

## Original Paper

# Pupils' Learning Experiences in Early Childhood government Pre-Schools Using the Tanzania Institute of Education Curriculum: Focus on Kisarawe District

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### **Abstract**

*Early Childhood Education is becoming a greater factor in determining future learning behavior among students, yet there are various curricula in use and with varying effectiveness. The TIE curriculum is the most popular in Tanzania and it is unknown as to how effective it is in preparing learners for future learning and developing key soft skills. This study investigated pupils' learning experience in early childhood education in schools using the Tanzania Institute of Education Curriculum [TIE] focus in the Kisarawe district. The objectives were; i) to assess the appropriateness of the teaching and learning environment of early childhood education; ii) to assess the actual learning practices of children in early childhood education in Kisarawe iii) to determine teacher's competencies in the provision of early childhood education and iv) to examine the parents, community, and government support towards the delivery of early childhood education. The study was predominantly qualitative and employed a case study research design. Respondents were drawn from four public primary schools. It involved 4 head teachers, 8 teachers, 8 parents, 6 members of the school committee, and 4 classes with 340 pupils. The study employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select respondents. Interview guides, observation checklists, and documentary reviews were the instruments used to collect data. Findings indicated that the learning experience gained by pupils who use the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum in early childhood education is low compared to what is expected and directed in the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. The schools in the sample had poor indoor and outdoor learning environments, and teachers were mostly uncertified and had little experience and competencies. There was low and poor support from parents and communities, and the local government who owned the schools contributed little to strengthen the learning experience and competence gained by pupils. The study recommends that education stakeholders*

*effectively play their roles to enable the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum to be implemented with greater success.*

**Keywords**

*Early childhood education experience*

**1. Introduction**

Early Childhood Education is an important experience for the development of young children before they join primary schools, it is the first step towards joining the world of knowledge for it represents the actual beginning of formal education for all children and the quality of care and education. At this stage, a child receives basic knowledge and skills which will to a greater extent determine the level of his or her physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development in the future (Ige, 2011). The main purpose of Early Childhood Education is to prepare children mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally for joining the higher level which is primary education.

Various studies have shown that all over the World children who have attended Early Childhood Education tend to learn more rapidly through an organized curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and interactions with their peers (Mligo, 2018; Smith, 2012).

Each country has its own educational goals and for those goals to be realized, they design educational policies which lead to the preparation of an education curriculum outlining goals, objectives, guidelines, and recommendations that have to be followed by implementers.

The delivery of Early Childhood Education in Tanzania is done through different curricula, however, the most popular ones are the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum which is used in all public Early Childhood Education classes, and in some private schools, the Montessori curriculum which is used by the Catholic-based institutions and the Madrasa curriculum which is used by the Muslim based institutions. What is common in these curricula is that although they have differentiated focus on physical, mental, moral, and even social formation, children get varying experiences from them, whoever, it is not very clear to what extent these children get from these curricula and how they can help them in terms of competences acquired when they join primary education.

The most used curriculum in Tanzania is the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum due to the high number of pupils registered in public pre-primary schools. According to MoEST (2020), 93.8% of pupils in 2018 and 93.4% in 2019 were registered in government pre-primary schools compared to private schools where the registration was 6.2% in 2018 and 6.6% in 2019 (BEST, 2020). From the above, it is clear that the majority of pre-primary level use the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum.

The main goal of the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum is to enable the child to develop holistically, that is, physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially (MoEST, 2016).

Assessment in Early Childhood Education involves making a follow-up on the child's development and learning from the time the child is enrolled in a school until the time he/she completes the Pre-Primary

class. The assessment also deals with measuring the ability of pupils in acquiring the intended knowledge and skills as guided by the curriculum in use. The teacher is required to continually assess the child's development and learning in all domains (cognitive, physical, emotional, and social). The purpose of assessment during this period is to understand the progress of the child's improvement and learning as well as recognize the child's special needs for the aim of providing suitable interventions. It is recommended by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum that assessment at this level should not involve written tests and examinations and a child's progress will not be compared with that of others. Therefore, the assessment will focus on the progress made by the pupils as he/she performs daily activities and acquire different knowledge and skills.

