

# Pedagogical Practices in Early Childhood Education and Care in Tanzania: Policy and Practices

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine current pedagogical practices in early childhood education and care in Tanzania, a reflection from policy and practices to the implementation of Learner-Centred Pedagogy and to put forward possible improvements for the future. In 2005 a new pre-school education curriculum introduced a learner-centred pedagogy so the first intention of this study was to find out how this pedagogy was being used in the classroom context. Anecdotal experiences indicated that classroom teachers continued teaching using traditional methods i.e teacher-centred pedagogy even after the new curriculum development which introduced child-centred learning. Child-centred pedagogy has the potential for promoting children's creativity, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, learning dispositions as well as socio-emotional/behavioural development skills. This study employed qualitative methodology and a case study approach. A total number of 28 people were participated in the study, whereby six were teachers, 12 children, and four parents in one rural and one urban pre-school (local level) and six government education officials (national level). Data was generated by using semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions guided by a series of open-ended questions, as well as classroom observation and documentary reviews. Findings showed that teachers were not using child-centred approaches in teaching and learning due to a lack of knowledge of the methods of using the new approach, and large classes with untrained teachers with insufficient teaching and learning materials and facilities. This study recommends for future practice that changes need to be made, for government policy makers to address the challenges identified. It needs the provision of initial teacher education, professional development, and to be richly resourced, so that qualified teachers may be able to translate philosophy to practice and promote children's meaningful learning and development.

**Keywords:** Early childhood education and care, initial teacher education, learner-centred pedagogy, pre-school education curriculum, pre-school teachers.

## 1. Introduction

From a pedagogical point of view, this paper reviews the implementation of the child-centred pedagogy which was proposed in the new curriculum over the past 10 years in Tanzania (Mtika and Gates, 2010, Taasisi ya Elimu Tanzania: Tanzania Institute of Education, 2005). It examines the changing realities of early childhood teachers' work to explore ways to enact and sustain changes in pedagogy in the classroom situation. The teaching profession, as a whole, is facing ongoing change and challenge; not only are ongoing educational changes redefining teachers' work, but increasing teacher attrition and turnover also creates challenges ECEC provision in Tanzania. Pedagogical practice has been identified as a critical factor of pre-school children's learning and developmental achievements so this study aims to investigate current pre-school practice and to explore what should be done in the future. Quality pre-school education in the literature indicates the importance of teaching by using Learner-Centred Pedagogy (LCP). By definition, learner-centred pedagogy, also known as child-centred learning, is a learning that mainly focuses on the needs and interests of the learners rather than those of other involved parties such as administrators and teachers in the education system (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Herbert, 2004, O'Sullivan, 2004). In this approach, the teacher is placed to facilitate the learning, and to focus on the needs, interests, and learning styles of the pupils. Previous studies indicate that the lack of pedagogical skills of teachers who work with young children is closely associated with children's delay in achievement of developmental goals and milestones and causes serious disadvantage in their future work and careers (Herbert, 2004, Sylva et al., 2003, Wood, 2004). It is probable that Tanzanian pre-school teachers may not have enough knowledge about learner-centred pedagogy (LCP). In this study "early childhood education and care" and "pre-school education" are used interchangeably.

Learner-centred curricula have long been established in the education systems of the West, and have become increasingly desired in developing countries transitioning to democracy (Herbert, 2004, Mtika and Gates, 2010, O'Sullivan, 2004). According to Herbert (2004) "learner-centred pedagogy becomes instantly appealing because it carries the promise of intellectual liberation from oppressive traditional approaches". The LCP promoted across countries worldwide, the Tanzania education system in particular, essentially derives from two philosophies, both of which originated in the twentieth century (Herbert, 2004, Mtika and Gates, 2010). The two philosophies are the "progressivism of John Dewey and the social constructivism of Lev Semenovich Vygotsky" (Herbert, 2004). Dewey considered education as a powerful agent of societal transformation; his model of

education highlighted individualised learning based on active participation and empirical problem-solving (Dewey, 2004)/1916. Dewey's highlighted his views and interests in a democratic education, i.e a deeper perception must focus on the freedom to act as the only means of self-realisation available to the individual in a school or classroom context. On the other hand, Vygotsky's major contributions to today's pedagogical practice are his epistemological views on the nature of human knowledge and influential factors which determine its acquisition (Vygotsky, 1997).

