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Pre-primary education in Tanzania: Observations from urban and rural classrooms

Lyabwene Mtahabwa^a, Nirmala Rao^{b,*}^a College of Education, The University of Dodoma, P.O. Box 523, Dodoma, Tanzania^b Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between pre-primary educational policy and actual practice in Tanzania. Policy relevant to pre-primary education was analyzed and 15 pre-primary lessons from two urban and two rural schools were videotaped. Although the national educational policy specifies the same standards for pre-primary education regardless of location, there were considerable differences across schools. Compared to urban classes, rural ones had considerably less space, larger group sizes, less favorable teacher/pupil ratios, fewer instructional resources and less qualified teachers. Teacher professional qualifications appeared to influence the quality of classroom interaction more than the physical setting and resources.

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1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the education provided to children during the two years before formal primary school in Tanzania. A variety of terms including early childhood care and education (ECCE), early childhood development (ECD), early childhood education and care (ECEC), early childhood care and development (ECCD) and early childhood care for survival growth and development (EC-SGD) have been used to describe services for young children. The different terms are a reflection of variations in the foci of services and the age group covered. International development agencies typically use either the term ECCE or the term ECD to refer to services for children from birth to eight years of age. These types of early childhood development services are based on a holistic approach, and recognize the interdependence of the physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains of development. ECCE or ECD services are typically provided in a center, and include converging interventions in the areas of health, nutrition, stimulation and education, and a component of capacity building for care givers. The term early childhood education (ECE), on the other hand, is used interchangeably with preschool education (PSE) or pre-primary education (PPE) and focuses on services for children ranging in age from three to six years. This type of pre-primary education typically aims to prepare children for formal primary education.

Education (PSE) covering the age group of three to six years, with a strong content/component of education as a preparation for

primary education/elementary education. In this paper, we use the terms early childhood education to refer to center-based educational services provided to children below six years and the term pre-primary education to refer specifically to services provided in pre-primary schools in the two years before Primary 1. Both terms are used in the Tanzanian context.

1.1. Early childhood education policy and quality

The importance of effective early childhood policy for high quality early childhood education has received increasing attention all over the world (Espinosa, 2002; Garcia et al., 2007; O’Kane, 2005; Rao and Li, 2007; Wood, 2004). Compared to other developing countries, the quality of pre-primary education in sub-Saharan Africa has been considered to be poor and practices in these countries have been closely related to policy (Pence, 2004). There is a dearth of research on the relationship between pre-primary policy and the quality of pre-primary education in sub-Saharan Africa and this paper focuses on the relationship between policy and practice in urban and rural pre-primary classrooms in Tanzania. Data on practice can inform policy (Pianta, 2003) and this can be achieved through a “backward mapping model” wherein policy is enacted to alleviate gaps identified between actual and desired practice (Dyer, 1999).

1.1.1. Policy and urban–rural differences in the quality of early childhood education

Many developing countries have national early childhood policies which cover all areas of the country but these are not always accompanied by operational plans with different target dates depending on location of schools. In the developing world,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 2859 2521; fax: +852 2858 5649.

E-mail addresses: Lyabwene@gmail.com (L. Mtahabwa), nrao@hku.hk (N. Rao).

62 poor and rural children are most disadvantaged when it comes to
63 access to early childhood services (UNESCO, 2006) and they also
64 tend to receive services which are of a lower quality than their
65 urban counterparts. Discrepancies in the quality of urban and
66 rural pre-primary schools in Kenya (Said, 1997; UNESCO/OECD,
67 2005), Botswana (Bar-On, 2004), Zimbabwe (Cleghorn and
68 Prochner, 2003) and Ghana (Morrison, 2001) have been docu-
69 mented. This may also be the case in Tanzania and this study
70 provides empirical evidence on the quality of pre-primary
71 education in urban and rural settings. Such data can inform
72 policy (Pianta, 2003).

73 1.2. Education in Tanzania

74 Tanzania, which is located in the East African Region of sub-
75 Saharan Africa, has a population of 37.9 million people, of which
76 44% are under the age of 15. Life expectancy at birth is 44 and 45
77 years for males and females, respectively. The infant and under-
78 five mortality rates are 68 and 112, respectively (Population
79 Reference Bureau, 2005). Two years of pre-primary education
80 became part of the formal education system in 1995 and the
81 country now has a 2 + 7 + 4 + 2 + 3 system denoting the number
82 years allocated to pre-primary, primary, ordinary secondary,
83 advanced secondary and higher education. Pre-primary education
84 theoretically serves children from aged five to six years although
85 some children below age five attend pre-primary schools (Ministry
86 of Education and Vocational Training, MOEVT, 2006). It is not
87 mandatory and parents are free to decide whether or not to send
88 their children to pre-primary school.

89 1.3. Early childhood education in Tanzania

90 Currently young children in Tanzania attend programs in child
91 care centers, nursery schools, Montessori/other preschools and
92 pre-primary classes which are affiliated to primary schools. Private
93 sector enterprises typically provide education and care for children
94 below five years. This paper focuses on services offered in pre-
95 primary schools for children ranging in age from four to six years.
96 The Gross Enrolment Ratio for five- to six-year-olds in 2004 was 29
97 (UNESCO, 2006) and private early childhood programs in Tanzania
98 are considered to be of higher quality than government funded
99 ones (Mwinuka, 2001).

