Head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies in supporting children's transition from pre-primary to primary school in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explored strategies to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. It employed a case study design, and semi-structured interviews were administered to nine head teachers and nine pre-primary school teachers from nine public primary schools in Mpwapwa and Chemba District, Tanzania. The collected data were subjected to content analysis. The study's findings revealed that the provision of teaching and learning resources, stakeholder or community engagement, teacher motivation, a supportive school culture, and learning follow-up are essential pedagogical leadership strategies employed by head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. The study recommends the implementation of pre-headship training programmes and in-service training on Early Childhood Education (ECE) management for head teachers, as well as the provision of increased budgetary allocations for pre-primary education. Since this study was conducted in the pre-primary educational aspect, the study also recommends conducting further research on other aspects of school readiness in an attempt to enable children to easily navigate the transition process into the education system.

Keywords: Head teacher, pedagogical leadership, pre-primary school, primary school, transition

Introduction

The children's transition from pre-primary to primary school is an important milestone and a crucial period for children's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical growth and development (Mabagala & Shukia, 2019). As such, the provision of high-quality early childhood education and care is inevitable for an effective transition process for children. Tanzania also recognizes the importance of quality pre-primary education as a basic step in enhancing children's foundational learning skills and their preparation for the learning process (URT, 2016). This recognition is reflected in various policy provisions such as the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 1995 and the subsequent ETP of 2014 which was revised in 2023.

To implement the global vision of Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.2, which aims to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood

development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030, Tanzania introduced a one-year compulsory pre-primary education under its Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 (Mabagala & Shukia, 2019). As a result, the implementation of this policy led to increased children's participation and access to pre-primary education services in Tanzania. Recently, local and international reports indicate that Tanzania is among the nations in Sub-Saharan Africa that celebrate the high rate of access and grade-to-grade transition from pre-primary to primary school (Hakielimu, 2019; The World Bank, 2016). Despite recommendable success in access and grade-to-grade transition, the available empirical evidence shows that the country still faces challenges in the quality of learning and low learning outcomes among pre-primary children (Education International & Tanzania Teachers' Union, 2017; Haki Elimu, 2017; Mabagala and Shukia, 2019; Ndijuye, Mligo, and Machumu, 2020; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018).

Educators and researchers in early childhood education recognize the significance of effective leadership in enhancing the quality of education in early learning settings (Cheung, Keung, Kwan, and Cheung, 2019). Research has shown that head teachers enhance the high-quality of early childhood education (ECE) programs (Cheung et al., 2019) and support children's growth and learning (Fonsén, Lahtinen, Sillman and Reunamo, 2022; Gibson et al., 2020). As a result, there is a growing global reliance on head teachers to lead pedagogy in early childhood learning settings (Aubrey, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008).

The available evidence indicates that head teachers' pedagogical leadership skills are critical organisational assets in determining overall school success and children's achievement (Peko et al., 2009 as cited in Varga et al., 2020). As school visionary leaders, head teachers determine the quality of education services to be given to learners (Boe & Hongnestad, 2016) and also they create a conducive school climate for teaching and learning (Douglas, 2019). Not only this but they also determine the organisation's performance, quality of service, and innovation within the school (Suaka & Kuranchie, 2018).

According to Varga et al. (2020), pedagogical leadership involves direct and indirect influences by head teachers on students' achievements through their support of teaching and learning processes. It includes supporting staff professional development and learning, creating trusting relationships with and among staff, facilitating peer learning, promoting the implementation of curriculum and assessment, and structuring the work environment to support all of these aspects (Cheung et al., 2019; Douglas, 2019). It also involves establishing positive family and community partnerships for successive children's learning. Douglas (2019) reveals that strategies such as leadership preparation and credentials, leader recruitment, leadership development and quality improvement, workplace support for leaders, and social contexts for leadership enhance head teachers' capacity to exercise pedagogical leadership roles.

Extensive research indicates that head teachers often lack the necessary pre-headship training, highlighting a significant concern within the education sector (Nemes, 2013; Suaka & Kuranchie, 2018; Zadock, 2022). For instance, in Sweden head teachers can be appointed without the necessary qualifications despite being recognized as school pedagogical leaders (Rapp, 2010). Rapp further explains that principals have a

weak foundation for exercising pedagogical leadership roles and do not consider themselves responsible for students' learning. On the contrary, countries such as Hungary, Lithuania, Catalonia, England, and Slovenia provide specific training for teachers who are appointed as school heads (Kayiwa, 2011; Rapp, 2010). For instance, in England, becoming a head teacher requires one to be a qualified teacher as the primary goal of a head teacher is to enhance effective teaching (Rapp, 2010). Therefore, alongside the administrative responsibilities, the head teacher is responsible for students' performance.

