrong. Is the name of primary education in Tanzania is an offence rather than a realization of human right? Dilapidated primary schools, inadequate facilities, poor trained and under- motivated teachers, poor working environment, inadequate supplies of teaching-learning materials, and lack of libraries which undermine rather than nourishing the potential of primary education. All these issues made me to articulate that quality primary education is a dream rather than a reality.

Keywords: Quality; primary education; educational system; Tanzania.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the quality of education provided in primary schools in Tanzania and it how can helps to thrive the national strategies of alleviating poverty as well as helping Tanzanian young generation to participate fully in East African political federation:

“Our education should be of good quality. Primary education in particular should be excellent; for this is the only formal education that most Tanzanians are likely to receive. At all present, the quality of our primary school education is appalling. We must do something about it, as a matter of national agency.” (Nyerere, 1998 cited in Lema et al., 2004)

Currently, there is a serious debate among educational stakeholders who are increasingly worried about the constant deterioration of quality primary education in Tanzania. This has been linked with the current report by [UWEZO \(2011\)](#) showing that, in 2005-2011, that 40% of standard seven leavers are not able to

read and write. Along the same line seven pupils of standard four out of 10 are not able to read an English paragraph (UWEZO, 2011).

UMEZO (2011) reports indicate that the proportion of students passing the primary school leaving examinations, for example, has been sharply declining since 2005. The Ministry of education and vocational training (2010) shows that the pass rate at the primary school level decreased from 70.5 % in 2006 to 54.2 % in 2007, and the trend continued to drop from 52.7 % in 2008 to 49.4 % in 2011.

It is now 22 years since Tanzania signed several international commitments on the provision of education for all. Some of these international commitments include: Universal Declaration of Human rights adopted in 1948, World Declaration on Education for all adopted in 1990 and the Dakar Conference of 2000. In Tanzania, evidence is everywhere in both rural and urban areas, to prove that primary school enrolment has risen and the country has made great strides towards gender parity at all levels of education and has made significant progress towards achieving Universal Primary Education, and Millennium Development Goal number 2. Since the eradication of school fees for primary education in 2001, primary school enrolment expanded to 95% in 2009. Pre-primary and secondary educations have also achieved steady expansion.

Despite the progress, there are still challenges such as regional disparities in primary education access; retention within the system, i.e. keeping children in school once they have enrolled; the quality of education at all levels; completion of each of the levels; and the smooth transition from lower to higher levels as children develop from early childhood into teenage and adult life, and the proportion of enrolled 7-13 years children ranges from 70% in Tabora to 100% in Mwanza (Lema et al., 2004).

The situation in primary schools is frustrating. Despite the huge funding by the government and donor community, there are appalling shortages of learning materials and qualified teachers in the majority of the country's rural schools. A recent research by UWEZO (2011) Institute indicates that the situation is worse than what is often being reported. The study was conducted in 38 out of 133 districts and the report shows that half of the pupils who finish Standard Seven in Tanzania's public schools cannot read even a Standard Two English book.

It is important to introduce this study by understanding and accentuating the role and value addition of primary education to national development. Tanzania poverty reduction efforts will depend largely on the levels of participation and achievement (relevance) in the educational sector, particularly that of girls and women. Attainment of relevant education will increase the capacity of Tanzanians to access basic services and means of production, generate sources or wealth, encourage participation in governance, reduce inequality, improve health standards and generally lead to sustainable development by helping in securing livelihoods.

The best-known and most reliable long-term strategy for poverty alleviation around the world is by ensuring that all citizens (children, young people and adults) have access to and completion of some quality basic education as stated by Vision 2025: Tanzania should be a nation with high quality of education at all levels; a nation which produces the quantity and quality of educated people sufficiently equipped with the requisite knowledge to solve the society problems, meet the challenges of development and attain competitiveness at regional and global levels (URT, 2005).

