Pedagogy and Leadership in a Tanzanian Primary School: A Whole School Approach exploring Classroom Realities in an Urban Setting

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Introduction

Ten years since the initial commitment to universal primary education, a recent mid-term report (MDG: 2010) shows that considerable strides have been achieved towards the goal and that more and more children are accessing primary education. Key initiatives such as the abolition of school fees at primary school level have led to a surge in enrolment in a number of sub-Saharan African countries. In the Republic of Tanzania, the enrolment ratio jumped to 99.6 per cent by 2008 (MDG report: 2010), as the country makes considerable efforts to provide access to more and more children in primary school. Although this progress is laudable and a success story at one level, there are a number of consequences and short-comings such as the shortage of trained teachers, the lack of primary schools to cater to the demand, the lack of resources, the shortage of teaching materials, and over-crowded classrooms. It appears that quantity not quality has taken over (Sifona, 2007). What the quantitative data do not show is what is actually happening in reality on the ground. This chapter describes an intensive two-year case study that was conducted in a primary school in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from February 2009-2011. The aim of the study was to engage in a research and development initiative with a 'typical' urban primary school and to gather detailed evidence of how the school was functioning and coping with the challenges exacerbated by the impact of MDG targets. In particular, the research looked at pedagogical practices and the role of leadership from a whole school perspective. It explored context-specific challenges and discussed culturally relevant approaches of how pedagogy could be improved through the perspectives and actions of local teachers in a sustainable and cost-effective way.

Context: Case Study

In order to identify a school for the case study, Discussions with the Ministry of Education at central, regional, district, and ward levels, and with the University of Dar es Salaam led to the identification of a 'typical' urban primary school, one which would reflect a diverse, multi-faceted community, in Kinondoni Municipality. The municipality is implementing the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), whose strategic priorities are: enrolment expansion, quality improvement, capacity building, institutional arrangement and cross-cutting issues (Kinondoni Municipal Report, 2008: 4). The decentralised nature of the government means that

key decision making and implementation takes place at the grass-roots (local) level, and the ward and school committees play a significant role in implementation and coordination of PEDP strategies for the community.

The location of the research was in Manzese, an administrative ward in Kinondoni Municipality divided into 6 sub-wards *(mtaa)* Kilimani, Uzuri, Mvuleni, Muungaro, Midzini and Manzaimmoja). Located approximately 7 kilometres from the city centre of Dar es Salaam, Manzese is an 'informal settlement' in a very highly populated area and, as such, typical of peri-urban areas where dwellers acquire land without formal process. (Ramadhani, 2007: 12)

Manzese is characterised by ethnic heterogeneity, multi-racial groups and a wide range of social and economic groups. In most of these settlements, the affluent and the poor live side by side (Ramadhani: 2007: 28) The population is estimated at 67,002 (32,613 females and 34, 389 males) living in 5,500 households, and it is reputed to be the largest squatter settlement in Dar es Salaam city in terms of population and area. During the 1970s it was notorious for robberies and 'lawlessness' and earned the name 'Soweto' (Kironde, 1995). Overall there is a lack of basic infrastructure, which results in overcrowding, poor sanitation and poor waste management. The area has been targeted by different initiatives to improve the infrastructure and to improve the safety of its dwellers, especially women. In 2002, Manzese was one of the first areas in Dar es Salaam to implement crime prevention initiatives under the framework of UN-HABITAT's Safer Cities Programmes. It was observed that the area was a hostile area, especially towards women, who were subjected to sexual violence exacerbated by the lack of street lighting, narrow streets, congested housing, too many guest houses and bars (UN-Habitat, 2002). Unemployment is very high, especially amongst the youth, and many people are engaged in petty trading activities and hard manual labour; there is a high rate of HIV and prostitution. The area is culturally mixed with a varied ethnic community and equally divided along religious grounds – roughly 50% Muslim and 50% Christian. Although the infrastructure is steadily improving with better roads, there is no dispensary or hospital and the inhabitants have to go to another ward to be treated for any illnesses.