100 Pre-primary education in Tanzania is largely regarded as a
101 preparation for primary education and the curriculum focuses on the
102 development of literacy and numeracy skills while social and
103 emotional skills tend to be neglected (Mbise, 1996). Further the
104 education has tended to be of a relatively low quality because of low
105 levels of teacher academic and professional qualifications, large
106 class sizes, and limited resources. For example, only 1426 (8.6%) of
107 the 16,597 teachers in pre-primary schools were professionally
108 qualified (MOEVT, 2008). As a result, "inappropriate" teacher-
109 centered instructional approaches are very common and pre-
110 primary teachers have tended to focus on academic skills (Kissassi,
111 1994) rather than promote the holistic approach which is advocated
112 for young children.

113 Tanzanian parents like teachers emphasize the early mastery of
114 literacy and numeracy skills during the pre-primary years as they
115 regard pre-primary education merely as a preparation for formal
116 primary education (Mbise, 1996). This is similar to the case in
117 Malawi where parents also view preschooling predominantly as
118 academic preparation for primary school although government
119 curriculum guidelines promote a holistic approach to early
120 education. Parents' perceptions may reflect their awareness of the
121 necessity of literacy and numeracy skills as a means of fighting
122 poverty in the African context (Kholowa and Rose, 2007). In
123 Tanzania, parents help in construction of school buildings and

donate food but they typically do not provide assistance in the
classroom (Mtahabwa, 2001).

1.4. Pre-primary education policy in Tanzania

In 1967, Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) was adopted to guide
educational practice at all levels of education (Nyerere, 1968). At
the pre-primary school level, it stipulates the use of child-centered
pedagogy to make children independent thinkers and actors and the
pre-primary school curriculum (Ministry of Education and
Culture, MOEC, 2005) recommends the use of active, hands-on
activities.

Governments in developing countries have moved from
emphasizing increased access to education to focusing on both
access and enhancing the quality of education (UNICEF, 2002). In
Tanzania, the emphasis on high quality education began after
independence when efforts were made to replace colonial-
oriented content and modes of delivery to contents and methods
relevant to the local environment (Mandi, 1969).

Pre-primary education policy in Tanzania was developed in
1995 and is part of the broader *Education and Training Policy*
(MOEC, 2005). Under this policy, the government mandated
primary schools to establish a pre-primary class in partnership
with communities. Pre-primary education for five- to six-year-olds
was declared a government responsibility. The government was to
supply teachers, curriculum guidelines and resources while non-
government organizations were encouraged to provide education
and care for children from birth to four years. When the policy was
adopted in 1995, there were insufficient numbers of trained
teachers and classrooms to educate all Tanzania's pre-primary
school aged children. The policy did not specify any guidelines on
group size, teacher/pupil ratio and size of available space. In
addition, there were no public education campaigns to enhance
community awareness about the importance of ECEC or to provide
skills to establish and manage pre-primary classes. More
importantly, the policy was not supported by implementation
guidelines. The lack of stakeholder awareness about the impor-
tance of pre-primary education, specialists in early childhood
education, policy specificity and implementation guidelines could
inadvertently lead to the promotion of inappropriate pre-primary
education practices. It is against this background that this study
examined pre-primary education in Tanzania.

It is important for investigators to proceed from an articulated
conceptual position when approaching the study about pre-
primary educational practice. Socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky,
1978) guided this study. This theory has at least three key stances
namely, shared learning or social interaction, zone of proximal
development (ZPD) and tools of the mind (Bodrova and Leong,
2007). Of these three, social interaction is the cornerstone of
learning which determines whether scaffolding in the ZPD will be
successful and whether this process will contribute to develop-
ment of tools of the mind or higher mental functions. As interaction
proceeds in a cooperative socio-moral atmosphere (DeVries et al.,
2002), the child internalizes higher mental functions and uses
them deliberately in problem situations (Bodrova and Leong,
2007).

Appropriate teacher-child interactions are characterized by use
of high-order cognitive questions (such as open-ended questions
as opposed to closed-ended ones), attention to individual learning
needs, learning by trial and error, positive feedback and a focus on
the process of learning (see Bodrova and Leong, 2007). Social
interaction has been found to be the most important aspect in the
teaching/learning process and the overall program quality (Pianta
et al., 2005). It is even more important in sub-Saharan Africa where
adult-dominated teacher/pupil interaction patterns are common
(Bar-On, 2004).

The relatively short history of pre-primary education in Tanzania and the paucity of research in ECE caused by few experts in this field (Katunzi and Mhaiki, 2003) have contributed to a dearth of knowledge on classroom practice in relation to policy. Against this background, this study was concerned with the following two questions: (1) What is the nature of the urban and rural pre-primary school teachers' classroom practices? (2) To what extent do the pre-primary education policy and related guidelines influence classroom practice? On the basis of the extant literature, we assumed that practice in rural areas would be less favorable than that in urban areas and that teachers' qualifications would differentiate the quality of practice among teachers.

