



Pedagogical Practices and Pupils' Academic Performance in Primary Schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJESS/2023/v42i4923

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/98458>

Original Research Article

Received: 09/02/2023

Accepted: 11/04/2023

Published: 17/04/2023

ABSTRACT

Our paper investigated the contribution of pedagogical practices on pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. We employed a qualitative approach and conducted the study in three public and three private primary schools, with a total of 60 respondents. Primary data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations. We used content analysis to analyze the data and develop themes and sub-themes. The results show that public and private school teachers differ in their approach to pedagogical practices, resulting in variations in academic performance. We conclude that effective pedagogical practices can significantly impact pupils' academic performance and suggest that teachers receive proper training and support to implement these practices. Therefore, our study

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emphasizes the importance of effective pedagogical practices in achieving good academic performance and underscores the need for teacher training and support to facilitate these practices.

Keywords: Pedagogical practices; pupils; academic performance; primary schools; morogoro municipality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pedagogy refers to the teaching styles that teachers use to help students learn through interaction and activity in the learning context [1]. Pedagogical practices originated from the Dewey and Piaget's progressive approaches, where learners are placed at the center of the process of learning [2]. These approaches encourage learners to become producers of knowledge, and knowledge is gained through reflective experiences as learners interact with the world around them [3]. Learners construct knowledge as they go through learning tasks and solve practical and social problems in daily life [4]. Pedagogical practices such as teaching approaches are effective or ineffective depending on the presence of resources and pupil support from teachers, parents, and the community [5].

Private schools are known to perform better than public schools worldwide. Private schools have adopted modern teaching approaches, whereas most public schools do not practice modern pedagogical approaches [6]. Private schools are more committed to their work and spend more time in teaching activities than public schools. Pupils' performance in private schools is due to various factors, including the better economic status of families, pupil background, and selection bias in private schools, as well as the relative efficiency of private schools, which is highly dependent on institutional management and the structure of the incentives under which they operate. In developing countries such as India, Pakistan, and Tanzania, studies have revealed that pupils in private primary schools achieve higher academic performance due to factors such as the teacher's professional qualifications, teacher's attitude towards schools, the teacher's residence's proximity to the school, the number of books, school characteristics, including the average teacher salary, pupil-teacher ratio, and the language of instruction.

The Tanzanian government encouraged the private sector to invest in primary and post-primary education in the mid-1990s. As a result,

private English medium schools rapidly increased, and these schools were considered to be the best ones compared to public schools. Students' academic performance in private primary schools improved rapidly once they enrolled, but at the end of the primary level, these students sit for PSLE of the same content but with a different medium of instruction except for Kiswahili and English as language subjects.

Public primary schools are funded by the central and Local Government Authorities, parents, and community groups, including NGOs, and funds are administered according to the school's size and educational provision. Grants are used for the general running of the school and its core purpose, which is for learning resources, materials, maintenance, or special projects. Private schools may be founded by religious or charitable bodies, NGOs, or private individuals, usually for profit-making. Private schools have specific objectives in opening and operating, and the foundation bodies give financial support to their schools in various forms such as land and buildings, equipment, and personnel. Private schools charge parents' fees for their children's education, which can vary widely depending on the school.

Despite the fact that education plays a vital role in the development of human capital [7], but the quality of education is a key factor that determines the success of any education system. Hence, pedagogical practices are regarded as the fundamental in shaping the quality of education, and they have a direct impact on pupils' academic performance. In Tanzania, primary education is compulsory, and the government has made significant efforts to improve the quality of education. However, there are still disparities in academic performance between pupils in public and private primary schools, which may be attributed to differences in pedagogical practices. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between pedagogical practices and pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Morogoro municipality in Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the study is to examine the influence of pedagogical practices on academic performance in public and private primary schools in Morogoro municipality, Tanzania. To establish the context, the researcher conducts an overview of related studies to assess whether the strategies applied in other parts of Tanzania and other countries can address the situation in Morogoro. The study defines academic performance as the knowledge gained by a pupil assessed by marks or educational goals set by teachers and students to be achieved over a specific period, as explained by Narad and Abdullah [8].

Several studies have been conducted on differences in academic performance between public and private primary schools. In Madagascar, Lassibille and Tan (1998) found that private primary schools maintain higher grades compared to public primary schools due to factors such as socio-economic background, differences in school inputs, and managerial effectiveness. Jimenez et al. [9] conducted a comparative study on public and private schools in developing countries and found that private primary schools achieve higher academic performance due to better economic status, selection bias, and institutional management. Similarly, Singh and Sakar [10] found that teaching quality impacts pupils' outcomes in public and private primary schools in India, with private schools having significantly higher scores.

