

Redrawing the Map of Complementary Basic Education to Guarantee the Child's Right to Quality Education in Tanzania

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Abstract

While more than 38,283 boys and 27,706 girls in Tanzania, who were out of school, gained access to basic education between 2014 and 2018, implementation of Complementary Basic Education (COBET) has been facing several challenges concerning the quality of education provided and the achievement of its goals. COBET aimed at providing highly equitable access to quality primary education as the basic right of all out-of-school girls and boys in Tanzania. Given the pace of its quality delivery and socio-economic impacts that have affected learners' access to COBET, this paper examines the state of the COBET programme today, more than 22 years since its implementation. More specifically, the paper explored the issue of quality that has affected implementation of the programme.

Data were collected through the qualitative method in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Rukwa regions, using in-depth interviews with 8 purposively selected school heads, 10 facilitators and 21 learners, 4 Ward Education Officers and 2 parents. Other data were obtained from focus group discussions with 55 learners, observations in 5 randomly selected schools and from reviewing 22 documents.

Findings indicated that the unsatisfactory quality of teaching and learning is a daily reality for many girls and boys, who fail to learn, due to poor community participation, ineffective teaching pedagogies, families' socio-economic hardships and inadequate resources to support the programme. They affected their learning outcomes and the country's efforts to ensure that all out-of-school girls and boys "complete free, equitable and quality primary education" as stated and emphasized in the National Education Policy of 2014, Tanzania Development Vision of 2025 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs-2030), particularly goal 4. Improving the quality of COBET requires increased commitment and political will to invest more in providing resources, motivated facilitators, teaching and learning facilities and materials as well as making the public aware on importance of education through outreach campaigns.

Keywords: Complementary Basic Education; Access to Education; Quality Education; Right to Education

1.0 Introduction

To ensure that all out-of-school boys and girls have equal access to quality primary education, with no-one left behind, and to show the government's commitment towards provision of care, welfare, rights and protection of children, Tanzania ratified many human rights treaties and conventions. They include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Dakar Education for All framework and the UN World Fit for Children (2002). Also, it ratified the Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), and passed the Child Act of 2009 (Mainland) and the Children's Act of 2011 (Zanzibar), which aimed at removing barriers preventing children from accessing and enjoying proper care, health, nutrition, education and protection (REPOA, 2009; URT, 2006).

One of the steps taken to support children's rights and welfare was introduction of the Complementary Basic Education Programme (COBET) in 2001 (URT, 2014; Bhalalusesa, 2005) known as MEMKWA in Kiswahili. COBET provides education opportunities to out-of-school young people aged 9 to 18 years outside the formal education system (URT, 2006b; BEST, 2018).

In Tanzania, the largest and fastest growing age group of 10 to 19 years constitutes 26 percent of the population, while those under 19 comprise 55 percent of the population, which is estimated to reach 58 million (World Population Review, 2019). It means that children's right to quality education needs to be ensured, and that their intrinsic worth is recognized as well as supported (Andrzejewski, Baltonado & Symcox, 2009; URT, 2006).

COBET as an alternative path to primary education, leading to improved livelihood and sustainable development, aimed at mainstreaming all school-aged boys and girls in the formal system. COBET caters for two cohorts, one comprising children aged 9 to 13 years who are supposed to be at school for two years before they take standard four examination. Upon passing the examination, learners continue to standard five. The second cohort of learners consists of children aged 14 to 18 who are at school for three years, before they take the standard seven national examination (BEST, 2018; UNICEF, 2006; URT, 2006a). Woods (2007) added that COBET was initiated specifically by focusing on girls, orphans and other vulnerable groups left out of the education system. Other objectives of COBET were to provide quality primary education to out-of-school children, develop a complementary basic education curriculum to strengthen basic competencies and survival skills,

and to develop the capacity of the community to plan, monitor, evaluate as well as report on COBET's progress and challenges (Mwegio & Mlekwa, 2003; UNICEF, 2006 & 2009). Also, it aimed at sensitizing and mobilizing communities to support the right to quality basic education for out-of-school girls and boys, including those in nomadic communities.

