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**Parents' Reasons for Sending Children to Pre-primary Schools: A Case of
Kaskazini 'A' District Zanzibar**

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Parents' Reasons for Sending Children to Pre-primary Schools: A Case of Kaskazini 'A' District Zanzibar



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Abstract

Purpose: This study explored parents' reasons for sending their children to pre-primary education in Zanzibar. The reasons are discussed with respect to their understanding of pre-primary education as a basic education in Zanzibar.

Methodology: A qualitative approach with a case study design was used; data were collected using face-to-face interviews from 36 parents, 14 males and 22 females who had children in pre-primary schools. The study was done in the light of the Expectancy Value Theory (EVT) that relates the expectations and values a person has over something, and proposes that achievement behaviour is primarily influenced by expectancies of success and subjective task values.

Findings: The results showed that most parents understood that early childhood education was a basic education in Zanzibar due to the fact that it is a starting point for children to learn basic life skills and literacy skills. Therefore, it was revealed that parents were sending their children to pre-primary schools because they wanted their children to be literates, prepared for primary education and learn socialization. It was revealed that early childhood education teaches children different skills like reading, writing, counting and socialization skills, and so changes a child from having a home-mind to school-mind.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends to the curriculum developers to plan and design early childhood education programmes to achieve the targets of the parents so as to encourage them in sending their children to pre-primary education as well as increase their involvement in their children's education.

Keywords: *Pre-Primary Education, Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, Pre-primary Schools, Zanzibar.*

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INTRODUCTION

Pre-primary education is a two year basic education in Zanzibar provided to children of four (4) years before starting a primary education at six. Pre-primary school prepares a child for holistic development and enables him/her to cope effectively to primary education (MoEVT 2012). The preparation includes introduction to 3Rs (reading, writing and counting skills). Children's enrolment in schools develops their ability to explore and increases development of their intellectual and social potential (Save the Children 2014). Because of its importance, pre-primary education is part of compulsory basic education in many countries in the world (UNESCO 2016).

Parents are sending their children in pre-primary schools for different reasons. The reasons include children to have basic literacy skills (reading, writing and counting), language skills, exploration, arts and social behaviours (Tandika 2015; Weatherholt et al. 2018). Children's success in basic education depends on their parents' understanding of pre-primary education, as those parents with high understanding are normally ready to enrol their children to school as well as engaging themselves in their children's education. This is because their understanding can also be translated to their involvement in their children's education. Donkor (2010) explained that although many parents understand the value and importance of pre-primary education, there is a wide gap between what parents say and what they do to support their children in school.

Cases of low level of parents' commitment and understanding of pre-primary education have led to different challenges in Zanzibar. The challenges include late enrolment of children to school, poor attendance and some children not to be registered in pre-primary education. These effects were associated with low community/parental awareness on the importance of education for children (Data Vision International 2018; MoEVT 2018).

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out parents' reasons for sending their children to pre-primary schools in Zanzibar, taking a case Kaskazini 'A' district. Specifically, the study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To explore parents' understanding of pre-primary education as a basic education in Zanzibar.
2. To find out parents' reasons for sending their children to pre-primary education in Zanzibar.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because parents' understanding would reveal the reasons and targets for enrolling their children to pre-primary schools. This has also shown their awareness on pre-primary education as well as their level of involvement and expectations in their children's education. The results of this study would form a base upon which pre-primary education policy planners and practitioners will refer to when making decision about improving pre-primary education and involvement of the society in the country.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study was confined to the parents with children in pre-primary schools in Kaskazini 'A' district, Zanzibar on their reasons for sending their children to schools. Parents were considered sufficient in generating comprehensive data for the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study was done in the light of the Expectancy Value Theory (EVT) developed by Eccles and Wigfield in 1983. EVT relates the expectations and values a person has over something, and proposes that achievement behaviour is primarily influenced by expectancies of success and subjective task values. It also explains that parents, as children's primary academic socializers, impact their school performance and self-efficacy through the messages and expectations they express and the behaviours they exhibit. With the children's perception of these messages, behaviours and expectations influence their academic outcomes (Hood et al. 2012; Kennedy et al. 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary role of pre-primary education is to prepare children for primary education by enhancing smooth transition from home to school, improving their self-confidence and enhancing independence (Obiweluozor 2015; UN 2019). Pre-primary education is also the rights of children as well as the investment. This means that not only does pre-primary school prepares children to be productive in their later days, but also it enables parents to participate fully in their production activities after leaving their children in safe hands in schools (Mtahabwa 2010; Mwamwenda 2014; Uchem & Onuh 2014; UN 1989; UNICEF 2019). Pre-primary education has also a strong bearing on attendance and participation of young children once they enter primary school (Ndijuye et al. 2020). Quality pre-primary education has also crucial impacts on the improvement of important schooling skills such as language, social development, curiosity, number sense and later school performance (Krieg et al. 2015; Yoshikawa et al. 2013).