2. Method

2.1. Contexts and participants

Pre-primary schools were selected so that they differed in terms of location (urban vs. rural) and teachers with varying educational and professional qualifications were chosen. The two urban pre-primary schools, A and B, were in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest city and a center for commerce, trade, banking and administrative functions. The two rural pre-primary schools, C and D were in the Mtwara Region. Five teachers, Anna and Bertha (School A), Christina (School B), Dorotea (School C) and Evelina (School D) were purposively selected. The four teachers had completed four years of secondary education and possessed the Grade III "A" Certificate, which is attained on completion of a two-year training course in primary education. The other teacher had only completed primary education and had no teacher training. Two of the teachers had professional training for pre-primary education.

2.1.1. Pre-primary School A

This school was located about 3 km from the National Examinations Council of Tanzania and the Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE). Both play a critical role in education in the country. The TIE is responsible for developing curricular materials for pre-primary, primary, secondary and teacher education. It was postulated that the location of School A would enhance its ability to secure curricular and instructional resources.

Anna and Bertha were appointed by the school head to teach pre-primary classes. Both of them had taught P1 classes for over 25 years and had no training in pre-primary education.

2.1.2. Pre-primary School B

School B was chosen due to its strategic location. It was close to the MOEVT which is responsible for policy development and approving pre-primary school books and resources. The Inspectorate Department responsible for ensuring the quality of pre-primary schools is located within the MOEVT. The school was also in close proximity to the Regional Education Office. The strategic location of the school would provide insights about how the availability of resources and visits by educational officials for quality assurance possibly influenced pre-primary education.

Christina had received professional training in pre-primary education. She had completed a two-year training course in the Montessori approach and obtained certification from a private teacher training institution. At the time of this study, she had two years' teaching experience.

2.1.3. Pre-primary School C

Schools C and D were located in one of the poorest socio-economic regions in Tanzania. There were no private pre-primary schools in the region. School C was chosen because it was the only school which had teachers trained in pre-primary education in the district where the study was conducted. This school had two

teachers who received their training in government teachers' colleges. Only one teacher was assigned to teach a pre-primary class while the other was allocated primary classes due to shortage of teachers in primary classrooms. Dorotea possessed a Pre-primary Education Certificate, obtained after undergoing a one-year training course in pre-primary education from a government teachers' college.

2.1.4. Pre-primary School D

This school was chosen because it initially had a teacher with a Grade III "A" certificate and training in pre-primary education. However, when the study began, this teacher had passed away and her aide, Evelina was made the class teacher. She had worked as a teacher's aide in the pre-primary classroom for nine years. Her participation in the study allowed us to gain an understanding of the influence of this kind of apprenticeship on pre-primary educational practice.

Although Evelina had only completed primary school, she had attended a 10-month training course in pre-primary education and vocational education but could not complete the training for personal reasons.

2.2. Procedure

The first author spent five consecutive days in each school. He observed the complete day in each pre-primary school classroom for the first two days. More systematic classroom observations were conducted after this two-day "sit-and-watch phase". One lesson a day was videotaped over the next three days and post-lesson interviews were conducted with each of the teachers. The school head and other stakeholders were also interviewed outside of lesson time. Fifteen complete lessons, including three from each teacher, were videotaped and subject to detailed analysis.

Teachers were interviewed to find out about the availability of national syllabus in their respective pre-primary schools as well as about their knowledge and interpretation of the syllabus.

2.3. Data management

The first author viewed the videos repeatedly to determine appropriate categories for coding the observations. Inductive analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to develop categories based on classroom interactions and the following four were used to code the observational data: information delivery (ID), teacher questioning (TQ), teacher feedback (TF) and classroom management (CM). Detailed descriptions of the categories are in the Appendix. The videos were coded in continuous 30-s intervals and the dominant behavior in each interval was coded. The videos were given to an independent early childhood professional for viewing and delivery of comments focusing on teacher/pupil interactions. His comments were similar to the first author's accounts on categories. Episodes focusing on teacher/pupil interactions were transcribed in Swahili, and then translated into English by the first author. The accuracy of these translations was favorably evaluated by an independent rater who assessed about 10% of episodes using a back-translation procedure.

Different frameworks can be adopted to analyze policy and researchers have considered "policy intentions", "policy-in-use" or "policy as discourse" (Ball, 1998; Grundy, 1994). In this study, we considered the background of pre-primary policy in Tanzania and factors related to governance, access, quality, financing and the focus on the under threes. This framework was taken from the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2006). Further, the 1995 pre-primary educational policy was analyzed from the perspective of the professional literature on quality in early childhood education and we focused on the extent to which extant

309 policy promoted structural and process quality in urban and rural
310 settings.

311 3. Results

312 3.1. Physical settings for learning

313 All five classrooms had children ranging in age from three to six
314 years. Classroom A was 7 m × 6 m, had large windows and
315 accommodated 48 children. There were few visual displays which
316 included alphabets printed on brown paper, number charts and a
317 few pictures. There was a blackboard, a teacher's desk, and adult-
318 sized desks and chairs for the children. There was one shelf on which
319 the limited instructional resources were stored. The teachers used
320 an original copy of the current syllabus (MOEC, 2005).

321 Classroom B was 9 m × 6 m and was used for 50 children
322 between three to six years of age. Children sat on mats on the floor
323 while the teacher sat on a stool. There were two desks where the
324 teacher stored children's exercise books. Behind the classroom was
325 a big box in which the teacher stored her resources. Beside this box
326 was a heap of charcoal covered by rugs. There was a blackboard in
327 front of the classroom and the walls had several pictures, number
328 chart and alphabets. The teacher used an original copy of an
329 outdated 2000 MOEC syllabus.

