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To cite this article: Donald R. Baum, Jimmy E. Hernandez & Arian Orchard (2019) Early childhood education for all: a mixed-methods study of the global policy agenda in Tanzania, *Early Years*, 39:3, 260-275, DOI: [10.1080/09575146.2019.1572075](https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2019.1572075)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2019.1572075>



Published online: 27 Jan 2019.



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# Early childhood education for all: a mixed-methods study of the global policy agenda in Tanzania

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## ABSTRACT

This study considers the extent to which access to basic education and student learning outcomes have become more equalized or more disparate in Tanzania following the implementation of the international Education for All (EFA) initiative, and whether early childhood education access and performance follow similar patterns. To answer these questions, we apply a mixed-methods research design, which includes a longitudinal analysis of changes in educational opportunity and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of key education policy documents in Tanzania. Findings from our quantitative analysis suggest that social inequality is persistent across time and consistent across access and learning outcomes at the early childhood and basic education levels. The implication is that, to date, the EFA agenda has only served to reproduce social inequalities in Tanzania, with the exception of increased opportunity for girls. These results align with CDA findings assessing the global and national policy discourse, which find educational inequalities to be prioritized in language but not adequately in final targets and strategies. Given the resiliency of such education inequalities, it would appear that policy capable of removing social barriers to educational opportunity requires more attention to specific at-risk student populations.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 June 2018

Accepted 16 January 2019

## KEYWORDS

Early childhood education;  
Education for All; Tanzania;  
education inequality

## Introduction

Despite high rates of return to investments (Heckman and Masterov 2007) and large developmental benefits for children (Currie and Thomas 1999; Reynolds et al. 2001), early childhood education (ECE) has historically been neglected in many low-income countries. More recently, however, greater emphasis is being placed on raising access to high quality ECE services (Gove 2017), in part as a result of the global Education for All (EFA) movement, but particularly with the advent of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, which have placed early childhood development more squarely within international policy frameworks. Specifically, SDG Target 4.2 commits countries to ‘ensure that *all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education*’ by the year 2030. In 2014, Tanzania drafted a new national education policy, which made one year of pre-primary education compulsory for all children, and reified the government’s

efforts towards implementing a program of fee-free education within the nation's public school system (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2014).

However, might there be reason to question a strategy for ECE expansion modelled after the free and universal approach that has dominated the EFA discourse? After all, although it is certainly an intended outcome of universalized education, it is not self-evident that the expansion of basic<sup>1</sup> education services experienced under EFA has reduced disparities in educational opportunity. In fact, some evidence suggests that the initiative has been restricted in its ability to reach the most vulnerable child populations (Lewin and Sabates 2012; UNESCO 2015a). In low-income countries, despite notable progress in access to services, the expansion of the pre-primary subsector to date has followed similar trends, with the most vulnerable children in many locations still largely being left behind (Woodhead et al. 2009; Delprato, Dunne, and Zeitlyn 2016).

This study considers the extent to which access to basic education and student learning outcomes have become more equalized or more disparate in Tanzania following the implementation of the international EFA initiative. Likewise, current distributions of ECE access and performance are assessed to determine whether trends are similar at the early childhood and basic education levels. Lessons from the growth of primary schooling are then used to assess the current status of early childhood education access and quality and to draw policy recommendations for the expansion of the subsector.

In addition to investigating the role of free and universal education for equalizing education opportunities, this study is interested in the forces that shape and determine agendas for national education systems, particularly at the early childhood level. The setting of policy priorities at the national level is rarely, if ever, carried out in isolation from the influence of global education forces, priorities and policies. The current education policy environment has been greatly influenced by a litany of global interests and initiatives. We are particularly interested in the flows of power from international regimes (such as the EFA and SDG initiatives) and actors (such as UNESCO, The World Bank and The Global Partnership for Education) to national policy makers, which have shaped national education policies centered on free and universal access to education. As such, we investigate the ongoing interactions between global and national policy and policy actors in setting agendas for the ECE system in Tanzania. To better understand the issues discussed here, we aim to answer the following three research questions:

- (1) Has the global EFA initiative reduced or reproduced social disparities in primary and secondary educational access and learning – as measured by enrolment in and progression through the education system, and performance on assessments of student learning across gender, wealth and urban/rural social groups?
- (2) Are disparities in schooling participation and student achievement at the ECE level different from those at the primary and secondary levels?
- (3) Are current global and national policy frameworks positioned to break down barriers to early childhood access and quality?

