



Experience-based School Principals' perspectives on the development of and roles of social relationships on Tanzania's pre-primary school children's learning

Tanzanyalı okul öncesi çocukların öğrenmelerinde sosyal ilişkilerin gelişimi ve rolüne ilişkin okul müdürlerinin deneyimine dayalı bakış açıları

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Abstract: This paper investigated the perceived role of the social relationships in the pre-primary school children's learning. It basically focused primary school principals' perspectives on social relationship among pre-primary children and in relation to the school community. To achieve the study purpose, four specific objectives guided the study that engaged 12 school principals in Mbozi district in Mbeya region through the use of purposive sampling strategy. Informed by the phenomenographic research design, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data from the school principals using face-to-face conversations that lasted for 30 - 50 minutes. The analysis followed the three conceptual tasks and revealed that school principal's conceptions about a child's social relationship staved off the development of unacceptable manner made possible through collaboration between family members (parents) and other community members. Cooperation and respecting child's needs are the two essential elements of positive teacher-child and child-child relationships. Importantly, teaching children to be cooperative and respect one another and adults help in strengthening social relationship in the society.

Keywords: Social development; Social relationship; Pre-primary children; Early childhood education

Öz: Bu çalışma, okul öncesi çocuklarının öğrenmelerinde sosyal ilişkilerin algılanan rolünü araştırmıştır. Temel olarak ilkököl müdürlerinin okul öncesi çocuklarının arasındaki sosyal ilişkiler ile okul çevreleri ile olan ilişkilerine yönelik bakış açılarına odaklanmıştır. Bu nedenle, Mbeya bölgesinde Mbozi ilçesinde 12 okul müdürü ile amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak, araştırmanın amacına yön veren dört özel hedefe rehberlik edecek şekilde belirlenmiştir. Fenomenolojik araştırma tasarımının kullanıldığı araştırmada, daha önceden bilgilendirilen okul müdürleriyle 30-50 dakika süren yüz yüze yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılarak veri toplanmıştır. Yapılan analiz sonucunda üç kavramsal durum şunu ortaya çıkarmıştır: okul müdürünün bakış açısı ile bir çocuğun sosyal ilişkilerinde uygun olmayan bir davranış aile üyeleri (ebeveynler) ve diğer topluluk üyeleri arasındaki iş birliğiyle ortadan kaldırılabilir. İş birliği ve çocuğun ihtiyaçlarına saygı duyulması, olumlu öğretmen-çocuk ve çocuk-çocuk ilişkilerinin iki temel ögesidir. Çocuklara işbirlikçi olmalarının ve birbirlerine ve yetişkinlere saygı duymalarının öğretilmesi toplumdaki sosyal ilişkilerin güçlenmesine önemli bir biçimde yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal gelişim; Sosyal ilişki, Okul öncesi çocuklar; Erken çocukluk eğitimi

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INTRODUCTION

Social relationships in early years particularly in pre-primary education-PPE has gained focus of researchers because of its positive relationship with child's participation early education settings and social outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, and Sammons, 2004). PPE which is the focus of this study is the first stage of learning and the heart of applicable pedagogy at this tender age (McLaughlin, Aspden, and McLachlan, 2015). In fact, it is one of the four key most important areas of learning in the early childhood curriculum. The Tanzania Institute of Education-TIE (2016) and Wolhuter (2014) affirm that building relationships is one of the two main purposes of PPE. After all, curriculum implementation in PPE occurs through relationships and interactions of a child and his or her teacher (McLaughlin, Aspden, and McLachlan, 2015). During such interaction, the teacher's role is supporting relationship that children develop, providing professional and personal relationships they are building with colleagues, families, and children because of its importance in their daily work.

Researchers (Birch and Ladd, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hamre and Pianta, 2001) underscore the importance of teacher-child relationships and teacher-family relationships, which teachers and researchers consider a priority in early childhood. Indeed, positive teacher-child relationship characterised of caring, responsive and nurturing, contributes to brain-development as the effects of close and meaningful connections emerge with families and home life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Teacher-child and child-child relationships in pre-primary contexts are crucial in creating and sustaining positive child development and learning at the same and higher levels. This dimension of child development is one of the five new opportunities for positive behaviours in which a child in school get involved (Kernan and Singer, 2011). Other opportunities include a sense of togetherness, collaboration, peer affiliation, and tolerance. Furthermore, positive relationship is important as it safeguards children experiencing unhelpful family relationships (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, and Sippola, 1996) and help in protecting school-based children against loneliness and depression (Nangle, Erdley, Newman, Mason, and Carpenter, 2003).