Against this backdrop, there are four primary schools serving this culturally diverse population; Ukombozi, Manzese, Uzuri and Kilimani. The recent primary school enrolment figures show that there are 6690 primary school children enrolled in the 4 primary schools in the ward.

Table 1: Manzese Ward: Primary School Enrolment and Number of Teachers

School	Enrolment	Planned number of teachers	Current Number of teachers	Shortfall
Manzese	1934	55	43 (78%)	12
Uzuri	1535	44	38 (86%)	6
Kilimani	1436	41	27 (65%)	14

Ukombozi	1785	51	43 (84%)	8
Total	6690	191	151	40

(Source: Manzese Ward Education Office)

Significantly, there is only one secondary school in the ward. This pilot research study focuses on Ukombozi Primary School. The school is adjacent to another primary school - literally side by side. The 'twinning' of primary schools in large urban compounds has proliferated throughout the region due to the large number of primary school children in the area and to cater to the demands of the donors and to achieve the EFA/MDG targets.

Formal Education in Tanzania: Structure, Language and Pedagogy

The structure of formal education and training in Tanzania constitutes two years of pre-primary; seven years of primary education (Standards 1-7); four years of junior secondary school (ordinary level); two years of senior secondary school (advanced level); and up to three more years of higher and tertiary education. At the end of Standard 7, students take the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) which is used as a means of selection for a student to go on to secondary school and is also used to rank the school according to pupils' performance. As Hardman observed in his baseline study in Tanzania, "Although the pencil and paper tests are seen as providing a standardised assessment in order to provide equitable opportunities for entry to secondary school, in practice they are generally seen as promoting teacher-centred routines and rote learning by testing recall or recognition of factual knowledge"(Hardman, 2008: 37). The pedagogical instruction in Tanzania, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, is primarily teacher centred, with rigid, chalk-and-talk, teacher-centred/dominated and lecture driven teaching in which pupils often take a passive role and limit themselves to memorising and reciting back (Dembele and Lefoka, 2007: 535)

The language of instruction in primary schools is Kiswahili, and English is taught only as a subject. In theory, all primary school teachers should be able to teach in English, but in practice many qualified teachers do not feel comfortable teaching English (Malekele, 1990). It is important to note that in the first few years of primary school English is integrated into the general course structure; however, in upper primary school, English is taught as a specialist subject with designated specialist English teachers.

There is a growing literature on the debate on the language of instruction (LoI) in Tanzanian primary schools and the shift in the medium of instruction in secondary school to English (Rubagamaya, 2008; Fentiman et al, 2010). Students who pass their Standard 7 exams, and hence are able to gain a place in secondary school (about 25% of the intake) are forced to switch from Kiswahili as the LoI to English. This switch has provoked much debate among educationalists, academics and politicians. (Mlama and Matteru, 1978; Criper and Dodd, 1984; Roy-Campbell and Quorro, 1987; Malekele, 2003).

The aim of this chapter is not to argue for or against the most appropriate language of instruction, but merely to bear in mind a very important issue which affects all: English is not only a challenge for children but also for teachers. Malekele reported that teachers lack a good foundation in English skills. Scrutiny of written letters by teachers to the Ministry of Education showed that the teachers' proficiency in English was very poor and further suggested that the inadequate language proficiency among English teachers is not only at secondary level, but also at the primary level. (Malekele, 2003: 107). If teachers have a poor grasp of English then it is not surprising that pupils are not performing well in their examinations. In a recent study conducted by UWEZO, a local educational advocacy non-governmental organisation, it highlights the severity of the problem as illustrated below:

> Half the children who complete primary school cannot read in English. English is by far the hardest subject for students. Even though all children in Standard 3 should be able to read the Standard 2 story level, less than 1 in 10 (7.7%) can. Progress in English is slow; by Standard 5, only 1 in 4 children can read a story. Nearly half cannot even read short English words. Many children reach Standard 7 without any skills at all. By the time they complete primary school. Half of all children (49.1%) still cannot read a Standard 2 level English story, and far fewer are likely to be able to read at the Standard 7 level. This means that the vast majority of children who enter secondary schooling are unable to read in the English language, the medium of instruction in secondary education (UWEZO, 2010)