1.1 Position of primary education in Tanzania

Education is the powerful weapon commonly used by human being in fighting their deadly threats. Ignorance, illness, and poverty not only cause physical, emotional and psychological soreness to humankind but also humiliate and devastate their dignity and humanity. Fighting these enemies does not need conventional arms like tanks and missiles; it requires more effective strategies that will bring about great victory at relatively minimum costs. Education enables its bearer to make right decisions and plans in a right time at a right place. It provides man with skills and techniques, which are necessary in making strategies of overcoming life challenges. It gives him the capacities of knowing what to do and how to do it.

Primary education provides a real fundamental base for further education, training, work, self education and employment. It creates the capacity to cope with rapid changes in the environment in the period of information and technology expansion, where basic literacy and numeracy skills are becoming absolutely essential for an individual to survive and prosper. Thus, its universal availability in reasonable quality is central to human resources capacity of society. Development of inquiring mind, creativity, analytical, and

manipulative, investigative skills, appreciation societal values, knowledge of the national language and culture, and creation of a strong sense of national identity are all essential components of the primary school package. Tanzania seems to go for low cost primary education and this result into low quality education that threatens all the potential benefits of primary education, as much as it might have been a risk worth taking (Omari, 1995).

Mosha (2000) stressed that, despite the success of government in massive enrolment in primary education, PEDP was introduced in hasty and without preparations, class size almost doubled and there was accelerated enrolment without corresponding increase in the production of teachers, equipments, and learning materials. Too much emphasis has been placed on achieving 100% enrolment rates, and building new classrooms. Rajani (2003) mentioned that, we are just staffing children into schools without enough teachers. The quality of teaching –learning relies on class size, teacher-pupil ratio, teacher-pupil interaction, teacher and teaching strategies, ICT usage, teachers' commitment and the teaching-learning materials.

1.2 Research questions

In view of the introduction, this paper was guided by the following questions:

1. How has the rapid expansion enrolment of pupils affected the teaching and learning process in schools?
2. Are the resources necessary for successful teaching –learning available in schools?
3. Do teachers in primary schools commit themselves to their work?
4. How primary school teachers motivated with their work?

2. Methodology

The study was a case study of primary schools in two administrative districts, which are Chamwino and Bahi. Creswell (2003) states that case study attempts to learn more about a little known or poorly understood situation. The focus is on the participants' perceptions and feelings of the event or situation and the study tries to answer the question of the experience. It was mainly qualitative in nature but it was supported by some quantitative data.

2.1 Selection and sampling

The study was carried out in two administrative districts: Chamwino and Bahi in Dodoma region in Tanzania. These administrative districts were selected through non- probability purposive sampling method.

Fifty (50) respondents who participated in the study come from two administrative districts. Six head teachers and 44 teachers were drawn from six primary schools to take part in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers. To achieve this end, the school head teachers were asked to identify experienced teachers who had at least been working in the teaching career for the periods ranging between four to seven years. It was important to involve teachers with experience as they are aware of the enrolment expansion and deterioration of education quality in their respective schools.

2.2 Data collection instruments

The main data collection instruments were semi-structured interview and observation. The interviews were employed as they enabled the researcher to discuss with the respondents. This allowed the respondents to freely express their feelings and experiences. The interviews also enabled the researcher to probe and prompt on answers given and this flexibility of interviews made it possible for the researcher to gather as much information as possible (Cohen, et al., 2000). The observation technique was used to assess teachers' classroom activities, availability of teaching-learning facilities and teachers' living and working conditions.

2.3 Data analysis

The analysis began with individual respondents, and answers from different respondents were grouped and presented per given question. Most of the data were qualitative in nature and were analyzed through narrative form.

3. Finding and discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that are affecting the provision of quality primary education in Tanzania with reference to two selected administrative district in Dodoma region, to represent the entire country.