Available data indicate that a large number of children (more than 3 million) are still excluded from getting basic education (URT, 2016a), which clearly predicts that an increasing number of them will be illiterate. Evidence suggests that many girl and boy pupils are completing their basic education without a strong foundation in reading, writing and doing simple arithmetic (URT, 2014 & 2014a). In addition, the Tanzanian Population and Housing Census of 2012 (URT, 2013) revealed that 5.5 million (22.4%) young people and adults aged 15 and over (22.4% of the population) were illiterate, with men accounting for 69 percent.

As the country aimed to achieve Education for All by 2015 and other national development goals, COBET was scaled up throughout the country in 2004 to provide basic education opportunities to more out-of-school girls and boys while improving their livelihoods (URT, 2014a). Through COBET, 40,040 school-aged girls and 28,909 school-aged boys were enrolled in non-formal educational centres in 2018 (BEST, 2018) compared to 82,459 in 2011, which was a decrease of 13,510 (16.3%) (URT, 2016a). Such decrease of learners in COBET programme reflects lower existence of out of school children, which was the key target of the COBET programme.

Although the number of out-of-school boys and girls dropped by 16.3 percent from 2011 to 2018, the country is still far from realizing inclusive and quality basic education for all vulnerable boys and girls (URT, 2014), despite its success in improving equitable access and providing basic education. COBET has failed to absorb all out-of-school boys and girls as originally intended. The programme has also been facing a number of challenges, including but not limited to, an uncondusive teaching and learning environment, inadequate funding, an incompatible curriculum, ineffective Non-Formal Education (NFE) committees, truancy and poor learning outcomes (Mushi *et al.*, 2012; URT, 2006 & 2005).

Similar to other studies that have identified the achievements, challenges and prospects of COBET-related programmes (Association for the Development in Africa-ADEA, 2017; UNESCO, 2013) in other African countries, faced

with the challenge of poor quality, scarce or irrelevant resources, the quality of basic education has been a national concern, requiring coordinated efforts of the government, communities, civil society organizations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Given the unsuccessful history of Adult and Non-formal Education (ANFE) provision in Tanzania and the need to realize the basic right to quality and inclusive education for all out-of-school girls as well as boys, while achieving the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and Strategic Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by 2030, this study sought to ascertain aspects that affected quality implementation of the COBET programme delivered in Tanzania during the last twenty-two years, with an eye to ensuring that all out-of-school girls and boys have equitable access to and participation in a COBET programme of good quality.

In this paper, the quality of the COBET programme was viewed in terms of resource allocation, the teaching and learning process, and pupils' expected learning achievements and their acquisition of skills. It also takes into account the teaching and learning materials, the curriculum and counselling as well as qualified and motivated facilitators capable of handling learning outcome challenges and enabling pupils to acquire meaningful competencies, attitudes together with values.

2.0 Methods

The study was conducted in a safe and ethical qualitative research environment by triangulating sources of data collected to provide a clear picture of COBET's implementation status in Tanzania. A total of 9 randomly identified schools were involved from three selected regions of Dar es Salaam, Dodoma and Rukwa, based on their convenience. At the school, ward and community levels, 45 interviews were conducted with nine conveniently selected school heads, 10 randomly selected facilitators and 21 randomly selected COBET learners from November 2019 to March, 2020 using Kiswahili. Other participants were two parents and four Ward Education Officers (WEOs) who were purposively selected. The interviews were recorded using a digital tape recorder, supplemented by note taking. Other data were generated from four focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising a non-random sample of 29 female and 26 male learners. Each group consisted 9 to 15 learners. A total of 99 respondents were involved (see Table 1).