In Tanzania, the pre-primary education curriculum designates head teachers as the school-based authority responsible for implementing, monitoring, evaluating, supervising, and ensuring quality (URT, 2016). Despite such critical roles being assigned to head teachers, several empirical studies conducted in Tanzania have indicated that primary schools are faced with an inadequate number of qualified head teachers who can take on their headship duties effectively (Mabagala & Shukia, 2019; Nemes, 2013; Zadock, 2022). Kalyalya (2017) adds that most head teachers are not conversant enough with their roles and responsibilities due to the lack of proper pre-headship training before being appointed as head teachers. Instead, the head teachers are appointed based on factors such as education qualifications, work experience, gender, school location, without undergoing the necessary pre-headship training program (Nemes, 2013). As such, the head teachers lack appropriate supervision skills for pre-primary classes (Cosmas, 2010; Zadock, 2022).

Furthermore, empirical findings indicate that pre-primary children in Tanzania's education system exhibit low levels of competencies in various areas, with only 40% demonstrating adequate socialisation skills, 30% showing basic skills in the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), and 15% exhibiting awareness of the school environment. The other aspects in which pre-primary children demonstrate low levels of competencies include language mastery (10%), and children's ability to introduce themselves to significant people in their lives (5%) (Education International & Tanzania Teachers' Union, 2017). Scholars (Cheung et al. (2019; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008) support the fact that effective leadership is essential in improving the quality of early childhood education and provision of care, which in turn, leads to better outcomes for the children. The presence of significantly low learning outcomes among pre-primary children within the Tanzanian education system serves as evidence that the implementation and supervision of the pre-primary curriculum by head teachers is inadequate.

Despite being a critical factor for ensuring quality early childhood education and improving children's learning outcomes, school leadership is less explored compared to other factors such as pedagogical practices, policy issues, instruction and teachers' knowledge, learning environment, and learning resources in the pre-primary education sector in Tanzania (Mabagala and Shukia, 2019; Mligo, Mitchell and Bell, 2016; Ndijuye & Rao, 2018). Nevertheless, there are few available studies, such as the one by Zadock (2022) that focus on the leadership aspect of early childhood education in Tanzania. This study emphasises the importance of improving teaching skills among pre-primary

teachers. However, the study is silent regarding the head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies in supporting children's effective transition.

Based on the former empirical studies, it is evident that researchers have paid less attention to head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies in supporting the children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. Due to this research gap, the researcher deemed the topic practical for exploration. To address this gap, the study aimed to answer the question: "What pedagogical leadership strategies do head teachers use to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school?"

Undertaking a systematic exploration of head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies in supporting children's transition from pre-primary to primary school is considered a timely decision. This is due to the insufficient empirical evidence on the strategies employed by head teachers to facilitate effective transitions for pre-primary children. The lack of such evidence may contribute to suboptimal learning outcomes and a deficiency in grade-level competencies as these children progress from pre-primary to primary school. It may also limit the attainment of pre-primary education objectives in Tanzania. The study aims to contribute to the field of early childhood education by identifying critical pedagogical leadership strategies used by head teachers in supporting children's transition from pre-primary to primary education.

Theoretical framework

This study was informed by the pedagogical leadership model proposed by Fonsen (2014). According to Fonsen, the pedagogical leadership model is built on five dimensions: value, context, organisational culture, professionalism, and management of substance. These dimensions are key factors for successful pedagogical leadership. The value dimension, for example, is based on the understanding that pedagogy serves as the primary value influencing all decisions made by leaders (Fonsen, 2014). In relation to this study, the model implies that head teachers have a wide range of competing responsibilities (administrative, management, and pedagogical roles). Thus, the head teachers as school pedagogical leaders need to have an equal balance between management and pedagogical responsibilities. Balancing their competing roles provides head teachers with the opportunity to engage equally in the school's pedagogical processes, including transitional practices for pre-primary children.