Taking into account that schooling has direct effects on children's educational achievement, their acquisition of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge (Sylva, 1994), and that development of specific knowledge and skills has a direct effect of classroom teaching (Good and Brophy, 1986), researchers were inquisitive on the understanding of and perspectives held

by school principals on social relationships among pre-primary children. Habegger (2008) investigating successful school principals' critically found those developing positive relationships between children and adults in school contexts is significant than those working for high test scores. In the school principal's articulation, the author reports that positive relationship between children and adults in school contexts is influential for pupils to have positive school attendance as they are supported and nurtured. Similarly, positive school leadership demonstrated by school principals contributes to organizational learning, which in turn influences the core business of the school - the teaching and learning, hence pupil's positive outcomes (Mulford, 2003).

Valuing teacher's suggestions by done by school principals is another essential way of building and strengthening teacher-child relationships (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011). Lynch and Simpson (2010) identifies other useful strategies for building social relationship in PPE as setting up classrooms to enhance social development, providing play opportunities to promote social functioning, and teaching social skills directly. Most of the strategies empirically discussed and presented indicate low family and community role in building positive social relationships. As such parents and community members as a whole tend to be regarded as complementary to the school role in building social relationship (Habegger, 2008) neglecting the reality that education provision is a shared responsibility of educators and families (Albright, Weissberg, and Dusenbury, 2011). In addition to listening and encouraging implementation of teacher's suggestions, listening to the voice of the child and fostering healthy relationships with peers, teachers and school staff essentially make children with positive experience of school and their cognitive and emotional development (Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

In Tanzanian context, the focus on child' social relationship is hard to obtain among researchers. The well-known and published studies have mainly focused on quality of PPE services including physical condition and arrangement of classrooms (Libent, 2015; Machumu, 2013; Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010; Tandika, 2014). Other studies have explored the challenges and the future of early childhood development and care (Mtahabwa, 2009), and policy and curricula (Mtahabwa, 2015). Shavega, Brugman and Tuijl (2015) examined relationships among teacher-child relationships, teachers' cultural beliefs, classroom emotional support, and children's behavioural adjustment in preschool. To our knowledge, these studies have not well explored the school principals' experiences and perspectives on the role of social relationship

in fostering pre-primary children's learning. Moreover, involvement of the school principals in this study were necessary as the government and parents entrust that their leadership and collaborative working with school community is of significant impact to pupil's life. Importantly, as leaders in their designated schools, they are well informed of their school organization and involvement in developing children with social skills. Critically, school principals have the ability to influence the structure, culture and mission of the school for a vibrant and successful learning community (Bredeson, 2000).

Study purpose and its objectives

This study intended to explore school principals' perspectives on social relationship as a child's development dimension and its role in influencing pre-primary children learning and development. Specifically, it aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Examine the primary school principals' conceptions of social relationship;
- ii. Determine the primary school principals' experience with the appropriate social relationships among and between pupils and teachers in pre-primary classes;
- iii. Find out the role of social relationships in fostering positive children's development and learning in a pre-primary context; and
- iv. Establish the roles that the primary school community could play to create positive social relationship among pre-primary children and other primary school pupils.

METHODS

Research design

Using phenomenological design, the study was able to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, provide responses on how the school principals experienced these social relationships (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). To obtain data for the detailed description of the research problem, the study employed semi-structured interviews with the primary school principals. The face-to-face conversations through in-depth interview lasted for about 30 - 50 minutes. The interview conversations were recorded in the notebook and sound recording device to enable researchers to analyse and report findings appropriately.