Observation involved paying close attention to classroom size, the teaching and learning environment, available facilities, learners' critical thinking level, their involvement and interactions in and outside classroom as well as teaching pedagogies. Observations took three weeks after conducting interviews with respondents. Specifically, the researcher took brief notes in short phrases during classes, such as a small "i" for weak interaction and a capital "I" for positive interaction to jog his memory.

The study was enriched by examining a lot of documents, including reports and agreements relating to the COBET programme. Twenty-two archival documents from the time COBET was established in 2001 to 2019 were explored. Some examples of reviewed documents are international and official national records, reports, policies and other relevant materials portraying the status of the current COBET programme in Tanzania.

Table 1: Approaches and respondents reached

| No | Respondents | Mode of approach | Number of Respondents | | |
|----|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | | | Male (percent) | Female (percent) | Total |
| 1 | School Heads (3 Rukwa, 3 Dodoma & 2 DSM) | In-depth individual interviews | 5 (62%) | 3 (38%) | 8 |
| 2 | Facilitators (4 Dodoma, 3 DSM 3 Rukwa) | In-depth individual interviews | 4 (40%) | 6 (60%) | 10 |
| 3 | Learners (15 Rukwa, 22 Dodoma 18 DSM) | FDGs Individual interviews | 26 (47%) 8 (38%) | 29 (53%) 13 (62%) | 55 21 |
| 4 | Parents (1 Dodoma & 1 Rukwa) | Individual interviews | 1 (50%) | 1 (50%) | 2 |
| 5 | Ward education officers (1 DSM; 2 Rukwa & 1 DOM) | Individual interviews | 2 (50%) | 2 (50%) | 4 |
| | Totals across methods by gender (N) | ----- ----- | 45 | 54 | 99 |

Source: Field data

Key: DSM – Dar es Salaam, DOM - Dodoma

2.1 Ethical issues

All interviews were transcribed, and participants were informed on the

purpose of the study and promised anonymity. Emphasis was placed on the participants' informed consent. In the case of minors (COBET learners), the facilitators, school heads and parents were involved in guiding individuals and group discussions with children. The interviews were scheduled and conducted at the participants' convenience using Kiswahili. The names of all participants were kept confidential and coded by numbers as well as letters to protect their identities. Any information obtained for the study that could be identified with the participants will remain confidential and would not be disclosed without their permission.

2.2 Data Analysis Plan

First, the interview data were transcribed and read through, and informal notes were written regarding the issues as well as themes that emerged. Information from secondary sources was cross-checked with information from interviews, meetings and discussions. Desk review of secondary data assisted in establishing a coherent background regarding success, challenges and mitigating strategies relating to implementation of the COBET programme. The researcher then honed categories of themes and analysed divergent findings, through deliberating on opposing ideas and agreeing on meaning of the findings. As a result of analytically processing the data and verification by respondents, codes, categories and themes were developed to demonstrate the findings (explicated and substantiated in results section).

3.0 Results and Discussion

The findings are presented according to the research question that sought to ascertain the state of quality of COBET programme today, twenty-two years since it was implemented, and whether or not learners have been socially and economically empowered. Data analysis is reported in an aggregate form and presented in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Social and demographic information

The COBET learners in this study were predominately females by 61 percent (Table 2). Some communities, particularly in rural areas, tend to see girls as an economic burden in the case of school fees and a source of income through marriage dowries, which might have led to more boys than girls in school in the past (Mnubi, 2017; Segumba, 2015). This aligns with a lot of data (URT, 2016) that have reported a greater number of female than male learners in the COBET programme, showing a positive move toward gender equality.

In addition, during interviews and FGDs, seven out of ten learners' respondents reported to come from socio-economically troubled families, and those with a single parent family through separation or divorce. In some cases, learners were forced by socio-economic circumstances to support themselves despite being underage. There is no doubt that such kind of life leaves very little time and space for schooling thereby promoting child labour and related abuses (Mnubi, 2017; Wedgewood, 2005).