On the other hand, the context refers to the operating environment. According to the model, the context includes both micro and macro levels of operation (Fonsen, 2014). Thus, in supporting children's transition at the micro level, the head teachers who are school pedagogical leaders, need to create school structures that support the children's transition, setting school purpose for transition and mobilising resources for supporting the transition. At the macro level, head teachers must also be aware of guiding policies in the provision of Early Childhood Education, as well as the values and attitudes of society regarding children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. Organisational culture focuses on the interaction networks within a school, such as peer interaction and teacher-child interaction that are established to support children's transition. It also encompasses the school's cultural structures, such as

creating a collaborative atmosphere, fostering teamwork, and building a sense of community among school members to aid in the children's transition. Additionally, it includes school professional development programs aimed at enhancing the support for children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. Thus, well-established school cultural patterns help pre-primary children to develop a sense of acceptance within the school community and facilitate their smooth adjustment in school settings.

Professionalism, which is the pedagogical leadership dimension, focuses on the leaders' professional skills for management (Fonsén, 2013). Without sufficient professional management skills, it is impossible to master the leadership skills necessary for leading the pedagogy (Fonsen, 2014). Consequently, in helping and supporting children's successful transition, head teachers need to have sufficient professional management skills such as time management, task or work management and leadership skills for managing the provision of pre-primary education and its pedagogy.

Another tenet of the theoretical model is the management of substance which refers to the leader's ability to manage educational knowledge (Fonsen, 2014). Head teachers, as school pedagogical leaders, need to have a clear understanding of the direction that will enable them to effectively lead pre-primary pedagogy and interpret the pre-primary curriculum. To enhance the effective implementation of the pre-primary curriculum and pedagogy that supports children's transition, head teachers need to possess technical knowledge of pre-primary pedagogy. Additionally, they should have both theoretical and practical knowledge in the provision of Early Childhood Education. Moreover, they must demonstrate a strong desire for personal development and a commitment to advancing the pedagogy leadership.

Research Methods

Research approach and design

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. This approach allows researchers to study phenomena in their natural settings, aiming to make sense of or interpret these phenomena based on the meanings that people ascribe to them. To understand the study topic from the participants' lived experiences, the current study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Schoch (2020) views a case study as an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context. For this reason, a case study design was employed to get an in-depth understanding of head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies used to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. In the context of the current study, the focus of exploration was the head teachers' pedagogical leadership strategies. The unit of analysis comprised head teachers and pre-primary class teachers.

Study Area

This study was conducted in Mpwapwa and Chemba Districts in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. The selection of the two districts was based on previous research findings which significantly indicate low learning outcomes among pre-primary children in the Districts. From the surveyed schools in the study area, the findings

revealed significantly low achievement in learning outcomes among pre-primary children. These outcomes included socialisation skills (40%), basic skills, particularly the 3Rs (30%), and awareness of the school environment (15%). Additionally, Language mastery was found to be at 10% and children's ability to introduce themselves and to significant people in their lives was found to be at 5% (Education International & Tanzania Teachers' Union, 2017). With these reasons, the two districts were considered relevant locations for data collection on the head teachers' pedagogical leadership practices in supporting the children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. The focus was on the head teachers, as they are responsible for creating a conducive learning environment and overseeing the educational process from pre-primary to primary school (URT, 2016).

Research participants and sample selection

Schoch (2020) argues that the samples in case study design are typically small, hence their selection is based on information-rich cases from which the researcher can have an in-depth understanding of the case under study (Yin, 2018). To achieve the purpose of the current study, eighteen (18) participants were involved, including nine (9) head teachers and nine (9) pre-primary class teachers. The participants were purposively selected based on their leadership and teaching roles in their respective schools. The total of six (6) out of nine (9) head teachers were males, whereas the three (3) head teachers were females. Among the nine (9) head teachers, two (2) head teachers had training in ECE. On the other hand, among nine (9) selected pre-primary class teachers, two (2) class teachers were males whereas seven (7) class teachers were females. With the exception of three (3) pre-primary class teachers, six (6) pre-primary class teachers were trained in pre-primary education.

The sample size of the current study was determined by the principle of data saturation. This implies that the researcher stops to gather new information if the results turn out as predicted are sufficient enough (Yin, 2018). In this study, the sample size of eighteen (18) participants was considered reasonable in understanding the pedagogical leadership strategies employed by head teachers in supporting the children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. Additionally, nine (9) public primary schools from two districts were purposively selected based on specific criteria. The selection criteria included the presence of a pre-primary class, the location of the school (rural or urban), and school performance (high or low performance). The referred schools were obtained with the support of the office of the District Education Officer (DEO) from two districts.

