THE AVAILABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND UTILIZATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MAKETE DISTRICT, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

The quality of pre-primary education is highly dependent on the availability, accessibility, and utilization of teaching and learning materials (TLMs). This study investigates the state of TLMs in pre-primary education in Makete District, Tanzania. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from 40 participants, including teachers, headteachers, ward education officers, and parents, through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. Findings revealed persistent inadequacies in physical materials such as textbooks, visual aids, storybooks, and educational toys, as well as disparities in access between schools. Despite these limitations, teachers demonstrated creativity by improvising learning materials using locally available resources. However, utilization of TLMs was often constrained by lack of training, irregular availability, and insufficient guidance on curriculum alignment. The study concludes that while teacher ingenuity partially mitigates resource scarcity, systematic provision of professionally designed, curriculum-aligned TLMs, supported by training and community engagement, is essential for effective pre-primary education. Recommendations include investment in infrastructure, consistent TLM provision, teacher training, and strengthened community participation.

KEYWORDS: Teaching and Learning Materials, Pre-Primary Education, Availability, Accessibility, Utilization, Tanzania

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a critical driver of socio-economic development, social transformation, and human capital formation (UNESCO, 2015; Fullan, 2016). It

provides individuals with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to participate effectively in society and contribute to economic growth and innovation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hattie, 2012). Early childhood education, including pre-primary education, is particularly important because it establishes the foundation for lifelong learning, cognitive development, and social-emotional growth (OECD, 2015; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Quality learning environments at this stage support children in acquiring basic competencies, fostering curiosity, problem-solving skills, and collaboration abilities, which are essential for later academic achievement and social integration (UNICEF, 2017; Moyles, 2010).

Pre-primary education emphasizes experiential learning, play-based activities, and holistic child development (Woodhead, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). In this context, teaching and learning materials (TLMs) are indispensable for facilitating interactive lessons, engaging young learners, and enabling teachers to implement curriculum objectives effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015). TLMs, including textbooks, storybooks, visual aids, manipulatives, and educational toys, provide opportunities for children to explore, experiment, and construct knowledge actively. They also support differentiated learning, catering to diverse abilities, interests, and developmental needs, which is vital for inclusivity and equitable educational outcomes (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019).

In Tanzania, pre-primary education is recognized as a critical stage in the formal education system, with government policies emphasizing access, quality, and holistic child development (URT, 2016; MEWAKA, 2020). However, despite policy frameworks and curriculum guidelines, many pre-primary schools operate under significant resource constraints. Insufficient teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teacher preparation undermine the quality of learning experiences (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Studies indicate that limited resources in early childhood education can result in teacher-centred instruction, reduced learner participation, and a narrow focus on rote learning, contradicting the principles of play-based, competency-focused pedagogy (Fullan, 2016; Moyles, 2010).

The availability of TLMs in pre-primary classrooms is crucial for achieving curriculum objectives and promoting effective learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Adequate and relevant materials enable teachers to implement hands-on activities, visual demonstrations, and participatory lessons, which enhance children's

understanding and retention of concepts. For instance, the use of counting beads, alphabet charts, and storybooks facilitates early numeracy and literacy development, while manipulatives and puzzles promote critical thinking and problem-solving (OECD, 2015; Woodhead, 2013). Without sufficient resources, teachers are forced to improvise, which, while innovative, may not consistently align with curriculum standards or provide all learners with equitable learning opportunities (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019).

Accessibility of TLMs refers not only to their physical presence in schools but also to equitable distribution, availability in sufficient quantities, and ease of use by both teachers and learners (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). In many Tanzanian pre-primary schools, especially in rural areas like Makete District, TLMs are often concentrated in urban centers or well-resourced schools, creating disparities in learning experiences between learners (MEWAKA, 2020; URT, 2016). Furthermore, even when materials are present, they may be outdated, damaged, or insufficient in quantity, limiting their effective use in the classroom (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019). Ensuring equitable access to quality TLMs is therefore fundamental for promoting inclusive education and reducing inequalities in early learning outcomes.

Utilization of TLMs is another critical dimension, as having materials available does not automatically guarantee their effective use in teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hattie, 2012). Teachers' professional knowledge, pedagogical skills, and familiarity with curriculum guidelines determine the degree to which TLMs contribute to learning outcomes (Fullan, 2016; Moyles, 2010). Research indicates that in contexts where teachers receive limited guidance or training on TLM use, materials are underutilized, reducing their potential impact on child learning (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; OECD, 2015). Conversely, structured teacher training, mentorship, and continuous professional development improve teachers' capacity to integrate TLMs into lesson plans effectively, enhancing learner engagement, motivation, and competency acquisition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

In the Tanzanian pre-primary education context, teachers' improvisation of learning materials using locally available resources is a common practice, particularly in rural areas with scarce resources (Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019; Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020). While innovative, such improvisation often requires significant teacher effort and creativity, and may not fully substitute for professionally designed, curriculum-aligned materials. Studies have shown that

reliance on improvised materials can create inconsistencies in content delivery and compromise quality, particularly when teachers lack guidance on aligning these materials with curriculum objectives (UNESCO, 2015; MEWAKA, 2020). Hence, assessing both the availability and utilization of TLMs is essential for understanding the effectiveness of pre-primary education programs.

