

Towards developing competence profile of Early Childhood Education educators in rural Tanzania in Chemba and Mpwapwa districts

Preamble

The early childhood period plays a critical role in a child's life, so is Early Childhood Education (ECE). Teacher competencies and qualification are the key to realizing the growth potential of children along the provision of quality ECE. This Policy Brief details how Education International and the Tanzania Teacher Union managed to train pre-primary education teachers in Tanzania to a Diploma academic qualification without a study leave through the project "Developing Educators, Improving Early Learning in Rural Tanzania". The project was implemented in the Dodoma region (Chemba and Mpwapwa Districts). It highlights to policy makers and practitioners with an orientation to the general issues to be considered towards the professional development of early childhood educators, given the Tanzanian context.

Highlights and Unique features of the project

- The project "Developing Educators, Improving Early Learning in Rural Tanzania" was conceived by the Education International and Tanzania Teacher Union (TTU) to develop relevant competencies among Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers through academic qualification training.
- This was important following the introduction of pre-primary education (PPE) in all public schools in 2016.
- Evidence-based data as obtained through baseline study and situation analysis were used to advocate among education stakeholders regarding the need to achieve quality Early Childhood Education in Tanzania.
- The project developed a national Competence Profile of ECE teachers in Tanzania with an assessment tool for measuring among them four competence domains; Knowledge, Skills, Attitude and Values, and Professional Ethics. The competence profile tool has been adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology along developing a national Operational Guidelines and Minimum standards for Pre-primary Education children and teachers.
- The project trained professional ECE teachers enabling them to acquire a Diploma in Early Childhood and Care Education (DECCE) from the Open University of Tanzania. Of the registered 438 teachers, 352 (80%) graduated successfully in 2020 and 21 (4.80%) in 2021 making a total of 373 (85%) ECE diploma graduates.
- The community observed increased enrolment in PPE and improved relevance of ECE at the community level is now enhanced.
- The endeavor was made possible through a careful selection of the project partners, particularly the Open University of Tanzania which bears the DECCE programme, involvement of Ministries responsible for Education in Tanzania, particularly the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Presidents' Office, Regional and Local government Authorities and the involvement of Teacher Training Colleges that provided tutors and the training facilities.
- The project team was also committed to enable for the realization of the project goal. The team stay focused with new monitoring mechanisms even after the outbreak of COVID-19.
- More support and sensitization need to be extended to the trained teachers who do not handle ECE classrooms to apply the competencies acquired for the benefit of the school and the community.
- A coordinated effort between the government and educational leaders is needed to sustain the spirit among the community members on the value attached to ECE.
- It is an honor to Education International and TTU to have accomplished the project activities, making a milestone in realizing their vision and mission statements. The initiative is worth commending and provides best practice for other trade unions to emulate.

- A call to policy makers and education actors is extended to develop competence profile of teachers for other levels of education.
- Finally, education actors including donor agencies need to offer professional development trainings geared towards academic qualification progression opportunities versus the provision of certificates of participation among the participants.

Introduction and Brief context

The early childhood period plays a critical role in a child's life, so is early childhood education (ECE). Besides encouraging the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills among children, ECE leads to higher levels of achievement in numeracy skills and long-term social outcomes such as labor force participation and productivity. Thus, any developmental and growth domain gaps at this time can have a lifelong impact, which can restrict the child's ability to realize his/her full potential later on in his/her lives. Given the relevance of ECE, countries worldwide have embedded at least one to three years of compulsory ECE into their basic education systems to enable children realize their growth potential. ECE is also supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), specifically Goal 4's target 4.2 which ensures that, by 2030, "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education"¹.

In Tanzania (the focus of this brief) Pre-Primary Education (PPE) literally translated as ECE refers to education targeting children with age range of 3 years to the start of primary education, normally 6 and 7 years (URT, 2016). Accordingly, the Education and Training Policy (ETP) (URT, 2014) stipulates a compulsory one year in Pre-primary education (PPE) and fee free basic education from this level, with its implementation beginning from 2016. With the stipulations at the global and national level, trends show increased involvement by various actors (state and non-state actors including religious organization and community care givers) in the provision of ECE. There has also been increased enrolment in PPE as well as increased number of educational programmes targeting ECE teachers including continuous professional developments. The Tanzania PPE enrolment for example grew from 39.5 per cent in 2010 to 102.6 per cent in 2016 in line with the policy stipulations (Education International & Tanzania Teachers' Union (TTU), 2017), ESDP, 2017). Regarding establishments of ECE/PPE classrooms almost all public primary schools in Tanzania established PPE classes (URT, 2017; URT, 2019; URT, 2020). This went hand in hand with the provision of Continuous Professional Development to the existing PPE teachers in public schools enabling them to handle the revised PPE curriculum and manage the children (URT, 2016; URT, 2020).