Data collection procedures

The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect the data from the head teachers and pre-primary class teachers. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to get rich information within a designed scope by enabling the researcher to improvise follow-up questions based on the participants' responses (Polit & Beck, 2010). The opportunity to improvise the follow-up questions allowed the researcher to explore more insights into the study phenomenon from the participants. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews which were conducted within the school setting. The interview sessions ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in order to allow in-depth exploration of the study topic. The interviews were audio recorded subject to

participants' permission. To get in-depth insights of the participants on the phenomenon under study, the interview sessions were conducted in Swahili language which seemed to be well-known among the participants. Additionally, to maintain consistency in exploring the phenomenon, the researcher developed interview guide protocols consisting of open-ended questions. These questions enabled the researcher to gather in-depth data and seek clarification, add details, or request further elaboration during the interview sessions.

Data analysis

This study employed inductive content analysis in analysing the collected data as proposed by (Bengtsson, 2016). According to Bengtsson, content analysis involves four stages which are: decontextualisation, recontextualisation, categorization and compilation. Before beginning the data analysis process, the collected data were transcribed and later translated into English by the language specialists from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Dodoma. The language specialists were employed in an attempt to maintain the original meaning of the interview transcripts.

When the task of translating the data from Swahili to English was over, the decontextualization process began. This involved reading and re-reading the various qualitative data sets generated through the interviews to become familiar with the data. After becoming familiar with the data, the next step was to develop meaning units, which served as the initial codes. To enhance the reliability of the codes, the researcher employed multiple coder systems, in which three different coders independently developed initial codes from the same data set. The coding process was conducted inductively based on the collected data, with the guiding research question being revisited to align with the insights emerging from the data set. The initial codes from three coders were merged by the researcher in an attempt to create the common working codes.

Having developed the codes, the researcher embarked on the recontextualisation stage. At this stage, the researcher re-read the original text alongside the developed meaning units (initial codes). This was done by the researcher to check whether all aspects of the content about the aim of the study were covered or not. The information which did not correspond to the aim of the study was excluded at this stage. After the recontextualisation stage, the researcher embarked on the categorization stage. At this stage, the researcher made sense of the data by grouping similar codes into content areas related to the study, guided by the questions used in the data collection process. The grouping of the codes into specific content areas led to the emergence of themes. The process of categorization was concluded when a reasonable explanation was reached aligned with the study's aim. Finally, the researcher proceeded to the compilation stage. In this stage, emerging findings from the data were presented in the form of summaries and narratives which were illustrated with examples and quotations that captured the participants' insights and lived experiences on the research topic.

Trustworthiness In the current study, credibility was achieved through environmental triangulation. Data on the same phenomenon were collected from multiple contexts.

Additionally, prolonged engagement was ensured by asking follow-up questions and encouraging participants to support their insights with examples. The aspect of transferability was achieved through provision of thick description of the current phenomenon under study through examples and quotations of the participants' insights. On the other hand, the aspect of dependability was achieved through an in-depth methodological description of the conduct of the current study and the aspect of confirmability was achieved through grounding the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of participants' own views.

Ethical issues

To uphold ethical standards during the study, the researcher ensured that all ethical guidelines and protocols were carefully observed throughout the research process. These include obtaining the research clearance from the University of Dodoma, which was submitted to relevant authorities where the study was carried out in order to obtain a research permit. Informed consent was obtained from the participants by having them sign consent agreement forms. Additionally, the researcher adhered to confidentiality requirements by providing and signing confidentiality forms with the participants. Anonymity for head teachers, teachers, and schools was ensured by using letters and numbers to identify them.

Results

The current study aimed to explore the pedagogical leadership strategies employed by head teachers in supporting children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. The table below summarises the participants' responses regarding the pedagogical leadership strategies used by head teachers in supporting preschool children's transition from pre-primary to primary school.

