Challenges Facing Primary Education under Decentralisation of Primary School Management in Tanzania

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Abstract

Decentralisation of primary school management in Tanzania has mainly been implemented by the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP). This programme has shown some successes in enrolment expansion and some improvements in classrooms, teachers' houses and pupils' latrines construction. The increase in enrolment, however, has resulted into crowded classrooms that make teaching a big challenge. In this study, the visited primary schools in Dar es Salaam and Mbeya faced a massive shortage of desks and classrooms and teaching and learning materials that affected the whole process of teaching and learning. Data indicate that there had been some improvements of pupils' performance in Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) in the beginning of the PEDP implementation (2002-2006). Recently, the available evidence suggests a declining trend of the pass rate in this examination for three years consecutively from 2007-2009. While involvement of the community in the school development plans may be important, there is a need for the government to intervene where it seems to be some problems in order to safeguard the pupils. I argue in this paper that, what is regarded as free education for all in primary schools is likely to create more harm than what is expected. For Tanzania to achieve its vision of 2025 that stresses on the learned society and preparation of people who are conscious about their own environment and be able to solve their problems encountered in their daily life class size has to be controlled and the provision of teaching and learning materials is vital.

Keywords: Decentralisation, primary education, management, school

1. Introduction

Decentralisation of public services, including education, is a major feature of institutional reforms that has recently been widely implemented in many countries. Governments in almost all countries, both developed and developing countries, recognise the centrality of education both for the individual and for the national economy at large (Sifuna, 2007:689; Mbelle, 2008:1). Due to that kind of belief, many governments focus on alternate forms of governance and management based on responsible participatory and accountability systems in education (Naidoo, 2003:3).

In many African countries and in Tanzania[1] in particular, a centralised education governance system was adopted at independence (Saito, 2008:3; Winkler, 1994:287). The main aims were geared towards promotion of the national identity and of rapid and easy access to education (Gaynor, 1998:1). The implicit argument was that, central planning and state involvement were necessary conditions to overcome the inherited socio-economic deficiencies (Gaynor, 1998:1; Naidoo & Kong, 2003:27) which included the high prevalence of illiteracy in the society.

However, it has become widely acknowledged that a centralised system is not always the best way for development and overseeing services provision in society (Gaynor, 1998:1). A centralised structure of school management has been criticised as inappropriate for day-to-day administrative tasks of for example, teacher deployment, payment of salary for teachers and purchase and distribution of school equipment (Gaynor, 1998:1; McGinn & Welsh, 1999:9).

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[1] Tanzania comprised Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar since the union of 1967. This paper, however, refers only to Tanzania mainland.

It has been stated that, since the 1980s most African countries had transferred some of the decision-making power, resources mobilisation and responsibilities to the regional/district levels of governments or grassroots (Brosio, 2000:1; Naidoo, 2003:2: Olowu & Wunsch, 2004:1). Primary school management is also receiving more attention in the direction for tighter accountability of teachers.

The government of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) is among those African countries that have adopted decentralisation policies in school administration and management to give more responsibilities to lower levels (Brosio, 2000:34). Decentralisation in Tanzania has been part of other wider government reforms covering different sectors, such as, the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), the Broader National Development Strategy (BNDS) (MKUKUTA) and the Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs).

There are various arguments for advocating decentralisation of primary school management. First, it has been argued that decentralisation brings decisions closer to people, leads to more equitable distribution of public services and to more participation of the local people in school development plans (Brosio, 2000:2; World Bank [WB], 2003: 74; Gariani, Gertler & Schargrodsky, 2008:2107). Second, it is also argued that because local tiers have a better knowledge of local conditions and preferences, they are likely to be more effective in service provision than the central officials (King & Ozler, 1998:1; Gropello, 2004:503; Galiani *et al.,* 2008:2107; Saito, 2008:6; Emmanuel, 2008:10). Third, it is further argued that, because many governments of developing countries are increasingly unable to administer primary education directly, in order to improve the provision of education, there is a need to dismantle centralised bureaucracies through decentralised system of school management system (Naidoo & Kong, 2003:ii; Winkler, 1994:287; Lexow & Smith, 2002:14). Embedded in these arguments, there is also an argument that, in order to reduce public spending, the central government should cut off the activities that are within reach of individuals in the local community environment, which McGinn and Welsh (1999:95) call a "subsidiary principle".

