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Assessment of Community Perceptions toward the Importance of Pupils' Enrollment in Pre-Primary Schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract: **This paper examined community perceptions towards the importance of pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. The research was motivated by inconsistencies in pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools, despite their recognised importance. A mixed-methods research design within the pragmatist paradigm was adopted using a convergent parallel design. Primary data were gathered from 51 participants, including 30 teachers, 18 community members, and 3 head teachers, using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings showed positive community Perceptions towards the importance of pre-primary education. There were, however, shortcomings in relation to a lack of sufficient awareness amongst parents, involvement of community leaders, and prevailing cultural beliefs that negatively impact enrolment. Although the participation of parents in meetings and activities was positive, awareness levels remained low. The paper recommends that community perceptions, parental awareness, and engagement of community leaders should be enhanced to boost enrolment in pre-primary schools.**

Keywords: **Community Perceptions, Pre-Primary Education, Enrolment, Early Childhood Education, Access to Education.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Pre-primary education forms a critical phase in pupils' development cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically. As such, pre-primary education prepares children for primary school (ETP, 2023). Although recognised as important, enrolment rates in pre-primary education are low throughout the world, especially in developing nations. For instance, research by Bose (2025) shows that low enrolment rates in pre-primary programs are closely linked to community perceptions and socio-cultural factors that determine parental Perceptions towards early childhood education.

From international evidence, community Perceptions are critical towards pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools. For example, D'Angelo et al. (2023) reported from research done in the United States that parents who recognise the importance of pre-primary education are likely to actively support their children's enrolment in early childhood classes. In Ethiopia, Wendie and Berhanu (2025) indicated that although enrolment rates had greatly improved in the country, negative community Perceptions towards pre-primary education remain common, as reflected by lack of awareness, shortage of qualified teachers, poor learning environments, and poor infrastructure.

From local evidence, pre-primary education was recognised as an integral component of basic education by the government of Tanzania. Nonetheless, research shows that pupil enrolment in pre-primary education is uneven in Tanzania and generally low owing to negative community Perceptions towards pre-primary education, limited community awareness, insufficient financial resources, and parental engagement. According to studies conducted by Ali et al. (2023) and Kojo et al. (2025) in

some Tanzanian communities, enrolment in pre-primary education is considered not so important in comparison to primary education. Some of the factors that explain such perceptions include sociocultural beliefs, economic constraints, and lack of awareness of the importance of early learning. In Morogoro Municipality, pupils are enrolled quite late or never enrol at all, despite the availability of pre-primary classes in public primary schools.

Generally, the reviewed studies indicates the significant importance of community Perceptions on pre-primary enrolment. However, there has been limited localised evidence in Morogoro Municipality, making it difficult for stakeholders to effectively deal with negative perceptions. Hence, an examination of community perceptions and enrolment rates together with the relationship between the two aspects is highly desirable. The research will help to generate useful insight for stakeholders to develop strategies that would enhance community enrolment in pre-primary education in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the recognised importance of pre-primary education in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, enrolment rates in pre-primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania, remain persistently low and inconsistent. Research indicates that community perceptions, including parental awareness, cultural beliefs, and the involvement of community leaders, significantly influence parents' decisions to enrol their children in pre-primary education. While some community members value pre-primary education, others hold negative perceptions, viewing it as optional, a waste of resources, or culturally inappropriate for young children. Furthermore, the involvement of community leaders in promoting early enrolment has been limited, and existing sensitisation campaigns have achieved only moderate success in shifting negative perceptions. Although studies have examined community perceptions and pre-primary enrolment in other regions of Tanzania and internationally, there remains a significant gap in localised evidence specific to Morogoro Municipality. This lack of context-specific understanding makes it difficult for education stakeholders and policymakers to design targeted interventions that address the unique perceptual barriers to pre-primary enrolment in this locality. Therefore, this study sought to assess community perceptions towards the importance of pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools in Morogoro Municipality to bridge this evidence gap and inform strategies for improving enrolment rates.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to assess community perceptions towards the importance of pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Global evidence indicates that community perceptions significantly influence pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools. Although acknowledged as important, enrollment rates in pre-primary education are low throughout the world. For example, Bose (2025) investigated factors affecting pupils' enrolment in pre-primary schools in relation to negative community Perceptions in a European country, the United States. The researcher used a cross-sectional design involving online surveys and established that parents having positive Perceptions towards pre-primary education were more likely to enrol their children. Parents having positive Perceptions were more likely to enrol their children in pre-primary schools. Moreover, parent-school relations played a great role in shaping community perceptions of early childhood education. Notably, although the study did not explicitly focus on enrolment, it highlighted one of the factors determining enrolment - parental involvement.