According to the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum in order for Early Childhood Education to be delivered successfully some very basic conditions need to be considered. These include the existence of conducive teaching and learning environment, sufficient and appropriate teaching and learning materials and facilities, the presence of sufficient qualified teachers, involvement, and support from parents, communities, and the government just to mention a few.

### *1.1 The research Problem*

Since the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum for Early Childhood Education was introduced, to a certain extent it has been used to guide teachers to equip the children with the required knowledge and skills at that level. However, research-based evidence indicates that its implementation is still unsatisfactory. Among key challenges noted include its curriculum content, the applicability of the curriculum guidelines, and how to domesticate it (Ndijuye et al., 2020, Mutahabwa, 2010; Mligo, 2018). Although this curriculum is being implemented and despite the challenges noted by various research reports, one key question is, what type of competencies do children gain as required for comfortably joining primary grade one. This study intended to determine to what extent Early Childhood Education pupils acquired the intended cognitive, physical, emotional, and social competencies as directed by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum to enable them successfully move forward in their future learning.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Research Approach*

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and case study research design to collect data from four public primary schools in the Kisarawe district.

### *2.2 Study Population*

The sample of the study consisted of 4 heads of schools, 8 parents who have their children in Early Childhood Education, 6 members of schools committees, 5 Early childhood teachers, 3 teachers who happened to teach Early Childhood classes in the previous, and 4 early childhood classes which consisted of 340 pupils.

### *2.3 Tools of Collecting Data*

The research used a purposive sampling technique to select heads of schools, Early Childhood Education teachers, and all Early Childhood Education pupils from four classes in four schools in the Kisarawe district. The snowball sampling technique was used to select parents who had their children in Early Childhood Education classes and members of school committees. We used multiple methods in data collection including observation, interviews, and documentary reviews. Observations were used in assessing the actual teaching and learning practice in and outside the classrooms. In the classroom, the researcher observed the teaching and learning sessions while concentrating on observing how teachers were following the Early Childhood Education curriculum guidelines, here the aim was to assess their competencies. In addition to that, it is through observation that the researcher was able to assess how the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum pupils were acquiring the required knowledge and skills. Outside the classroom, the researchers observed how pupils participated in games, sports, and learning through play in acquiring the required skills. In documentary reviews, the researcher went through the Early Childhood Education TIE curriculum, syllabus, pupil attendance registers, and minutes from school committees and lesson plans. All these were for the researcher to get a better understanding of the issue under study and the required data.

Another method employed in this study was interviews; they were administered to Early Childhood Education teachers who were provided with structured and unstructured interviews to give their responses based on their knowledge and experiences in teaching Early Childhood Education classes. Another unstructured interview was administered to the heads of schools, members of the school committee, and parents who had their children in Early Childhood Education classes on the monitoring, coordinating, and implementing of the pre-primary school curriculum and its effectiveness on the learning experience of pupils.

After data collection, the researcher coded and categorized data into meaningful themes for data analysis. Data were analyzed through Semantic analysis. The researcher though out this study made sure that confidentiality, trust, dignity, and respect were considered during the data collection and analysis process.

## **3. Findings and discussion**

### *3.1 Appropriateness of Teaching and Learning Environments Early Childhood Education in Public Schools*

In Early Childhood Education, the environment has a crucial role to play in a child's learning and development. It is important to make use of early childhood philosophies and theories for organizing the indoor and outdoor learning environment, to provide the child with opportunities to learn by doing. The Pre-Primary class should be well organized and resourced in such a way that children will learn even in the absence of their teachers" (MOEST 2016). The findings from this study noted the following from indoor and outdoor environment situations in the schools under study.

### 3.1.1 Overcrowding

It was realized that in all four schools, the Early Childhood Education classes were overcrowded as clearly shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Enrollment of Early Childhood Education Pupils in 4 Public Primary Schools**

SN	School	No of Early Childhood Education pupils	No. of teachers
1	A	34	1
2	B	120	1
3	C	95	1
4	D	91	2

As can be observed from the table above, the classes were overcrowded and the teacher-pupil ratio was lower. This is clear evidence that under such situations no meaningful teaching and learning can take place as recommended by the TIE curriculum. During class sessions the researcher observed that some children were making noise, some were playing, some were quarreling and some were sleeping. Concentration on teaching and learning by following the curriculum guidelines was low. Responses from teachers on how they were managing their classes were that it was a very tough exercise; it was not easy for them to control the children. It is therefore obvious that a teacher cannot play his or her role effectively and this can lead to the acquisition of cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills pupils being very low as recommended by the Tanzania Institute of Educational curriculum guidelines.