Parents have different reasons for sending their children to pre-primary schools ranging from social to academic skills. The reasons include acquisition of 3Rs (reading, writing and counting skills), language and independent skills, play, exploration, arts, socialization, cleanliness and respect (Gertler et al. 2014; Tandika 2015; Al-Shatti 2011). Additionally, Şahin, Sak, and Şahin (2013) found that most parents expected pre-primary schools to support social skills' development of their children, express self effectively, develop self-confidence, establish effective communication and physical skills.

METHODOLOGY

Approach and Design

The study used a qualitative approach to get in-depth descriptive data on the participants' reasons for sending their children to pre-primary schools. A case study design was used to examine the reasons for sending children to schools. The study followed an interpretivism philosophical paradigm to understand individual parents' views and perspectives regarding their reasons for sending children to pre-primary schools and their understanding of pre-primary education.

Area of Study, Population and Sample

The study was done at Kusini 'A' district in Unguja, Zanzibar –Tanzania. The sample included parents who had at least one child in pre-primary schools in the study area. A total of 36 parents were purposively chosen for the study. A face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect data about parents' understanding on pre-primary education.

Data Collection

The researcher asked for an introductory letter from University of Dodoma which was later used to seek clearance letter and research permit from Zanzibar authorities. The researcher sought an authorization letter from the District Council of Kaskazini A. Those letters introduced the researcher to the schools where the selection of parents was done. The researcher then booked appointments with the parents to conduct interviews.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interview were analyzed through thematic analysis procedures as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Qualitative data was analyzed thematically along the study objectives and presented in narrative forms.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured the adherence to research ethics throughout the process including getting clearance from the responsible authorities, respectful treatment to the participants, ensured their rights, freedom to participate and confidentiality.

RESULTS

Demographic Data of the Participants

Data showed that 22 participants were female and the rest (14) were males. In this case, mothers were more available than fathers for the interview during data collection process. The results indicated that many parents had a secondary education and above with some few parents (8) without school education.

Reasons for Sending Children in Pre-Primary Education

Participants were asked about the reasons for sending their children to pre-primary schools. The results have shown that study participants sent their children in pre-primary schools to: get knowledge (be literates), be prepared for primary education and 3rs (reading, writing and counting) and get socialization.

Reason 1: Preparing a Literate Child

Results show that parents had sent their children to schools to be literates, that is, to know different things that were important to them. Participants reacted that after their child became of age, they had to send them to school to learn important things in their surroundings. They concurred that they wanted their children to get education and start to understand the current world issues as well. One Parent remarked as follows:

For me, I sent my child to school to learn about the current world issues and get education. As there are many things that are now happening, and one cannot understand them if you are not educated. Issues like diseases, health, and people from other places and others ... through enrolled him to school, he will be prepared to know and understand these slowly according to his age and will continue to understand them. These will eventually make him to know himself better [Parent 26, Interview: September 2020].

Others felt that through pre-primary education, the children would get skills to free themselves from discrimination and would also know the meaning of education. Parent 28 commented:

I have sent my child to school because I wanted him to get rid of illiteracy so that he may have good development. Through the knowledge and education that he will get in school,

he will later be able to free himself from discriminations and know the meaning of education since in his childhood [Parent 28, Interview: September 2020].

Some participants have pointed out the security issue as among the reason for sending children to pre-primary education. Because the children are safe and secure, parents can also continue with their economic activities peacefully. For example, parent 17 made the following point:

Yes, nursery is very important for children. Even myself, when my child is at school, I know that she is in safe environment. I can continue with my job ... I go to work and her mother goes to work too. What we do in the morning is to prepare her and bring her to school, instead of leaving her to the caretaker. The child reduces playing in the street without proper care [Parent 17, Interview: September 2020].

Reason 2: Preparing a Child for Primary Education

Participants commented that they had sent their children to pre-primary schools because they thought that the children would get good preparation on basic skills before primary level. They added that the children and even the primary school teachers would have no problems in attending these children. Parent 18 had the following to say:

Actually, I sent my child in nursery school so that he would be taught different skills that would prepare him for primary education. As you know nowadays Primary is a little tough, not like in our time. Nowadays it is important to a child to start in pre-primary school for proper preparation before primary school. [Parent 18, Interview: September 2020].