Participants and their selection

Using purposive sampling, the study selected primary school principals commonly known in Tanzania education system as school principals because they daily oversee the curriculum implementation in their schools. Further, school principals are responsible for ensuring that quality services - including education, prevail in their schools. And as part of their pedagogical leadership, school principals are required to lead and develop teachers' capacities in attaining the desired learning outcomes. The sample size of the study involved 12 school principals of the selected primary schools in Mbozi district in Mbeya region. Mbozi district council is among the three districts, others being Mbeya Urban and Mbeya rural that had high number of children living or reared by grandparents or aunts, single parents or without caregivers at all (Mwenisongole and Mligo, 2018). Authors hint on page 47 that, Mbozi district like other areas along Mbeya city to Tunduma are highly affected by HIV/AIDs resulting into orphanage or loss of parents. Loss of parents or by being cared by single parent makes the child being at risk of gaining quality child care; hence undertaking research in this area was important for establishing the role of school in completing to caring gap that children experience in Mbozi district. The involved school principals were distributed evenly gender wise. The majority (83.3%) were holders of the teacher education obtained after attending it beyond their advanced level secondary education with only two holding a university degree in teacher education. With regard to their work experience, 41.6 percent of the primary school principals were new to the managerial post with only 1-3 years of experience during fieldwork, with a further 33.3 percent having less than one year on the job following their appointment to the position of primary school principals.

Analysis procedures

Data analysis followed the three conceptual tasks: epoche bracketing, eidetic reduction (or phenomenological reduction), and imaginative variation as described by Moustakas (1994). As such, researchers suspended their personal biases, beliefs, preconceptions and assumptions about the role of social relationships in the development and learning of pre-primary children. Second, researchers read the discussion written in recorded field notes to determine the core issues by going beyond, behind, or underneath the conventional patterns of thoughts and action to expose the meaning structure (Moustakas, 1994). Eidetic reduction materialised in the process of data analysis by clearly obtaining the core of thoughts and actions that successively yielded experiences, reflections of experience, until the invariants of experience yielded the

essence of meaning. Third, data analysis entailed the imaginative variation aimed to complement the eidetic reduction by expanding the scope of analysis following the elimination of the irrelevant data from the primary school principals to discover the hidden explanations from the respondents.

Ethical consideration

School principals were contacted and for their own will agreed to participate voluntarily that helped researchers to generate data about their perspectives on the contribution of young children's social relationship on learning. In addition, school principal's name and their schools are anonymously treated as letters substitute their real names for confidentiality purposes.

Trustworthiness of the study

In this phenomenological study, researchers conducted fieldwork without incorporating their prior knowledge and experience on the role of positive social relationships pertaining to children's learning and development. Further, engaged study participants on their own consent after they have agreed to the study purpose. They agreed to participate in the study after being ensured of confidentiality. Researchers took such measures to avoid imposing personal judgments on the study outcomes. To avoid personal bias, a linguist was invited to translate and transcribe collected interview data from the school principals. Further, researchers present description of participants' background information for the study for readers to understand the interpretation of data provided.

RESULTS

This section presents an analysis and interpretation of data collected from the involved study informants. The presentation is done as per research objective that guided this study. Overall, the analysis of data collected indicates that the primary school principals selected from the public schools were informed about young child's social relationship. As well, findings reveal that school principals hold positive on the friendly interactions that teacher and children or child-to-child interaction in building positive social relationship and child's learning. As a whole, they indicated to be quite informed of their critical role in influencing the school community participates in ensuring that the school plays its essential role in influencing direct and indirect learning of the child on various social skills acceptable in school and in the community. The detail of the presentation is made in under this section.

School principals' conceptions of social relationship

Through semi-structured interview conducted to individual school principals using the face-to-face mode, the researcher examined their conceptions of the social relationship pertaining to the child's social development. Overall, they seem to emphasize a value-centred upbringing of children on reasons that any society has its own values that need to be cherished and a school is a place where acceptable behaviours, social values are embraced and moulded, and developing child's competencies for the social and production changes, and how children should be taught manners and other traditional matters. Findings indicated that school principals held varying and occasionally differing conceptions about child's social upbringing so that they are able to live and work with others. School principal 1 said:

"Every child is raised and lives in a community; therefore, the community is responsible for rearing a child in terms of cognitive, physical as well as spiritual development for behaving well".

Whereas school principal 2 said:

[Child's social development] refers to the changes occurring as the child develops while learning and doing things that are acceptable in the given community. A child should learn and be able to greet elders and peers, respect people, be responsible for his/her life, and be co-operative.