### 3.1.2 No Time to Prepare Learning Resources

In responding to the same question, another teacher explained that she is not able to prepare the proper and enough teaching and learning materials and resources because she is responsible for teaching Early Childhood Education children as well as standard one and two. Consequently, due to space and time factors, she has to combine Early Childhood Education and standard one pupils in the same class and at the same time.

From the above observation, it is evident that the TIE curriculum guidelines and recommendations are not adhered to, under such a situation where a teacher is supposed to teach children of two classes in the same venue at the same time, both classes are affected. What happens is that the blackboard at the front of the class is divided into two parts i.e left and right by vertical line materials for ECE are written on the right side and the left side is for standard one and the teaching and learning process continue. In the case of Early Childhood Education pupils, they will be getting very few competencies contrary to what has been directed by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. This is likely to affect their future progress when they join standard one. On the other side, teachers become discouraged because of being overworked where they are being affected in applying their competencies. Here are two

responses from one of the teachers on how she is handling the situation, she said in order to accomplish work in a given period, she has to reduce the number of exercises to be given to the pupils contrary to what is recommended in the

curriculum. Another alternative is to miss some of the periods in order to balance periods in other classes.

Another teacher who participated in the research after being asked by the researcher as to why her class had not enough proper arrangement of teaching and learning materials, she responded that:

The room I am using is not specifically for ECE children. The room is also used for conducting meetings and some teachers store their materials and other belongings in the cupboards which are in this class. Therefore, I am discouraged to prepare and arrange ECE teaching materials and aids as I am sure they will be disturbed.

### 3.1.3 Lack of Playing Grounds

During this research in the schools under study, it was observed that two out of four schools had completely no playing grounds as well as lacked sports and games facilities. Therefore, it was clear that in these two schools which had no playgrounds, Early Childhood Education pupils had no opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities. The situation in the remaining two schools in terms of availability of playing grounds was observed that they were very few, almost all of them were for football and the schools had an acute shortage of games and sports facilities for Early Childhood Education children. Under such a situation Early Childhood Education pupils are denied the opportunity to enjoy school life, relaxation, and more integration among colleagues. It is believed that one of the things which attract children to go to school is recreation and integration, the aspects that promote cognitive, social, physical, and emotional skills. Shortage of playgrounds and facilities denies the pupils from enjoying their school life and their academic progress.

### 3.1.4 Outdoor Activities Undermined

The Early Childhood Education curriculum gives indoor and outdoor activities equal weight. The Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum among other things insists on learning through doing and learning through plays to promote creativity among pupils. As already shown under this situation of both indoor and outdoor such activities can poorly be conducted. Shortage or lack of the aspects mentioned above greatly affects cognitive skills and development. The same situation denies the children to acquire physical, emotional, and social skills which are gained through interactions in plays and learning through doing. Lack or shortage of all these greatly affects the whole teaching and learning process in Early Childhood Education classes.

## 3.2 *Actual Learning Practices (Cognitive, Physical Emotional, and Social) of Children in Early Childhood Education*

In almost all schools, Early Childhood Education pupils and their teachers start their day by gathering together, singing songs, and responding to general questions and instructions to remind them of the things they learned on the previous day. This is done in form of questions and answers. After that, they

get into the classes. It was observed that to a certain extent due to the situation in the school environment as already shown the actual teaching and learning in an Early Childhood Education class was not following either the syllabus nor Early Childhood Education curriculum guidelines. In all the schools they lagged behind the syllabus and in some schools, they were completely not following neither the syllabus nor the curriculum because Early Childhood Education pupils were combined with class one. Another error committed to Early Childhood Education pupils is that they had to sit for the examinations and tests which is contrary to the Tanzania Institute of Education Early Childhood Education curriculum which maintains that, "Assessment at this level will not involve written tests and examinations and a child's performance will not be compared with that of others. Therefore, the assessment will focus on the progress made by the child as he/she performs daily activities" (MOEST, 2016). Here it can be correctly argued that Early Childhood Education pupils in the schools under study as observed by the researcher were not been imparted with the knowledge and skills which could lead to their competencies because teachers were not following the Tanzania Institute of Education Early Childhood Education curriculum.