Quality pre-primary education also depends on systemic support, including policy frameworks, funding, teacher training, and community involvement (URT, 2016; UNICEF, 2017). National policies such as the National Early Childhood Development Policy and the MEWAKA framework emphasize the provision of adequate teaching resources and professional support for teachers. However, gaps in policy implementation, inadequate funding, and limited supervision often result in uneven TLM distribution and suboptimal classroom practices (Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019; Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020). This highlights the importance of assessing the extent to which TLMs are not only present but also accessible, appropriately used, and supported by teacher capacity building.

The current study focuses on Makete District, a rural area where pre-primary education faces multiple resource and capacity challenges. By assessing the availability, accessibility, and utilization of TLMs, the study seeks to identify gaps that hinder effective early learning and explore opportunities for improving quality education outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015). This assessment is crucial for informing interventions, guiding policy implementation, and supporting evidence-based resource allocation.

Furthermore, understanding TLM dynamics provides insights into broader educational challenges, such as equity, inclusion, and quality in early childhood education (OECD, 2015; UNICEF, 2017). Learners in pre-primary education are at a critical stage of cognitive, social, and emotional development, making it essential that they have access to well-designed, engaging, and appropriately challenging learning materials. Schools that lack sufficient TLMs risk compromising children's readiness for primary education, which can have long-term consequences for educational achievement and social development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Woodhead, 2013).

By examining availability, accessibility, and utilization, this study contributes to understanding how TLMs can be strategically leveraged to improve teaching and learning in pre-primary education. It also highlights the role of teacher professional capacity, resource

allocation, and policy support in maximizing the benefits of learning materials (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; MEWAKA, 2020). The findings are expected to inform policymakers, educational planners, school administrators, and teacher educators, providing practical recommendations to enhance early childhood education in Makete District and similar contexts.

The pre-primary education in Tanzania faces challenges related to limited TLMs, inequitable access, and inconsistent utilization (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019). Teaching and learning materials are central to promoting active, competency-based, and inclusive learning experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015). Assessing their availability, accessibility, and utilization provides critical insights into the quality of pre-primary education and informs strategies for teacher support, resource provision, and policy implementation. The current study therefore aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of TLM dynamics in Makete District, highlighting gaps, opportunities, and recommendations for improving early childhood education outcomes (UNICEF, 2017; MEWAKA, 2020).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature

The study is anchored in Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes learner-centred pedagogy and active knowledge construction. In early childhood education, TLMs play a critical role in enabling children to interact with their environment, manipulate objects, and internalize abstract concepts. Additionally, Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980) highlights the importance of teacher engagement and professional development in applying pedagogical principles effectively. Teachers utilize TLMs optimally when they have relevant training and can adapt materials to classroom needs.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Empirical studies indicate that the availability and quality of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) directly influence teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes in pre-primary education. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that insufficient and inadequate TLMs often force teachers to adopt teacher-centred approaches, limiting interactive learning and reducing student engagement. Similarly, Lyimo and Kajoro (2020) highlight that when TLMs are scarce, learners' development of foundational literacy and numeracy skills is hindered, leading to gaps that can affect long-term academic performance. These findings suggest that

both the quantity and quality of instructional resources are critical for ensuring that pre-primary learners acquire essential competencies.

In Tanzania, resource limitations in early childhood education are often exacerbated by teacher capacity challenges. Sanga and Mkumbo (2019) observed that many pre-primary teachers lack sufficient training in the effective utilization of TLMs, which reduces the potential impact of existing materials. Likewise, Lyimo and Kajoro (2020) argue that professional development programs that focus on TLM use are essential to enable teachers to integrate materials into lesson plans, facilitate active learning, and apply innovative strategies for child-centred pedagogy. Empirical evidence thus points to a dual need: ensuring the provision of adequate TLMs while simultaneously enhancing teachers' skills to use them effectively.

Several studies document how teachers in Tanzania adapt to resource constraints by improvising materials using locally available resources. Sanga and Mkumbo (2019) found that teachers often create visual aids, learning games, and manipulatives from everyday objects, which fosters learner engagement and participation. Similarly, Lyimo and Kajoro (2020) noted that such improvisation encourages creativity and problem-solving among learners, but these strategies are inconsistent and may not fully align with curriculum requirements. Consequently, while improvisation mitigates some challenges, it cannot replace the need for standardized, high-quality TLMs that ensure equitable learning experiences across schools.