And school principal 3 explained:

"Child's social development entails receiving all essential needs from family members while learning customs, values, traditions and acceptable behaviours in a particular society".

Looking at a principal's conceptions about a child's social development, the school principals related to and insisted staving-off the development of a child's unacceptable manner requires the collaboration between family members (parents) and other community members. That is to say, school principals are aware that some family members tend to be less involved in child's development of socially acceptable behaviours for child's easy interaction and integration with other community members. This child rearing and socialisation should reflect agreeable socio-cultural and community values and not necessarily age-appropriate teaching and learning practices.

Primary school principals' experience on teacher-pupils' social relationships

School principals were also being interviewed about their understanding of the social relationship a between a child and a teacher. Specifically, researchers wanted to establish the school principals' experience and understand on teacher-pupil social relationship. The analysis revealed that school principals viewed teacher-pupil social relationship as the co-operation between the teacher and a pre-primary school child in various social activities. These activities include responsibilities the teacher renders to a child without external stimuli such as fear of the authorities or any material award. It was elaborated by the school principal that:

“Teacher-pupil social relationships involve teaching and directing the child’s societal values, customs and tradition. The teaching done by teacher is the extension of things taught by family members since the child was born”.

Another principal said:

“Teacher-pupil social relationship is important in exploring and understanding child’s needs, his/her basic rights, and a child’s family status before responding accordingly in how you teach him or her”.

Based on the school principals' views, it is apparent that friendliness between the teacher and the child as well as between the teacher and parents/caregivers in and outside the school contexts is important in fostering the teacher-child social relationships. To maintain such friendliness, school principals insist on the teacher interacting positively with the child as well as the parents/guardian. The interaction should entail engaging the child in various activities while providing him/her with opportunities for expressing his/her feelings and needs. Through the strategic activities that the child participates in, he/she can demonstrate his/her talents and learn from the teacher as well as peers. School principals' explanations based on their experiences indicate that teacher-pupil social relationship is largely characterised by the positive co-operation among the society, and between the teacher and the pre-primary school child's in different social activities including learning. In this regard, during the course of interviews, the researcher asked the school principals to characterise positive teacher-pupil social relationship. The analysis and findings areas summarised in Table 1:

Table 1. *Positive Teacher-Child social relationship*

S/N	Response	<i>f</i>	%
1	Being co-operative	11	91.6
2	Helping each other	05	41.6
3	Understanding child's needs	07	58.3

School principals' understanding of positive teacher-child social relationship broadly revolved around co-operation (91.6%) among children and the teacher and children in learning and other school activities. They described such co-operation as entailing different things engendering the teacher working together with the society/community in child rearing in physical, cognitive, and spiritual aspects. Moreover, such co-operation should also help the child to realise and know the things both the society and schools prefer. It was emphasized by one of the school principals that;

“Family members need to be in harmony with the school in ensuring that their child develops well. They should frequently meet to share experiences regarding child rearing”.

On the other hand, the school principals described co-operation as essential during teaching and learning so that children develop from teacher capacity to solve problems. Co-operation should also prevail during sports and games, and class activities such as reading as well as use of instructional materials.

In fact, high co-operation between pupil and their teacher, according to the primary school principals, allowed children to learn different things and solve problems or take turns in using instructional materials. Moreover, co-operation during teaching and learning enable children to have good discipline, for example, greeting elders and peers and giving thanks for different goods or prizes they received. More significantly, co-operation help engaged partners (teacher and children) set forth direction appropriate for all to follow as they work on the child's better future. Through teacher-parent partnership, the child is poised to get essential needs for health and schooling.

Furthermore, the co-operation will ensure child safety as each member has responsibilities to deliver to the child. The other feature of good teacher-pupil social relationship is the observable and reported situation of helping each other (41.6%). School principals reported that teachers should develop the children's capacity and desire to help each other as the situation demands. They exemplified that there were times when the children fell sick or uncomfortable in the way that they fail to walk home on their own, hence support is necessary. Sometimes, children fail to manage their own things such as expressing their needs or solving academic and social problems. In this regard, scaffolding children become a necessary strategy for them to live comfortably and develop their capacity to solve problems or expressing needs using accessible language amongst their peers and the teacher. Such a development would also make them feel

valued and part of the learning community. In consequence, the child can emulate the same values in the family or the wider community.