With Gerard to actual learning practice in the delivery of Early Childhood Education, concentration was on how and to what extent pupils were acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies as instructed by the Tanzania Institute of Education Early Childhood Education curriculum, the main method used here was observation inside and outside the classroom although to a lesser extent interviews and documentary reviews were also employed. The researcher deeply and carefully tried to analyze how the children were acquiring cognitive skills, physical skills, emotional skills, and social skills as directed by the Early Childhood Education Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. It was realized that to a certain extent, pupils were acquiring those skills, not because of following the Early Childhood Education Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum but it was because of the creativity and efforts made by their teachers and school administrations. Therefore, the pupils' failure to acquire the required skills is not associated with the Early Childhood Education Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum but is due to the existing unsupportive environment and conditions.

### *3.3 Teachers' Competencies in the Provision of Early Childhood Education*

For teachers to be conversant and competent in teaching Early Childhood Education classes, they need to have attended relevant courses, seminars, workshops, and training in Early Childhood Education [or a full pre-service diploma program] as directed by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum.

Findings from the interviews conducted with Early Childhood Education teachers indicated that it was only 3 out of 8 Early Childhood Education teachers in the sample once attended a two-month training in Early Childhood Education. Here, there is a need to question how effective the remaining five teachers are teaching children without undergoing any training in Early Childhood Education.

During interviews, one teacher maintained that:

I have never attended any course in Early Childhood Education, five months ago, I was assigned to teach an Early Childhood Education class while I was teaching standard six, in the first instance, I was

happy knowing that the job will not be very difficult, I was going to enjoy by playing with children, etc. In reality, I came to realize that, the children were many, not enough books and other textual materials, no teaching media, and other teaching facilities. I came to conclude that without one having the required qualification to teach at this level, and without all the required conditions for one to teach an Early Childhood Education

class, it will be difficult to impart the required knowledge, skills, and competencies in teaching Early Childhood Education.

However, researchers discovered that the low teacher-pupil ratio is highly affected by the classroom management aspect by making it difficult for teachers to attend to each pupil that's why during class sessions pupils had very low concentration, some were crying, playing, and bullying each other, etc. One class, for example, was having 91 children taught by one teacher. In these circumstances, it was very difficult for all children to carefully listen to the teacher because of overcrowdedness.

From the research, it was observed that the school administrations used to make some changes that were detrimental to Early Childhood Education teachers. Some teachers after teaching Early Childhood Education for one year or two years later were shifted to teach lower primary classes and teachers from that level were assigned to teach Early Childhood Education classes. This took time for them to orientate themselves and cope well at this level.

One teacher who was teaching Early Childhood Education remarked:

I have never attended any training in Early Childhood Education, but I was assigned to teach that level for two years, as I continued teaching through my initiatives I found myself gaining knowledge and experience as well as being creative, however, after two years, I was assigned to teach lower primary classes and one of my colleagues replaced me in the ECE class. I was demoralized and am not ready to be assigned the Early Childhood Education class again.

That being the case one can correctly argue to what extent the pupils taught by these teachers acquire knowledge and skills by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum recommendations whose intention is to make sure that the pupils get ready to join standard one. Therefore, their failure to acquire competencies is associated with being taught by unqualified teachers in Early Childhood Education. This is supported by Mligo, (2018) who argues that teachers' qualifications with professional development are more important factors in improving and provision of quality education along with the implementation of the Early Childhood Education curriculum.

This calls for the government to set up a program of making sure that all teachers who teach early childhood education attend appropriate courses to improve Early Childhood Education, and even allocate some teachers' colleges to run certificate and diploma courses for ECE teachers.

#### *3.4 Parents, Community, and Government Support towards the Provision of Early Childhood Education*

Parents, communities, and government support towards the provision of early childhood education are very pertinent for they are key stakeholders in the development of Early Childhood Education, there is

no way the delivery of Early Childhood Education in a school can succeed without the involvement of these key education stakeholders. Through interviews and documentary reviews, the following were identified: there was very poor parental participation in the school education of their Early Childhood Education children. As it has been made clear parents were not fulfilling their respective roles in school as well as at home to their children. Looking at the roles of school committees, half of them due to lack of training on their roles and responsibilities they were not doing very well, while the remaining half of the school committees were not properly addressing issues about the development of Early Childhood Education in their schools. On the side of the government, there is no budget allocated to the development of Early Childhood Education. Heads of schools had to divert funds allocated to lower primary to meet Early Childhood Education needs. Worse enough, the government has done very little on training and employing teachers who have undergone Early Childhood Education training, schools have an acute shortage of resource materials and facilities. Consequently, pupils are partially imparted with the required knowledge, skills, and competencies in Early Childhood Education following the Early Childhood Education Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum.