Based on these arguments, many African countries have implemented various education management and decentralisation policies in order to improve the quality of education provision and learning achievement of pupils (Naidoo & Kong, 2003:ii). The main objective of education policy in many countries, including Tanzania, is to enable individuals acquire knowledge and skills that will enable them to compete in the labour market-driven economy (Codd, 2005:194). This is so because of a growing belief in the power of education to influence the well-being of individuals and nations (Lauder, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006:1; Lauglo, 1995:10). For countries to attain this goal, education systems have to be transformed to become more responsive locally to market forces and demands. This is done by making the service providers more accountable to local tiers and clients (Glassman & Sullivan, 2006:4; Gropello, 2004:1; Galiani *et al.,* 2008:2106; Levin, 1991:145). The assumption is that collaborative leadership and management will strengthen accountability of the service providers (teachers) to pupils, parents and communities and improve educational achievement.

2. Conceptualisation of Decentralisation

Decentralisation can mean different things to different people and so it is difficult to define it as a concept. Bush (2003:12) defines decentralisation as a "process of reducing the role of central government in planning and the provision of education. In education, it refers to a shift of the authority distribution away from the central "top" agency in the hierarchy of authority". According to Lauglo (1995:5) decentralisation could in spatial terms denote a process of "dispersing objects away from a central point" but that in education it refers to reduced authority for the top authority in an education system. According to Lauglo, the term decentralisation is in practice not only used about that process of change but also about a condition of dispersed authority from a centre. Decentralisation processes then, take many forms at different levels of government which have authority to make decisions about the efficiency[2] in utilising scarce available resources (Lauglo, 1995:9; Naidoo, 2003:3).

In general terms, decentralisation can be conceptualised as a process of devolving some degree of authority from the top cadre to the lower levels to give local tiers more power in decision-making for effective service provision. In this case, school committees as representatives of the community members take charge in school management related activities.

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[2] Efficiency is the ratio between the resourcing of a system and the results coming from the system. To Lauglo (1995:9) "efficiency" is a wider concept than "effectiveness" which denotes goal realisation (our output) without taking account of resources expansion.

2.1 Approaches to decentralisation process in education

It seems that there is no consensus on approaches to decentralisation process in education. Some call them types, some name as approaches and some call them as forms/strategies/frameworks. So, mostly it depends on the choice of words different people would like to use in denoting decentralisation features. Generally, there are three main terms used to denote decentralisation process, usually these terms refer to the nature or degree of power being transferred, these are; deconcentration, delegation and devolution (Fiske 1999:10; Duhou, 1999:25; Aitchison, 2006:9; Naidoo, 2003:4). Some also mention privatisation as an approach to decentralisation in education (see for example Abu-Duhou, 1999:24; Muriisa, 2008:86). Others would group privatisation under the devolution approach to decentralisation (Naidoo, 2003:4). As indicated by Naidoo (2003:4) decentralised education policy encompasses varying degrees of institutional autonomy and school-based management with the aim of restructuring centralised education bureaucracies in order to devolve the authority at lower levels of administrative system. The most common approaches to decentralisation involve the first three forms:

2.1.1 Deconcentration

This approach to decentralisation refers to the transfer of the government responsibility from the central ministry to the lower level at the same time the central government retains its control (Fiske, 1996:10). But the shift of responsibilities is within the same level of government, meaning no shift of authority to bodies outside the state civil servants system at local level (Lauglo, 1997:6; Aitchson, 2006:9). This is the weakest approach as compliance to the top authority remains and local level is mainly for implementing the directives and not for making them (Fiske, 1996:10).

2.1.2 Delegation

This approach denotes the transfer of decision-making authority to other public or private agencies at the same time making them accountable to the central government in terms of compliance to policies and directives (Naidoo, 2003:4; Winlker, 2005:2; Cohen, 2004:3). This is a general and more extensive approach to decentralisation where the transfer of authority from central ministry to lower levels of government or different organisations such as churches is made, though the delegated authority can be withdrawn in case of mismanagement (Fiske, 1996:10).

2.1.3 Devolution

Devolution refers to full legal and permanent transfer of authority in decision-making from the central ministry to the lower level of administrative structure (Aitchison, 2006:9). The transfer over financial, management or administrative and pedagogical issues is permanent and it cannot be revoked without legal back up (Fiske, 1996:10; Cohen, 2004:3). This is the strongest approach to decentralisation process as it involves a permanent transfer of authority from higher level of government structure to the lower levels of authorities (Heredia (2007:14).