Table 2. Sex of learners

| Sex | Frequency | Valid Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------------|
| Male | 109 | 39 |
| Female | 168 | 61 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

3.2 Learners' pro-social school behaviour

With regard to learners' socio-economic circumstances, most of them came from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, particularly those who see no value in acquiring an education. UNICEF (2006) defines vulnerable children as those who are at risk of not getting access to quality education, who come from poor households that are at greater risk of contracting the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

There was consensus among respondents that parents/guardians' lack of responsibility, poverty and not valuing education resulted in an increased number of out-of-school boys and girls. During interviews and FGDs, the majority of learners (6 out of 10) indicated that financial difficulties and the need to sustain their lives were the main reasons for dropping out of school.

The school head 'F' pointed out that "... some learners came from the streets, some from troubled 'dysfunctional' families and some were engaged in begging and petty trading." During interviews, the learners reported their experience, some as breadwinners, generating incomes to sustain their lives and those of their families. Child labour was one of the sources of income for some COBET learners' households. One female learner explained that, "[Before joining COBET classes] I used to do household chores and other-income generating activities, such as selling packed drinking water, peanuts and sweets to support my family..." Another learner added that, "...I stay with my grandmother who is now old and needs my support." Therefore, effective learning would not happen without some psychological counselling.

3.3 Community participation in COBET programme

Poor community participation in monitoring key COBET programme targets was also an issue. Before joining COBET, some pupils had also been engaged in immoral behaviours such as taking drugs, theft and so forth. Thus, they needed the community to pay more attention. It is challenging when the community does not have enough time to model pro-social school behaviour to such specific group that needs it the most. These feelings were shared by one WEO who said, “It is crucial to cultivate extensive community and active parental participation both in and outside the children’s classroom for COBET to succeed.” Other school heads A, D and E also emphasized the need to sensitize the community, particularly parents and guardians, about the need to support the education for their children. One of the reasons girls and boys drop out of school was lack of parental support and involvement in their education.

3.4 Ineffective teaching pedagogies

Majority of facilitators expressed their concern over use of combined classes [mixing two cohorts of different ages in the same classroom] due to shortage of classrooms and teachers and the large number of pupils in the class. Data from the visited school indicated that some COBET classes accommodated up to 70 learners per class. Female facilitator 2 noted that, “... due to shortage of facilitators, particularly for teaching COBET classes, I am forced to combine pupils of different grades in one class...” This is a challenging problem for teachers, especially those with not enough experience. The facilitators acknowledged that they received a form of training in COBET.

A number of scholars agreed that the lecture method commonly used to teach tends to be less effective in regard to improving learning outcomes than alternative methods, such as role plays, brainstorming, group discussions and problem-based learning that require small classes (Saville, Zinn & Elliott, 2009; Tiwari, Lai, So, & Yuen, 2006).

A facilitator from Dar es Salaam explained that, “teaching vulnerable and hard-to-teach street children requires special pedagogical approaches that are participatory and child friendly, which incorporate local ways of knowing and learning ... these are not supported in our combined classes.” It is argued that utilizing culturally responsive teaching approaches to promote increased connections between what learners’ experience in school

and what they experience outside school appear to have a significant and positive impact on their academic performance (UNESCO, 2015). UNICEF (2008) adds other dimensions to the quality of teaching and learning that include a gender-friendly classroom and learning environment that provide physical as well as psychological safety and security inside and outside the classroom.

Classroom observation indicated that a few learners actively participated in the lessons. Many facilitators reported having limited time to engage fully with so many learners and meet their diverse learning needs. The school head 'G' added that, "teaching special classes requires more exercises and feedback to track their learning needs and help them accordingly." Another facilitator explained how class discussion helps to stimulate learners' thinking and engage them in the learning process. She indicated that,

"I always ask many questions to make my learners engage in lessons... Therefore, recognizing and support the education potential of each girl and boy in COBET classes, and making changes necessary to meet their learning needs require effective teaching pedagogies as well as supportive teaching and learning infrastructure, including learning materials and motivated teaching staff."