Co-operation is a crucial feature of the teacher-pupil social relationship. Understanding of the child's needs (58.3%) in the school compound is another feature essential in facilitating teacher-child social relationship. As teachers understand the child's needs (e.g.; level and developed skills in language and cognitive development), teachers and pupils would work while understanding that all pupils need levelled learning environment that do not segregate /separate or isolate pupils.

With regard to the school principals' positive characterisation of the child-child social relationship, the analysis revealed the following features:

Table 2. *Characteristics of positive child-child social relationship*

S/N	Child-child characteristics	f	%
1	Greeting each other and elders thanksgiving	7	58.3
2	Caring and respecting caregiver and peers	12	100.0
3	Co-operating in learning	12	100.0
4	Caring school compound	07	58.3

As illustrated in Table 2, caring and respecting caregivers (the teacher and parents) and peers as well as co-operating in various activities including learning (100%) were highly ranked by primary school principals to constitute good child-child social relationship. Co-operation among children also encompassed children working together in school activities such as cleaning the school compound. Participating and collaborating in keeping the school compounds clean make them learn the importance of living in hygienic environment that avoids communicable diseases. In relation to learning, school principals gave various statements. For example, one of the school principals said:

I would like to see preschool children in my school working together in groups when in or outside the class in various learning activities. They should help fellows in areas of their interest and ensure that each one of them benefits from group activities to allow slow or lower achievers to catch up as well. In case they fail to help themselves, they can ask for help from their elder brothers and sisters in school.

Another principal contended:

I would like be proud and happy when I see preschool children in my school developing good friendships and skills in areas other than academic. It is important that they help their fellows by reporting to the teachers when in the school compounds when they notice him/her looking ill. In case they are outside school premises, they should call family members so that other measures such as going to the hospital or getting first aid can occur.

The school principals also underscored the value of playing and getting school meals together, and co-operating with teachers in rearing their fellows as important in equipping children with acceptable behaviours in and outside the school premises. Good child-child social relationship also translated in children not fighting each other while playing. Playing and eating together with limited fight among themselves indicates that they love each other. Furthermore, sharing experiences in friendly manner and being fair to each other contributes to making pupils know each other, develop tolerant behaviours useful in working collaboratively in learning or solving problems they face. Other important behavioural traits identified by school principals include cultivation of good social relationships among children that allow them to help elders carry luggage that they could manage while being wary of the dangerous and unwanted materials.

In addition to helping the elders and peers in carrying goods/luggage, a good social relationship is characterised by giving thanks to peers when sharing or receiving some materials such as pens/pencils, textbooks or when they provide assistance during a particular task. The school principals also insisted that children with good social relationship participate in various activities aimed to improve the school or class learning environment. In this regard, the children might participate in the preparation and keeping of instruction or learning materials. The primary school principals also noted that caring and respectful behaviours were important as they enabled children to demonstrate different good character traits such as good table manners, caring about the school calendar and being punctual and regular at school or any other place as required. Good table manners and proper observing of school timetable reduce teacher-child conflict, hence fostering a cordial relationship that allow pupils to enjoy being in school. Moreover, it is important for children to learn to observe and ensure that they follow the school timetable to help schools run their programmes well while developing a sense of accomplishing theirs as planned.

Valuing other child's views and those with disability is a clear indication that children have good social relationships. Caring parents, caring teachers and caring peers strengthen the child-child social relationship that fosters the ability and sense of belonging in the school compound

(58.3%). As they develop a sense of caring for the school compounds, they will participate in ensuring that they keep school premises in order, plant and grow flowers and trees to serve various functions and making the school compounds beautiful and conserved. Schooling in well-kept school premises would allow children develop keen interest in schooling and the school environment and enjoy being in school and learn well. From the primary school principals' views, a crucial indicator of pupils caring school compound is advocating for and protecting the school and community properties. Advocacy and protection of the school and community property help to cultivate in them feelings that they are an integral part of the beneficiaries of the school and community property.

The study also established that the school timetable is necessary for the child and school activities to run as planned. In addition, such scheduling would allow children to grow while observing punctuality as a necessary trait in school and general life.