Participants also agreed that when a child passes pre-primary school, it would be easy to learn in primary school and that even the teachers in primary schools expect to receive a child who already has some basic skills learnt. The following comment from Parent 31 explains this:

I sent my child to school because I wanted that when my child is sent to primary he would not have problems in learning. Even the teachers would have no problems in teaching him, they would just continue with the teaching instead of start anew [Parent 31, Interview: September 2020].

Study participants also believed that because pre-primary schools is a preparatory stage, a child who passes in this level would develop foundation skills for learning that would help him/her doing better in the subsequent levels. One male parent (Parent 8) reported that he had sent his child to school so that she/he would continue doing well in other levels. Because of such importance, he also reported as follows:

I had sent my child to nursery school so that she will get a good foundation to continue well in primary school. I have seen that they are being taught how to read and write so that when they go to primary school they will not have problems [Parent 8, Interview: September 2020].

Other participant understood that after getting the necessary skills, a child will have an automatic continuation to primary level. On this issue, Parent 25 had the following comment to make:

I have sent my child to nursery school because I knew that I have simplified the burdens of competing for a seat in primary school. Before nursery being compulsory, getting a seat in primary level was a bit difficult. But now getting your child in nursery school guarantees a seat in primary school as a child has started the learning process [Parent 25, Interview: September 2020].

Preparation for primary education includes getting a good foundation of 3Rs. Therefore, ability to read, write and count (3Rs) was also found to be among the reasons for many parents in this study to send their children in pre-primary schools. Different participants argued that they had sent their children in school to be able to read, write and count earlier. Some comments were as follows:

For me, I sent my child to school because I wanted her to get education, to be able to read, count, arranging things and drawing [Parent 23, Interview: September 2020].

I wanted my child to learn in pre-primary education and understand, opens up his mind early, be able to read, write and then go to upper levels [Parent 29, Interview: September 2020].

Parent 16 added that even primary teachers are hoping to receive students who were able to read and write:

We know that nursery is a basic education, because children must start their education in this level for preparation. When they enter standard one they already understand how to write and read ... even primary teachers believe that those children know how to read and write, so they get no problems in teaching these children (their work has been reduced) [Parent 16, Interview: September 2020].

Reason 3: Socializing a Child

Pre-primary school also plays an important socialization role to children through education. The study participants also shared that they had sent their children to schools for socialization reasons. Participants mentioned different socialization reasons such as making friends from different places, good ethics and living well with people.

Participants commented that they hoped that their children would make friends with other children from different places. This would help them to get extra experiences and learn different habits. For instance, Parent 2 commented that she had sent her child to school because she wanted him to learn and befriend with other children:

I sent my child to school to get awareness, meet, learn and play together with children from different areas ... make friends to children from different places ... that will help him to experience different habits from those in our home [Parent 2: Interview: September 2020].

A female participant, Parent 12 also commented on the socialization role of pre-primary school in the early years where she used a Swahili saying 'samaki mkunje angali mbichi' (strike the iron when it is hot). She meant that in pre-primary school a child is given important preparation to get used to school life and be accustomed to it as well living with other people different from his/her family. She narrated as follows:

Pre-primary education is a basic education because in this level a child gets opportunity to socialize with other children from different places. We are told strike the iron when is hot, so when they reach primary school they already understand themselves and the school life [Parent 12, Interview: September 2020].

Participants also expressed their satisfaction to the social development of their children as an influence of pre-primary schools. They narrated that some of their children had shown much improvements since they started school. For example, Parent 22 expressed her relief on her child who was very shy and anti-social before sending her to school. She stated as follows:

I had sent my child to school because I wanted her to learn. You see my child was very shy and somewhat passive and not social. I'm happy that she is continuing with the school, and now she is less shy and she has many friends with other class mates who are living near and she would go out sometimes to play [Parent 22, Interview: September 2020].

Parents' Understanding of Pre-Primary Education in Zanzibar

Participants were also asked on their understanding of pre-primary education as a basic and compulsory education in Zanzibar. The question was: What do you understand by pre-primary education as a basic education in Zanzibar? The findings indicated that the study participants understood pre-primary education as a starting point for learning and literacy with different explanations:

a. Pre-Primary Education as a Starting Point for Learning and Skills

Participants expressed their understanding of pre-primary education as a basic education by relating it with an important avenue for the opening up of the children's minds as a preparation for their learning. They informed that children were being prepared for their learning journey through different activities in schools that make them to get different skills very early. The following quote from Parent 1 illustrates this point:

For me, I can say that nursery is a basic type of education because it helps children to get earlier understanding. Children start to understand different things... This opens up his/her understanding and help him for further knowledge especially when they go to primary school [Parent 1, Interview: September 2020].