In Malaysia, research indicated persistently low enrolment rates in pre-primary education as a result of negative community Perceptions. According to Ramli (2025), using machine learning analysis of public sector data coupled with qualitative surveys, enrolment was associated with socio-demographic characteristics and regional disparities. The researcher suggested policy makers to invest in pre-primary education in the country and improve access to pre-primary classes. It was evident that community Perceptions and income inequality affected enrolment rates in pre-primary education. However, since the findings of the research were from Malaysia, there is a lack of literature concerning a similar situation in Tanzanian communities. It is for this reason that the current research investigates the influence of community Perceptions on pupils' enrolment in pre-primary education in Morogoro Municipality.

Within Tanzania, numerous research studies indicate low enrolment rates in pre-primary education. For instance, according to Ali et al. (2023), parents' perceptions of pre-primary enrolment were investigated using early grade reading assessments to collect relevant data. Findings revealed that parental awareness and involvement, socio-economic status and experience shaped the perceptions of the importance of pre-primary education, hence influencing the enrolment decision-making

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process. As a result, the researchers recommended that there was a need to maintain and enhance access to pre-primary education so as to sustain educational gains. It was also noted that parental awareness was among the factors influencing pre-primary enrolment rates.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a research methodology that was aimed at establishing the assessment of community perceptions on enrolment rates in pre-primary schools. First, a pragmatist research philosophy was adopted. According to the philosophical position adopted, the research adopted a mixed-methods design in order to capture both numerical trends and experiences. In line with the pragmatist philosophy, a convergent research design was used to gather and analyse quantitative and qualitative data concurrently in a bid to investigate the influence of community perceptions on pre-primary enrolment.

As per the research population, the current study targeted pre-primary school pupils, teachers and school administrators within Morogoro Municipality. From this target population, 51 participants, including 30 teachers, 18 community members and 3 head teachers, were sampled using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. To collect relevant data, questionnaires were used for teachers, semi-structured interviews for head teachers and focus group discussions for community members, while secondary data were collected as well. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perceptions on Community Perceptions towards Pre-Primary Education in Morogoro Municipality.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on Community Perceptions Towards Pre-Primary Education (n=30)

Statement	Strongly Agree F(%)	Agree F(%)	Neutral F(%)	Disagree F(%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Mean	SD
Most community members value pre-primary education for young children.	15 (50%)	10(33.3%)	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.27	0.907
Parents in this community understand the role of pre-primary school.	12(40%)	11(36.7%)	4(13.3%)	3(10.0%)	0(0%)	4.07	0.980
Community leaders encourage parents to enrol children in pre-primary schools.	9(30%)	2(40%)	5(16.7%)	3(10.0%)	1(3.3%)	3.83	1.085
Some parents believe that pre-primary education is not important for children's future learning.	6(20%)	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	7(23.3%)	3(10.0%)	3.30	1.317
Community awareness about the importance of pre-primary education is adequate.	6(20%)	13(43.3%)	6(20.0%)	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	3.63	1.066
Parents regularly attend meetings related to pre-primary education	9(30%)	13(43.3%)	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	3.90	1.029
Community members support school activities aimed at improving pre-primary education.	9(30%)	14(46.7%)	4(13.3%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	3.93	1.015
Cultural beliefs in the community influence children's enrollment in pre-primary schools	12(40%)	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	3.97	1.129
Parents encourage regular attendance of children in pre-primary classes.	16(53.3%)	9(30%)	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	4.30	0.915
Community campaigns and sensitisation programs have improved Perceptions towards pre-primary education.	9(30%)	12(40%)	5(16.7%)	3(10%)	1(3.3%)	3.83	1.085

Source: Field Data (2026)

Community Value of Pre-Primary Education

As can be seen in Table 1 above, teachers' perceptions towards community Perceptions show that most community members value pre-primary education. The majority of respondents (83.3%), representing 50% strong agreement and 33.3% agreement, believed that the community valued pre-primary education highly, while only 6.7% disagreed and 10% were neutral. Therefore, it can be seen that parents understand the importance of early childhood education, although some of them were not fully aware of its benefits.

As shown by local stakeholder perceptions, one head teacher remarked that "*most parents now understand that pre-primary education gives children a strong foundation to prepare for joining primary school*". Another community member added that "*We have realised that pupils who attend early classes perform well when joining primary school; therefore, they value early learning*." From the above views, it can be inferred that Perceptions towards pre-primary education are positive within the community.