The central concept of Vygotskian social constructivism relevant to the present pedagogy is his claim that an individual's knowledge is not transmitted from one person to another (Tracey and Morrow, 2012), but rather it is actively constructed or rather, co-constructed through interactions among learners within a defined sociocultural context (Bell, 2011, Tracey and Morrow, 2012, Wertsch, 1991, Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, knowledge is not external to the learner and awaiting detection by her or/him; rather, knowledge "is created through a process of new information interacting with the prior knowledge and experiences of learners" (duPlessis and Muzaffar, 2010). From this perspective, knowledge needs to be engaged rather than "delivered" or "transmitted" (p.45). Herbert (2004) asserts that the common aspects to both Dewey's and Vygotsky's approaches is heavy emphasis on learner-centredness, as well as the promotion of active knowledge attainment through exploration, discovery, and reflection rather than passive absorption of facts and skills through rote learning and drilling. Hence, today's pedagogies based on Dewey's and Vygotsky's ideas are "often referred to as learner-based and learner-paced, the latter highlighting the need to tailor instruction to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each individual learner" (Herbert, 2004). That means each person learns differently, hence an individual child's achievement should not be compared to that of other children, but only can be assessed in terms of his/ her own individual progress such as the use of standardized tests (Al-Zu'be, 2013).

Since the early 2000s many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Tanzania included, have begun to adopt LCP. This paradigm shift has generated interest among researchers and policy-makers on how African teachers interpret and implement methods of teaching that differ significantly from the Teacher-Centred Pedagogy (TCP) model used across the continent (Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Mtika and Gates, 2010, O'Sullivan, 2004). To date, the literature from Africa, such as Tanzania indicates "the idea of learner-centred education has not taken root in the classrooms" (Mtika and Gates, 2010). Thus, important questions remain regarding how teachers in Africa, Tanzania in particular, conceptualise LCP and what obstacles they face in attempting to use it. How are pre-school teachers educated and prepared for their roles and tasks? These issues need to be addressed.

In Tanzania between independence in 1961 and the formalisation of pre-school education in 1995, there was no formal pre-school education curriculum. In 2003 the government decided to incorporate pre-school education topics in the teacher education curriculum for primary school teachers. The intention was that after student-teachers' completion of their Grade III 'A' they could teach primary and pre-school classes, (Grade III 'A' refers to a completed lower secondary education and enrolment in two years certificate in teacher education for primary school teachers). The initial teacher education for pre-school teachers was compulsory for all Grade III 'A' student-teachers and it consisted of two years full time study. Before these efforts, primary teachers attended a one year programme as an in-service course which was on a voluntary basis and aimed entirely at pre-school education, however, it did not exist for a long period of time due to poor coordination and management. The current two year programme is offering pre-school education as a module added to all primary school courses. Recruitment of the student-teacher trainees is made directly after completion of the four years of ordinary level secondary education and passing the national examination.

However, the problem still exists. Because student-teacher trainees have developed specific philosophies related to primary education courses; it needed a lot of effort and expertise to transform them into pre-school teachers' topics. This necessitated a change from one philosophical position to another (paradigm shift) in the teaching and learning process; it would require professional tutors to make this objective realistic in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) area. However, previous studies indicate that there were no qualified tutors in teacher education to teach early childhood education courses and as a result more focus was on primary education courses (Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Paris and Combs, 2006).

With this knowledge in mind, for the first time a pre-school education curriculum in Tanzania was developed in 2005, with the curriculum emphasis on the use of child-centred approaches. The Tanzanian ECEC curriculum development has encountered considerable changes and challenges, particularly in the area of pedagogical approaches. The government prioritised curriculum reform in order to improve the quality of ECEC because many early childhood teachers continued to favour direct instruction over more appropriate teaching practices for young children. Numerous writers report that young children enjoy learning when it is in a participatory way and for them to plan what they need to do according to their interests (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Maldonado-Carreño and Votruba-Drzal, 2011, Massey, 2004). Research indicates that when children are given opportunities they are much more capable of taking action, problem solving, creativity, thinking skills, understanding, and reasoning (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Herbert, 2004). If these capabilities are to emerge there is a need

to provide access for children to engage in spontaneous learning with teachers/adults scaffolding their learning when need be.