Other participants agreed that pre-primary education was the preparatory stage where a child is being transformed from a home-mind to school-mind. This marks the beginning of a child in learning process where a child improves his/her mind and understanding. Parent 2 made the following point:

On my side, pre-primary education is a basic education because it prepares a child to move and change from home-mind to school/learning-mind through different activities... a child comes to school to learn about school issues, this helps a child to improve his mind and knowledge ... therefore nursery is the starting point for a child to understand at school [Parent 2, Interview: September 2020].

Participants also believed that pre-primary education was a compulsory type of education because it helps children to prepare for their future education, as it is the first and initial level of education. They believed that it prepares children to cope with the current world which needs literate people. For example, Parent 15 made the following remarks:

Nursery is a must level of education in the current world ... if we won't prepare our children earlier, many things will happen to them without their knowledge. Children also become easy to be taught in primary ... the beginning of being an educated person is nursery [Parent 15, Interview: September 2020].

b. Pre-Primary Education as a Starting Point for Literacy Skills

Most participants attached pre-primary education with the starting of literacy skills to children because it gives them a basic foundation in learning 3Rs (reading, writing and counting skills). Parent 9 illustrates this from the interview:

For me, I can say that pre-primary education is a basic education because it is an important level of education ... where at this stage children need to be introduced to letters. As you know, reading and writing are important skills in education. And I think this has been a bit successful because I can see that my child who is now in the second year can identify almost all the letters, and she can also write her name and other simple words [Parent 9, Interview: September 2020].

On emphasizing the role of pre-primary education in the preparation for literacy skills to children, participants informed that it is a must level for children because all the basic skills have been shifted to pre-primary education. Because of that, participants warned that those children who miss pre-primary education will have poor understanding in their later education. Parent 21 had this to say:

Pre-primary education is an important and a basic level of education where all children must pass through. It looks like the old STD 1 syllabus has been shifted to nursery school, and so a child gets here those foundation skills like basic skills, letters, numbers, how to hold pencils and others that were once taught in STD 1. This means that primary is a continuation of what was reached in pre-primary. So, if a child misses nursery, s/he will not have better understanding in primary [Parent 21, Interview: September 2020].

The results here reveal that participants have attached pre-primary education with a starting point for literacy skills. Participants mentioned that children would start learning basic literacy skills and getting earlier experiences on literacy, and so they will get a good foundation for reading, writing and counting (3Rs).

DISCUSSION

The results have shown that participants understood pre-primary education as a basic education in Zanzibar because they felt that pre-primary education is a starting point for literacy learning and skills. That understanding relates also to their reasons for sending children to school as they wanted their children to be literates, to get basic skills that would prepare them to continue with primary education and getting socialization skills. All the reasons are much valid as far as children and pre-primary education are concerned.

Regarding the starting point for acquisition of literacy learning and skills as well as preparation for primary school, we witness that this is the crucial role of pre-primary education. These finding resembles with Yasmin and Rumi's study (2020) that concurred that by participating in pre-primary education, children can know various things such as study materials, how to read and write, languages, alphabets, and numbers. Children's ability to read and write was also found as the main outcome of a quality pre-primary education program by parents in the study conducted by Al-Shatti (2011) in Kuwait.

Tandika (2015) emphasized that the mastery of literacy skills (reading, writing and counting) is crucial to children, because they increase their confidence and positive attitudes. Parents in Tandika's study stressed that they had enrolled their children in pre-primary education expecting that they would be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills for socialise with the school environment, acquire foundational knowledge and skills for smooth transition to primary school, and fulfil a prerequisite for enrolling children in primary schooling. The basic skills and knowledge emphasized in Tandika's study include the literacy skills as emphasized by the participants in this study.

Kilic (2013) informed that pre-primary education is the foundation of children's education, a vital aspect of a child's learning and development, and is the most important stage in the development of an individual. It is also contended that pre-primary education not only enhances basic cognitive skills, such as reading and writing, but also encourages self-control, curiosity, diligence, and perseverance (Pholphirul 2017). This view is also supported by Ünal and Aral (2014) who found that pre-primary education helps children to learn and improve their problem solving skills. Problem-solving skills help children to gain confidence in their ability to make good decisions for themselves, avoid conflicts in a school setting and in their day to day lives (Mandal 2019).