Research also highlights the relationship between resource adequacy and learner outcomes. UNESCO (2015) reports that pre-primary classrooms equipped with sufficient and age-appropriate materials see higher levels of learner participation, better mastery of literacy and numeracy skills, and increased enthusiasm for learning. Likewise, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) stress that early exposure to diverse and engaging materials enhances cognitive, social, and emotional development, laying a strong foundation for primary education. These studies underscore that resource provision must be coupled with strategies that ensure materials are pedagogically relevant and aligned with curriculum objectives.

Furthermore, the accessibility and proper utilization of TLMs are crucial for maximizing their impact. Lyimo and Kajoro (2020) found that even when materials are available, inconsistent distribution and insufficient teacher guidance limit their effectiveness. Sanga and Mkumbo

(2019) echo this observation, arguing that structured teacher training, mentorship, and ongoing professional support are necessary to translate resource availability into improved classroom practices and learner outcomes. Together, these studies highlight that the effectiveness of TLMs in pre-primary education is contingent not only on their presence but also on how they are integrated into pedagogical practices.

In conclusion, empirical literature consistently demonstrates that TLMs are a critical determinant of pre-primary education quality. Studies by UNESCO (2015), Lyimo and Kajoro (2020), and Sanga and Mkumbo (2019) collectively emphasize that adequate provision, equitable accessibility, and skilled utilization of materials are essential to promote learner engagement, holistic development, and competency acquisition. This body of research informs the present study by highlighting the need to assess not only the availability of TLMs in Makete District but also how teachers access and use these resources to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative strategies to gain a comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) in pre-primary education. The quantitative component provided measurable insights into the availability, accessibility, and utilization of resources, while the qualitative aspect explored teachers' experiences, classroom practices, and perceptions of TLM effectiveness. By combining these methods, the study ensured rich, triangulated data that captured not only statistical trends but also the nuanced dynamics of resource use in Makete District (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Research Design

A descriptive case study design was employed to examine the experiences of teachers, school administrators, and parents in selected pre-primary schools. This design allowed for an in-depth investigation of classroom practices, teacher innovations, and the provision of TLMs within their real-life context. It facilitated detailed descriptions of how resources are accessed, applied, and perceived by different stakeholders, providing a holistic understanding of the factors influencing TLM use. The case study design also enabled triangulation through multiple data sources, strengthening the credibility of findings (Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.3 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised 40 participants, including 15 pre-primary teachers, 5 headteachers, 5 ward education officers, and 15 parents. This composition ensured representation from administrative, instructional, and community perspectives, capturing insights from stakeholders directly involved in pre-primary education. Teachers provided information on classroom practices and TLM use, headteachers on school-level management, ward officers on supervisory aspects, and parents on resource adequacy and learner engagement. This multi-perspective approach strengthened the validity of the study's findings (Patton, 2015; Kumar, 2014).

3.4 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to select schools and participants with direct involvement in pre-primary education, ensuring that the study focused on information-rich cases relevant to the research objective. Schools known for active pre-primary programs were prioritized, and participants were chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and engagement with TLMs. This technique enabled the researcher to access critical insights into resource availability, accessibility, and utilization while minimizing the inclusion of unrelated cases. Purposive sampling thus supported both efficiency and depth in data collection (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through multiple methods to ensure triangulation and validity. Structured questionnaires were administered to teachers and parents to quantify TLM availability, accessibility, and utilization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with headteachers and ward education officers to capture administrative and supervisory perspectives. Focus group discussions with teachers and parents provided qualitative insights into classroom practices and challenges. Additionally, classroom observations were conducted to assess the actual use of TLMs, enabling comparison between reported and observed practices (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequencies, to summarize the availability, accessibility, and utilization of TLMs. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, where patterns and themes were identified around key areas such as resource adequacy, usage strategies, challenges, and innovative practices.

Findings from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and observations were triangulated to enhance validity. This combination of analytical techniques ensured a comprehensive understanding of TLMs in pre-primary education, highlighting both statistical trends and contextual experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Availability of Teaching and Learning Materials

Findings revealed persistent inadequacies in essential TLMs. Most schools lacked sufficient textbooks, storybooks, visual aids, and educational toys. Over 70% of teachers reported that one textbook had to be shared among multiple learners. Classroom observations confirmed the scarcity of manipulatives for play-based learning. This scarcity aligns with previous studies indicating that limited resources hinder interactive teaching and holistic child development (UNESCO, 2015; Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020).