3.5 Effects of combined classes for COBET

Data from observation showed that some learners were shy and uncomfortable being in a combined class and they felt embarrassed when they failed to answer the questions correctly. One male learner commented that, "I sometimes dodge school to avoid being questioned about something I can't answer..." During the focus group discussions, it was noted that bullying and lack of sensitivity when dealing with COBET learners pushed them away, causing them to drop out of school. Another facilitator recalled during teaching sessions, "I always ensure there is enough space and time for both girls and boys to participate and contribute, which has led to their improved ability to think, enthusiasm for studying, and they actively participate in class activities." Furthermore, a retired male facilitator pointed out that early learning and development of children occur within socio-cultural contexts, involving collaborative efforts of learners, teachers and parents, which need to be cultivated.

3.6 Learners' socio-economic hardship

Overall, poverty and poor parenting were significant barriers for many resource-poor families to fully support their children's education. Although primary education has been universal and free in Tanzania since 2000, some children are still far from enjoying this basic right. Some of the examples cited by the pupils and facilitators during interviews on challenges that pushed learners out of school included, but were not limited to, the following:

- a. Economic hardship drives girls and boys out of school, the need to work and earn money and the inability to cover their basic needs, such as uniforms, exercise books, pens, and so forth;
- b. Parents' lack of involvement in and awareness on importance of education;
- c. Lack of moral and material support due to death of either one or both parents; and
- d. Long as well as risky distance from school, where in some cultural settings, it is uncommon for girls to travel unaccompanied for a long distance.

However, the majority of interviewed parents asserted that the cost of schooling was the main reason for not sending their children to school. One parent from a rural setting reported that, "Although basic education, including primary education is compulsory and free, I need money to cover school-related expenses, such as exercise books, uniforms and transport."

A girl of 14 from Dodoma reported that, "I am glad that I am back at school." Another boy of 13 explained that,

"I wanted to go to school and be like my neighbours who go to school ... but there was no-one to pay for my educational costs. I live with my grandfather and he cannot afford to meet my educational expenses... but then I was enrolled in school by my Village Executive Officer."

In her own voice, a 16-year-old female learner explained: "when my parents separated, I was forced to live with my grandfather in the village....." [Therefore, I left school].

Similarly, a female learner aged 17 from a nomadic community described her experience:

"My parents insisted that I should stop attending school by pretending that I didn't want to continue schooling so that they could not be legally held accountable to the local authority for denying my right to education."

To justify this inhumane act, my parents constantly informed me that they are poor, and cannot afford to pay for my education ... and it would be better for them if I got married so that they could receive a dowry” [Quality education is the catalyst for achieving socio-economic development].

Like many studies that have indicated how learners with special needs face many challenges getting equal access to quality education (Mnubi, 2017; UNICEF, 2009), many young boys and girls with special needs find it difficult to access education for cultural and socio-economic reasons. When analysing the quality of education, Andrzejewski and colleagues (2009) caution that variables such as gender, disability and marginalization of children should not be overlooked. A rare case of a 14-year-old male learner from Rukwa rural district explained that,

“I have now come to realize that despite my positive HIV/AIDS status, I am very optimistic and focused on my studies. It is hard as many people regularly ask me about it, and sometimes in a few cases, teachers refused to give me permission to go to the hospital to take some medication and my guardian has not told them of my HIV/AIDS status. However, some teachers like the head teacher have been giving me support, such as providing me with school uniform, food and sometimes even money for buying books, pen, pencil, soap, shoe polish and skin oil, which sustain my life and my young sister’s life because we live with our jobless grandmother. This helps to reduce the hardship of life ... I am currently a permanent leader in the school and I am very glad that we have a strong bond as we live like brothers and sisters supporting each other. My fellow leaders understand my issue and respond appropriately without any stigmatization.”