In summary, these questions aim to answer whether current interactions between global and national policies and policy actors influence the setting of agendas for national ECE systems, and how these are likely to impact educational opportunities

and social inequality over time. To answer these questions, we apply a mixed-methods research design, which includes a longitudinal analysis of changes in educational opportunity and a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of key education policy documents in Tanzania.

## **Theoretical framework**

### ***Theories of educational inequality***

In considering the potential effects of a free and universal strategy for ECE in Tanzania, we can examine the outcomes of prior universal education movements within the country. Lessons gained from the expansion of basic education services could thus be instrumental for the purposes of creating and implementing more effective policy for expanding early childhood services. To this end, we analyze changes in the accessibility of primary and secondary schooling during the EFA era. In particular, this analysis is guided by Raftery & Hout's (1993) hypothesis of maximally maintained inequality (MMI). Alternatively labelled the 'saturation hypothesis', MMI posits that the most socially and economically privileged groups within a society – given that they have the most cultural and social capital to maximize new educational opportunities – will be the first to gain access to schooling at any given level until they reach saturation, after which the benefits of expansion are extended down to the less-privileged groups (Ayalon and Shavit 2004; Hout 2006). As a result, existing class differences within education remain stable over time (Bar-Haim and Shavit 2013).

The theory predicts that households at the bottom of the social ladder will be the last to gain full access to education, and will only do so after universal access is obtained for all others. If such a hypothesis holds up within a post-EFA policy environment, it would reflect poorly on the global initiative, which, in large part, is aimed at providing high-quality education services for the most disadvantaged individuals across the world. Furthermore, it may call into question the adequacy of a universal access strategy for successfully expanding education services at the early childhood level.

### ***Theories of global governance and power***

National efforts towards expanding and improving educational access and student learning – such as those explained by the MMI hypothesis – are situated within a broader international policy environment. Thus, the policy decisions made by governments are influenced by forces of both local and global politics. To better understand the impact of global influences on Tanzania's education policymaking, we draw upon Tikly's (2017) analysis of EFA as an emergent regime of global education governance, which dictates the 'rules, structures, and institutions that guide, regulate, and control' the dialogue on educational expansion and improvement across countries (p. 26). In addition, we employ Barnett and Duvall's (2004, 2005) typology of power in international relations and politics. Our interest centers on the ways in which countries are or are not free to pursue educational strategies that fall outside the scope of the dominant global regime. To this end, we are primarily concerned with Barnett and Duvall's forms of compulsory and institutional

power. *Compulsory power* involves the direct interactions between actors, which allow one to exert control over another (Barnett and Duvall 2004) such as in the conditionalities that link global financial assistance to required policy decisions on the part of recipient countries. *Institutional power* is concerned with the ways in which powerful and dominant actors design and shape global institutions to their advantage and to the disadvantage of others, including the historical control of Western nations over international development decision making, the expanding influence of EFA and the SDGs within the global education discourse and the dominance of particular ways of knowing (e.g. western knowledge or rational scientific practices) or universal ‘best practices’ that countries are expected to adopt.

## Methods

### ***Quantitative methods and data – analysis of inequality in student attainment and achievement***

To better understand the forces shaping education policy in Tanzania, along with their observed and potential future impact on desired social outcomes, we use a mixed-methods research design to answer the questions posed above. The quantitative analysis involves three parts, which provide insight into (i) longitudinal changes in primary and secondary school attainment, (ii) cross-sectional rates and determinants of early childhood participation and (iii) current levels of student achievement at the end of early childhood and lower secondary school levels, across demographic groups. The first analysis builds upon more than three decades of research – largely from the field of sociology – on the persistence of educational inequality amidst periods of schooling expansion, including the MMI hypothesis (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Breen et al. 2009; Bar-Haim and Shavit 2013). We first make use of data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program, analyzing data from three DHS cohorts – 1996, 2004 and 2015 – to identify any changes in educational attainment (years of education) during the EFA period of 1990–2015. More specifically, this analysis assesses changes in attainment across demographic groups (wealth, gender and location) for each year’s cohort of 18-to-30-year-olds. What we seek to understand is whether these quantitative gains in educational access were distributed equally across certain social strata– in other words, whether the education system under EFA appears to be reducing or reproducing educational disparities.