Effective use of LCP, teachers' pedagogical skills and commitment is important. The interaction of teachers and learners is the determinant factor for failure or success for the learners and teachers themselves. The Tanzanian pre-school education curriculum design aims to make children enjoy meaningful learning through LCP (Taasisi ya Elimu Tanzania: Tanzania Institute of Education, 2005). Teachers are the ones who interpret the goals and aims of the pre-school education curriculum in the classroom context (philosophy to practice). Hence, teachers' pedagogical skill and availability of materials, facilities, and a conducive teaching and learning environment is highly recommended. Previous studies indicate that there is potential in understanding the needs and interest of children and how these should be met (Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Wood, 2004). Unfortunately, experiences in Tanzanian pre-school education indicate that pre-school teachers who are responsible for the interpretations of goals and objectives in the classroom situation neither attended initial teacher education nor professional development (Mligo, 2015).

### *1.1 Learner-Centred Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care*

There is plenty of research evidence to suggest that children's success in school and other aspects of their life can be considerably enhanced when quality educational experiences in their early years are taken seriously (Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006, Sylva et al., 2003, Whitebread, 2008, Yelland, 2010). It is theorised in the literature that the focus in learner-centred teaching in the early years is to enable an individual learner to construct knowledge for him or herself using the environment, including both the physical and social environments (Tracey and Morrow, 2012, Vygotsky, 1978), and therefore require a flexible curriculum within the broad parameters of the socially constructed curriculum (Bell, 2011, Mligo, 2008). However, many writers advocate that LCP is situational, that means it is not effective for all learning environments i.e "it works some of the time, or for some of the pupils, but not all of the time for all of the pupils, and that some clusters of variables produce better results in terms of pupils academic achievement than others" (Herbert, 2004). In other words, aspects that produce better results are described where academic attainment is understood in terms of performance measurable by internationally accepted assessment tools, such as those used by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) e.g standardised test (Barnett and Frede, 2010, Herbert, 2004). Recognising settings that are likely to enhance the effectiveness of LCP, as well as those in which it is likely to fail, should help education policy makers to take a course of action most suited to a particular context, instead of adopting (habitually for ideological reasons) a learner-centred framework only because it may have worked in another country, or for a different population (Herbert, 2004, Wood, 2004). However, for meaningful learning in the early years, LCP is the most suitable for engaging in spontaneous learning (Barnett and Frede, 2010, Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006, Sylva et al., 2003, Wood, 2004, Mitchell et al., 2008).

In deed, this article presents current pedagogical practices of the Tanzanian teachers on child-centred curriculum having developed in 2005 and what should be done in future for better practice. LCP has been a critical issue in teaching and learning and few empirical studies have been conducted regarding this matter in Tanzania (Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Mtika and Gates, 2010, Paris and Combs, 2006). However such studies did not describe how LPC can be conducted where there are limited resources, large class sizes with a sole teacher, untrained teachers and limited professional development, and lack of teaching and learning materials and facilities. Furthermore, the analysis of the pre-school curriculum document indicates that the curriculum seems to be based on "ideological rather than pragmatic grounds" (Herbert, 2004). That means it does not reflect a constructivist pedagogy model such as constructivist principles of teaching and learning. There was no implementation plan to guide how the child-centred approaches can be practised. It was an expectation that the new pre-school education curriculum would help to re-establish child-centred learning which was in contrast to that of the previous curriculum design where teachers instructed children what to do.

A severe shortage of the necessary early year's expertise within the existing pre-school settings, extremely poor pedagogical knowledge of skills suitable for children, and limited professional development for Tanzanian pre-school teachers turned the intended aim of educational success into a new variety of educational malpractice. It produced a lack of confidence and independence, lack of creativity, lack of skills for problem solving and lack of socio-emotional control for Tanzania's children. This article reports how teachers currently enact the child-centred curriculum in the classroom context. The intention of this study is to gain knowledge and understanding of the importance of teaching through child-centred pedagogy for children's learning and development. The paper explores how changing societal expectations and the changing educational philosophies and subsequent pedagogy have impacted on the beliefs and practices of pre-school teachers. The paper concludes with suggestions for areas for future research in Tanzania in the field of ECEC and suitable pedagogical practices. The current research is therefore worthwhile, timely, and needed, particularly to explore pedagogical approaches.