3.1 Evidence on the deterioration of quality primary education in Tanzania

There are models which have been used for several years in assessing the quality of education of a particular level, which are the traditional model from the examination of the quality in education focusing on the quality of intakes, facilities, and teachers, the nature of curriculum and quality of attainments and the production model that suggests traditional indicators of efficiency such as teacher-pupil ratio, pupils-textbook ratio, salary, and no-salary inputs and unit costs, which are actually indicators of material document rather than the quality of schooling (Heneveld, 1994). Even without using these models, all indications are that quality of education in Tanzania are deteriorating day after day and is in deep trouble. The more deafening manifestation of poor quality primary education, which is the subject of this study, has been presented as follows:

3.2 Class size and teacher-pupil ratio

There is a very high shortage of qualified primary school teachers in Tanzania Mainland despite the claim by the World Bank that there are “no absolute shortages of teachers (Wedgwood, 2005). Although the pupil-teachers ratio (PTR) in primary schools is 1:40 as per government official report, but aggregate figures do not reflect the real situation in the field. It is observed that, this target is far from to be attained in line with the enrolment increase. There has been a substantial increase of pupils in classrooms in all visited primary schools. Interview showed that it was a normal case for a classroom to contain 90-120 pupils and teachers agreed that the quality of teaching-learning was highly negatively affected by the over crowdedness of pupils in a single class.

3.2.1 Teacher - pupil in classroom interaction

A teacher is the heart of any good school. In the classroom, the teacher is the main instrument for maintaining qualitative improvement in learning. Such quality is maximized where there is an enabling and supportive environment where pupils participate actively in the process and where pupils, teachers and schools have opportunity for institutional growth (Nkumbi et al., 1997).

It was observed that, the interaction between teachers and pupils in primary schools was not effective due to the large number of pupils per class and poor sitting arrangements. In same vain pupils did not get enough individual assistance from their teachers during teaching-learning process. Teachers agreed that, it was very difficult for them to assess learning advancement and capacities of individual among pupils. This in turn makes it impossible for teachers to pursue teaching adjusted to individual pupils' levels of cognitive development. Interestingly, one teacher noted that the absence of an individual help in the current classrooms was underlined by the fact that teachers did not even know the names of all pupils in their classrooms.

In addition, school heads were asked whether the assessment techniques employed by teachers and feedback to pupils were affected by a big number of pupils in the classes. All school heads emphasized that, the situation was far from satisfactory. It was perceived that the feedback have deteriorated in line with the big number of pupils. One respondent noted that:

“I have 65 students in my class. These large classes make teaching very difficult. You do not have time to attend to individual difficulties. You know children learn at different paces. So if you do not assist slow learners, then they get discouraged and give up. We also have a problem of textbooks. For example, I have only 6 textbooks for my mathematics class which has 52 students. To overcome the problem, I prepare good notes which they photocopy.”

However, it was discovered that it was too difficult to attain feedback from teacher to pupils and pupils to teacher due to a big number of pupils in the classrooms. Pupils are many for the teacher to check understanding and share the learning outcomes with his/her pupils are impracticable.

Generally, respondents posed that it was impossible to have effective assessment, since there was no proper marking of pupils academic works, as the results marking had started to lag behind substantially.

Photo 1 shows that, there is large number of pupils in classes to the extent that others have to sit on the floor. The number of pupils in this class was 115. This shows how difficult it is for teachers to manage the classes in such worst situation with other pupils sitting very near to the blackboard.

3.3 Teaching-learning materials

Teaching–Learning materials are a broad concept that entails text book, exercise books, exercise sheets, pencils, papers, blackboard and pens. Against the background of quantitative enrollment expansion, it is very important to take the availability and quality of learning materials into consideration. Thus, if learning materials are given to a smaller number of pupils, it might generate considerable detention. The availability and quality of teaching-learning material become more important in a context characterized by a large group of pupils, especially if the teacher has difficulties to find time during the lesson to help the child (Colclough, 2005).

The official goal s of PEDP on student-book ratio is 1:2 pupils but the observations in classroom were contrary to PEDP goals. It was observed that six pupils still have to share one book during the reading session, which constitutes problems in quality of the teaching-learning progress. One respondent at school noted that:

“Large numbers of pupils actually have brought some constraints regarding access to teaching-learning materials...”

This respondent added that, although the government is providing the Capitation Gants to all schools, yet pupils have to pay for other related learning materials such as: exercise books, pens, and others. This caused a big problem to pupils from poorest household income to afford this as one respondent mentioned:

“Availability of textbooks is a big problem. One book is supposed to be shared by 5 pupils while 4-5 children’s sit on a desk and many sit on the dilapidated floor. In many subjects we have 5 textbooks for 50 pupils; some classes even have more than 60 pupils. Lack of textbooks is making teaching very difficult.”