In Pakistan, Shabbir [11] conducted a study that showed private school teachers are more committed to their work and spend more time on teaching activities than public school teachers. In Tanzania, Magidanga [12] conducted a related study in secondary schools that found differences in academic performance between public and private schools are related to pupil background and school characteristics. The study suggests that public primary schools could emulate some of the teaching and administrative practices of their private counterparts.

The literature reviewed shows that previous studies on the related topic were conducted on secondary school levels, and those conducted on primary schools were from abroad. Therefore, the current study aims to enrich the literature on factors contributing to differences in academic

performance between public and private primary schools in Morogoro municipality, Tanzania.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Description of the Study Area

The purpose of the study was to investigate the differences in pupils' academic performance in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) in Morogoro municipality, Tanzania. The study was conducted in Morogoro municipality because it has a good number of both public and private primary schools that experience differences in pupils' academic performance in PSLE [13].

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a case study research design, which is suitable for investigating a phenomenon in its real-life context [14]. A qualitative approach was employed to get a deeper and clear understanding of the respondents' feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences [15]. To ensure the reliability in our study, multiple issues were covered from fewer respondents. Data were analyzed through the identification of themes, described and findings were communicated in a narrative way [16].

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The target population was 64 public and 35 private primary schools in Morogoro municipality. We have selected a sample of six primary schools, three public school and three private primary schools with almost related number of pupils [13] Also, to obtain adequate and proper information about the phenomena, 60 respondents (such as 36 pupils and 24 teachers) were selected to be involved in our study. From each school 6 pupils were randomly selected making a total of 36 pupils while 24 teachers (six head teachers and six academic supervisors i.e., one from each school and 12 language subject teachers (two from every school were purposively selected.

3.4 Source, Type and Data Collection Methods

We used both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through various methods, including interviews, observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) [15]. To gather

these secondary data sources, the researcher approached the relevant school management and personnel in charge [17]. Their assistance was crucial in obtaining more information, and the data collected from both primary and secondary sources were combined to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research question.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Pedagogical Practices and Academic Performance in Primary Schools

In our study, various aspects of pedagogical practices were examined, including pedagogical approaches, teaching methods, strategies, classroom management, time management, lesson planning, and teachers' practices regarding individual pupil learning characteristics. The purpose of this investigation was to identify the differences in academic performance between public and private primary schools in Morogoro municipality. The research observation revealed a significant difference in pupils' academic performance between these two types of schools.

To further explore this finding, we surveyed 60 respondents to gain insight into their views on the disparities in academic performance between schools. All respondents agreed that there is a persistent gap in academic performance between public and private schools in Morogoro municipality. One head teacher from a public school affirmed this finding by stating, "the situation persists.":-

... There is a big difference, you can find from the final examination the first positions are held by private schools for example district wise among top ten schools, the first eight schools are private schools (HT28 PUB).

The Fig. 1 below shows the aspects of pedagogical practices that contribute to pupils' academic performance.

Through observation, interviews and focus group discussions, we have found that there are differences in pedagogical practices which contributes to the differences in the pupils'

academic performance in Morogoro Municipality, as discussed here below.

4.2 Lesson Planning

Lesson planning is a crucial aspect of pedagogical practices that involves the preparation of lesson plans and notes. According to Eliezar [16] students tend to achieve more when lessons are well-structured and sequenced, and when teachers make the objectives clear. This is because when students know what they are supposed to be learning, their learning becomes more meaningful. A lesson plan is a written document that outlines the learning objectives from the scheme of work and provides an outline of the learning procedures. It also indicates what students are expected to produce at the end of the lesson or sequence of lessons to demonstrate their learning. The advantage of lesson planning is that it creates a good sequence of teaching [16]. During data collection one private teacher attested that:-

I always prepare the lesson plan before the lesson because it helps me to manage time and to be consistent in teaching (AT 48 PRIV).

The study result is in line with the findings of Ayra and Kösterelioğlu [18] who found that there is a significant correlation between a teacher's lesson planning strategies and their class performance. The study found that teachers who prepare their lesson plans before the class session tend to have better class performance than those who do not. Furthermore, the study revealed that private school teachers are more likely to prepare their lesson plans before teaching than public school teachers.

Moreover, the study by Ayra and Kösterelioğlu [18] revealed that while most public-school teachers included a reflection section in their lesson plans, the allocated activities were limited to asking students oral questions as a reinforcement of the subject matter. On the other hand, private school teachers allowed students to reflect on the subject matter and relate it to their life experiences. Therefore, few teachers were observed during the classroom session, indicating that lesson planning played a crucial role in determining class performance.