Specifically, this study addresses the following two research questions:

1. What is the current pedagogical practice in Tanzanian early childhood education settings?
2. To what degree does current practice impact teaching and learning of young children and what should be done for future practice?

## 2. Methodology

This study is an outcome of the main thesis study carried out in two regions in Tanzania, where two schools were selected—one school in a rural region and another one in an urban area. Questions were asked regarding ECEC curriculum enactment (developed in 2005) and pedagogical practices, as well as early years education provision in the Tanzanian context. This study adopted an interpretive perspective. It took a case study approach to investigate participants' views on a child-centred curriculum and enactment of Tanzanian pre-school education. Views on child-centred curriculum and pedagogical practice were elicited from three groups of participants: A total number of 28 people participated in the study as follows: six teachers, 12 children, and four parents in one rural and one urban pre-school (local level) and six government education officials (national level). Data was generated by using individual interviews, focus group discussion, classroom observation, and documentary review. The data generation in the main study occurred from April 2013 to September 2013.

An in-depth analysis of the teachers' pedagogical practice was conducted in order to identify how they interacted with children in the classroom situation, the use of LCP on the actions and configuration of the activities, the roles of the participants, and their responsibilities. The thematic analysis approach was used in analysing qualitative data. Transcripts of dialogues were also systematically interrogated in the NVivo 10 software developed by QSR International. The data was grouped into topical themes and analysed for each participant separately. The researcher looked systematically at each individual's data and made comparison by identifying the similarities and differences between one participant and another. In addition, the documentary review data was used to supplement and clarify the interview, focus group discussion, and classroom observation data. This theoretical analysis mapped the teachers' pedagogical practices and the position of children's participation in learning activities. To enhance accuracy the researcher reviewed the data analysis in detail to ensure that the participants' intended meanings and descriptions in relation to the research focus had been captured.

Teachers in the sample were selected by the Head Teacher of the particular school, and the criteria were: teachers teaching a pre-school class and willing to participate in the study. Pre-school children for the focus group discussion were selected by their teachers and the criterion was that the pre-school child who showed interest in working with the researcher was selected. For parents the criterion was any parent and/or guardian who, it was felt could work with the researcher in her study; the Head Teachers sent the letters of invitation. A large number of parents were invited but on the day of the meeting only two parents in each school turned up.

## 3. Results

The results presented in this section are mainly based on analysis from the interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews with the Heads of schools, classroom teachers, ECE children, and parents since their points of view are the main focus of this study. However, activity plans including lesson plans and schemes of work, and policy documents were used to supplement and verify the interview data from the Head Teachers and classroom teachers. The documents were analysed to elaborate the degree to which the policy documents such as a new pre-school curriculum was included and made visible in the schools' strategy documents, activity plans, and time schedules. Also, a documentary review was done in order to understand what was suggested in the policy documents regarding the implementation of a child-centred curriculum. To achieve comparable information, the interview themes were overlapping and similar for all study participants (i.e. Head Teachers, classroom teachers, and parents). In addition, representative quotes were included, to clarify the points under discussion.

### 3.1 The Current Pedagogical Practice in Tanzanian Early Childhood Education Settings

The findings indicated that the current pedagogical practices in the classroom situation were inappropriate. During classroom observation the researcher found teachers guided children with teacher-centred approaches. All teachers from both locations mentioned the difficulties in using learner-centred pedagogy due to overcrowded classes with a sole teacher, lack of materials and facilities, children sharing one room for two streams due to lack of classrooms and lack of qualified teachers. Teachers confirmed themselves that they were not specialised in teaching pre-school classes. Teachers claimed to be aware of learner-centred pedagogies as they never attended no any professional development or orientation about the new approaches. In addition, children were not doing play-based activities as teachers had no time for supervision as they also taught Grade one pupils in primary school. For example, the following two quotes illustrate the views of classroom teachers:

*I teach by using non-participatory approaches, that is, the whole class teaching method. I write*

*alphabets, words and numbers on the blackboard and I guide them on reading as a whole class thereafter if time allows I pick one by one to read a letter or number written on the blackboard. As you have seen the number of children in the class, my class has 75 children and I am also teaching Grade one at primary school. The Head Teacher informed us to use learner-centred pedagogy but it is hard to apply it due to the poor teaching and learning environment and no orientation has been taken on how to use the new approaches [Classroom teacher, an urban area/Interview].*