It is challenging to model learners’ behaviour and facilitate quality COBET teaching and positive learning outcomes through mainstreaming them in formal school. Increasingly, a male facilitator noted that, “allocating resources for this critical, special group has been a low priority, which is why they are inadequate.”

Learners’ motivation to learn

Data from interviews indicated that majority of learners had a number of reasons for joining the COBET programme, including the need to know how to write, read and count (82%), complete primary education (30%), and pressure from local authorities, their guardians or parents [(10%) see Table

2].

Table 3. Reasons for joining COBET programme

| Why joining COBET programme | Frequency | % Some form of agreement |
|---|-----------|--------------------------|
| The need to know 3Rs | 58 | 82 |
| The need to complete my education circle | 63 | 37 |
| The external pressure from authorities, parents and guardians | 60 | 37 |

As explained by one female learner from Dodoma that, "... I wanted to wear a uniform and go to school, but my grandmother told me that she cannot afford to cover for my school fees and support me with other necessities." One male learner aged 15 from Dar es Salaam explained that,

"It was hard for me as you can imagine being denied my basic right to education. I wanted to go to school and get education. [During that time, although I didn't know much about what I would do with my education, I loved it and believed it is the right thing for me]. I didn't give up my dream to get education. Then I was supported by the religious leader who helped me get back to school. It is good that last year I started school."

Enthusiastically, one female learner from Dodoma remarked how she was very eager to re-join the school. Such desire to go back to school was the result of awareness and empowerment she got from her mother and village chairperson. In his own voice, the chairperson insisted [Now, after the abolition of school fees and other financial contributions], "... we are striving to ensure that all out-of-school children are back to school."

It is worth noting that in 2016, the Government of Tanzania introduced free basic education (primary and secondary schools) whereby all public schools were prohibited from charging pupils or their parents any fee. The male school head 'C' acknowledged how the COBET programme had absorbed many out-of-school pupils and mainstreamed some of them in formal education settings, "In my school, we have about 46 children mainstreamed in standard 4." However, a female school head noted: "the increased demand for primary education via the COBET programme has not been matched by provision of supporting infrastructure, such as teaching and learning materials, qualified teaching staff and a structure capable of handling challenges and improving pupils' learning outcomes."

Although COBET was a temporary measure to absorb all out-of-school age groups, one WEO stressed that maintaining and enhancing the quality of COBET was becoming a major challenge as it involves many dimensions that need to be addressed simultaneously. For example, resource allocation, the teaching and learning process and availability of motivated teachers, all of which can affect pupils' learning outcomes and acquisition of knowledge as well as skills.

According to participants, many out-of-school girls and boys have been enrolled in the COBET programme. As a result of Honourable President John Pombe Magufuli's strong commitment and public outreach campaigns to ensure that all girls and boys have access to free basic education, Tanzania experienced a 52 percent increase in number of learners from 54,029 in 2013 to 82,339 in 2016 (URT, 2016b). A Ward Education Officer (WEO) pointed out: "we expect to phase out the COBET programme with introduction of fee-free education."

3.7 Teaching and learning materials and facilities

Good quality teaching and learning materials are very important for having an impact on children's learning and for improving their learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2013). The current materials used in the COBET teaching process are for standards one and two for cohort one, and for standards three and four for cohort two. Although the facilitators acknowledged that the materials used were outdated, the government has issued new learning materials, but they were not yet available or well-known to schools. Findings from this study indicated that the COBET programme used an informal curriculum, especially designed for COBET learners. However, the syllabus used is one for formal primary schools. A facilitator indicated that the curriculum and syllabus used in the COBET programme are available and well-known. For example, when a pupil reaches stage two, he/she moves up to class four, ready for the standard four national examination.