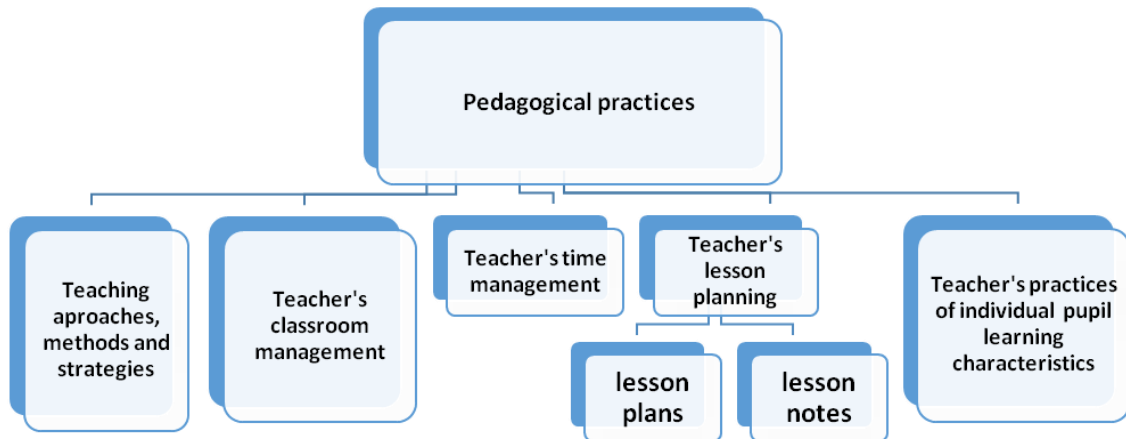


Fig. 1. The aspects of pedagogical practices and pupils' academic performance in schools

Source; Researcher view, 2020

4.3 Lesson Notes

Lesson notes are instructional materials that are prepared by teachers to aid in the delivery of lessons and to enhance the learning activities of students. These notes provide a comprehensive guide on what to teach and how to teach it, which helps to ensure that the learning objectives are met [18]. Moreover, Ayra and Kösterelioğlu ascertained that, when pupils are provided with well-prepared lesson notes, it can have a positive impact on their academic performance. Also, during interviews from both public and private schools' teachers attested that: -

Preparing lesson notes help me to have summarized materials from different sources which are used for teaching using. Summarizing various books for a single lesson notice help the teacher to obtain supplementary ideas rather than using a single textbook (KT 46 PRIV).

Lesson notes helps to present the summarized content of the subject matter for pupil's easy understanding. (ET 61 PUB).

The study results are consistent with the findings of various related studies [16,18] who found that pupils who have access to lesson notes tend to perform better academically than those who do not. This is because lesson notes provide students with a clear understanding of the subject matter, which helps to reduce confusion and increase retention of information. Furthermore, lesson notes promote active engagement in the learning process. When

pupils are provided with well-structured lesson notes, they are more likely to participate in class discussions and ask questions, which helps to deepen their understanding of the subject matter [16].

4.4 Teaching Approaches, Methods and Strategies

In assessing the contribution of pedagogical practices on pupils' academic performance, our study sought to investigate the effective use of teaching approaches, methods, and strategies that can significantly enhance pupils' academic performance. During interviews, respondents had differing opinions on how teaching approaches, methods and strategies can enhance pupils' academic performance. Research shows that using a variety of teaching methods and strategies can help pupils engage more fully with the material being taught, leading to improved academic performance [19]. For example, the use of hands-on activities, group work, and multimedia resources has been shown to be effective in enhancing students' learning experiences and increasing their retention of information [6]. During data collection one of the private teachers attested that: -

I think teacher-centered approach is mostly applicable in public schools due to large class size but on my side, I can arrange a 40 minutes lesson in which I give short explanation, guide learners to participate through discussion, provide assignment and mark the work in the classroom to assess my pupils understanding (ET 47 PRIV).

Despite the fact that, incorporating pupils-centered approaches such as inquiry-based learning and project-based learning can help pupils develop critical thinking skills and foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter [20]. But, personalized learning approaches, which allow pupils to learn at their own pace and according to their individual needs, have been shown to improve student outcomes [21]. Also, one of the teachers from public schools expressed the difficulty on applying learner-centered approach like group work.

Some teaching and learning methods like discussion are difficult to apply only lectures and question with answer can be applied due to classroom environment factors (AT 31 PUB).