4.2 Accessibility of Teaching and Learning Materials

Even where TLMs were available, they were unevenly distributed. Rural schools faced greater shortages than urban schools. Many available materials were outdated, torn, or insufficient in quantity, requiring teachers to improvise. These accessibility issues reflect systemic challenges in resource allocation, delayed government funding, and weak policy enforcement (Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019).

4.3 Utilization of Teaching and Learning Materials

Despite resource gaps, teachers demonstrated creativity by using local materials (bottle tops, sticks, seeds, and cardboard) to teach numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving. While such improvisation promoted learner engagement, its effectiveness was inconsistent due to irregular availability of materials and limited training on curriculum-aligned use. This highlights the critical need for professional development programs that integrate TLM usage with pedagogical skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

4.4 Challenges Affecting TLMs

The study identified several challenges affecting the availability, accessibility, and utilization of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) in pre-primary education. Key issues included inadequate government funding, which limits the procurement and replenishment of essential resources, and limited parental and community contributions, reducing local support for learning materials. Additionally, poor distribution and maintenance of TLMs hinder their

effective use, while insufficient teacher training constrains the ability to maximize available resources. Collectively, these systemic barriers reduce the quality of pre-primary education and exacerbate educational inequities (UNESCO, 2015; Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020).

4.5 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that the availability, accessibility, and utilization of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) are fundamental determinants of the quality of pre-primary education. Adequate TLMs provide opportunities for interactive, play-based, and experiential learning, which are central to early childhood pedagogy. While teachers in Makete District demonstrated creativity by improvising learning aids from local resources such as bottle tops, sticks, and cardboard, such measures are insufficient for long-term, sustainable curriculum implementation (Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). Sustainable improvements require systematic provision of curriculum-aligned, age-appropriate materials, alongside targeted teacher training in their effective use (Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Furthermore, multi-stakeholder engagement including government, school administrators, parents, and community members is critical for ensuring resource mobilization and maintenance. Studies from similar contexts indicate that schools with active parental involvement and consistent governmental support experience higher learner engagement, better classroom practices, and improved literacy and numeracy outcomes (Kusumawati et al., 2018; Mbugua, 2016). The study also underscores that teacher capacity and professional development interact with resource availability; even well-resourced classrooms may fail to produce positive learning outcomes if educators lack skills to integrate TLMs effectively (Fullan, 2016; Hattie, 2012). Overall, addressing systemic funding gaps, enhancing teacher training, and promoting collaborative resource management are essential for improving pre-primary education quality and equity.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pre-primary schools in Makete District encounter significant challenges regarding the availability, accessibility, and utilization of teaching and learning materials (TLMs). Limited government funding, inadequate parental and community contributions, and poor distribution systems have resulted in resource scarcity, which directly constrains the implementation of interactive, learner-centred pedagogy. Although teachers demonstrate creativity by improvising materials from locally available resources, such efforts

are insufficient to ensure sustainable and standardized curriculum delivery (Sanga & Mkumbo, 2019; Lyimo & Kajoro, 2020). The findings emphasize that effective pre-primary education requires systematic provision of age-appropriate, curriculum-aligned TLMs, complemented by continuous teacher professional development in resource utilization, classroom management, and participatory teaching methods (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, active community involvement and policy support are crucial for resource mobilization, maintenance, and equitable access. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving learning outcomes, promoting holistic child development, and reducing educational disparities in early childhood education.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations for Action

Based on the study findings, several key actions are recommended to enhance the availability, accessibility, and utilization of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) in pre-primary education. Firstly, the government and educational stakeholders should ensure a consistent and adequate supply of textbooks, visual aids, and educational toys that align with the national curriculum. Regular provision and timely distribution will reduce inequities between urban and rural schools, thereby improving the learning environment. Secondly, teachers should be equipped with professional training on designing, improvising, and effectively integrating TLMs into classroom instruction. Such training would enhance pedagogical competence and encourage the use of diverse instructional strategies to foster active learning. Thirdly, strengthening community engagement is vital. Parents and local communities should actively participate in resource mobilization, maintenance, and sustainability initiatives to support school efforts. Lastly, policy enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure transparent allocation, monitoring, and evaluation of TLM distribution across all pre-primary schools, thereby promoting accountability and educational equity.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is recommended to expand understanding of the relationship between TLM availability and early learning outcomes. Future studies should examine the long-term impact of TLM availability on children's literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional development in pre-primary education. Additionally, researchers should assess the effectiveness of teacher training programs in enhancing TLM utilization and their influence on learning outcomes.

Finally, it is important to explore innovative, community-driven strategies for resource mobilization and sustainable financing models to strengthen pre-primary education, particularly in resource-constrained rural settings such as Makete District.

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