Table 1: head teachers' leadership strategies in children's transition trajectories

Category	Participants' Responses
Provision of teaching and learning resources	● Books ● Teaching aids ● Playing materials
Stakeholders/community engagement	● Community involvement ● Parents' engagement
Teachers' motivation	● Recognition ● Appreciation ● Teachers' workload
Supportive school culture	● Teamwork ● Teachers' support ● Peers' support ● Distributed leadership
Learning follow-up	● Classroom observation ● Checking instructional documents ● Learning participation

Source Fieldwork (2023)

Provision of teaching and learning resources

Based on the interview results presented in the table above, the study participants hold the view that the provision of learning resources constitutes one of the pedagogical leadership strategies employed by the head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary education. In this regard, both head teachers and pre-primary class teachers agreed that interacting with quality and sufficient learning resources in pre-primary classes provides children with opportunities to acquire and develop the necessary grade-level skills for future school learning. Additionally, the study findings revealed that children who are exposed to quality and sufficient learning resources acquire skills related to effective resource use, interactive skills, critical thinking, creativity, interpretation, visual, and emotional skills. Such skills help children to negotiate and adjust with other next levels of the learning process. The participants identified books, teaching aids, and playing materials as the teaching and learning resources provided by head teachers in helping and supporting pre-primary children in developing grade-level competencies as they transition from pre-primary to primary school. During the interview, one of the participants from School 3 shared this:

> For pre-primary children to acquire and master school-related skills, they need to interact with various learning materials. As they frequently interact with learning resources, they develop the ability to use them and develop interaction and emotional skills. So, in order to support a successful transition among pre-primary children, I ensure the availability of various teaching and learning resources such as books, playing materials and teaching aids for pre-primary class (Interview with head teacher from school 3, May 2023).

Another participant added that:

> Effective learning for children depends on the teaching and learning resources that they are exposed to. Resources support in building critical thinking and creativity skills as the children are in the transition period. Although we lack enough budget, the head teacher tries to provide learning resources for pre-primary classes (Interview with a pre-primary class teacher from school 9, May 2023).

With regard to the above verbatim responses, it is evident that the provision of sufficient and quality learning resources constitutes a powerful strategy for supporting pre-primary children in building grade-level competence as they transition from pre-primary to primary school. These resources also support the holistic development of children, making it easier for them to navigate and effectively adjust to primary school settings. Furthermore, the assertion above suggests that schools lack sufficient funds to adequately support the pre-primary children with the necessary learning resources during the transition period.

Stakeholders or community engagement

The findings of the current study revealed that head teachers support children's transition by promoting engagement. Specifically, the participants named the parents' school visit, parents-teachers' meetings and teacher-parent interaction as the key strategies that head teachers employ to enhance parents and community participation

in children's transition process. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the community's or parents' engagement in the transition process increases the children's attendance in the programme. Additionally, provision of school requirements such as exercise books, pencils, and school uniforms as well as supporting children through shared reading at home and improving school infrastructures improved children's transition. In supporting this argument, one of the participants from school 1 had the following to comment:

> At this level, we need collective responsibility for supporting children to acquire and develop school-related skills and the head teacher is doing a good job in this aspect. He always argues for the parents' engagement. Currently, we get good support from the parents and children's attendance has increased compared to the past. Nowadays, the parents come at school to make a follow-up of their children's learning progress and they, sometimes, show an interest in how they can support their children at home (Interview with pre-primary class teacher from school 1, May, 2023).

Regarding community engagement another participant had this to share:

> Financing pre-primary education is still a challenge. You need to know that this level of education needs a lot of materials and equipment of which the school cannot afford to finance alone. So, in creating a conducive environment for primary school learning among the children, the parents' involvement is inevitable. The parents should support us with the learning resources and improving infrastructures for pre-primary children's effective transition (Interview with head teacher from school 2, May 2023).

With reference to the above quotations, it can be established that schools need to recognize the roles played by parents and community members during children's transition. This will make schools have transition programmes that are more meaningful and contextually relevant for pre-primary children.

In contributing to parents' engagement in supporting children's transition, one of the participants from school 4 shared the following observation:

> What I see in this community is ignorance of the importance of pre-primary education. They never respond to whatever they will be asked regarding improving the learning conditions. Others say that education is fee-free so why should they be asked to improve the learning conditions (Interview with pre-primary class teacher from school 4, May, 2023).

From the verbatim quote above, it can be concluded that some schools experience limited parental engagement in the children's transition process due to parents' lack of awareness about the importance of pre-primary education and the misinterpretation of the fee-free basic education policy.