A key component of the research was to examine pedagogical approaches and appropriateness. There is a growing literature which questions the assumptions that Western derived ideas and pedagogies are appropriate in culturally diverse African societies (Barrett, 2007; Guthrie, 1990; Hardman, Abd-Kadir &Smith, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2004; Robinson, 2002). Perhaps as Vavarus has pointed out: "it is not formalism or constructivism that should be promoted through teacher-education; instead, what is needed is a contingent pedagogy that adapts to the material conditions of teaching, the local traditions of teaching and the cultural politics of teaching in Africa and beyond"(2007: 310).

Within this context of language and pedagogy, the focus of the research was twofold:

(i) to observe and examine the teaching of English as a subject in primary school

(ii) to explore ways to improve the quality of teaching, learning and leading throughout the school.

Specifically, the research examined various questions, but the most pertinent and relevant to this chapter include:

- *What are the dominant patterns of teaching English lessons throughout the school from Standards 1-7?*
- *What are the teachers' reflections, individual and collective, on these dominant teaching patterns?*
- *What cost-effective and sustainable strategies can be used to inform better practice?*

The School Environment

Ukombozi School was built in 1982 and is made of concrete with corrugated iron roofing; it is located off a main arterial road, Morogoro Road, in Manzese, and contained within a large walled area with a gated entrance way. It has a large playing field which is used for extra-curricular activities and for community football matches in the evening. There are female traders sitting within the walled compound who sell foodstuffs and other small items - fried potatoes, sweets, drinks, and stationary such as envelopes, exercise books, and pencils - during the break time. There are separate latrines for male and female pupils as well as for male and female teachers, and water is on tap at the school. There are patches of green around the compound and the school is currently trying to improve the school environment by planting trees and flowers. The rooms are sparsely furnished and there are not enough desks, chairs or teaching materials. Teacher pupil ratios in Ukombozi are roughly 100:1, and there is a distinct lack of teaching resources and materials. There are not enough desks and many children sit on the floor in crowded, poorly ventilated classrooms. The school boundary abuts another primary school – Manzese School - and these two schools cater for about 56% of the Ward's children.

The school's senior management consists of a headteacher, two deputy headteachers, and three academic officers. However, all teachers are delegated additional roles and responsibilities outside their 'teaching' roles. At the time of the research, the total number of teachers in Ukombozi was forty-three - 36 female and 7 male – 12 below the acknowledged full staffing quota. The teacher qualifications varied but the majority of the teachers had completed Form IV and two years at the Teacher training college, thus acquiring their certificate.