The distinction between delegation and deconcentration is not very clear, and it seems that these concepts are more-or-less the same in practice. It is only that, deconcentration has spatial dimensions and is within the line ministerial authority, while delegation can even take place in other private firms and organisations to provide the services and, it can be easily revocable. However, these approaches to the decentralisation process depend on the extent to which the state or country government wants to meet certain objectives. There is no approach that is considered to be the best in all contexts; it will largely depend on the situations prevailing in a particular society. As McGinn and Welsh (1999:18) state, this is also partly the reason why there are conflicting results from decentralisation policies as much depends on the capacity for faithful implementation and on the extent to which corruption can be controlled.

3. Education decentralisation in Tanzania

Like most developing countries, Tanzania has passed through many political and socio-economic reforms. The government has formulated a number of development plans and policies with the goal of eradicating poverty, ignorance and diseases. Some were based on top-down policies, while, in other cases, the government opted for the decentralisation of key authorities to the regional, district and community level. On some occasions, the government abolished one kind of decentralisation policy only to re-introduce other types of decentralisation again. Despite the many problems associated with the policies, the rationale has always been to strengthen the country's economy in order to improve living conditions for Tanzanians.

Decentralisation policies in Tanzania can be traced back to 1962 when local authorities were introduced. However, the most recognised decentralisation policy in the country was implemented during the 1970s, when the government decided to decentralise its authority to regions and districts so that people at the local level would make decisions based on their local needs (Massoi & Norman, 2009: 133). The policy was supported by Operation Villagisation[3], a massive mobilisation of people who were to live and work together in villages for the common good (Norman and Massoi, 2010: 315; Buchert, 1994: 91). This was because the centralised system had failed to provide the most basic social services such as water, health care, schools and roads (Mmari, 2005: 5, 6; Therkildsen, 2000: 408). Primary and adult education were decentralised to regional authorities in 1972, while secondary education, teacher education and higher education were left under the control of the central government through the Ministry of Education (Galabawa, 1990: 10). Most of the primary school infrastructures that still exist today were constructed through the cooperation between community-based village organisations and the government (Therkildsen, 2000: 408).

In recent years, education decentralisation in Tanzania has mainly been implemented by the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP)'s primary education under PEDP I (2002-2006) and PEDP II (2007-2011) which was accompanied by the abolition of school fees in 2001/2002 and 2006/2007 respectively (URT, 2001:11; URT, 2006:22). The PEDP I, had four priority areas: the expansion of enrolment, improvement of quality in primary schools, capacity building among the educational practitioners and key stakeholders, and the strengthening of education management (URT, 2001:4). Some of the successes of decentralisation of primary school management through PEDP are as follows:

3.1 Expansion of enrolment for standard one (I) pupils

One of the most acknowledged successes of decentralisation of primary school management through the PEDP is an expansion of enrolled school age pupils. Access to primary education has significantly improved, whereby the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) rose from about 4.4 million pupils in 2000 to about 7.5 million pupils in 2005, an increase of about 72 per cent (URT, 2005:1). The number of 7 year pupils has increased. In 2001, about 1.1 million pupils were enrolled in standard I (one). In 2004, there were about 1.4 million pupils at the same level of whom about 700,000 were female pupils, an increase of 51 per cent in the female pupils, in primary schools (URT, 2004a:4).

Following the abolition of school fees, enrolments increased by additionally about 2.2 million children during the period 2001-2004, an increase of about 45 per cent. Due to that, even secondary school enrolment rose (URT, 2004a:i). For example, in 2002 there were 100,000 pupils who were selected to join form I. In 2004, the number of standard VII pupils selected to join the same level was about 150,000, an increase of more than 51 per cent (URT, 2004b:2). This necessitated the introduction of the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) for 2005 to 2009 in order to expand the absorption of primary school leavers. Enrolment in pre-primary schools rose from about 670,000 in 2006 to 775,000 in 2007, an increase of 15.8 per cent (URT, 2007:1). In 2010 the number of pre-primary school children has also increased to about 1.4 million (URT, 2010:21), an increase of about 43 per cent.