These observations are in line with what Mmbaga et al. (2001) observed, where some children had no exercise books, pencils and pens because their parents could not afford to buy them. In almost every class observed, there were pupils who were not writing notes simply because they did not have exercise books, exercise book finished, stolen and they did not have new ones and some had no pens.

3.3.1 Teaching and learning environments

Learning can occur anywhere, but the positive learning outcomes generally sought by educational systems happen in quality learning environments which are made-up of physical, psychosocial, and service delivery elements (UNICEF, 2000). The learning environment is a total surrounding that is healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive, considering special needs, provision of adequate resources and facilities, and content that is reflected in the relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, gender, and health.

Researchers confirm that there is a clear link between environmental quality of schools and pupils performance. The quality of the school environment shapes attitudes of pupils and teachers. Attitudes affect teaching and learning behavior, and likewise behavior affects performance of pupils and the school. Therefore, educational performance determines future outcomes of individuals, pupils and society as a whole.

Principally, teaching and the learning environment is far from conducive in many primary schools visited. Many primary schools were in bad situation, because no enough desks, and textbooks. Almost the primary schools visited; there was a nearly total absence of displayed teaching and learning materials within all the classrooms irrespective of the quality of the buildings themselves. Photo 2 shows a deadly classroom in some sampled primary school in Tanzania.

3.3 Commitment and respect among teachers

Teacher commitment and respect is a clear sign of well functioning school and support for quality teaching-learning progress. All interviewed school heads and teachers maintained that, they were not committed very much. In line with this, it was mentioned that teacher's absenteeism was high and that most teachers did not take their work seriously in terms of preparations and curriculum implementation. One teacher maintained that,

“You may be committed if the work you perform pays you and recognized by the society. The status quo of teachers is no longer recognized and respected by the society even the government that is why we engaged in other business in order to raise our earnings.”

Another teacher argued that, “in the current situation, only people who are rich are respected.”

“The disrespect for teachers even filters down to the children whom they teach. In the past, when I was a student, teachers were respected. Respect for teachers declined after 1980s to 1990s when teachers' salaries became much lower compared to salaries of other professionals. Parents do not respect teachers at all. One day, a father of one of the students came to beat up a teacher because a teacher had punished his child. Parents tell their children that teachers are the lowest people. Once a student told one of our teachers “you should come and ask my father to give you a job. Why do you waste your time teaching when you earn so little?”

The observation of this study indicates that respect for primary school teachers in both rural and urban areas is low. A major reason for the disrespect is that primary teachers viewed by the majority that are not highly trained like other professions. [Bennell and Mukyanuzi \(2005\)](#) cited that Tanzania Teachers Union is also concerned that the strength of pre-service training with just one year of formal college training will also further lowers the status of primary school teachers. Teaching in Tanzania is widely perceived as employment of the last resort. As one head of school put it, no one wants to be a teacher so why should they be respected?

The survey conducted by TADREG in 1990 shows that, 12% of the teacher respondents said they joined the teaching profession because they could not get the job they wanted and only 5% said that there was no alternative to teaching. Over ten years later in 2003, the [Bennell and Mukyanuzi \(2005\)](#) cited that most of the primary school teachers stated that they became teachers because of lacking of alternative employment opportunities.

Generally, the presented scenario has caused more trouble on primary school pupils who are enrolled in a large number in public primary schools since they have not getting the benefits of education. It is agreed that proper education is the cornerstone for any economic and social development and that primary education is the foundation of the whole educational system in any country which is struggling to fight against poverty.

3.4 Teachers motivation

Learning is a process of interaction between teachers and students as they both participate in the learning process, but with more weight given to teachers to show the way. It is commonly known that the quality of

education depends mainly on ability of the teachers to manage and actively engage the children in the process of learning in a classroom.

Effective pupils learning achievements can mainly be determined in classroom by motivated teachers who plan for teaching, put into practice what they have learned but teachers' motivation is a critically ignored factor in all levels of policy choices in Tanzania (Ndawi, 1997).