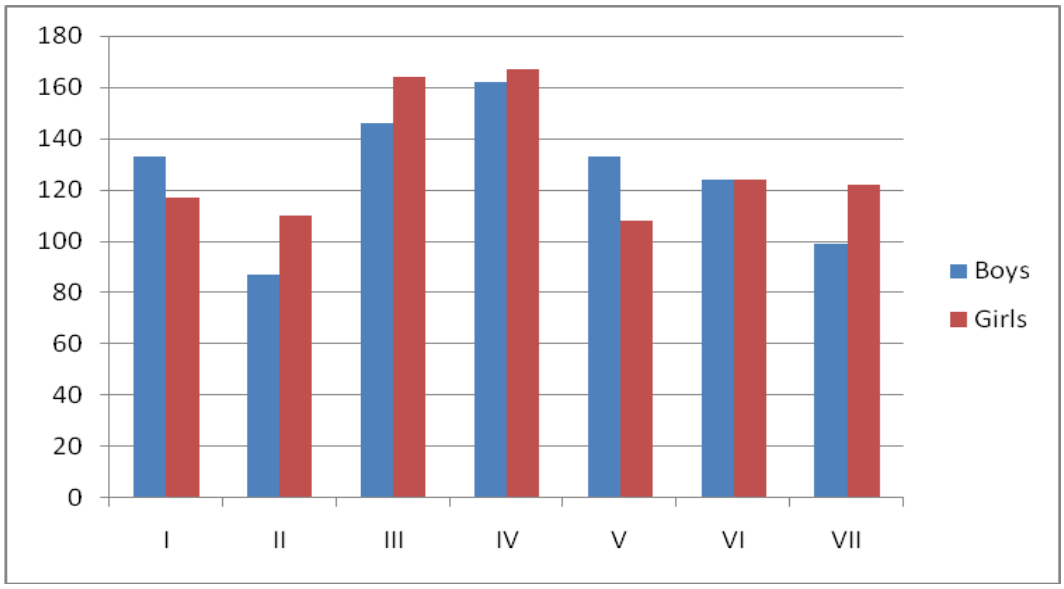


Table 1: School Enrolment in Ukombozi by Standard and Gender
Source: Ukombozi Primary School Statistics

School enrolment varies across each grade (Table 1), with numbers peaking to over 300 pupils in each of grades III and IV. The number of females is higher than boys, significantly even in upper primary (Standard VII), where normally in Tanzania female drop-out is reported to be higher. However, this data are only cross-sectional, and it may be due to the urban situation in which enrolment is fluid and constantly fluctuating; therefore, this may be reflective of the high rate of transfer within an urban setting.

According to the recent national examination results, Ukombozi ranked 76 out of 106 in the District; 212 out of 433 in the Region and 3566 out of 14759 nationally (National Examination Council of Tanzania, 2011). The Ukombozi Standard 7 test results (Figure 1) corroborate the finding that English is one of the most difficult subjects when performance is compared with other compulsory subjects; out of a total of 216 children who took the exam, only one received an A grade in English. Figure 1 compares the pupils' relative performance in English with the other compulsory subjects, identifying the difficulties of English and maths.