It can be noted that parents and the community to some extent understand the importance of Early Childhood Education, by their children attending Early Childhood Education classes they note some positive changes and they witness their children improving. Whomever they are poorly supporting this progress by not adhering to their roles and responsibilities manifested in their reluctance in making financial and material contributions to the building of Early Childhood Education classes, purchase of facilities, supporting the feeding programs, and monitoring their children's academic progress. On the side of school committees, they did not fully fulfill their responsibilities accurately, e.g., sensitizing parents and other community members to make contributions to the development of Early Childhood Education, furthermore, they don't give priority to resources mobilization to the development of Early Childhood Education. On the side of the government, all we see on record is issuing instructions of attaching Early Childhood Education classes to primary schools, emanating from the ETP of 1995 and that of 2014 and endorsing the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum and employment of teachers. For Early Childhood Education to be useful as intended the government needs to budget for Early Childhood Education, training and employing sufficient and qualified Early Childhood Education teachers and improve the teaching and learning school environment. The government announced in the ETP Policy of 2014 that all primary schools must have a preschool wing attached to them, but they have not trained teachers for preschool, nor produced teaching and learning materials relevant to the same. Most able parents, including government employees, realizing this, take their children to private Early Childhood Education schools run by private individuals and NGOs. These schools use Montessori, English medium, or Play schools curricula that are popular among these children. The majority of children of ordinary citizens attend government preschools using the TIE curriculum.

### *Conclusion*

In almost all the schools involved in the study, there existed an environment that was not conducive to

allowing smooth teaching of Early Childhood Education classes, which did not allow clear implementations of the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. The Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum recommends the availability of enough space in and outside the class to make it easy for practicing teaching through play as well as games and sports. In all the schools under study, such a situation never existed hence it was not possible to follow the recommendation of the curriculum.

Looking at the actual learning practice it was realized that the exercise was coupled with several obstacles. These include low teacher-pupil ratio, overcrowdedness of pupils in the class, acute shortage of teaching and learning materials, poor support from parents and community, etc. All these made it so difficult for children to acquire the required knowledge, skills, and competencies as directed by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. The main goal of the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum is to make sure that pupils acquire cognitive, physical, emotional, and social skills by following the recommended guidelines in the implementation of the curriculum. Findings have indicated that children get very few skills from what is expected due to the already identified challenges.

It was also observed that teachers' competencies in teaching Early Childhood Education pupils are coupled with different challenges such as unlimited in-service training, and the habit among the heads of schools to re-allocate teachers who teach Early Childhood Education to teach lower primary classes after a few years of ECE teaching. This practice has a negative effect on teachers who have already gained experience and interest in teaching early childhood education. Shortage of competent and experienced teachers in Early Childhood Education is another serious setback, it was suggested that there is a need for the government to conduct training for Early Childhood Education teachers which could involve teachers teaching Early Childhood Education.

Poor parental and community support for Early Childhood Education has been a very serious setback to the development of Early Childhood Education for they are giving very low financial and material support. This is because they are not well-sensitized and organized. The study has also found that the government does not make a budget allocation to the Early Childhood Education subsector. It is suggested that the government need to allocate a budget for Early Childhood Education and ensure that the Early Childhood Education sector is fully staffed and by so doing the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum can fully be realized and fulfill intended goals.

At this juncture, it can be concluded that the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum as it is, is very clear for it sets out very clear goals, instructions, and guidelines which if well-implemented, children can acquire the intended knowledge, skills, and competencies. Actual learning practice shows that pupils get very little knowledge and skills (cognitive, physical, emotional, social) as directed by the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum. This is because in schools the conditions which are favorable for the implementation of the curriculum as shown in this research are not there. It is after the identified challenges have been resolved and some improvements made that the Tanzania Institute of Education curriculum can be well implemented and pupils in Early Childhood Education can acquire

the intended knowledge, skills, and competencies.

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