In 2010 there were about 8.4 million pupils in primary schools of whom about 4.2 million were boys and about 4.2 million were girls (URT, 2010:14), i.e no difference between boys' and girls' enrolment in primary schools. Considering the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools in 2001, which was about 4.9 million up to about 8.4 million in 2010, the increase has been about 72 per cent of the enrolment. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) have also been higher than in previous years. For example, in 2007 the GER was 114.4 per cent with NER of 97.3 per cent, in 2008 the GER was 112.3 per cent with NER 97.2 per cent (URT, 2008:24) and in 2010 the GER was 106.4 per cent and NER was 95.4 per cent respectively (URT, 2010:17). So, the NER, which is the best and truest indicator, has been high and quite stable across the regions.

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[3] Operation Villagisation (1974–1976) was a process in which people were to live in collective villages known as "Ujamaa villages" and work together on village farms for the common good (Buchert, 1994: 91). The aim was to inculcate a sense of ownership, a spirit of hard work and the value of manual work. People were to be provided with access to social services, such as schools, health care centres, and transport and water supplies. The produce that came from the village farms was to be distributed among the members of the community.

Similarly, there are pupils with disabilities such as autism, multiple impairment, behavioural disorders and learning difficulties who were enrolled in schools. The number of pupils with such disabilities who were enrolled in schools increased from 24,003 in 2007 to 34,661 in 2008. By 2010 there were 36,585 pupils with disabilities in schools (URT, 2008a:37; 2010:33). Accordingly, the dropout rate from standard I-VII was on average 2.6 per cent in 2010, though there had been some experience of the high dropout rate between standard IV to VII, account to 4 per cent (URT, 2010:24). However, it can be seen that, the successes of the PEDP arrangements as a total package of decentralisation, have mainly been an increase on quantity.

3.2 School management by school committees

As part of the implementation of the decentralisation plan, the school committees have the responsibility for preparing the school budgets, giving financial reports on income and expenditure and preparing the school development plans. Primary schools receive grants (Capitation and Development grants) from the central government through the district/city council directors who are responsible for disbursement of the funds to schools through the district educational officials (DEOs). Though, the provision of these grants appear to have been reduced as visited schools in Dar es Salaam and in Mbeya no longer receive them according to the number of pupils enrolled in schools. The school committees are responsible for opening and managing their own school bank accounts, which has, to some extent, helped improve the accountability for the utilisation of the available meagre resources. School committees are responsible for procurement of teaching and learning materials and at the same time take part in ensuring that the standards in construction of the school buildings such as classrooms, school latrines and teachers' houses are maintained. School funds are monitored by the district educational officials who provide the instructions on how such funds should be spent. Although the appointment of teachers is done at the central government, payment of their salary which comes from the central government is done by district/city authorities, the other monitoring and discipline related matters for teachers, is under the DEO's office.

3.3 Reaching the out-of-school children

Through the Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET[4]) programme some of the pupils who were out of the school system have been absorbed and some have been mainstreamed into the formal system. There are also COBET pupils who have joined secondary school education. For example, in 2010 there were 49,321 COBET cohort I (11-13 years) learners and COBET cohort II (14-18) had 23,478 learners. This gives a total number of 72,799 for both Cohorts. In the same year there was a total number of 10,114 cohort I learners who sat for the standard IV examination. About 85 per cent were mainstreamed to formal schooling (standard V). Further, in the same year there were 8,175 COBET standard VII learners who sat for PSLE of whom about 56 per cent were selected to join form I or secondary education. Hakielimu (2005), however, revealed that there is a lack of a child-friendly environment and gender sensitive pedagogies. Other challenges that are at stake, though there are some improvements compared to early implementation of the PEDP reforms, are related to equity, enrolment of children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children in schools (URT, 2010:33). Haggerty (2007:28) indicates that children from marginalised groups, such as nomadic Masai and those with disabilities have little chance of accessing education in Tanzania.