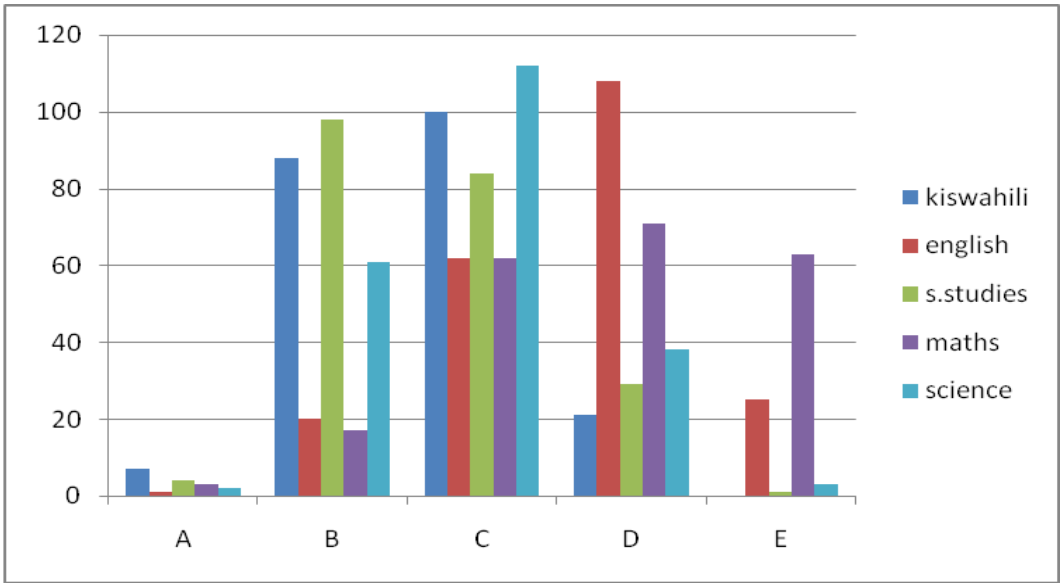


Figure 1: Ukombozi Standard 7 test results, 2011

Data Collection and Methodology

Data were collected over two academic school years in 2009 and 2010. Qualitative data approaches were employed and consisted of observations of the school environment, an ethnographic survey of the ward, lesson observation in the classroom, video-taping of teachers' teaching of English (as a subject) in Standards 1-7 (n=14), semi-structured interviews with English language teachers, as well as interviews with the head teacher, the ward education officer, the District education officer, and a meeting with the school committee. Quantitative data were collected in the form of statistics on enrolment, examination performance and the number and qualifications of teachers. Educational officials at the region, municipal and ward offices were informed of the nature of the research, as were parents and guardians who gave informed consent.

In conjunction with the data collection described above, a series of participatory workshops which engaged the whole school (all teachers) were held to initiate a 'reflective conversation' about the teachers' perspectives, perceptions and views of pedagogical instruction and to explore various approaches of the teaching of English in a contemporary urban setting. These meetings were recorded on audio and video and analysed using Hyper Research.

Workshop 1 focused on the current teaching practices at Ukombozi – basically, a record of how teachers teach English in Standards 1-7. Teachers from each standard viewed the first data set of video recordings; this was the first opportunity for the teachers to come together as a group with CCE staff and to observe the current

teaching practices and to discuss the challenges teachers face in Ukombozi. The aim of the workshop was to initiate a dialogue with the teachers and to ask them their views of current teaching practices within the school. Although the focus was only on the teaching of English, it was important to gather their opinions combined with constructive criticism of the positive and negative aspects of the teaching.

The second workshop, some nine months later, built upon the earlier 'conversations' with the introduction of a modest amount of resources including books, charts, story books, magazines and materials to create teaching aids, group work, collaborative conversations with all participants, as well as role play exercises. The teachers started to 'play' and 'explore' alternative pedagogical possibilities with the use of resources, group, levels of classroom interactions, nature of questioning and the quality of student answers, pupil-pupil interactions as well as pupil questioning. After the workshop, teachers were provided with a 'box of materials' which consisted of coloured board, markers, scissors, glue, and other items to make posters and visual aids.

A third workshop, again after a nine month interval, brought together headteachers and a selection of teachers from all four schools in the Ward. The aim of this meeting was to share the work with the other three schools in the ward, and to exoplore the various ways books could be used in teaching. Teachers from Ukombozi shared their views and opinions with the head teachers and staff of the other three schools. In addition, the participants broke up into groups and acted in a series of role play activities which were all conducted in English. This enabled all attendees to participate and the only criteria were the dramas had to be acted out in English. These were video recorded and then played back to the participants to simulate discussions about the appropriate use of English. Debates on controversial subjects were also conducted in English. This provided a forum for teachers to use and practice their English in a relaxed and friendly way in front of their peers.

The Reality: Initial Findings

The institutional challenges facing teachers and pupils were immediately apparent from the research through the analysis of field notes of observations, analysis of the video material and analysis of the teacher's discussions in workshops. The lack of teaching resources (textbooks, exercise books, lack of visual aids) and large class sizes (over 100 pupils per class) clearly have a significant impact on how teachers teach and students learn. The first-data set (2009) of video showed and confirmed that the pattern of the lessons followed a teacher-centred approach whereby the teacher teaches and the children listen. As mentioned above this is not unique for it is the case in many African countries (Lewin and Stuart, 2003; Hardman et al. 2008; Vavrus, 2009). The analysis of the audio transcriptions revealed that teachers were aware of the daunting challenges, but they felt they did as well as they could under the prevailing circumstances. The teachers identified aspects of good practice such as motivating the class through singing, applause from classmates when a child answers a question correctly (with clapping and singing 'good, better, best'), moving around the classroom, using objects in their lessons as 'positive approaches'. In addition the teachers confirmed that the children are very keen to learn. They also vented their frustrations in the poor foundation of teaching they experienced (both as a pupil and at teacher training college) and the challenges they faced in trying to teach in large,

over-crowded, under-resourced classrooms. Examples of the personal challenges and experiences of teachers' lives are discussed elsewhere (Sugrue and Fentiman, 2011).