Besides the initiatives, challenges such as inconsistencies in policies regarding the content of ECE curriculum in relation to the age as well as the availability and shortage of qualified pre-primary education teachers have continued to affect the provision of quality PPE in Tanzania (HakiElimu, 2021). On the PPE teacher qualifications, most of the professional development programmes issue

¹ Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, SDG Goal 4. Available: <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sdg-goal-4>

certificate of participation that do not align to the national qualification framework². On the policy inconsistencies particularly the age aspect, ETP (2014) stipulates one compulsory year of PPE for children aged 3, 4 & 5 years old. In reality however, 18.1% of enrolled children are below 5 years and 36.1% are above 5 years reflecting a high proportion of over-age children in the pre-primary classrooms (BEST 2020). Regarding the curriculum, the PPE curriculum is designed for children aged 5 years old (currently representing 45.8%) with specific criteria for children aged 3 and 4 years. There is also a gap in Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR). While the URT (2016) recommends as a norm a PPE PTR of 1:25; the reality reflects 1:177 (URT, 2016) and of recent the PPE PTR is 1:193 reflecting a growing trend (URT, 2020). This results in large class sizes and hence reduced development of the child and lower achievement of ECE learning outcomes. Other challenges such as increased enrolment at PPE compared to the available classroom facilities, high ratio of children to teaching and learning materials and resources, lack of school feeding programmes, parents' negative attitude towards ECE have also continued to add to the already existing problem of illiteracy and cycles of poverty (URT, 2019; URT, 2020). Therefore, pre-primary classes often are taught by primary trained teachers with little or no Early Child Education training. According to URT (2019), only 29% of the pre-primary teachers have pre-primary certificate qualifications, with the rest being primary school teachers, having attended 8-day orientation to PPE (Education International & TTU, 2017; URT, 2020).

About the project

The project “Developing Educators, Improving Early Learning in Rural Tanzania” was conceived by the Education International and Teacher Training Union (TTU) to develop relevant competencies among ECE teachers through academic qualification training and advocacy using evidence-based among education stakeholders on the need to achieve quality Early Childhood Education in Tanzania. The project was implemented in Dodoma region, Chemba and Mpwapwa Districts. The project trained 438 PPE teachers through the Open University of Tanzania to acquire a Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECCE) (See figure 1).

² The National Qualification Framework comprises of 10 levels from certificate of primary education (Level 1) to doctoral qualification (Level 10) (TCU, 2010).