Furthermore, teachers from public and private schools agreed that the effective implementation of these pedagogical practices is a crucial factor in determining the success of pupils [22]. Respondents from both public and private primary schools explained how these Pedagogical practices influence pupils' academic performance in schools, as indicated below;

When pupils centered approach is used, then pupils are assessed through competence-based curriculum which emphasizes on learner centered approach and insists on effective pupils' participation in learning, surely those pupils may perform better compared to those who learn through teacher centered approaches (HT 49 PRIVATE).

The study result is in line with the findings of Smith [23] who ascertained that private schools were found to adopt a more learner-centered approach compared to public schools. This was attributed to the challenging classroom environments in public schools. Additionally, our study revealed that both participatory and non-participatory teaching methods were used in both public and private primary schools in Morogoro municipality. However, the most commonly used teaching strategies were question and answer sessions, group discussions, and explanations. Nevertheless, the organization of these strategies differed between the public and private schools.

4.5 Classroom Management

Classroom management refers to the actions and strategies implemented by a teacher to

establish and maintain a positive learning environment that promotes students' academic success, fosters their social-emotional development, and enhances their overall well-being. Effective classroom management practices have been found to significantly impact pupils' academic performance [24,25]. It is considered that a well-managed classroom led to improved pupils' engagement, motivation and achievement [26,27]. During data collection the private teachers attested that: -

Good classroom management provides good opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the teacher during instructional activities. (ET 37 PRIV).

Effective classroom management helps the teacher to understand to what extent students capture the subject matter (AT 73 PRIV).

Although, the classroom management practices differ between private and public schools due to variations in funding, resources and class sizes but private schools often have smaller class sizes, which make it easier for teachers to implement effective classroom management strategies [28]. Additionally, our study found that private schools place a greater emphasis on classroom management as a key component of their educational philosophy and mission. On the other hand, during data collection of one of the public teachers attested that: -

In my school pupils are not attentive in the class due to over crowdedness, it is difficult to organize and monitor their work, leading poor performance. (HT 63 PUBLIC).

Pertaining to the above teachers' views, effective classroom management is a crucial factor in promoting pupils' academic success and overall well-being. Our study indicates that class size in public primary schools restricts teachers to effectively interact with pupils and also, obstruct pupils to learn effectively. The study result is in line with the findings of various related studies [29,25] who found that in public schools, classroom management is more challenging due to larger class sizes, limited resources and a diverse range of pupils needs. Furthermore, while differences exist between private and public schools in terms of classroom management practices, the implementation of evidence-based strategies can improve outcomes for all pupils.

4.6 Time Management

Based on classroom observations, we observed that the level of time management among teachers in public primary schools is comparatively poor compared to their counterparts in private primary schools in Morogoro municipality. Teachers in public schools frequently arrive late to classes and struggle to complete the intended learning objectives for the day. In contrast, teachers in private schools demonstrate a high level of time management by waiting at the door to receive their pupils at the start of the lesson and effectively managing their time to ensure that the lesson objectives are accomplished. During data collection of one of the private teachers attested that: -

Here in private schools' teachers do not wait to be reminded to go to class, when the bell rings the teacher is already at the classroom door waiting for pupils to start teaching without wasting any time (ET 47 PRIV).

In public primary schools, one pupil expressed their experience on the way their teachers manage time for the classroom session as a group they all agreed that:

A period of 40 minutes a teacher comes 30 minutes late and has only 10 minutes to teach (this is mostly during the rainy season). So, he/she writes an exercise on the board and tell us to ask the next teacher no to erase the exercise on the board. But the next teacher also does the same, at the end of the day, we have compiled a lot of unfinished work (PFGD 34 PUB).

The study result implies that pupils who effectively manage their time are more likely to achieve higher grades, perform better on exams and exhibit better learning outcomes. Our study result is consistent to the findings of various related studies [30,31,32] (Hafeez et al., 2018) who found that effective time management plays a critical role in determining students' academic performance. Furthermore, teachers who manage their time effectively provides a more conducive learning environment that helps pupils to focus better and enhance their academic performance.

Furthermore, in public primary schools, pupils also expressed difficulties they face on understanding of the lessons due to regular

shifting of classes as they use much time on it. One pupil attested that: -

We always keep on shifting classrooms by exchanging with the other stream for the sake of writing notes written on the chalkboard. Teachers do not follow the time table effectively. Due to time limit we fail to accomplish our work (PFGD 58 PUB).

On the other hand, a pupil from private school expressed his experience on how teachers are made accountable to time so as to ensure effective teaching and learning process as he said: -

In our school there is a set deadline to complete the syllabus. Timely finishing of syllabus you get enough time for revision, when pupils perform well, it means you secure your job (AT 48 PRIV).