*The common way of teaching here is the whole class teaching; I made songs of alphabets, so they sing in order to remember alphabets and numbers. Play-based activities are not used here because teachers have no time to supervise, even my fellow teacher her stream has a big number of children. Children need to keep in the classroom quiet when I prepare lesson and/or marking their works, so we need more teachers here [Classroom teacher, rural area/Interview].*

Teachers reported the difficulties in giving children the opportunity to be initiators of learning due to overcrowding in the classroom and no learning materials. They reported that usually they use whole class teaching methods with chorus answers and they usually use songs for counting and alphabet and sometimes they use stories. The researcher feels that with large class sizes, chorus answers may make it difficult to assess the individual child and whether he/she understands the particular lesson or not.

In addition, the researcher interviewed Head Teachers to get their views regarding the new approaches (learner-centred pedagogies) and its enactment in the classroom situation. Both Head Teachers blamed the curriculum developers of the Ministry of Education for introducing new approaches without thorough assessment in the field. They reported the situation in the classroom context was alarming with big classes with a sole and untrained teacher, and limited professional development. Head Teachers reported they just got directives from the top officials informing their teachers on using new approaches and there was no guidance. This explanation was evidenced by the government circular the researcher was shown in the Head Teachers' office. This implied top-down approaches, and inequality in decision making at the national level which did not favour the local levels. The following quote illustrate Head Teachers' views:

*Teachers still use the traditional way of teaching, the Ministry of Education through curriculum developers introduced a new pre-school curriculum in 2005 which directed teachers to use child-centred methods. Unfortunately I as a head of this school I just saw the circular of implementation of the new approaches in the office. A sole teacher with such big classes becomes difficult to use learner-centred pedagogy. I thought of indoor training but still we need expertise and materials [Head Teacher, an urban area/Interview].*

The descriptions from teachers from different locations (urban and rural) were also supported by children during focus group discussions. For example, a pupil from an urban pre-school described how the teacher oriented them in modelling letters and used repetitive songs to reinforce letter learning. The pupil commented:

*Teacher Satu normally writes letters, A, E, I, O, U on the blackboard and then she teaches us how to mention a letter thereafter guides us through songs in order to remember well. Also she teaches us to sing other letters in alphabetical order like A, B, C, D, E, F., G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z also counting, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9, and 10. So we start by reading, singing then writing, the teacher teaches us on how to formulate letters and numbers [A pupil, an urban area/ Focus group Interview].*

Other pupils from both pre-school settings also revealed their interests; however, they reported they had no opportunity to demonstrate them. The views implied that children were just following what their teachers instructed them to do, but in their heart it is probable they were not willing carry out the instructions as they were different from their needs and interests. Comments were:

*I like drawing, playing football and other plays like running, playing soccer, driving models of cars which we make by using boxes with my friends at home but here in our school no playing grounds for children. Teacher Satu told us not to go to the older pupils' playing grounds; you know older pupils can hurt us, so we need children's play grounds [A pupil, an urban area/Focus group interview].*

*Teacher Msimighutwa teaches us writing, reading, and arithmetic but I like much drawings, sports and games and playing with my friends [A pupil, rural area/ Focus group Interview].*

*During writing I become tired because I put my exercise books on my thighs or on the dust floor so my hand writing is bad and my notebook become dirty with dust, look my dress is also with dust. And if I fail to finish writing on time the teacher beats me [A pupil, rural area/ Focus group interview].*

With reference to the quotes narrated above, the findings indicate that children were limited in demonstrating their abilities through activity-based play. Instead teachers taught through teacher-centred pedagogies which were not friendly to children's learning and development. In this situation it may become difficult to identify the individual talents of children as they have no chance to reveal them. This argument is supported by an urban teacher, who reported:

*Child-centred pedagogy has the potential for promoting children's creativity, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, learning dispositions as well as socio-emotional development skills [Classroom Teacher, an urban area/Interview].*

Another observation in the documentary review was that teachers in the urban area had the lesson plan and scheme of work prepared before the lesson. While teachers in the rural area were preparing lessons when they were in the class and no previous preparations for lessons was found. The researcher suspected that they may have started preparing during her presence. The rural teachers, when asked why they did not prepare their lessons in advance, responded that they were not preparing lessons every time because sometimes when they went into the classroom the situation does not allow them to accomplish what they planned. This view runs counter to the principles of teaching and learning which needs teachers to plan the lesson in advance and let the children be the initiators of the tasks in the learning environment.