Regarding the role of pre-primary schools on children's further education, it is true that the acquisition of literacy skills takes place in lower grades, and that good foundation of literacy skills in pre-primary education affects performance of children in the subsequent levels (McBride 2016; Reardon et al. 2012). Again, the study conducted by Mbogo (2017) had also highlighted that literacy skills are acquired in pre-primary education and that pupils who had attended pre-primary education performed better in numeracy and literacy than those who had not. Studies by Guta et al., (2017) and Osakwe (2009) have also underlined a significant difference between pupils who had pre-primary education experiences and those without in their academic performances. The differences were found in terms of literacy skills, understanding of the subjects, cognitive ability, social skills, classroom participation and performance of practical activities. This shows that good literacy foundation in pre-primary education impacts on reading and writing in upper levels of education, and those who lack this opportunity are short of literacy experiences that make it hard for them to cope. It is important therefore, to ensure that all children are passing in pre-primary education for good performance in their studies.

Regarding the results about foundational role of pre-primary education for primary and further education, parents from the study by Niikko and Havu-nuutinen (2009) concurred that the most significant aim of pre-school education was to give the children positive conceptions of the primary school and school learning. Also, Ngozi (2013) informed that pre-primary education is definitively positioned to address a smooth transition from home to the school and preparing the child for the primary level of education (Ngozi 2013). This means that pre-primary education is important for preparing children not only for primary but also further education levels. Any pre-primary education centre must ensure that children are getting the basic literacy skills and other learning skills that would enable them to move forward successfully. Pre-primary education curriculum should be prepared to facilitate acquisition of such skills, and teachers should also be creative enough to engage children in different activities that would help them achieving the targeted skills.

The Zanzibar curriculum has equally emphasized that pre-primary education "*prepares a pre-primary child on his/her general and complete development as well as facing primary education more effectively*" (MoEVT 2012, 6). This also agrees with UNICEF (2019) that children who attend a quality preschool programme start primary school with a solid foundation for learning – stronger social skills, larger vocabularies, better number sense and curiosity to learn more. There is also a clear association between attendance in pre-primary education and educational developmental outcomes as well as child's readiness for school (UNICEF 2019).

The Zanzibar pre-primary education curriculum has emphasized on early years learning that "*education in childhood is like a drawing on a stone*" which means that the skills learnt during

the early years remain permanent to the children and the children can remember and use it throughout their lives (MoEVT 2012, 6). Therefore, those basic skills that the children are learning in pre-primary education will persist throughout their lives, and they will help them to cope and understand other skills in their education in later years.

The socialization reasons from parents are also valid as school is a socializing agent. Therefore, sending children to pre-primary education introduce them to the culture and ethics of their society. This contention has also been emphasized by Bibi and Ali (2018) who found that attending high quality preschool program helps to promote children's social and emotional development.

Also, social role of the school was unveiled by Manigo and Allison (2017) whose results show that participants believed that because of the appropriate social interaction among children, preschool contributed to a child's social and emotional development, and noted that learning how to interact with others with positive emotions was the most important skill to be learnt in pre-primary education. Participants also concurred that pre-primary education developed positive emotions about school, communication skills and the self-management of their emotions. Development of communication skills and ability to have good self-expression is developed through interaction with class mates and peers in schools, that also discourages misconducts (Şahin et al. 2013).

Generally, man is a social being who does not feel secure unless supported by social customs and traditions and belonged to a certain social group. Therefore, it is important that the structure of education system, including the pre-primary education, promotes the sense of belonging and integrity, children be given the opportunity of learning how to live in their societies, cooperate, and get along with other people.

A child in school learns and understands different habits apart from his or hers. Due to the importance of socialization skills to children, Kitta and Kapinga (2015) have emphasized that socialization skills are much needed by children even before the academics. They added that socialization skills are not necessarily taught the same way that the academics are, and therefore, it is one of the biggest goals for a preschool programme.

Overall, findings of the current study are in line with the central premise of the EVT that behaviours and expectations influence academic outcomes. Results showed that parents had different understanding and reasons for sending children to pre-primary education. The understanding and reasons were resulted from their different expectations. Parents believed that pre-primary education might help their children to get proper foundation for learning and education and live well in the society. These skills help building an important foundation for the survival of a child inside and even outside the education system, as well as living well in the society.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be seen from the results of this study that parents had different reasons for sending their children to pre-primary schools as a basic education in Zanzibar. Although, all the conceptions sum up the parents' understanding of the importance of pre-primary education in their children's schooling and development. Given that pre-primary school is a very important level of education, it is important for the policy planers and curriculum developers to ensure that pre-primary education is prepared to achieve all those skills and competences that are needed by parents in their children. This will motivate parents to continue sending their children to

pre-primary schools and increase their involvement in their children's education. All these will increase the enrolment rate of the students, retention and performance in education.

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