The increased enrolment and insufficient facilities, such as classrooms, have made it difficult to ensure quality teaching and learning as well as good outcomes. Data from observations showed considerable shortage of desks, books and other teaching facilities in various schools. For example, in schools A, B, D, J and H, it was observed that the learning environment was uncondusive, as COBET learners shared classes with standards I and II

once they had finished their class sessions. Some of the sampled schools that were visited in Dar es Salaam, Rukwa and Dodoma regions faced shortage of classrooms as well as teaching and learning materials that affected the quality of teaching and learning.

Generally, data indicated that there has been a discernible improvement in terms of increasing access to primary school by un-reached out-of-school girls and boys, but lack of quality teaching and learning could worsen the learning outcomes thereby failing to achieve the national and international goals the country strives to achieve.

3.8 Availability of Qualified and Motivated Facilitators

Qualified and motivated teachers [facilitators] play a crucial role in enabling learners to understand what they are being taught and in producing positive learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2016a). There is growing consensus and enough evidence of the fact that well-trained and motivated teachers are the single most influential factors in determining quality education (Cherry, 2013; Mkumbo, 2012). This can be done through teachers' professional interactions with learners to give them competence and the confidence to cope with their learning. Also, it requires continuous professional development and the disposition to be able to understand learners' diverse learning needs (Mushi *et al.*, 2012). Evidence from the field indicated that majority of facilitators, who implement COBET programmes, have not been given significant training in teaching out-of-school children, using andragogical principles and methods.

Although the government strived to increase the number of qualified facilitators by 2016, the learners-facilitators ratio stood at 32:1 (URT, 2016b). Many schools are still facing the challenge of insufficient facilitators capable of handling the teaching and learning challenges typical of Tanzanian schools. Since the government abolished school fees at the primary school level, many schools have experienced increased enrolment, causing large classes due to shortage of teachers (facilitators) and teaching infrastructure. In the field, it was noted that there was usually only one facilitator per class, making it difficult to properly facilitate and manage the class, particularly when it was large and had learners with diverse needs.

Evidence from observations and interviews showed that overcrowded and unfavourable classrooms affected the quality of teaching and learning. The

female head of school 'K' explained that, "the acute shortage of qualified facilitators represents one of the biggest hurdles to achieving quality basic education [particularly in COBET] and more political will, community engagement and more financial and human resources are needed to help quality basic education to contribute in our country."

Another facilitator noted that,

"It is a challenge to improve the quality of teaching and learning when you have an overcrowded class of more than 50 pupils who need special attention ... due to the acute shortage of teachers and facilities [buildings] that can handle group dynamics and diverse socio-economic backgrounds, therefore, the school decided to combine COBET and traditional classes. Teaching pupils with diverse learning needs and life experience in one multi-grade class has created additional learning challenges."

Many studies have proved that small classes are likely to facilitate effective teaching and learning (Blatchford *et al.*, 1996). For example, a facilitator explained that, "It was a very uncomfortable teaching experience when you realize that you have left your pupils behind in the learning process because of the large class size and limited time." A large class of about 60 learners must be supplemented by extra tutoring, seminars and assignments to help build creative as well as interactive learning communities, which are rarely done. Importantly, the school head F explained that, "In order to make teaching and learning highly effective in situations where the facilitators address a huge number of learners, a pedagogical approach that encourages interactive discussion through use of dialogue, debates and course forums to brainstorm and expand ideas taught in class are vitally important."

The school head E pointed out that, "Overcrowded combined classes might sometimes discourage teachers [facilitators] and especially learners who are already at great risk of not attending school and focusing on learning resulting in poor learning outcomes, which might lead to an increased number of illiterate youths and adults in the country." Another facilitator explained how the problem of overcrowded classes is one of results of the country's widespread shortage of facilitators and resources to manage, lead and supervise the teaching and learning process in the COBET programme.