Overall, our study results suggest that there is a positive relationship between time management and academic achievement among pupils in Morogoro municipality. It is important for both public and private teachers to encourage good time management practices among pupils in order to help them achieve academic success.

4.7 Consideration of Individual Pupil Learning Characteristics

Our study sought to know the consideration of individual pupil learning characteristics due to the fact that variations in pupils' comprehension levels of classroom instruction exist, and it is the responsibility of both public and private teachers to recognize and cater to their diverse learning needs and styles. As such, effective communication of instructional approaches is essential for successful knowledge transfer. Research indicates that learners differ in their cognitive abilities, learning style, and preferences for various instructional methods (Pashler et al. 2008). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to understand and accommodate these differences in their pedagogical practices (Tomlinson, 2014). One approach that can help achieve this is differentiation, which involves adjusting the content, process, or product of instruction based on pupils' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 2014). Moreover, the teacher's communication of instructional strategies plays a crucial role in students' comprehension and motivation to learn (Chin, Chin, & Hanafi, 2017). For instance, teachers

who use clear and concise language, provide relevant examples, and encourage active participation tend to promote better learning outcomes (Cavanagh, Chen, & Bathgate, 2016). During interviews from both public and private schools' teachers attested that: -

I always encourage my department to use different strategies to engage the pupils of different learning characteristics so as to enable them to provide appropriate advice to their pupils on how to improve their learning ability. I also keep on reminding the teacher that recognizing student by names is vital in promoting effective learning (ET 47 PRIV).

Knowledge and skills on individual pupil learning characteristics facilitates the best selection of teaching and learning methods that suit the pupils. With large class it is difficult to deal with individual pupils learning needs. (ET 61 PUB)

The study result is in line with the findings of Cicek and Tok [33] which demonstrated that a teacher's knowledge and skills related to the individual learning characteristics of their students can influence their academic performance. They further suggested that teachers should recognize that each student has unique interests, needs, and skills, and that not all students can be expected to achieve the same level of academic performance or behavior. Consequently, teachers should act as leaders in the classroom, but also listen to their students, encourage individual work, and avoid overloading them with excessive or overly challenging homework assignments [33].

Therefore, our study reveals that a crucial factor affecting academic performance is the ability to comprehend students' learning characteristics. Nonetheless, it appears that addressing the individual learning requirements of pupils in a challenging class is arduous, particularly in public schools. In contrast, private schools appear to possess superior skills in catering to individual needs, which may be attributed to their smaller class sizes. This enables teachers in private schools to utilize diverse teaching approaches that foster student engagement. Moreover, addressing students by name promotes greater interactivity in the classroom and reduces absenteeism, as pupils feel more recognized and valued [34-37].

5. CONCLUSION

Our study reveals that the academic performance of pupils is significantly influenced by the pedagogical practices implemented by their teachers. The study concludes that there are varying degrees of use of pedagogical practices in different categories of schools. Additionally, the results indicate that private school teachers tend to have a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of these practices compared to their public-school counterparts. This is attributed to the closer supervision and support from the school administration, parents, and availability of resources in private schools. However, public school teachers are found to be less responsive to the application of these practices due to lack of motivation, limited resources, and insufficient parental support.

The study also highlights the importance of constructivist approaches in pedagogical practices, where activities are designed to build on the pupils' current knowledge and match their appropriate developmental stage. These practices challenge pupils to make progress by accommodating new information. Thus, teachers' pedagogical skills and practices play a crucial role in improving pupils' academic performance. Therefore, the findings suggest that differences in academic performance between public and private primary schools in Morogoro municipality are attributable to the varying use of pedagogical practices.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Although our study emphasizes that pedagogical practices have a considerable influence on pupils' academic performance but recommends that public schools should increase the level of support provided to teachers, such as closer supervision, motivation, and availability of resources, to enhance the implementation of pedagogical practices. Additionally, public schools should adopt constructivist approaches in their pedagogical practices to match pupils' current knowledge and appropriate developmental stage. By doing so, public schools can bridge the gap in academic performance with their private school counterparts.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our study has important implications for policy and practice in primary education in Morogoro

municipality, Tanzania. Specifically, it highlights the need for schools to adopt effective pedagogical practices, particularly in the areas of classroom management and teacher subject knowledge, to promote academic achievement among pupils. The study also, suggests the need for teacher training programs to focus on these areas to improve the quality of education in primary schools in Morogoro Municipality and other regions in Tanzania.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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