Teachers' motivation

Furthermore, insights gained from in-depth interviews with the participants indicated that the aspect of motivation was among the strategies employed by head teachers to support children's transition process from pre-primary to primary school. Specifically, the findings showed that teachers develop a sense of being valued, accepted and recognized when motivated by their head teachers. Owing to such feelings, teachers tend to demonstrate strong morale and a willingness to actively engage in supporting children through effective transition practices. The study findings further revealed that the common strategies employed by head teachers in motivating pre-primary class teachers include teachers' reduced workload, recognition, and appreciation for good performance. In supporting this aspect of teachers' motivation, a pre-primary class teacher from school 7 gave the following comment:

> Although we are few, the head teacher has exempted me from other duties such as taking sessions in upper classes in order to get enough time to prepare the learning resources for pre-primary children. With such recognition from the head teacher, I really feel indebted to support pre-primary children (Interview with a pre-primary class teacher from school 7, May 2023).

Another participant also added:
> We have more than one hundred children in a pre-primary class. As head teacher, I always recognize and appreciate her tireless efforts in supporting these children. So, as a school, we have agreed to exempt her from the teachers' weekly duty roster in order to motivate her to keep on supporting and helping the pre-primary children (Interview with a head teacher from school 5, May 2023).

Interpretation of the above assertions suggests that head teachers' motivational strategies have both a direct impact on teachers in fulfilling their daily professional responsibilities and duties and an indirect impact on children's learning process and outcomes.

Supportive school culture for transition

The analysis of the interview data revealed that head teachers play a key role in supporting children's transition from pre-primary to primary school by cultivating a school culture that is conducive to the transition process. Furthermore, the findings indicated that head teachers create organisational structures that promote interaction and learning, ensuring a seamless transition for the children. Specifically, the study pointed out teachers' support, teamwork, distributed leadership and peers' support as organisational structures that support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. In an interview, one of the participants remarked that:
> For the pre-primary children to have smooth adjustment to school settings, it depends much on the role played by the people surrounding such children. So, as a school head, I always argue and ask the teachers and pupils in upper classes to support these children. For example, we have already told the pupils in upper classes to support the pre-primary children as they cross the road and when

playing with them (Interview with headteacher form school 1, May, 2023).

Another participant added that:
> It is difficult to be in every aspect of the school learning process. I have allowed our pre-primary class teacher to handle some administrative matters for the pre-primary children (Interview with head teacher from school 5, May, 2023).

Moreover, in supporting school culture, another participant shared the following sentiments:
> The head teacher always argues that we need to work as a team in the preparation of these children. For example, in our pre-primary days, the parents, teachers, and pupils in upper classes would join hands to prepare the teaching and learning resources for pre-primary classes (Interview with a pre-primary class teacher from school 9, May, 2023).

With reference to the above verbatim responses, it can be concluded that schools with well-established supportive school structures for transition allow children to easily navigate and effectively adjust to primary school settings. It also allows them to learn easily the school related skills and practices compared to those who are exposed to schools that lack supportive school structures or cultures for transition.

Learning follow-up

The study findings revealed that another pedagogical leadership strategy employed by head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school was conducting follow-ups on the teaching and learning process. Classroom observation, checking of instructional documents and participation in learning activities were cited as strategies employed by head teachers to support children's transition process. In supporting this argument, one of the participants remarked that:
> I normally conduct classroom observation in order to determine how teachers engage and interact with children in attaining the curriculum goal for pre-primary children (Interview with a head teacher from school 4, May 2023).

The head teacher's voice constitutes evidence that head teachers fulfil one part of their duties of observing curriculum implementation. However, the voice does not inform about the outcome of their observation which can help the pre-primary class teachers in improving their classroom practices, thus supporting effective transition from pre-primary to primary school among children.

On the other hand, one of the head teachers from school 7 had the following comment regarding learning follow-up:

> As school quality assurer, it is my role to check the teacher's instructional documents such as scheme of work and lesson plan. However, at this level, I lack some skills to support my pre-primary

class teacher because I was not trained in Early Childhood Education
(ECE) (Interview with head teacher from school 7, May, 2023).

The head teachers' insights suggest that, while they recognize their responsibility in supporting the teaching and learning preparation process, they lack the professional knowledge in Early Childhood Education, which is essential for effectively guiding teachers in their learning preparation.

In supporting learning follow-up, one of the pre-primary class teacher had the following comment:

Compared to the former school in which I was working before, the head teacher in this school does attend the learning sessions. Nevertheless, the head teacher is not aware of the pre-primary pedagogy (Interview with a pre-primary class teacher from school 9, May 2023).