There was general consensus among teachers/facilitators and school heads that a class is large when learners have no place to sit, cannot hear, and cannot read what is on the board. Three female teachers/facilitators claimed that, “Currently, we have the biggest learner-facilitator ratio, hindering what can be read and said. Teaching large classes hinders effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning.” However, when they were asked to explain what they meant by large classes, there was no consensus on what constitutes a large or small class. Meanwhile, the male school head K elaborated that, “A class is big when teachers do not have enough teaching materials and they are unable to assess learners’ performance.” Therefore, it was believed that inadequate teaching and learning materials as well as financial and human resources led to classes being large.

4.0 Conclusion, recommendations and implications

As the country strives to achieve SDG 4 by 2030 and realize the National Development Vision 2025, evidence from the study revealed the undisputed challenge of promoting access to quality education for out-of-school girls and boys. It is evident that the increased access to education and the growing demand for education for out-of-school girls and boys in Tanzania has overwhelmed the education system. That has been the case in terms of ensuring its quality and availability of resourceful as well as motivated facilitators, teaching and learning facilities and materials, and making the community aware, particularly learners’ parents or guardians on the need to support their children’s education.

Given the importance of effectively managing the growing challenge of the poor quality of the COBET programme in Tanzania, it is essential that it should be redesigned to produce a comprehensive and broad-based COBET programme, which should take into consideration learners with special needs, such as orphans, nomads, learners with disabilities and street children. As Tanzania continues to make some progress in providing education opportunities to all citizens as a liberation tool (URT, 2016; Mushi & Bhalalusesa, 2002), the state of out-of-school children remains precarious, forcing education stakeholders to re-examine how they can make education attractive to them. Investing in education and developing skills of girls and boys will empower them to be highly responsible for their own well-being and that of their communities. This is integral to the right of all learners to an education that meets their basic learning needs, and to society’s goal of

having people with the skills, knowledge and values needed to bring about a greatly peaceful and inclusive society. It means ensuring delivery of a good quality COBET programme, through increased commitment and political will, as regards provision of adequate financial and human resources as well as physical infrastructure.

4.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations to improve and strengthen policies and practices for delivery of the COBET programme in Tanzania:

- a. The government needs to consider redefining the approach to delivering COBET from focusing on access to ensuring quality learning outcomes.
- b. The government needs to consider expanding provision of COBET to include those with special needs in an inclusive education, and strengthening the curriculum so that it would take into account gender equity and the equality of disadvantaged groups, such as learners with physical disabilities and those from marginalized ethnic groups like Wamaasai who have been unable to take advantage of education due to various cultural practices.
- c. All education stakeholders need to consider conducting sensitization and public outreach programmes on the issue of out-of-school children, particularly making NFEs aware of their responsibilities. The government should also be made aware of the need to invest further in COBET. It means doing an in-depth programme evaluation to see how it could be improved through provision of what is needed in terms of sufficient material and human resources, particularly teachers who are well trained and committed.
- d. The government and other stakeholders need to consider improving the teaching and learning environment so as to make it highly conducive for learning through building additional classrooms.

4.2 Implication for practice

As a vulnerable group, COBET learners as children are physically smaller and weaker than adults and hence, they are typically voiceless. Although education is among priorities of the fifth phase government, as stated in article 52 (I) (ii) of the ruling Chama cha Mapinduzi's five-year Manifesto of 2015, the alarming trend of the poor quality of COBET calls for the need to invest further financial and non-financial resources to address the

need of young people having improved access to COBET, giving them the opportunity to learn and reach their potential. Also, it should involve making the public aware and being committed to the COBET programme, and making the government aware on the need to train additional facilitators and experts with specialization in the area of non-formal and out-of-school programmes, including working closely with parents to achieve the required level of complementary education.

As the data showed that more girls are out of school than boys, educating girls is vital to ensure that the next generation of Tanzanians should receive quality and equitable education, leading to sustainable livelihoods. Strengthening the quality of basic education in the country will reduce the number of illiterate youth and adults in the future and create a learned society, which will contribute to achieving the National Development Vision 2025, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2025, the SDGs-2030 and African's Agenda for 2063.

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