### 3.2 The Extent of How Far the Current Practices Impact Teaching and Learning of Young Children

The findings indicated that current pedagogical practices impacted on the meaningful learning of children. This was evidenced through classroom observation. For instance, the data indicated that in the rural area school there were 195 children with two teachers. In one stream there were 98 children and the other one had 97 children. So the ratio was 1:98 while the recommended ratio is 1:25 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), 2012). The large number of children in one class contributes to the teacher not being able to make a follow-up for each child. It would be difficult to apply LCP in an overcrowded classroom like that. For more evidence see the following conversation between teacher and children in a classroom lesson. The teaching process of a teacher in the rural area; it was a lesson of 45 minutes and she started the lesson at 10.15 am.

**Teacher:** Good morning children

**Children:** Good morning madam *Msimighutwa*

**Teacher:** Do you remember what I taught to you Yesterday?

**Children:** Nooooo...! Yes .....! Noooooo!... ..yes.....,Me I did come teacher, I was sick....

**Teacher:** Okay, listen to me please! Keep quite, listen children..... Efrem, Atanas, Nestory, Judith, Ernest, quite please.....! Come here in front kneel down, you are always trouble-makers, promise before others that you will change your bad behaviour accordingly. Okay, today we are going to learn alphabets starting from A, B, C, D....up to Z, I will begin by mentioning a letter then all children follow me to mention the same. Okay.....!

**Children:** Yes teacher; (some children shouted), teacher, teacher, look Lydia and Anifa are going outside, (another child), teacher, teacher.....look here.....James is beating me.....teacher, teacher look these two boys are pushing me.....!

**Teacher:** You children sit down, Lydia and Anifa why are you going out without my permission? Come back, I beat you.....James stand up.....!

In this class the teacher faced difficulties in management and she just taught for 20 minutes instead of 45 minutes. Twenty five minutes was lost with classroom management and she said that it is difficult to handle a class of 98 children alone. This implies that meaningful learning for children in such a situation cannot take place. Furthermore, an observation was conducted with another stream in the same pre-school setting in the rural area. The intention was to observe how child-centred learning approaches were enacted in the classroom situation. The teacher wrote numbers on the blackboard from 1-20. Below is the lesson in progress:

**Teacher:** All children stand up!

**Children:** We are standing up!

**Teacher:** Count the numbers on the blackboard from 1 up to 20!

**Children:** One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, *fifteen*, *eighteen*, *sixteen*, *fourteen*, *twenty*.

The researcher observed children started counting correctly up to thirteen: from fourteen they were just following the child who starts to vocalise a certain number whether correct or not and it was not correct sequence of numbering. Then the teacher ordered them to follow her counting from one up to twenty in a chorus form. Having seen the situation and not being satisfied with such learning, the researcher was interested to know if pupils were aware of the figures for the numbers they were uttering. Therefore, just for interest she communicated in a friendly way with the teacher for further analysis. Thereafter, the teacher called four children randomly and said:

**Teacher:** Jesca, Hamphrey, Neema and Michael come in front with your exercise books.

**Children:** Yes, Madam Rebeca.

**Teacher:** Please, write in your exercise books in figures the following numbers; eight, nine, ten and eleven.

**Jesca:** I don't know, teacher, show me please so that I can copy the figures.....!

**Humphrey:** I don't know.

**Neema:** ..... (*Silence*)

**Michael:** I will ask my brother *Nicholaus* to help in home.

In the classroom observation the researcher investigated through the analysis of teachers' actions and practices. Through observations children seemed not to be aware of the numerical figures which the teacher had just guided them to sound. It seemed like a common song and children were not aware of the content. This implies that the teacher lacked pedagogical skills on how to work with young children. This kind of teaching could be termed as just passing time and does not create meaningful learning for children. No matter what philosophy underlies a pre-school curriculum, or what methodologies are on the cutting edge of classroom practice, the findings indicated that teachers only taught according to their attitudes, beliefs, and how they know; no clear assessment tools were evidenced as there were no pupils' progress reports.