The data from the 14 video-taped lessons (over two academic years) revealed that a set pattern or structure emerged of a 'typical' lesson. This entailed the teacher introducing the topic of the lesson, writing questions on the blackboard for the children to copy, setting out the task, and marking the exercise books. However, despite the lack of resources available some teachers did employ innovative and interactive methods to explain a concept as the following vignette shows:

> Leah is a Standard 5 teacher, and she was teaching a lesson on prepositions and she was trying to explain the definition of words such as *under* and *between*. In order for the class to understand the concepts, she asked for a child to come up to the front of the class. She then positioned the child under a table. She then asked the class, "Where is Anton?" They replied, "Anton is under the table" The class repeated this several times. The teacher then called for two more pupils to come to the front of the room. She placed Anton between the two pupils. She then asked where is Anton? They chorused, "Anton is between Laila and Mary". This 'visual' display of putting the words within a context that the children could comprehend was a successful approach where resources are scarce. (videotape 5, 2009)

However, throughout the interviews and discussions the teachers expressed their frustrations and the challenges of teaching large classes:

> "There are so many children….some children need individual teaching which they can't get because there are too many of them for the teacher to deal with, so they don't get any individual attention. So they can chorus along with others, but there is no understanding"

Challenges created by overcrowded classrooms and lesson time are maximised by scarce resources which are the key issues that were frequently mentioned in the audio recording by teachers. The majority of pupils do not have textbooks or exercise books. Teachers report that in some instances there are only twenty textbooks for 100 children. As a result the teacher has to write out the lesson on the blackboard for children to copy. This takes a considerable amount of time away from the lesson.

> "The lack of sufficient textbooks brings about a big learning problem because children fight for the texts and there is a lot of disorder. Classroom management is difficult because every child wants to use the textbook and when you have one to 20, it's just really difficult" (Maria).

Significantly, during the second year of video-taping there were noticeable changes in the ways teachers were teaching, arising perhaps from the November professional development workshop. Initial analysis of the data-set from 2010 reveals that teachers were more confident to explore and to try out new ways to teach their pupils by using more visual aids, group work and trying to engage in more interaction, and showed a willingness to adapt and modify their teaching.)

Outcomes

After several field visits the teachers became more relaxed and confident and they were more at ease interacting with the CCE team and in having their classes observed

and video-taped. Not surprisingly, teachers who taught English in the upper classes – Standards 5-7 were more confident and had better speaking and written English. As a consequence there was a disparity within the level of competency and the capacity of teachers to teach and speak in English. Instead of widening the gap, it was suggested by the teachers (themselves) to bridge the gap by encouraging the teachers who were more competent (or in many instances, more confident) to assist and help other teachers who were less competent. In the second workshop, teachers were asked what kind of realistic and practical commitments they were willing to make to improve English language teaching in the school over the next academic year. The majority said they were willing to try to practice and improve their English and improve their teaching. The examples below depict some of their suggestions:

> "I am going to improve my English by using the communication skills such as listening, reading, writing and speaking when I teach my students in the classroom and when I communicate with my fellow teachers. I am going to improve English by reading story books and all magazines which surrounding in my school and in the library." (S, English teacher in Standard 7)

> "What I am going to do for our school is to speak English frequently and daily. Then to greet our pupils in English and talk to them. Even to convince all teachers to read the story book of English. Then, in our teaching I use methodology for participate all pupils to interpret and to say something in our period when I am teaching English." (L, English teacher in Standard 4)

> "I am going to speak English every day: reading storybooks, novel, newspaper; Learn more courses of English course; Write composition; Guide pupils by educate them English is good language like other language; Give them plenty of exercise of talking/writing; Guide them English is like other subjects." (J, Standard 6)

> "What I am going to do? To speak or greetings pupils; To read story from book to the pupils; To use pictures I ask what they see in the picture and they will answer me in English." (K, Standard 3).