330 Classroom C was 8 m × 8 m, served 82 children, and was
331 originally a room for teaching domestic science. The floor had
332 several pot holes and the walls had cracks in them. Children had
333 neither desks nor mats; they sat on the bare floor. The blackboard
334 was in very poor condition. Instructional resources prepared by
335 using local materials were displayed on two desks on one side of the
336 classroom. The teacher used a photocopy of the 2000 MOEC syllabus.

337 Classroom D was 7 m × 4 m and this relatively small space,
338 which was originally a teacher's house, now contained 98 children.
339 The walls were bare and full of cracks and the floor was full of pot
340 holes. There was one desk for the teacher. As was the case in the
341 other rural classroom, children had neither desks nor mats, they sat
342 on the floor. Windows were too small to let air in and circulate
343 sufficiently. This classroom was separated by wall from a small
344 room which contained rubbish swept from the classroom. The
345 teacher used a photocopy of the outdated 2000 syllabus.

346 3.2. Teacher-child interaction

347 The total number of teacher/pupil interactions varied among
348 teachers depending on three factors: length of the lesson, class size
349 and the degree of adult dominance. Despite the class size and
350 length of the lesson, adult dominance resulted in more coded
351 teacher/pupil interactions where virtually all communication was
352 initiated and controlled by the teacher. When teachers had long
353 lessons they simply had more time to talk. Class sizes exceeding 80
354 pupils also resulted in much talk targeted to guide social behavior.

355 Using the 30-s intervals, communication episodes reflecting
356 information delivery (ID), teacher questioning (TQ), teacher feedback
357 (TF) and classroom management (CM) were coded [see Appendix for
358 definitions of each category]. The teacher/pupil interaction
359 patterns in each category are shown in Fig. 1. The most dominant
360 type of teacher talk was evidenced in ID (40.36%) while the least
361 was in TF (11.14%). Teacher talk in TQ was 29.15% while in CM it
362 was 19.35%. The total time used by teachers was as follows: Anna
363 (1 h 10 min); Bertha (1 h 37 min); Christina (46 min 28 s); Dorotea
364 (1 h 03 min) and Evelina (57 min 10 s).

365 ID concerned all scenarios in which teachers sought to provide
366 children with knowledge and skills considered important by the
367 teachers, requests for completing a task and demonstrations. The
368 most common ways through which teachers delivered information
369 were through songs, imparting facts, reminding children about the

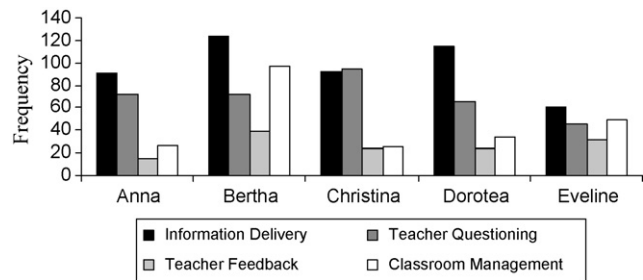


Fig. 1. Teacher-child interaction process: behavior categories.

370 past lesson, and rarely, storytelling. Orders or requests for children
371 to do something related to academic behavior were coded as ID
372 category while requests related to social behavior were coded as
373 CM. Four of the five teachers spent most of the time in ID.

374 Teachers dominated the interaction episodes. Except for few
375 cases such as children telling the teacher about conflicts among
376 them, all other interaction episodes were teacher-dominated. There
377 were about four instances where the children initiated activities
378 without the request or permission from the teachers. Three of these
379 cases came from Evelina's lessons while the other one was from
380 Bertha's lessons. At the beginning of the Kiswahili Language
381 Activities lesson by Evelina, two children stood up and sang songs,
382 in succession, after the teacher had asked one child to do so.

383 During the Health Activities lesson there was one incident where
384 one child contributed her ideas about body cleanliness. She did this
385 without being asked by the teacher. The teacher had initially asked
386 children questions about washing and ironing clothes. She then
387 asked the children to give reasons for washing their bodies. After
388 some few children had provided their answers and the teacher was
389 now building on the answers, one child came in with an idea:

390 Teacher! [Exclaims Mary while looking at the teacher cheerfully
391 and continues]
392 My sister washes me!
393 Evelina: Ok, thanks! She washes you well! Good! [The teacher
394 ends interactions with Mary and moves to another aspect of the
395 lesson]
396

397 During Bertha's Kiswahili Language Activities lesson, there was
398 one child who seemed to have a different focus from what the
399 teacher was doing. Bertha was drawing some lines as preparation
400 for writing the Kiswahili letter [a]. She had commanded them to
401 bend over the desks and keep quiet as she went on drawing the
402 lines. Immediately, one child started singing a song which they had
403 sung a few minutes ago despite the command to be quiet.