It is evident that parents' Perceptions towards pre-primary education are generally positive, and this finding is consistent with international evidence. For instance, Bose (2025) noted that in the United States, parents with positive Perceptions promoted enrolment of their children in pre-primary schools. Therefore, it can be concluded that recognition of the importance of early childhood education contributed to increased enrolment. Within Tanzania, Ali et al. (2023) found that community recognition of early education prepared children for joining primary schools.

Parents' Understanding of Pre-Primary Education

In relation to the community understanding of the role of pre-primary education, 10% of teachers disagreed with the notion that the community understands the role, while 76.7% either agreed or strongly agreed. Therefore, this means that although most parents were aware of the role of early education to some extent, they were not fully aware of its important role.

As illustrated in local literature, one head teacher explained that "*some parents view pre-primary class as a place where children play instead of recognising its educational significance*." On the other hand, one community member remarked that "*I understand that children gain important skills in mathematics and English in early classes, which enables them to join primary school smoothly*." Thus, from the above findings, it can be seen that some parents understand its role while others do not.

As shown above, most teachers believe that some parents do not recognise the role of pre-primary education. In this case, findings are similar to those obtained from previous literature. Specifically, Ali et al. (2023) noted that some parents misunderstood pre-primary education as an area where children play as opposed to an educational phase.

Involvement of Community Leaders in Pre-Primary Enrolment

According to Table 1 above, the majority (70%) of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that community leaders were actively involved in promoting early enrolment, while 16.7% were neutral and 10% disagreed. Therefore, it can be seen that there was moderate involvement of community leaders as regards enrolment in pre-primary education in Morogoro Municipality. Since community leaders are supposed to encourage early enrolment, their limited involvement might hinder efforts in boosting enrolment.

Based on local views, one head teacher expressed that "*while some leaders encourage enrolment of children in pre-primary classes during community meetings, others fail to discuss early enrolment completely*." Similar sentiments were expressed by a community member who mentioned that "*while leaders discuss education during meetings, they mostly concentrate on primary and secondary levels*." Therefore, from the above findings, it can be noted that some leaders support pre-primary education while others are not interested.

As seen above, findings indicated that community leaders are not extensively involved in early education. This view corroborates international evidence as per findings by Bose (2025). Specifically, community leaders played an important role in encouraging parents to enrol their children in pre-primary classes.

Negative Community Perceptions About Pre-Primary Education

It is interesting to note that some teachers believed that some community members held negative perceptions towards pre-primary education. However, a large number (33.3%) of teachers disagreed with this notion, while 33.3% agreed and 13.3% were neutral. Therefore, the findings showed that some negative community perceptions existed, albeit in few cases.

Some parents hold certain negative beliefs in relation to pre-primary education, as illustrated in local evidence provided below. One head teacher expressed that "*some parents view young children as too small to start schooling, hence prefer to leave them at home*." A similar belief was expressed by one community member who remarked that "*Some people consider pre-primary education a waste of resources since attendance is optional.*" Therefore, as shown above, some negative perceptions persist.

In this regard, the current findings are in line with local literature showing that negative community perceptions remain common even though enrolment rates have greatly improved. Specifically, Ali et al. (2023) noted that some Tanzanian parents considered pre-primary education as not so important. Likewise, Ramli (2025) reported that some Malaysian parents considered pre-primary classes as unimportant.

Community Awareness About Importance of Pre-Primary Education

As per Table 1 above, teachers believe that the community had only moderate awareness about pre-primary education. For instance, 43.3% of teachers agreed while 20% were neutral and 13.3% disagreed with the assertion that the community understood the importance of pre-primary education. From this, it can be inferred that awareness was moderate and therefore, community campaigns should be intensified.

Community stakeholders also expressed similar sentiments, with one head teacher stating that "*Although community awareness has greatly improved, many parents still need to know more about its significance*." Similarly, one community member said that "*We have been hearing of pre-primary education for quite some time, but much sensitisation should be carried out to create greater awareness*." As illustrated above, it can be concluded that there is a need to sensitise more parents.

As per the findings above, it can be seen that community awareness remains moderate in relation to pre-primary education, and this agrees with the literature. Specifically, Ali et al. (2023) reported that although community awareness had greatly increased in recent years, much awareness is needed for maximum educational benefits.

Regular Attendance of Parents in Pre-Primary Education Meetings

In relation to parents attending pre-primary education meetings, about 73.3% of teachers believed that they attended regularly. Specifically, 30% strongly agreed while 43.3% agreed with the statement that parents attended school meetings regularly. On the other hand, 16.7% were neutral while 15% disagreed with the assertion. Therefore, it is clear that parents attended meetings regularly, as per the findings.