> "What I am going to do? I am going to teach English language in Class V. I am going to speak English where ever I will be in the school surroundings. I am going to put restrictions that NO ENGLISH NO SERVICE from my office, from me." (M, Standard 5)

By signing up to these commitments, the school was participating in an improvement plan that would benefit the whole school and not just individual teachers. Another significant outcome of the research was that the headteacher and teachers developed and initiated their own staff development plan to improve the general teaching practices and to improve the use of English in and out of the classroom. These initiatives included practical and low cost strategies.

Confidence: One of the most striking changes observed is that there is evidence which shows that with the very little support provided intermittently by the CCE team (10 field visits and 3 participatory workshops), teachers' confidence and competence in their use of English is significantly improving – they say so themselves.

Consequently they are more willing to take pedagogical risks to push the boundaries of their teaching.

Improved Pedagogical Development: For example, students are successfully used as a resource and peer assessment is employed where students both assess their peers' answers and correct them when they are wrong. Other noticeable improvements were the use of groups in classes.

Practice: Ideas, suggestions and recommendations that were discussed in the workshops to improve teaching have been put into practice. For example, teachers have created visual teaching aids (posters, words and pictures from magazines) and some teachers have applied 'group' teaching and story book reading with big books. Collecting English magazines and newspapers and making study aids for the classroom are on-going activities.

English Language Day: The school has established an English language day – every Wednesday- in which teachers and pupils are encouraged to greet and speak in English. It was observed that there is greater confidence in speaking English among the teachers and the pupils.

Library and Resources: A library has been established with donated books in English from the United Kingdom; this initial initiative has had a positive impact and the school was recently selected by the Tanzanian Book Aid Trust to receive more books and teaching aids. One English teacher has taken on the responsibility of acting as a 'librarian' which allows children to borrow books and to take the books home. There is such a demand from the children (and teachers) to read and more book drives are planned for the school.

Collaborative Partnerships: An important aspect of our collaborative partnership is the improved communication between the University of Cambridge and the school through email. A computer was provided to the school which allows continuous reporting and up-dates from the school. In addition, the school committee bought a printer for the school which demonstrates a willingness to take part in the partnership. Significantly, the school has shared its resources with the other three schools in the ward. Well-established partnerships now exist with the Ministry of Education at all levels and an important link with the University of Dar es Salaam has been forged. Manzese ward is committed to, and supportive of, the project and all the local stakeholders including the schools, the parent teacher associations, and the school committees are engaged.

Environmental Changes: The school environment is important to the welfare of the school. An initial small grant assisted the school to commission a local artist to paint murals, pictures and visual aids with descriptions in English on the school walls. This form of 'edutainment' is important because it is twofold: it livened up the environment and it is also educational. Upon a field visit, it was asked to a group of children, why are you staring at the map on the wall? "Because we like it, we want to learn and we so proud of our school. Can you show us where you are from?"

Expansion of the Pilot to other Schools in the Ward: Creating a sustainable collaborative network is an important outcome of the case study. The other three schools in the ward expressed their interest in the initial pilot study and have asked to be included in the next phase of the research. Research started in February 2011 and a training workshop took place to train teachers in the use of recording teaching in the classroom with a video camera. Each school was provided with a video camera to use for their own school improvement which will enable them to reflect on their teaching methods.

Conclusion

The introduction began with an overview of the impact of the MDG goals and the achievements that the Republic of Tanzania has made in getting more and more children in school and to comply with EFA and MDG targets. It also highlighted the difficulties and consequences facing primary school teachers in light of these targets: overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and lack of training. However, this research has shown that despite the daunting situation facing teachers in our urban case study, it is not all gloom and doom. There is a continued sense of commitment and resilience by the teachers to help and to educate their children; they expressed a willingness to reflect on their teaching, to try new approaches and to initiate ways to improve English. This study cannot claim dramatic changes in the pedagogical practices, but it can show how fairly simple, cost-effective measures can make a difference to the ways teachers think about teaching and the ways schools can club together and share limited resources with the community to make education more appropriate to the needs of its learners.

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