404 Pupil 1: Nampenda ndugu yangu, siwezi kumwacha; a-a mama
405 siwezi kumwacha. [Meaning: I love my relative, I cannot leave
406 him; a-a mummy I cannot leave him. [The pupil sings a song
407 which the children had sung shortly]
408 Teacher: Who's singing? [She stops drawing the lines and
409 angrily turns to the class].
410 Pupil 2: This one here! He sings 'a-a mama siwezi kumwacha'
411 [The teacher ignores this. As a way of warning the child, she tells
412 the children about how well she behaved while at school and
413 then continues drawing the lines].
414

415 There was only one instance in Dorotea's Health Activities
416 lesson where storytelling was used as a means to convey
417 information to children. The topic was food and fruits. The teacher
418 wanted to make the pupils understand that food and fruits were
419 supposed to be washed before being eaten. She narrated a story of
420 Katumbotele, a boy who ate mangoes without washing them and
421 who fell sick.

Among all the lessons videotaped, there was only one lesson by Evelina which facilitated children's learning through play. She took the children outside and had positive interactions with them.

The TQ category revealed that the highest number of questions was from Christina 94 (40%) while Bertha asked the least number of questions 72 (21.68%). Anna, Evelina and Dorotea asked 94 (35.29%), 45 (24.32%) and 65 (27.31%) questions, respectively. To gain a deeper understanding of the TQ strategies, each teacher's questions were analyzed separately to determine the nature of questioning. The criterion of *whole class vs. individual* questions was adopted. The results indicated that 4 teachers asked more whole class questions than individual questions while the pattern was reversed for Christina. Questions were also classified as *high-order cognitive* or *low-order cognitive* ones. The overall teacher questioning behavior for the 15 lessons showed that 263 (75.57%) were low-order cognitive questions while high-order cognitive questions were 85 (24.43%). Christina asked the highest number of high-order questions (46 questions) while Bertha only posed six such questions. The results based on these two criteria are as shown in Fig. 2.

The criterion of *repetition* was used to further understand the teachers' questioning strategies. We counted all repetitive questions found in the video transcripts and computed for frequencies for each teacher's lessons. In descending order, the results were as follows: Evelina 9 (21.43%); Bertha 9 (12.16%), Dorotea 4 (6.15%), Anna 3 (4.1%), and Christina 0 (0%).

In addition, untrained teachers tended to use questions, statements, or phrases that have been considered inappropriate in other contexts. They included: "No", "Is he/she right?", "Don't answer this question because you failed the other question", "Very Good" and "Tease those who have not finished writing by calling them tortoises".

In terms of teacher feedback, approval was used more than disapproval. As shown in Fig. 3, the highest approval came from Evelina 29 (93.55%) while the least approval was evidenced in Anna's lessons 8 (53.33%). Dorotea, Christina and Bertha approved 22 (91.67%), 19 (79.17%) and 23 (58.97%) pupils' responses, respectively. As with TQ in general and question levels in particular, the teachers portrayed a common pattern in TF. Those who asked more individual and higher-order questions tended to provide approval more than those who did not.

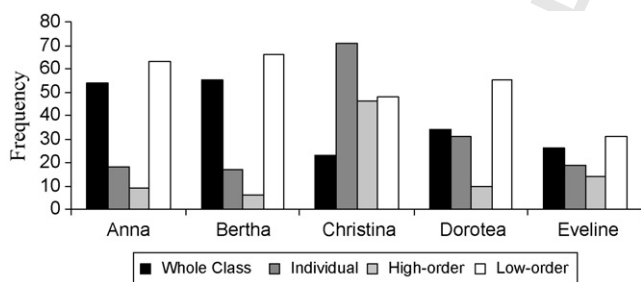


Fig. 2. Teachers' questioning behaviors.

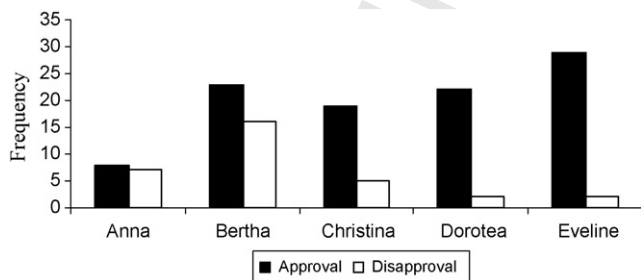


Fig. 3. Types of teacher feedback.

Table 1
Teachers' classroom management behaviors.

Pre-primary school	Teacher's name	Classroom managing behavior
A	Anna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses time-out • Exerts less control • Has fewer classroom rules
	Bertha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less tense socio-moral classroom atmosphere • Uses time-out • Uses threats to punish children • Highly controlling • Has several classroom rules • Tense socio-moral classroom atmosphere
B	Christina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not use time-out • Grants children some freedom • Has fewer classroom rules • Neglects most of the children's accusations • Relaxed socio-moral classroom atmosphere
C	Dorotea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not use time-out • Grants children some freedom • Has fewer classroom rules • Responds to every children's accusations • Relaxed socio-moral classroom atmosphere
D	Evelina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not use time-out • Grants children some freedom • Has fewer classroom rules • Responds to every child's accusations • Relaxed socio-moral classroom atmosphere

CM focused on utterances that were intended to regulate or manage social behavior. The main function of this category was to create a socio-moral atmosphere conducive for children to effectively engage in the learning process. The highest frequency of classroom management utterances were manifested in classes taught by Bertha, i.e., 97 (29.22%). She was followed by Evelina 49 (26.49%), Dorotea 34 (14.29%) and Anna 26 (12.75%). The lowest frequency was evidenced in the classes taught by Christina, i.e., 25 (10.64%). Table 1 summarizes teachers' classroom management strategies.