The verbatim quote suggests that, although head teachers are involved in the learning process, they lack the pedagogical competencies needed to effectively support children's transition practices in their schools

Discussion

This study aimed to explore pedagogical leadership strategies used by head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. The study identified various strategies used by head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. One key strategy noted was the provision of teaching and learning resources to facilitate this transition. There is an extensive body of empirical evidence in support of this claim. For instance, the study by Oppong (2021) observed that teaching and learning materials (TLMs) are important factors in ensuring the quality provision of early childhood education. Similarly, Onyango (2014) found that teaching and learning materials increase the transition rate of preschool learners when appropriately acquired, used and stored.

Despite teaching and learning resources being critical in supporting children's transition process, yet studies by Education International and Tanzania Teachers' Union (2017) reported a severe shortage of ECE facilities, infrastructures and teaching and learning materials in the visited schools. Enos and Francis (2016) made a similar observation, reporting a shortage of learning resources in the pre-primary school classes they studied. This shortage of teaching and learning resources, in turn, limits the quality of learning in pre-primary school classes. The shortage of teaching and learning resources is attributed to challenges in budget allocation for pre-primary education, as noted in the current study and supported by Haki Elimu (2017). Kalyalya (2017) reports that the lack of priority for pre-primary education among head teachers is another reason for the shortage of teaching and learning in pre-primary education. According to the pedagogical leadership model, economic efficiency often competes alongside pedagogical values in decision-making. Since head teachers are responsible for overseeing pedagogy from pre-primary to primary school (Zadock, 2022), they must maintain an equal balance in prioritizing and allocating resources to both levels of education. This balance is essential for enhancing effective pedagogical leadership in ECE settings (Fonsen, 2014).

The study also emphasised that fostering engagement is one of the key strategies employed by head teachers to support children's transition. This fact is also supported empirically by other previous studies. In a similar tone, Deysolong (2023) found out that parents' participation in their children's education contributes to their children's academic success, emotional well-being, and overall development. Munz and Wilson (2017) also noted that parental engagement is crucial during children's transition.

Munz and Wilson further found that parents instil the value of a "growth mindset," which encourages practice and persistence for school success and helps address any anxious feelings children may have about the transition. Furthermore, Iruka, Gardner-Neblett, Matthews and Winn (2014) also reported the criticality of family and community engagement in children's transition. In their study, they revealed that families engage in children's activities such as telling stories, doing puzzles, playing maths and science games and singing songs. Such activities prepare the children for the demands of the kindergarten or school.

Despite the importance of fostering engagement to support children's effective transition and learning, both the current study and previous research report limited parental and community involvement in supporting the transition and learning process. For example, the current study noted that lack of awareness among parents regarding the importance of pre-primary education and misinterpretation of the policy of fee-free basic education were the reasons that limit parents and community participation in children's learning and transition process. Similarly, Ndijuye et al. (2020) also report limited parent-school engagement in the provision of ECE in Tanzania, attributing this to the extremely low status of ECE among stakeholders.

The findings of the current study reveal that making learning follow-up constitutes another strategy that head teachers employ in supporting children's transition by making classroom observations, checking instructional documents and participating in learning activities. The findings of the current study are in consonant with the findings by Cheung et al (2019) and Zepeda (2016) who noted that head teachers support children's learning by enforcing curriculum implementation and conducting classroom observation. However, these findings are contrary to the findings by Zadock (2022) who observed that head teachers lack appropriate supervision skills for pre-primary classes, thus leading to low quality of learning in pre-primary classes. The lack of appropriate supervision skills among head teachers may be attributed to a lack of pre-primary education and pre-headship training before assuming leadership roles in schools. (Cosmas, 2010; Ndijuye et al., 2020; Nemes, 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that several key pedagogical leadership strategies are employed by head teachers to support children's transition from pre-primary to primary school. These strategies include the provision of learning resources, fostering engagement, conducting learning follow-up, creating a supportive school culture, and motivating teachers. On the other hand, the study suggests that lack of proper training in pre-primary education among head teachers, the challenge of budget allocation and lack of pre-headship training among the head teachers limit their ability to effectively fulfil their leadership duties in supporting

children's transition. Therefore, the study recommends that for schools to have meaningful and contextually relevant transition programmes for pre-primary children, in-service training on ECE management should be provided to head teachers, along with an increase in the budget allocation for pre-primary education. The study further recommends other studies to be conducted on other aspects of school readiness in order to improve children's transition practices in the education system.

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