However, there are growing concerns that teachers in Tanzania, are increasingly de-motivated, which is reflected in the deteriorating teaching performance and learning outcomes. The 1995 Education and Training Policy noted that in Tanzania teachers have experienced low and irregular salary payments, lack of proper housing, inadequate teaching facilities, low status and limited opportunities for professional development. Poor incentives also mean that too few qualified and experienced teachers want to work in schools in rural areas where the large majority of the population and the poor live and where primary school enrolment and completion rates are relatively low.

In a similar vein, the 1990 World Bank report on teachers' conditions of service concluded that 'in the absence of incentives to perform better, many teachers are currently providing much less and lower quality education than they are capable and the de-motivation of teachers is a major contributory factor to poor learning achievements of primary and secondary students' (World Bank, 2001).

Approximately all respondent in sampled primary schools asked about the state of teacher motivation in Tanzania, agreed that, they were completely tired and de-motivated by the low pay, poor working and living environment, and other went on saying that "teaching is a more frustrating profession they never seen in the world and others have plans to leave the profession."

4. Conclusion

Tanzania has just received an award for attaining the UN Millennium Development Goal on universal education way before the 2015 deadline. A well deserved recognition for a country that, in a few years it managed to increase primary school enrollment by more than 95%. In the similar vein the report released on the state of education around the world by the Global Campaign for Education a coalition of over including Oxfam 100 commended Tanzania for making positive steps in delivering education for all. However, this milestone achievement and awards should go hand in hand with the provision of quality primary education. The government has many challenges, which must be addressed by the government and development partners. The main concerns of Tanzanians are the provision of quality education in the country, which can help their children to have capabilities and capitals to invest in them. As state owned schools which are the hopes of many Tanzanians, are not financed them they will continue to widen gaps between the rich and the poor people in the country. In so doing, the country's national security may be threatened, which can disturb the unity and peaceful environment the country has been enjoying since independence.

On the other hand, quality education cannot be achieved if decisions are not made on who should be allowed to teach. Accepting teaching as profession and abiding with its ethics is one way of promoting quality education in the country. The country need motivated teachers who have been empowered by the government to promote their profession in terms of pedagogy and freedom of choice on which pedagogy should be applied in a classroom. The government needs to be vigilant with the prevailing situation around primary schools. Otherwise it will end up with better enrolment for All but not quality education for all.

4.1 Policy suggestions

1. A national debate on education provision is needed in order to develop a common and more clearly defined philosophical vision on quality education. The absence of philosophical vision prolongs to hamper our ability to equip pupils fully for sweeping social and economic changes that Tanzania is aimed.
2. Quality education needs to be redefined in term of outcomes and capabilities we aimed to develop pupils. This point means that to develop pupils in wide range capabilities that will be a value to them regardless of the certain work and life paths the follows.

3. Human and capital resource intensity determines primary school performance as measured by pass rates, first and foremost the number and qualified teachers should be employed so as to reduce a big ratio between teachers and students.
4. The welfare of teachers needs to be significantly improved, primarily through the provision of adequate salaries that are paid on time. Teacher benefits regarding health care and double shift, leave and transfer allowances, among others, need to be clarified, known to all and made available on time. The negative effects of promising already demotivated teacher something, and then not giving it, should not be underestimated. This entire process should be done closely with the representatives of teachers, with a demonstrated commitment to taking their ideas and inputs seriously.
5. Teachers should be supported and held accountable to fulfill their roles. This can be done by the more effective use of existing ward, district and regional education officials, including the inspectorate, as well as by providing training to head teachers and other teachers. A major focus should be on ensuring teachers are in school during school time, and that all periods are taught fully and effectively.

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Table and pictures

Table 1: Teacher-pupils ratio in the sampled schools

Schools	Number of pupils in each school	Number of teachers in each school	TPR
A	3089	48	1: 64
B	4003	46	1: 87
C	2757	49	1: 56

Picture 1a: A class photo shows overcrowded classroom at primary school



Source: Field photo 2006-2007

Picture 1b: A class photo shows overcrowded classroom at primary school



Source: Davidson 2006