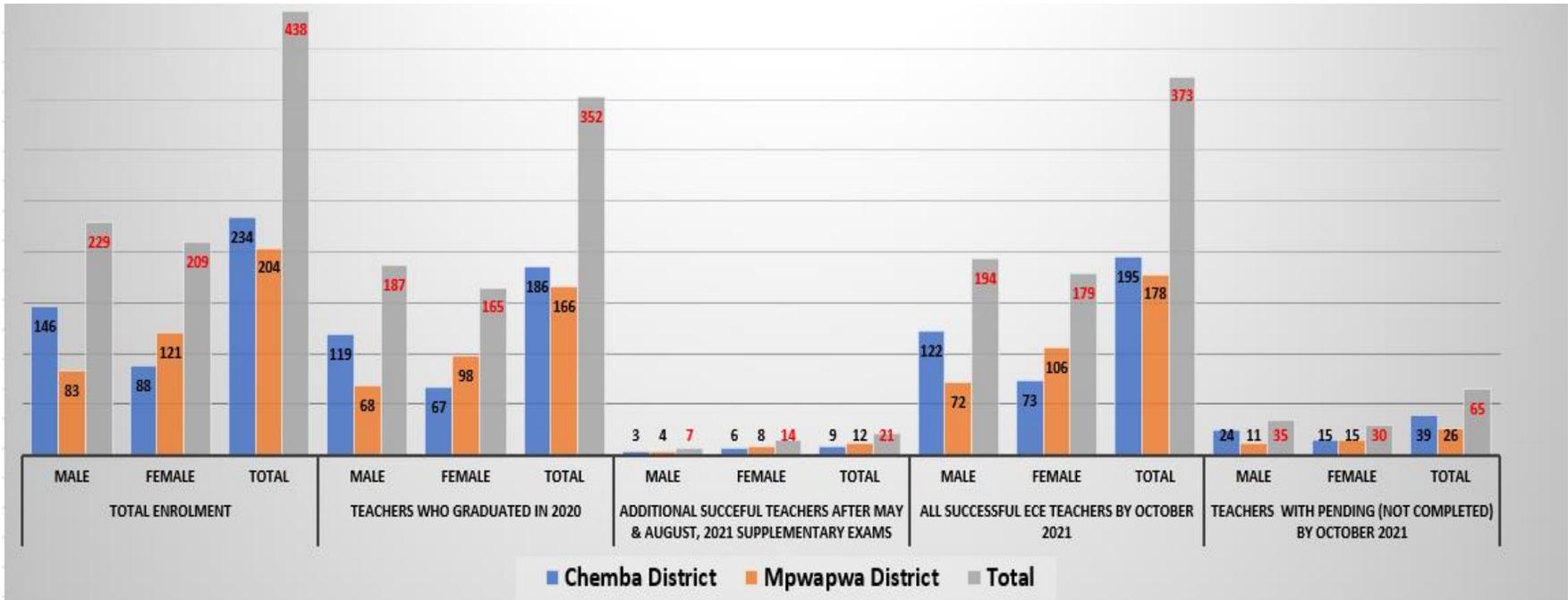
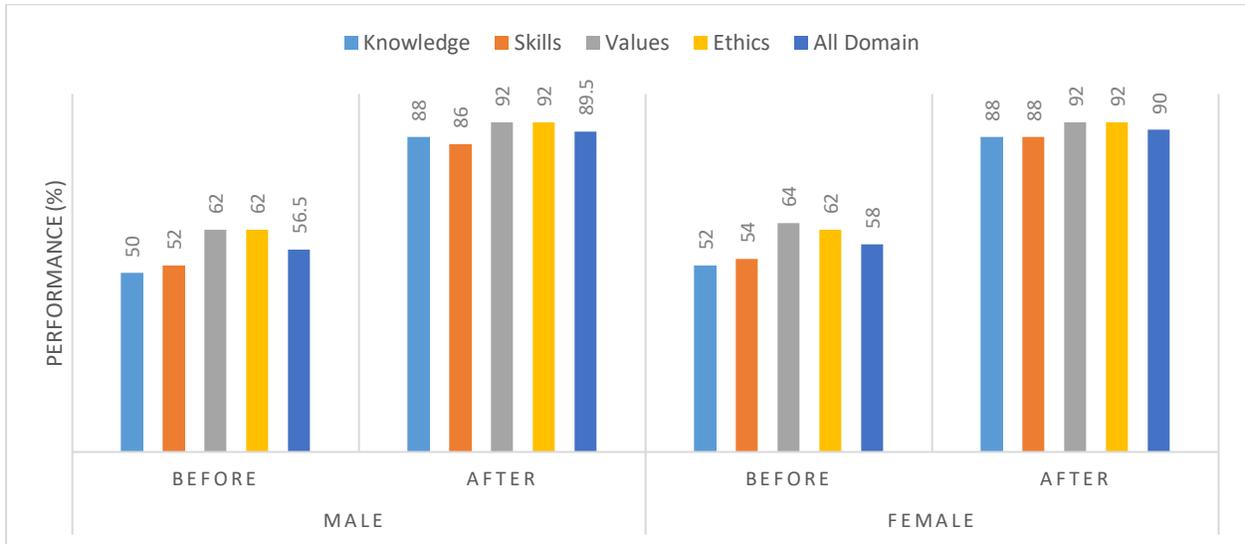


Figure 1: Summary of graduation rate and pending cases per district as segregated by gender

Project results

By participating in the DECCE programme the following aspects were realized; First, teachers improved their competencies along the four domains. Particularly, the competence profile of the ECE diploma graduate teachers almost doubled having gone through the training programme in all the competence profile domains of knowledge, skills, values & attitudes and professional ethics. Figure 2 shows the CP of the ECE teachers pre and post training where improvements are observed in all four domains. Minor variations are observed based on gender. The domain knowledge demonstrates low competence both pre and post training.



Source: Evaluation findings

Second, there has been positive change on the attitude among parents and the community about ECE with this observed on parents' willingness to enroll ECE children at younger age and increased enrolment in pre-primary education in the district schools. Figure 3 shows increased enrolment in some of the selected project schools. The data was collected in March, 2021, with the possibility that the number can increase until the end of the year.