3.4 Construction of classrooms, teachers' houses and school latrines

Decentralisation of primary school management has stimulated community involvement in school development plans. As community members offer their labour power, the number of primary schools has increased from about 12,000 in 2001 to about 15,000 in 2006 (URT, 2008a:3). There are also some increases in classrooms and latrines or toilet holes construction in schools (URT, 2010:11). A total number of about 4,000 classrooms were constructed by 2006 (97% of the target) and about 5,000 teachers' houses (208.7% of the target) (URT, 2007:11). Similarly, the URT (2007:2) points out that a total of about 2,000 latrines were constructed within the same period and about 45,000 desks were purchased. By 2007 there were a total number of 2,000 classrooms, about 3,000 teachers' houses and 4,000 latrines at different levels of construction (URT, 2007:2). However, there were some uncompleted projects under PEDP I that could not be rolled over onto PEDP II due to a change in priorities (URT, 2008a:91). Further, during visits to schools in this study in Dar es Salaam and Mbeya, only one or two teachers' houses were noted in some schools and they were in need of repair.

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[4] It is a programme that aims at providing life skills and vocational training opportunities to the youth aged 11-18 years who were supposed to be in school and they are out-of-school system due to various reasons such as poverty, orphanage, truancy, and early pregnancies for girls (URT, 2008b:25).

No teachers were willing to live in such houses except some of the student teachers who had temporarily been using them during their Block Teaching Practice (BTP).

4. Challenges of schools and teachers

Most teachers complained that teaching has been a very difficult activity in recent years due to increased enrolment leading to a huge number of pupils in the classrooms. Other challenges were shortage of teachers, shortage of desks, low performance in national examinations for standard VII pupils and shortage of teaching and learning materials. Although there were many other shortages, such as insufficient toilets, teachers' houses, tables, and chairs, the study concentrated on the availability of teachers in relation to available pupils, desks and classrooms, since these, seemed to be the most important and more pressing problems. Teachers wondered how they could be accountable for the results of their teaching while there are no facilities to facilitate their work.

4.1 Congestion and shortage of classrooms

As stated earlier, the abolition of school fees at primary school level appears to have increased the enrolment of standard I pupils. As a result teaching and learning have been compromised by large classes and a shortage of teachers. In this study, there was alarming classroom congestion in the visited schools which would seem to adversely affect the teaching and learning process for both teachers and pupils. The visited classrooms in every school not only that had congested classrooms but also pupils were sitting on the floor. In some schools, like school 'D', all class II pupils in stream A & B sat on the floor. At school 'B', all class IV and VA & B pupils were sitting on the floor while a few tables were kept at the back. The explanation was that they did not have chairs. Further, at school 'G' all class IIIA & B pupils were sitting on the floor. The situation was worse in Dar es Salaam compared to Mbeya.

Teachers explained that it was very difficult to handle such big classes and they found it difficult to walk around the pupils in the classroom to check the pupils' work and handwriting. As a result, teachers said that they concentrated on those pupils who could raise their hands when the teacher asked questions. A single class comprised at least between 70 and 100 pupils. At school 'B' for example, in class II more than 100 pupils were estimated to be in a single class. The congested classroom situations were worst in school 'B', 'C', 'G' and 'H' in Dar es Salaam and in school 'E' and 'J' in Mbeya region. Further, the visited schools seemed to have a shortage of classrooms. For example, school 'B' had only 7 classrooms and with about 1,500 pupils, it needed 33 classrooms according to the official norms, i.e. a shortage of 26 classrooms (or 79% of its requirement). School 'G' had only 14 classrooms while the requirement was 61, leaving a shortage of 47 (77%). School 'C' had only 10 classrooms while the need was 35 classrooms, a shortage of 25 classrooms (about 71% of the needed facilities). As a result, pupils were accommodated in too few classrooms with extreme congestion. Teachers complained that it was very difficult to teach and mark the pupils' exercise books to cope with their timetable for the next class teaching.

There is general consensus in the literature that small classes are likely to provide effective teaching (see for example, Bourke, 1996; Blatchford & Martin, 1998; Goldstein & Blatchford, 1998; Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein & Martin, 2003). The study by Blatchford *et al* (2003) on the class size differences related to pupils' educational progress and classroom processes at the age of 5-7 years indicates that in small classes, pupils are more likely to interact with their teachers on a one-to-one basis. A pupil is also more likely to be the main focus of the teacher's attention and pupils experience more teaching, unlike in the large classes where there is a more like procedural talks. Blatchford and his associates also found that in smaller classes there is more likelihood of teacher support for learning and teacher task time with pupils. Teachers know their pupils and tend to be more sensitive to individual pupil's learning needs. It was also indicated that teachers found it easier to manage and control the classroom.