Role of positive teacher-pupil's social relationship

In addition to the school principal's experience about the positive teacher-pupil social relationship, the study explored from the school principals the importance of positive social relationship in pre-primary children's development and learning. Table 3 summarises their responses:

Table 3. *Role of positive social relationship in child's development and learning*

S/N	Response	<i>f</i>	%
1	Ensure child's safety	4	33.3
2	Learn effectively	10	83.3
3	Develops child's relationship skills	11	91.7
4	Strengthens pupil-pupil relationship	5	41.7
5	Improves school attendance	6	50.0

As Table 3 illustrates, the school principals reported that good social relationship among children and between the teacher and children have positive outcomes in various aspects/domains of a child's development. For instance, 11 out of 12 (91.6%) noted that such good social relationship promotes child's skills to behave appropriately to the elders including following the teachers' and elders' instructions. Key to the children is developing confidence in doing things regardless of the mistake they make as they would be corrected and learn how to do acceptable things. In addition, the study established that learning and demonstrating

acceptable behaviours strengthened child-child social relationships (as reported by 41.6%). Strong child-child relationship would make children value each other and, hence, co-operate among themselves. Good social relationship also ensures child safety (33.3%). Safety in this case constitutes living and studying in the learning environment without children harbouring any fear, hence feeling free to talk and ask from their peers, children, and other members of the society. In such a leaning context, children develop inquisitive skills necessary for enhancing cognitive, language and vocabulary. This suggests that good social relationships enabled through the creation of safe leaning contexts promote and foster pupils' learning (83.3%). Through the question-and-answers (inquisitive habits) sessions, children develop and use words they could otherwise not manage to develop that are socially inhibitive. In this regard, the school principals conceptualised good social relationship between the teacher and children as essential in making the child talk and receive feedback. In process of talking to each other (sharing experiences or responding to some demands), children learn and develop appropriate language skills.

In addition, a good social relationship between children and their teacher boosts school attendance (as reported by 16.6%). In their explanations, the school principals noted that school attendance dropped when the teacher used harsh and hostile language before the children. Indeed, such unfriendly language does discourage children and make them dislike schooling altogether, with some even missing class sessions and other essential curricular and extra-curricular activities. Because of the importance and influence of the good social relationship among children and between them and their teachers in learning, primary school principals proposed and advised preschool teachers to observe and practise some behaviour as summarised in Table 4:

Table 4. *School principals' advice to classroom teachers*

S/N	Responses	f	%
1.	Love children	12	100.0
2.	Make home visits to family heads	5	41.7
3.	Child friendly instructional practices (concrete materials and strategies)	6	50.0
4.	Teach children/ pupils to cooperate and help each other	11	91.7

The Table 4 illustrates that, school principals advise preschool teachers to teach and treat children as human being endowed with the right to be loved (100%). Teaching, working and co-operating with children in a friendly environment while valuing them would help children develop problem-solving skills as they receive support from the elders and teachers with whom

they interact. Teaching acceptable values greeting peers and elders and, in particular, using acceptable language indicates that such teacher respects and loves his/her children. Equally important the school principals underscored the value of educating children to help elders in or outside school compound when they see these elderly citizens carrying loads or luggage. However, school principals were of the view that classroom teachers should caution children they should not carry any luggage that elders carry because some may be too heavy for them or contain dangerous materials such drugs. Teaching and helping or interacting with all the pupils equally in class (without segregation) was another crucial value that school principals insisted upon, which classroom instructors (teachers) should demonstrate. Listening to, tolerating pupils who make mistakes, and working with them in solving problems prevailing in class or school compounds without segregating anyone made children develop with confidence. Furthermore, there was a need for the development of positive self-esteem among the pupils for them to feel part of the school and under communality so that they are able to serve their peers as well.

Another advice that school principals gave to pre-primary school teachers was that when teaching the young children, it was vital to work co-operatively (91.7%). The study participants insisted that teaching children to co-operate with others in school and homesteads cultivates in them a sense of togetherness and sympathy. By being sympathetic and working with a sense of group values and norms, children managed to live and work co-operatively in different learning activities and other social gatherings such as sports and games. One of the group norms that primary school principals insisted upon was protecting rather than stealing other pupils' properties as that was a sense of selfishness.