Teachers' classroom management styles appeared to influence the socio-moral atmosphere. In general, teachers who did not have professional qualifications in pre-primary education tended to make excessive use of time-out, rules, threats and disciplinary orders and their pupils were quieter and less active than other pupils. Classroom A seemed to lie on one side of the continuum while classrooms B, C and D tended to be on the other side. The atmosphere for classroom A was tense due to strict rules and threats that teachers posed. It was also the classroom in which little learning appeared to take place as teachers paid more attention to pupils' conduct than to the teaching and learning. Lessons taught by Bertha tended to be more rigid than those taught by Anna. There were some differences among classrooms B, C and D. Classroom D appeared disorganized, a situation which made the teacher lose track of the content although she struggled to return back to the intended content with little success. Despite the commotion, the teacher refrained from using threats and strict rules as witnessed in classroom A. The teacher in Classroom C did not appear rigid and classroom discipline was maintained. The only difference between this classroom and classroom B was in the number of utterances used to manage social behavior. There were more such utterances in the former than in the latter.

3.3. Policy analysis

Table 2 considers different dimensions of pre-primary education policy in Tanzania. We believed this summary facilitates analysis of the practice observed.

Table 2
Pre-primary education policy exemplars in Tanzania.

Background	Governance	Access	Quality	Financing	Focus on under threes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although parents have shown high interest in pre-primary education, the government has not articulated the ways they should participate; participation is limited to construction of buildings and managerial functions; there is limited access to pre-primary education. The 1995 pre-primary education policy states that each primary school establishes one class by involving communities; government would supply teachers, curricular materials and other resources; partnership among stakeholders is stressed; the government caters for the five- to six-year-olds while the private sector caters for children below this age cohort. The pre-primary education policy is not specific and has no implementation guidelines. The Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children developed its policy in 1996 to cater for children from birth to late childhood but no link to the pre-primary education exists. Rural areas are underserved and have poor quality services. There is low public awareness on the importance of early years thus a need for public information campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before 1995 pre-primary education had no custodian; various government ministries and departments as well as the private sector offered uncoordinated services. After policy development, sectoral coordination has remained poor; the Prime Minister's Office; Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children; Ministry of Education and Vocational Training as well as the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare lack common goal risking duplication of efforts; there is currently no lead agency. There is almost an arbitrary community involvement in service provision because such communities are not aware of their roles and importance of early years. The nature of policy suggests it follows decentralization type of governance. Various reports on early childhood development suggest sectoral coordination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Almost 40% of the five- to six-year-olds have access to pre-primary education; most pre-primary schools are urban-based; children under five especially from birth to three are the most underserved; there is generally dearth of accurate statistics on extent of access based on criteria of age and setting. Programs existing include nurseries, preschools, kindergartens pre-primary schools and child care centers. Currently, there is no deliberate government effort to increase access to early childhood education for disadvantaged rural children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The TIE has developed an activity-based national pre-primary education curriculum since 2005 but the strategies to disseminate it are not articulated thus making its availability in schools particularly for rural schools doubtful. The dissemination policy of teaching/ learning resources does not exist. The inspectorate department for primary schools also inspects pre-primary education but the inspectors have no training in ECE; most officials entrusted with ECE lack professional awareness of ECE. A few government teachers' colleges at certificate level exist but the government does not have diploma and degree programs; at least one private college offers a diploma in ECE. In 2004, MOEVT offered an eight-day orientation to tutors in teachers' colleges to prepare pre-primary school teachers. Private early childhood programs are of higher quality than government-owned ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no specific fund for pre-primary education. The location of pre-primary classes in primary school premises has tended to overshadow the former. Private pre-primary schools are too expensive for most families. Public pre-primary schools are far cheaper and most families can afford them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ministry of Health serves all people from conception to death. Pregnant and lactating mothers are encouraged to attend clinical services to monitor children's development. Free medication is offered for young children and subsidized mosquito nets are available. Nutrition is not a state responsibility.

This table clearly shows that most of the most important variables for high quality pre-primary education are either inappropriate or insufficient. Failure of the policy to be specific on regulation and lack of implementation guidelines signified problems at practice level. Still, lack of a dissemination policy of the teaching and learning resources could make schools particularly those in the rural setting unable to access the needed resources. This being the case, it could lead to, among other things, teachers' lack of knowledge of the syllabus resulting in inappropriate classroom practices. In this study, rural teachers used outdated syllabus and were not aware of the new one.

The overall influence of the extant policy on classroom practice tended to be negative. The policy had failed to address the urban-rural dichotomy at the expense of the rural, disadvantaged children. This tendency could be attributed to the governance policy which did not accord priority to the needs of rural children. In relation to this policy deficiency, parents and community participation remained arbitrary and thus unproductive. A combination of all these factors led to poor quality of services. The pre-primary schools that were close to the MOEVT and TIE did not have much difference in terms of quality apart from possession of original copies of the syllabus, somewhat small class sizes, presence of mats or desks for children and few wall displays. Absence of policy on finance impinged on the range and quality of services available. As with the urban-rural dichotomy that remained unsolved, the under threes were not on the policy agenda.