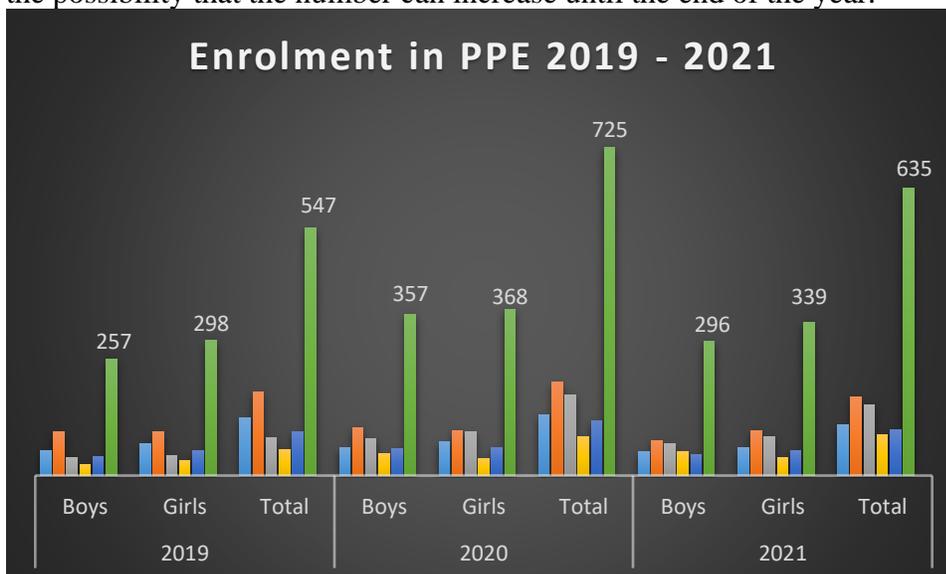


Figure 3: Enrolment in PPE from 2019 – 2021 in Chemba and Mpwapwa

The improved performance is attributed to the academic professional development trainings to teachers as received under the Educational International/TTU project, education leaders and government directive towards the need for all school aged children to be enrolled in school. District officials have all the time been involved from the planning stage of the project with their involvement facilitating easier coordination and monitoring of the project activities at the local level. The programme distance learning mode also enabled for teachers to study while performing their normal duties. The close monitoring of the project remotely by the team even after the COVID-19 outbreak, all have led to the realization of the project activities.

While most of the project implementation challenges were addressed, challenges such as high pupil-teacher ratio in the district schools and inadequate facilities such as desks and inadequate physical infrastructure (most of them being beyond scope of the project) have continued to affect the realization of the project activities in the respective districts.

Lessons learned

The Educational International/TTU project activities as implemented have transformed the ECE educators in terms of academic qualification and competencies. While English language as a medium of instruction was seen as a barrier to learning, relevant technical and moral support was given to the pre-primary teachers during the early phase of the DECCE programme, making it possible to realize the graduation rate. Application of the learned by the ECE educators will further transform children in terms of academic, physical, emotional and attitude with this having an impact throughout their future lifetime. The schools are also transformed and the overall community favorably perceive PPE and contributes towards building classrooms and feeding programme.

Developing teacher competencies is a combination of trained tutors, evidence informed and academically developed programme, recommendable pupil-teacher ratio, availability of resources (story books for children, objects for manipulating, artefacts) government support (political will), safe and secure learning environment including infrastructure, community engagement and a coordinated effort among the actors. In this project, the aspects pupil-ratio ratio, infrastructure and availability of resources were beyond the scope of the project. We however noted increased community involvement in constructing classrooms, with the project activities contributing to create awareness among the community members.

The involvement of the parents, schools, ECE teachers and other stakeholders during the baseline study and situation analysis and its validation created awareness about the existence of the project making ECE educators more ready to apply. We also commend the TTU management at the district level both in Chemba and Mpwapwa for taking an active role in the advocacy endeavor.

To further improve the success and sustainability of the project, there is a need to sensitize policy makers and education leaders at the national and the local level to own by actions the ECE agenda and thus place emphasis on community resource mobilization in order to create a conducive and safe learning environment for ECE children. Overall, the project is well received by the ECE

teachers, the school community and at the national level with most of its intended objectives being realized.