Again, the use of child friendly instructional practices was reported (by 50%) as another crucial advice that school principals gave to the pre-primary school teachers of their respective schools. They insisted that use of child-centred learning strategies and tasks that require fostering pupils' togetherness in solving it coupled with the use of a variety of instructional materials make pupils enjoy their learning and, more importantly, allow them to engage their senses (seeing, touching and so on). Moreover, the use of child-friendly instructional practices would also help foster the understanding of the pupils' feelings, interests and their potentials in learning, hence facilitating the teachers' provision of necessary assistance to the child for a holistic development to occur.

The school principals also insisted that teachers should develop a habit and ensure that they conduct home visits to learn more about child rearing practices parents/adults or other family

heads embrace (41.7%). The home visits by teachers to parents or family heads would enable both the visitor and the visited to share beliefs and values related to the child rearing and development so that they can exchange the most accepted values in school and the general community. One school principal she said:

“As teachers visit parents, they learn different things like friendship and mostly trust that helps in implementing things agreed together in meetings and other gathering for the child a positive development”.

Another school principal he explained:

“Co-operation between teachers and parents is significant as apart from learning cultural experiences in child-rearing, they would share the learning conditions in schools and at home necessary for improving the school infrastructures for attractive leaning environment”.

On the whole, one could argue that school principals' advice to all the pre-primary school teachers imply that they are informed and knowledgeable that friendly learning environment using more child-centred and safe infrastructure are necessary for a child's development and learning. Significantly, co-operation in terms child-child, teacher-child, and teacher-parents/adults is a cornerstone in fulfilling school mission of educating all the children enrolled in school and for child's personal development.

School community in child's development of appropriate social relationship skills

The study also determined the school community's responsibilities in developing a positive child-to-child social relationship. Through interviews, school principals gave varied responses regarding the school responsibilities as summarised in Table 5:

Table 5. *Role of the school community in developing children with social relationship skills*

S/N	Responsibilities	<i>f</i>	%
1	Ensure safe and attractive teaching and learning environment for all pupils	7	58.0
2	Requiring school teachers cooperate with family and or community	9	75.0
3	Reminding pupils to help elders/visitors to carry luggage	1	8.0
4	Educating pupils on good morals and using acceptable language	5	41.7
5	Training teachers to be professionals for quality instruction	2	16.7
6	Reporting pupils progress (motivating them receiving claims)	2	6.7

According to the school principals' understanding and experiences, the main school responsibilities identified were building good child-to-child and other kinds of pupil social relationships. The main responsibility is ensuring that the school community (teachers and pupils) co-operates well with families and the village/ street community (75%) in a number of activities. One of the activities is child rearing in both social and academic matters. The respondents also reported that co-operation should entail the identification and provision of school essentials such as sports gear for children to participate in sports and games for building positive relationships.

Another crucial responsibility was for schools to ensure that the teaching and learning environment is safe and attractive. They exemplified, classes have enough space for child to interact with materials coupled with a safe learning environment that both abled and disabled could use (58%). Finally, schools should continue educating children to practice good morals and using language acceptable all community (as reported by 41.7% of the school principals). Some of the good or acceptable morals identified by the school principals were respecting others, greeting both elders and peers when meet them, protecting school properties, and avoid inductive. Analytically, primary school principals, as study participants, demonstrated interest in ensuring that schools prepare and adequately supply materials for pupils or children to use in interaction and learn. They affirmed that through interactive with materials or among themselves with teachers, they would learn good social relationship skills and live with others friendly and meaningful life.

DISCUSSION

Primary school principals' understanding of the child's social development and social relationship in PPE in Tanzania is mostly associated with learning and demonstrating acceptable behaviours, customs and cooperation amongst and with elders. These views as established by this study converge with findings of other studies. For instance, Cheah and Rubin (2003) report that Chinese mothers of pre-schoolers would like to see their preschool children demonstrate sharing and being helpful to other children for social conventional reasons. Key among the conventional reasons is to fit in the group and function well in Chinese society. And as it was noted by school principals, cooperation among children and between children and their teachers is essential relationship maintenance (Schneider, Woodburn, del Toro, and Udvari, 2005) and for developing competition among themselves (Rubin and Melissa, 2010) in different cultural contexts mostly in educational contexts. Essentially, an established close relationship

between family members with their children is important (McLaughlin, Aspden, and McLachlan, 2015) for deepened understanding of every child and for them to understand family's culture.