According to Hattie (2002:2) it is what teachers know, do, and care about, which is powerful in learning among pupils. Excellence in teaching is what is regarded as the single most powerful influence on pupils' academic achievement. As stated by Heneveld and Craig (1996:9), improvement of pupils' learning achievement is the central goal by which school effectiveness is judged. Rogers and Freiberg (1994:7) give reasons why pupils usually tend to love school. From the pupils' own voices indicated that pupils like a teacher who cares about pupils' learning and their grades. Pupils like a teacher who cares about the whole class and not just teaching a particular subject and who finds out what a pupil is doing. A small class size may, as Rogers and Freiberg puts forward, encourage the pupils to think for themselves and may enhance their autonomy.

A small class size is also likely to encourage pupils to be creative as they 'learn by doing'. Rogers and Freiberg (1994:6) and Hopkins (2007:12) share the common thinking that pupils need to be encouraged to think and to take responsibility for their own learning so as to unfold their fullest potential. This can be more easily achieved in a smaller class, where the teacher has the opportunity to know and understand each and every pupil's strengths and weaknesses and to help her/him unfold their inner intellectual abilities.

According to Blatchford *et al* (2003:12), however, while very large classes inevitably affect adversely teachers' professional satisfaction and enthusiasm of teaching, a small class does not necessarily make a bad teacher become better. It will only make the teacher more effective. To Blatchford *et al* effective teaching may be possible in large classes as well, but this may come at some additional cost to the teacher such as working much harder to ensure that pupils get what they need in terms of learning. Further, the effect of class size is of a great controversy. While in some countries like the United Kingdom (UK), a class size of 29-30 is regarded as a big class size and many teachers would think that this is too many pupils to handle at the age of 5-7 (Blatchford, *et al*., 2003:2), in the Tanzanian context a class that is thought to be possible to control by a teacher comprises between 40 and 45 pupils. So, even if in a more advanced countries in terms of economy it seems that teachers can be effective in big classes, yet the number which is considered to be big in those countries seems to be only 2/3 of the considered small number in developing countries.

4.2 Shortage of teachers due to poor teacher deployment

The number of teachers has not kept pace with expanding enrolments; and the poor quality of education remains a challenge. Teachers complained of a heavy work load due to a shortage of teachers in their schools. This can be in part due to poor distribution of teachers. While some schools had excess number of teachers, others had shortages of up to 15 teachers. One of the teachers who introduced herself as an academic teacher at school 'H' who was sitting outside in the corridor and marking test scripts, said: "We do not have a staff office and we just sit like this. And, you can imagine three teachers teaching 10 subjects in a class of 120 pupils. How can you do that?" One of the school committee chair persons from school 'B' confirmed that teachers have been teaching more than 100 pupils in a single classroom.

This shows that there was a teachers' shortage in some schools while others had an excess numbers of teachers. In general, this shortage as stated earlier has been caused by poor distribution of teachers. Sifuna (2007:696) has the view that staff shortages force teachers to work without a break right from the morning until the afternoon. According to Sifuna, having few teachers in schools increases teachers' workloads and they may end up providing few assignments to pupils. This greatly dampens their commitment towards their work and readiness to accept accountability of their pupils' learning outcomes.

4.3 Shortage of desks

There was extreme shortage of desks in each school visited. Though, the problem seemed to be more serious at school 'B' where the requirement of desks was 497 and where they had only 78 desks, a shortage of 419 desks (84% of the requirement). Pupils were congested in those 7 classrooms. School 'G' and 'H' in the same region respectively had a shortage of 67 per cent and 64 per cent of desks. School 'D' had a shortage of 348 desks (58% of the requirement). On the other hand, it was interest to find desks in excess at school 'F' in Mbeya, but this was explained by having few pupils as it had been divided from a bigger school within the same area in 2003.

The problem of shortage of desks appeared to be the most serious one among the visited schools and even if desks had been available, they can, of course not be fitted into already overcrowded classrooms. There were no immediate plans to cub the problem, thought the government in URT (1995:37) pledges: "Government shall set and establish standard infrastructure and facilities for primary schools such as desks, educational equipment, libraries, and instructional materials necessary for effective delivery of and acquisition of good quality education". The government acknowledges the problem of the poor teaching and learning environment in Tanzanian primary schools as in URT (1995:37), it has been stated that: "At present, the school environment at primary school level is very poor and non-conducive to learning. Pupils attend classes in poorly constructed and ill equipped schools. It is estimated that 70% of the 10,400 primary schools are in state of disrepair and therefore need urgent rehabilitation". These statements were made by the government almost 20 years ago. One might wonder why the provision nonetheless remains so inadequate. Is it because of the increased enrolment of pupils and school-age population? Is the government serious in its statements? Or is education not a priority in Tanzania?