4. Discussion

4.1. Teacher-child interactions

The objectives of this study were to compare pre-primary education in urban and rural classrooms and consider the extent to which pre-primary education policy influenced classroom practice. We found substantial differences between urban and rural classrooms in terms of both the physical setting for learning and in teacher-child interactions. The findings suggest classroom contexts including teacher professional qualifications have important influences on teaching and learning. Both the physical learning environments and teacher qualifications are, in turn, closely related to the (lack of implementation) existing pre-primary education policy.

Rural pre-primary schools had poorer physical and psychological environments than urban ones. While urban pre-primary classrooms had either desks or mats for children, rural classrooms had neither of these. Also, while the urban classroom walls and floors were in relatively good condition and had some pictures, number charts and alphabets, the rural classrooms were less favorable and lacked wall displays. Classroom D was too small to serve 98 children. The classroom context influences the quality of teaching and learning particularly children's sustained attentiveness and motivation (López et al., 2005).

The ID category reflected adult dominance in classroom interactions. Children typically listened and only talked when called upon or to report conflicts among them. When pupils initiated conversations, they were either ignored or silenced. The child's behavior could have been an effort to internalize the taught content (Bodrova and Leong, 2007). Excellent opportunities raised by some of the pupils such as that of the girl who reported to the teacher during the Health Activities lesson that her sister washed her were not sufficiently utilized. That opportunity could have been used to discuss with other pupils about, for example, who washed them, when, where, the temperature of the water, how they felt and how many times

per day they were washed. This is the essence of dialogic teaching, a critical component in the socio-cultural framework (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

At the pre-primary school level, teachers are expected to be better listeners than children. The reasons for this are straightforward. Teachers have to observe and listen to children in order to gauge their prior knowledge and provide appropriate instruction. The Vygotskian approach emphasizes determining what the child understands (Bodrova and Leong, 2007). Indeed, many approaches to early childhood education including the one followed by Reggio Emilia Schools focus on adults listening rather than speaking (Edwards et al., 1998) and children's actions are assumed to reflect their thinking (DeVries et al., 2002). Good early childhood teachers, according to Lobman (2006), collaborate with children to pursue a topic of interest. They provide opportunities for children to speak and facilitate collaborative learning.

Play and storytelling were rarely used to facilitate children's learning. Only one class was given time for play. This was possibly done to give the 98 children crowded in a small classroom some fresh air. Interestingly, it was the small classroom size that provided children opportunities for outdoor free play. Vygotskians argue that play influences development in five main ways: it creates a zone of proximal development for many areas of intellectual development; facilitates the separation of thought from actions and objects; facilitates the development of self-regulation; increases motivation for learning; and promotes decentration (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

Despite being a common method in Africa for passing information to children, storytelling was observed only once. The infrequent use of storytelling and play suggests an increased attention to academic mastery at the expense of play-like methods. The latter tend to delay children's mastery of academic skills. The focus on academic skills may not be necessarily bad. For example, in France play is rarely used in preschools but no serious effects have so far been reported (Tobin, 2006). The focus on academic mastery has contributed to preschoolers in Hong Kong having superior literacy attainment than those in Beijing where early literacy teaching is prohibited (Li et al., 2007). The main threat posed by the adult dominance in the interaction pattern in this category could be failure of children to acquire higher mental functions which occur when there is "shared learning" (Berk and Winsler, 1995; Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

The TQ category indicated that teacher professional qualifications matter for high quality practice. The criteria of whole class vs. individual questions, high-order cognitive vs. low-order cognitive questions and repetition showed that teachers with some training in pre-primary education did better than those without it. For example, while all teachers asked more whole class than individual questions, Christina had displayed the opposite pattern. She also had the highest number of high-order cognitive questions and demonstrated no repetitions. Other teachers with training in pre-primary education also did better than those without training. Even Evelina, a primary school leaver with a 10-month training and 9 years' working experience appeared more child-centered in her instructional approaches than Bertha and Anna who had no training in pre-primary education. The high number of repetitive questions observed in Evelina's class could have been related to the inattentiveness of children crowded in a small classroom. Frequent use of whole class questions, low-order cognitive questions and repetitions would most likely deprive children of the opportunity to develop higher-order cognitive functions, such as metacognitive and problem-solving skills (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

Teacher qualifications also influenced the type of feedback strategies deployed by teachers. Untrained teachers had slightly

higher disapproval rates than those with training in pre-primary education. As mentioned earlier, untrained teachers tended to make comments considered inappropriate in other contexts such as, “Tease those who have not finished writing by calling them tortoises”. Although the effects from these feedback strategies could not be immediately established, research done in other parts of the world have shown that they lower children’s intrinsic motivation in learning, make children unconfident and direct children’s focus on “finished products” rather than the process (Rowe, 1974). Instead of praise, encouragement through “comments to specific child’s actions” (Holt, 2007, p. 3) has been found useful. Effective praise or encouragement focuses on the pupil’s efforts and attributes of the accomplished work (Hitz, 1989). Whole class feedback was also less frequent in classes taught by untrained or partially trained teachers than in those taught by trained ones. Generally, the feedback strategies demonstrated by all teachers tended to be product-oriented and this may not be conducive to the development of higher mental functions.