Implications and Recommendations

Recommendations for Policy

The government needs to have a policy and a curriculum that is appealing to children's age variation. In this regard, the policy stipulates one compulsory year of PPE for children aged 3, 4 & 5 years old. In practice, 18.1% of enrolled children are below 5 years and 36.1% are above 5 years (BEST 2020). Regarding the curriculum, the PPE curriculum is designed for children aged 5 years old (currently representing 45.8%) with specific criteria for children aged 3 and 4 years. Alternatively, since not all children manage to enroll in PPE, there is a need to adopt the teaching at the right level approach to enable children who missed the PPE master the ECE basics even after joining primary education. Likewise, the government needs to recruit more teachers to reduce work load among the PPE teachers. The political will on ECE should be the national agenda to continue creating awareness about its relevance and attached value among the community members.

Recommendations to improve practice

There is a need to address the challenge of limited physical infrastructure and facilities especially classrooms with safe and secure learning environment to improve the provision of ECE. Accordingly, most of the schools visited PPE classrooms lack relevant resources to stimulate child development at their age. Should there be another project and/or relevant actors, the focus should be placed on the provision of facilities to create speaking classrooms for children to stimulate further brain development.

Finally, classrooms are overcrowded with children sitting on bare floor. A recommendation is extended that the design of the programme for ECE educators and education leaders, to add an element regarding mobilization of resources given their context. Some of the resources are within their reach, it is about stimulating the educators and leaders' ability to use creatively their environment for improving the learning environment.

Project recommendations

DECCE teachers recommended for the need to have another project to enable other teachers to benefit from the programme. Indeed, all PPE teachers need to study DECCE since the programme's delivery mode and approaches are relevant in contexts with scarcity of teachers.

As one school head mentioned;

"He wishes the project to continue so that he may have an opportunity to pursue the course..., I have observed the positive changes among teachers who attended the course and I admire them." (School Head).

While in some communities, the awareness is raised and the community contribution is becoming realistic, more sensitization is needed to maintain the spirit and even inspire other communities to engage in the process. There is also a need to create awareness to education leaders at the district, village and ward level to enable them advocate for value addition to ECE among the parents, other teachers and the larger community. In this regard, all the quality assurers, district education officers

and school heads need to attend training regarding the relevance of ECE and how the same is managed. Parents should also actively participate towards the upbringing of their children while in the school environment. Finally, more motivation is needed to let the teachers especially those who graduated from DECCE to teach ECE children.

On the success factors, the project advocacy component positively improved the community perception towards ECE and academic qualifications of PPE educators. Parents are now perceiving PPE more favourably compared to the project baseline data with this reflected on the increased enrolment (Educational International & TTU, 2017; URT, 2020; Educational International & TTU, 2021).

More government support and community participation are however needed especially on the children feeding program and on the availability of conducive PPE classrooms. There is also a need to address PTR and adequate teaching and learning resources for children to acquire quality PPE. The project has been a success, since teachers managed to attain a Diploma in ECE as a higher academic qualification without a study leave through the Open Education distance learning modality. Similar project can be replicated in other regions to bring about related positive benefits thus raising the number of formally qualified PPE teachers in Tanzania.

Conclusion

The project enabled for the development of competent and professionally qualified ECE teachers at the diploma level in the project districts. The success of the project was made possible due to the involvement of key stakeholders from the project inception, towards validating the baseline study and the validation of the developed CP. This has made it possible for the CP tool to inform the revision of the OUT DECCE programme and adoption at the national level, adding value to the national initiative towards ECE teachers.

The teachers were also committed to qualify as ECE diploma graduates, with this demonstrated through active participation in the DECCE programme as handling their normal working schedules besides all the challenges associated with permission, work load, negative perception from the community and other colleagues towards ECE. The significant improvements in their competencies before and after the training show that they were learning along the DECCE programme.

Education leaders at the ward and district level also owned the project as demonstrated towards adjusting their working schedules to enable teachers attend the DECCE programme. To further improve the success and sustainability of the project, there is a need to create more awareness at the community level about ECE and encourage parents to actively participate in the feeding programme given its relevance in the wellbeing of children. Accordingly, there is a need to sensitize policy makers and education leaders at the national and the local level to own by actions the ECE agenda and thus place emphasis on community resource mobilization in order to create a conducive and safe learning environment for ECE children. Overall, the project is well received by the ECE teachers, the school community and at the national level with most of its intended objectives being realized.

The TTU initiatives with further support of funders including the Comic Relief can transform the children in terms of academic, physical, emotional and attitude throughout their future lifetime by continuing investing in ECE educators. The schools will also be transformed as well as the overall communities, also demonstrated in this project through similar initiatives. A request is being put forward for another project of a similar nature to enable other communities and even the ones that benefited to sustain the realized impact.