The examination trends for standard VII leavers, indicates an alarming decline a warning signal about the condition of the educational system. The next section shows trend of performance in the national examinations.

4.4 Low performance in national examinations for standard VII pupils

There was an increase in the pass rate at the beginning of the PEDP I implementation especially in the period 2001-2007. The pass rate was 28.6 per cent in 2001 to 70.5 per cent in 2006. More recently, the pass rate has gone down especially from 2007 to 2009 (URT (2008a:32; 2010:28).The results in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) indicate that only about 54 per cent of standard VII pupils passed in 2007, about 53 per cent in 2008 and about 49 per cent in 2009 (URT, 2010:28). This indicates that the pass rate has declined by about 21percentage points from 2006 to 2009. The poor teaching and learning environment observed in the 10 visited schools might illustrate some conditions which have contributed to pupils' poor performance in their final grade (class seven), though other factors may also be at work.

The international literature on school effectiveness indicates that a successful school in terms of academic achievement, is a result of a number of factors, such as the support from the community, teachers' supervision on what they do at school, availability of textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, school facilitates such as desks, classrooms, school leadership, flexibility and autonomy, pupils' assessment and examinations, 'school climate' and the whole process of teaching and learning (Heneveld & Craig, 1996:10-11; Scheerens, 2000:100; Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hadfield, Hargreaves and Chapman, 2003:11). A statement by Joseph Mungai, the then, Minister of Education and Culture (MoEC) when launching the PEDP I was:

Each of these children is an individual in his or her own right, with feelings, emotions, talents, aspirations, and potential which could contribute to national development. I appreciate that if a substantial investment is made in the interests of educating all children and youth, the country is assured of a very prosperous future (URT, 2001:i).

4.5 Shortages of teaching and learning materials

Although the supply of teaching and learning materials is likely to have been considerably improved in the country as a whole as a result of implementation of PEDP, serious shortages do remain. The study carried out by Sifuna in 2007 indicated that pupils shared books on an average ratio of 1:3 and in some subjects 1:5 (Sifuna, 2007:697). Though again, Sifuna's study was basically a country wide and so that could be the average picture of the availability of books which does not necessarily represent the actual condition in specific schools. The present study in Dar es Salaam and Mbeya did not concentrate on the number of books available in schools, but information from teachers indicated that pupils shared a single book on a ratio of 1:10 and in some subjects 1:20. Some of the reasons for the shortage of books in the visited schools, were thought to be connected to the frequent change of the curriculum, which has meant that the text books used previously have been turned into supplementary materials. According to Sifuna (2007:697) the shortage of text books and other teaching and learning materials makes it difficult for pupils to do their homework and to complete on time other assignments given by teachers. Sometimes teachers fear giving pupils more work because more assignments implies more time needed for marking. Sifuna (2007:687) has the view that access to schools does mean mere an increase of the number school places. To Sifuna school participation involves the interaction of supply, demand and also of the learning process. Supply, according to Sifuna, refers to the availability and quality of the school facilities, teachers *and of* teaching and learning materials.

5. Conclusion

Given the environment within which primary education is provided in the visited schools, it is unlikely that Tanzania can expect a prosperous future. It may remain an unfulfilled dream, unless interventions quickly take place. If the government does not keep its promises, then, what is regarded as free education for all in primary schools seems likely to create more harm than what is expected. Increased enrolment while children do not get what they need in school could create a bomb that might erupt any time. Furthermore, if the problem of large class size remains unsolved, it is no surprise to find high illiteracy levels in the near future. Illiteracy is a threat to national survival and to the economy of the country. Studies indicate that an illiterate person may not contribute much to the economy of a country as illiteracy is a stumbling block for any meaningful acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for any development activity (Tilak, 2005:7; Chhetry, 2001:294). For Tanzania to achieve its Development Vision 2025 that stresses the learned and learning society and preparation of people conscious of their own environment and be able to solve the problems encountered in their daily life (URT, 1999:19) class size has to be controlled and the provision of teaching and learning materials is of fundamental significance.

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7. References

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