Too much attention to social behaviors as observed in classroom A has been considered to hinder the learning process and teachers in other countries, particularly those in the west, have been encouraged to focus on learning tasks (Gardner, 1996). A pleasant social context encourages shared learning to take place (DeVries et al., 2002). The untrained teachers in this study, particularly Bertha, spent a substantially large portion of time warning children about consequences of their misconduct. This happened despite having the smallest group in the study. Frequent statements about social behaviors such as those observed from Evelina who taught a class of 98 pupils could be associated with unfavorable social and physical conditions. López et al. (2005) and Love (1993) found that physical and social conditions could be facilitating or inhibitory on pupils’ sustained attention. Christina’s approach to CM was different from the other teachers. While other teachers addressed virtually every “telling the teacher” statements from pupils, she tended to neglect several of such cases. She just focused on the task at hand.

4.2. Policy and practice

Research has shown that there is a close link between policy and practice in early childhood education (Espinosa, 2002; O’Kane, 2005). Policies tend to specify standards in terms of physical conditions, teacher–child ratios, teacher qualification, and curriculum. These factors influence teachers’ ability to plan and meet children’s needs. In this study, the large classes with a wide age range of children posed challenges for the teachers to manage and interact effectively with pupils.

4.2.1. Urban vs. rural settings

Consistent with findings from other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, there were considerable differences between urban and rural settings. The structural variables were less favorable in rural settings which, in turn adversely influenced the quality of classroom practice. The larger number of pre-primary schools in urban areas, for example, could have contributed to smaller class sizes while existence of few pre-primary schools in rural areas could be the reason for large class sizes. In this case, it could be argued that the more “urban” the pre-primary school is, the better the quality of practice and vice versa. The overall explanation to this phenomenon could be poor policy that has not adequately considered factors that positively impact on children’s well-being.

4.2.2. Physical settings and resources

While urban pre-primary schools are somewhat better in terms of the quality of available space, resources, facilities

such as desks or mats and syllabus availability, the rural pre-primary schools had markedly unfavorable conditions. This could be related to the failure of policy to be specific on standards for these variables together with lack of implementation guidelines.

4.2.3. Group size and teacher/pupil ratios

The teacher/pupil ratio in urban pre-primary schools ranged between 1:48 to 1:50 while in rural pre-primary schools it ranged from 1:82 to 1:98. This structural factor had implications on rural teachers’ practices where most of the time was spent on classroom management due to children’s inattentiveness. Further, it is very difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention to children. It appears that this state of affairs was also caused by the failure to specify “standards” in policy that were contextually feasible and the absence of the enforcement mechanisms to ensure that such standards were met. This is an important step if the quality of pre-primary education is to improve in rural area and specific policies are needed to target the development and learning of young children in rural areas. Urban areas are currently well served with the state-funded and private pre-primary schools.

4.2.4. Teacher professional qualification

Teacher professional qualification appears to be the most critical determinant of the quality of teachers’ classroom practices. Its insufficient treatment in policy could have an adverse impact on practice. Extant pre-primary education policy has not articulated standards for teacher professional qualification and this has led to the employment of untrained or partially trained teachers. Despite working under highly constraining environments, teachers with training in pre-primary education in this study managed to demonstrate practices that had possibilities for meaningful learning while respecting for children’s contributions in the teaching and learning processes. A major challenge is to encourage teachers to move from being product-oriented to process-oriented and from being transmitters of knowledge to being facilitators of learning in a shared social learning context. Although the practices observed in this study could reflect social and cultural concerns and values in Tanzania, development of higher mental functions in young children is necessary for optimum human and national development. The most powerful change agent leading to teachers’ paradigmatic shift could be a teacher education program. There is a need for the pre-primary education policy in Tanzania to stress the role of young children as co-constructors of knowledge during the teacher training period. Teacher professional qualification should be viewed as the most prudent policy strategy for improvement in practice.

This study had several limitations including a small sample size. Only four pre-primary schools located in urban and rural settings were studied for an in-depth understanding of teachers’ classroom practices. Generalization of the findings is therefore dependent upon contextual similarities. However, most urban and rural pre-primary schools in Tanzania exhibit similar conditions.

5. Conclusions

The differences between pre-primary schools in urban and rural areas in Tanzania are similar to those found in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Urban pre-primary schools have much better conditions for learning and teaching that rural ones. Many challenges remain for improving the quality of pre-primary education in Tanzania and efforts must be made at the policy, community, program and family levels to make this a reality.

Appendix A. Appendix

Category	Description
Information delivery (ID)	The teacher extends children's knowledge through storytelling, singing, demonstrating, explanations and providing instructions. Orders or requests requiring children to perform learning activities were also coded under this category.
Teacher's questioning (TQ)	The teacher questions children. The question could be whole class or individual; high-level or low-level cognitive question. High-level cognitive questions are open-ended (including probes) while low-level ones are closed ended.
Teacher's feedback (TF)	The teacher responds to children's academic behaviors, such as reading, writing, listening and answering questions. Positive remarks constituted approval while negative ones referred were coded as disapproval.
Classroom management (CM)	The teacher uses a variety of techniques to manage social behaviors. These included following classroom rules and routines, e.g., settling down to work quietly, remaining seated when appropriate, putting hands up in answer to a general question to the class. They also included the use of threats, rule setting, reprimands, alerting children to maintain good social behavior through use of orders or requests, time-out and ordering trouble-makers to promise before others that they would improve.

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