As shown in the following local evidence, one head teacher expressed that "*Parents usually attend meetings when called, especially on issues regarding the progress of their children*." Similar sentiments were expressed by a teacher that "*Although parents attend meetings regularly now, some still fail to attend*." As illustrated above, parents are increasingly attending meetings but still lack some consistency.

In this case, the above findings are consistent with previous literature indicating that parents participated in school meetings regularly in order to support early education. Specifically, according to Ali et al. (2023), parents regularly attended meetings so that they could collaborate effectively with teachers for successful enrolment of their children.

Community Support for Pre-Primary Educational Activities

From Table 1 above, most teachers believed that community members supported school activities as a way of improving early education. The majority (76.7%) of teachers believed that community members supported schools through activities aimed at improving pre-primary education, while 13.3% were neutral and 6.7% disagreed with this statement. This finding showed that the community was actively involved in supporting school activities.

Similar views were shown by stakeholders, as evidenced below. One head teacher mentioned that "*Community members assist school teachers on matters relating to school activities such as school cleaning days*." Similarly, one community member remarked that "*We normally assist teachers in school activities because we understand the importance of creating a conducive learning environment for our children*." From the above discussion, it is clear that community support existed.

Based on the above views, it is clear that community members supported school activities aimed at boosting enrolment in pre-primary education, and the finding was consistent with local literature. For instance, Ali et al. (2023) indicated that there was positive involvement from the community that helped to improve early education.

Impact of Cultural Beliefs on Pre-Primary Education

It can be seen from Table 1 above that some cultural beliefs within the community influenced pre-primary education enrolment rates. For instance, 40% of teachers agreed while 33.3% strongly agreed that cultural beliefs played a role in shaping enrolment of children in pre-primary classes, while only 13.3% were neutral and 10% disagreed. Therefore, it can be seen that cultural beliefs played an influential role in determining enrolment in pre-primary education.

In accordance with local evidence, one head teacher mentioned that "*Although modern perceptions prevail nowadays, some parents have certain cultural beliefs preventing them from enrolling their young children in schools*." Another community member remarked that "*some parents still believe that young children should stay at home until they grow old enough before going to school*." From the above, cultural beliefs continue to affect enrolment in pre-primary education.

As evident from the above findings, cultural beliefs played an influential role as regards pre-primary enrolment. In this regard, the findings of the current study were consistent with evidence from Ali et al. (2023). In fact, these researchers found that in some communities, cultural beliefs played a role in deciding enrolment in early education.

Effectiveness of Community Campaigns and Sensitisation Programs

As shown in Table 1 above, some teachers believed that community awareness programs had been ineffective in changing Perceptions towards early enrolment. However, the majority (53.3%) believed that these programs had been effective to some extent since only 10% were neutral while 6.7% disagreed with this claim. Therefore, it can be seen that sensitivity programs had some effect in changing Perceptions towards enrolment in pre-primary education.

As revealed by the following local stakeholder perceptions, one head teacher mentioned that "*community campaigns have greatly helped in raising awareness, but more sensitisation is needed*." On the other hand, one community member expressed that "*we have heard of such campaigns from time to time and they have greatly changed*".

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The study results indicate that community perceptions towards pre-primary education are quite positive, despite several challenges. It is observed that most respondents highly regard pre-primary education and actively encourage their children to participate in various activities and attend school. Parents' involvement can also be noted by their participation in school meetings and in promoting learning among their children.

At the same time, there is still insufficient awareness among parents, a lack of consistency regarding the involvement of community leaders and the presence of cultural beliefs affecting enrollment in pre-primary schools. Besides, the level of awareness about the significance of pre-primary education can be characterised as moderate rather than sufficient. All these facts prove that, despite considerable achievements in promoting pre-primary education, further development and improvement are needed.

Thus, the study has revealed that the perception towards pre-primary education remains mostly positive, yet the enhancement of awareness, participation of community leaders and overcoming cultural stereotypes are required.

7.2 Recommendations

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations can be made:

i. The government and relevant education stakeholders should promote increased sensitisation of communities in relation to the significance of pre-primary education in poorly informed rural areas.
ii. School administrations should promote closer cooperation between parents and teachers through the regular conduct of meetings and discussions.
iii. Community leaders should take an active part in the promotion of pre-primary education at public and community meetings.
iv. Multi-channel awareness programs should be implemented using media such as radio broadcasting, community meetings, and religious institutions.
v. Education programs that aim at overcoming negative cultural beliefs about pre-primary education are needed to raise enrollment.

Parents' involvement in their children's education should be encouraged constantly to increase attendance

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