Teacher-child and child-to-child interaction as was identified by school principals being essential in fostering positive teacher-child relationships, offers an opportunity for developing positive relationships using strategies such as listening to children (Ostrosky and Jung, 2010). Authors further indicate that teachers and children interaction especially through making eye contact with them; and engaging in many one-to-one using pleasant and calm voices; and face-to-face interactions with young children promote secure teacher-child relationships. Interactions [teacher-child; and child-child] embedded within proximal (e.g., activity settings) and more distal systems (e.g., pre-primary school classroom), child's including social relationship skills are gained over time (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Carta and Greenwood, 1985).

The teacher-child interaction as was perceived by the school principals as essential in building PPE children with social relationship just as the use of demonstration, case study, stories, *ngonjera* – some kind of African poetry, drama, songs, and question and answers suggested to be employed in the classroom by the Tanzania Institute of Education-TIE (2016). It therefore implies that, social relationship as an essential part of social environment is built through the use of teacher-pupil interaction concur with the use of sports and games by TIE (2016). Play opportunities as were identified by school principals and by the TIE (2016) promote learning and teaching social functioning and teaching social skills directly (Lynch and Simpson, 2010).

School principals' responses on the benefits of positive social relationship between the teacher-child and between children (develop child's relationship skills—91.7% and learn effectively—83.3%) concurs with researchers (Birch and Ladd, 1997; Hamre and Pianta, 2001) and specialists (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) evidence on child development. They recognise the significance of the contribution of positive social and emotional development to the overall child's well-being as it sets the stage for future academic and personal outcomes, and undergird other areas of development (Denham and Brown, 2010). Furthermore, treating children as people endowed with the rights deserving love aligns with the argument made by Eley and Baker (2006) and Spilt (2010) who postulate that closeness is one of the three constructs describing the quality of teacher-child relationship. Other two constructs are dependency and conflict. As suggested by school principals, loving children characterised by teaching them

good behaviours and respecting each other further results into child's healthiness, openness and emulate harmony in a social relationship (Spilt, 2010). Unlike Shavega, Brugman and van Tuijl (2015) who found that teacher-child closeness was more applicable in private schools, the current study revealed that teacher closeness to pre-primary children was essential in influencing positive interaction during teaching and learning.

Limitation and conclusion

The current study intended to explore the perceived role of social relationships in children's learning at pre-primary level predominantly using phenomenological qualitative design. Given the large size and multi-ethnic nature of Tanzania, we do not know whether pre-primary school principals across Tanzania hold the same views. This study has found that primary school principals were well aware of the significance of positive teacher-child and child-child social relationships on child development and learning. They were also aware that being friendly, open-minded and working closely with family/community members allowed the pre-primary children to develop and learn well in both school and home contexts. More significantly, teachers can fulfil their responsibilities, particularly in ensuring the effective execution of the curriculum, hence preparing children for school easily. In addition, it is important that primary school principals play their instructional leadership to ensure that pre-primary teachers can interact with children positively without an inkling of discriminating children because of their social or economic background so that they attend school and classes well. On the other hand, school principals and pre-primary teachers should co-operate in educating parents to play their role in ensuring that they collaborate with the school community in preparing children to work co-operatively and more positively with peers and teachers in school for the attainment of their success.

Recommendations

The study managed to engage school principals on their experiences with pupil-teacher social relationship and its importance in fostering pupils' learning. Based on the findings obtained from the school principals, the study recommends that, first the school principals should orientate their pedagogical and instructional leadership towards empowering teachers to work and establish positive teacher-pupils' relationship as well as pupil-pupil relationship so that they can find the school a friendly place for learning and development. Second, school principals should work hand-in-hand with classroom teachers—as their subordinates—to establish

collegial relationship with parents/community as such collaboration would improve the schools' learning environment through the supply of materials for learning and construction of classrooms. By working with parents/community, they can establish a strong link for co-operative and collaborative interaction in child rearing to emerge on a sustainable basis. Furthermore, the study recommends that more research be undertaken on the teachers to establish their conceptions and experiences in ensuring positive social relationships in their classes.

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