Furthermore, respondents claimed that there is a need for curriculum developers and policy planners to do an evaluation and assessment of the pre-school curriculum to ensure quality practice. For example a classroom teacher commented, "*Since the curriculum was developed on 2005 no curriculum review has been taken place, there is a need for government to do an evaluation in order to ensure the quality practice*" [Classroom Teacher, Classroom teacher, rural area/Interview]. It would seem from the the data that more emphasis needs to be placed on the system level failures and not the teachers, per se; and how the educational systems are failing to support teachers and what are the immediate supports needed.

#### 4. Discussion

This article aimed to investigate the current and future pedagogical practices in early childhood education and care in Tanzania. The intention was to understand the current pedagogical practices of teachers in the classroom contexts, having introduced a learner-centred pedagogy in the new pre-school education curriculum developed in 2005. The new curriculum located an emphasis on the use of learner-centred pedagogies for children's learning and development. The findings indicated that the study participants appreciated having an ECEC curriculum; however, they reported the enactment of child-centred pedagogy in the classroom situation was problematic. The classroom teachers continued teaching using traditional methods i.e teacher-centred pedagogy as they used to do before the new curriculum development introduced LCP. They reported the main reason as a lack of human and physical resources such as large class sizes with a sole teacher, lack of qualification of pre-school teachers who could use pedagogical skills on working with young children, limited professional development; curriculum materials did not reach teachers in the field, and lack of facilities in classrooms.

Teaching and learning was formal and structured (teacher-centred pedagogy), it did not provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their creativity, exploration, and problem solving so that they could develop their potential and possibilities for life. From this line of argument, a study by Isaacs (2010) argued that education should no longer consist of imparting knowledge; it must instead take a new track seeking the release of children's potential, creativity, and problem solving. Importantly, children need to learn through practising tasks rather than through listening and having to memorise (Isaacs, 2010, Al-Zu'be, 2013, Herbert, 2004).

The findings regarding the lack of a good teaching and learning environment and pedagogical skills of teachers who could use LCP was significant. All sound teaching of children in early childhood is based upon understanding of how young children learn. Lack of knowledge of pedagogical skills impacted on teachers' teaching practice which is likely to lead to poor quality pre-school education. As asserted by Ableser (2003) when teachers' pedagogical skills are more explicit, they will tend to guide children more fully and to respond to children's queries more sensitively. It is true that teachers' sound knowledge of pedagogical skills and approaches is important when they teach; content knowledge alone is not enough to provide children with high-quality teaching in practice (Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Mtika and Gates, 2010, O'Sullivan, 2004). High-quality and expert teachers not only know the subject matter, but also know how to guide and orientate children towards spontaneous learning. Teachers require pedagogical knowledge as well as an understanding of the content of the lesson so that young children could get meaningful learning needed for their future life. These findings inform us of the benefits that teachers' knowledge of LCP is crucial to the child's success. The findings demonstrate that teachers who are knowledgeable and have an understanding of LCP can promote children's problem solving, critical thinking, inquisitive skills, and in non-cognitive skills such as social-emotional skills, persistence skills, motivational skills, psychomotor skills, and self-regulation skills.

It is theorised in literature that principles of teaching and learning emphasise the "holistic nature of children's learning and development, the importance of developing autonomy, intrinsic motivation and self-discipline through the encouragement of child-initiated, self-directed activity, the value of first-hand experiences, and the crucial role in children's development" (Whitebread, 2008), and how these principles and ideas are translated into practical activities in the classroom context. During classroom observation it was revealed that children worked alone on questions relating to the teacher's presentation. It would have been advantageous for children to work together in groups or pairs as per the demand and purpose of the subject learning activity. In

this way, teaching and learning becomes an enjoyable, friendly, active and rewarding activity, hence making it easier for the children to understand the lesson as they are actively involved in the learning. Previous studies indicate the child-centred teaching approach is more advantageous than the teacher-centred approach (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Bartlett and Mogusu, 2013, Herbert, 2004). The learners tend to have an easier time studying in a child-centred teaching system because they have the freedom to engage in spontaneous learning and to learn from each other through interaction with peers and teachers/adults. With LCP children are actively involved since they work in groups or individually to arrive at the desired results. Children take part in communication with peers and adults/teachers, hence developing their communicative skills as they learn from their own or peer's mistakes (Maldonado-Carreño and Votruba-Drzal, 2011, Massey, 2004). This view implies that both the teacher and the learners engage in learning activities together. The children in their tasks and/or discussion engage their teachers and this way, the two parties learn from each other. The teachers also get to learn from the children. With the learner-centred approach, the teacher and the learner are both active participants since they share the learning activities. This may help teachers identify any learning difficulties the children have. Understanding teacher-child, child-child relationships in the learning processes, and how teachers are involved with children to ensure that their needs are met is significant (Massey, 2004).

On the other hand, the teacher-centred approach portrays children as basically passive while the teachers are active since teachers are the main focus in this method. This is not sensible since the teachers are familiar with the lesson while the learners are not (Al-Zu'be, 2013). This was evidenced during classroom observation where learners were less engaged in learning process. The curriculum relied on the teachers' attitudes and experiences whereas children took only a receptive role in the learning. Teachers acted as knowledge transmitters, while the children acted as receivers (Al-Zu'be, 2013, Herbert, 2004). The study findings have shown that with the teacher-centred approach, it is the teacher who chooses and decides on what topics to teach the pupils. The teacher also exercised the power to decide how and when to teach the topics depending on her/his views and attitude. Children who are the initiators of the curriculum were not given an opportunity or mandate to take the topics of their choice and remained passive, waiting for instructions from teachers as discussed above. The findings extend our understanding that the teacher-centred approach does not give room for interactive discussions since the teacher is in control of the class and he/she is the only one who passes the message to the learners and there are no discussions.

The results have further revealed that teaching with a teacher-centred approach limits the assessments of children's learning because of the difficulty of making close follow-ups of each individual child. Teachers may not be able to discover the weaknesses of the children or areas children did not understand in the course of learning and are therefore not able to find a way of making a point clear. As asserted by Al-Zu'be (2013) assessments of children's learning plays a great role in diagnosing and promoting learning among the pupils, and the desired learning is directly tested through children's portfolios, performances, and projects. In the Tanzanian pre-schools of this study this appears not to be the case.

What is clearly the case, however, is that all these concerns and challenges including unqualified early year's teachers working with our young children and no professional development continue to decrease the status and quality of early years education provision. There is a shortage of resources to ensure that our young children are being educated by qualified teachers and other educators who are better trained and more professionally prepared. Hence, the observed pedagogical practices impacted teaching and learning of young children, it was likely no meaningful learning was taking place but rather teachers were just passing time.

## 5. Conclusion

From the perceptions of Head Teachers, classroom teachers and pre-school children discussed above, it can be concluded that child-centred pedagogy has the potential for promoting children's creativity, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, learning dispositions as well as socio-emotional/behavioural development skills. This can be achieved when relevant and varied activities with available resources are used, and when interaction is encouraged during the teaching-learning process. Teachers' pedagogical skills are important because such knowledge may inform us about the benefits of developing a whole child in all aspects of learning.

Since there is no pre-school curriculum review has been taken place since it was developed on 2005. This study recommends that government policy makers and curriculum developers need to do an evaluation and assessment of the pre-school curriculum to ensure quality practice, as well as to gain understanding of whether the approaches suggested in the 2005 curriculum are attainable in the field. Also, in the future there needs to be a greater government commitment and spending on training more teachers in initial teacher education. Alongside this, emphasis should be placed on the provision of professional development, and improving teaching and learning materials and facilities. For meaningful learning in early childhood education and care, teachers should be trained in a learner-centred pedagogy. The findings suggest that creativity, problem solving, and inquisitiveness in children, among other things, can be promoted when children are involved actively in interactions with teachers/adults and with their peers. This study stresses the importance of children's



participation in planning their learning tasks and the evaluation of this learning by using suitable, developmentally appropriate assessment tools.

Overall this study locates more emphasis on a curriculum review; curriculum review would lead to improvement in practice. More teachers are needed to reduce the workload and reduce class sizes, as well as professional development for the existing teaching workforce and improvements in initial teacher education. ECEC stakeholders need to think about creating new ideas and concepts in their curriculum framework rather than holding old outdated ideas (Yelland, 2010). In addition there is a need for an intervention study to evaluate the enactment of a child-centred curriculum in a play context with a variety of playing materials made by local teachers, parents, and community. Teaching methods could include drawings, simulation, role play, storytelling, songs, local dances, games, and cultural aspects. The intention would be to develop children's critical thinking after intervention.

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