Second, to determine the extent to which the distribution of educational opportunity at the primary and secondary levels is reflected in ECE access, we apply a cross-sectional analysis of ECE participation in Tanzania, using data from the World Bank’s 2013 Living Standards Measurement Survey. Lastly, we conduct a cross-sectional analysis of the distribution (across demographic groups) of academic achievement in mathematics and Swahili for students at the end of pre-primary (age 7) and in the latter half of lower-secondary school (age 16). Data for this analysis come from the 2014 Uwezo assessment, a nationally-representative household-based assessment of child literacy and numeracy, administered annually in Tanzania.

### *Qualitative methods and data – CDA of global and national policy*

The qualitative component of our study applies a CDA to Tanzania's key education policy documents to investigate the intersection of global and local decision making related to the expansion of early childhood and basic education services. Grounded in critical theory, CDA presents a lens for identifying and uncovering dominant ideologies found within discourse to critique and resist inequities in society (Van Dijk 2003). In Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse, the underlying assumption is that discourse is a socially-constructed representation of reality. Rules of exclusion, division and rejection in discourse thus govern the production of systems of knowledge and disclose a relation between language and power. Studies of discourse are concerned with 'what can be said' and 'by whom' (Ball 1990), and examine negotiations and struggles for power, as revealed through language and social practices (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

In the context of this study, CDA is employed to investigate relationships of power within international and national policy discourses. As discursive texts, public policies are 'imbued with authority' (Vavrus and Seghers 2010, 77), conveying the social power of dominant groups and institutions whose ideologies are represented in the texts. When wielded in such a manner, the structures of knowledge and ideology serve as hegemonic forces (Gramsci 1971) in the form of common sense (Apple 2014) and are perpetuated through social practice. Drawing upon Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational (DRA) methodology (Fairclough 2016), we carry out a CDA of key national education policy documents focused on education in Tanzania. Table 1 lists the policy documents used in the analysis, the publication date and the institution associated with the creation of the policy document.

**Table 1.** Policy documents used for critical discourse analysis.

| Institutional affiliation        | Document                                         | Year of publication |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| International EFA framework      | Jomtien Declaration and Framework for Action     | 1990                |
|                                  | Dakar Framework for Action                       | 2000                |
|                                  | The Muscat Agreement                             | 2014                |
|                                  | Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action     | 2015                |
|                                  | Sustainable Development Goals                    | 2015                |
| Tanzania national document       | Education for Self Reliance                      | 1967                |
|                                  | The National Education Act                       | 1969                |
|                                  | Tanzania Education Act                           | 1978                |
|                                  | Tanzania Education and Training Policy           | 1995                |
|                                  | Education Sector Development Program             | 2000                |
|                                  | Education Sector Development Programme 2008–17   | 2008                |
|                                  | Tanzania Education and Training Policy           | 2014                |
|                                  | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper                 | 2006                |
| World Bank/IMF                   | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper                 | 2010                |
|                                  | Big Results Now in Education – Program Appraisal | 2014                |
|                                  | Tanzania Mainland Appraisal Report               | 2013                |
| Global Partnership for Education | Literacy and Numeracy Education Support Program  | 2013                |
|                                  | Basic Education Master Plan 2000–2005            | 2001                |
|                                  | Tanzania Education Sector Analysis               | 2011                |
| UNESCO                           | Education for All 2015 National Review           | 2014                |
|                                  | UN Development Assistance Plan 2011–2015         | 2011                |
| United Nations                   |                                                  |                     |

## Findings

### *Educational attainment, ECE participation and student achievement*

In the years following the introduction of the EFA agenda, Tanzania demonstrated its commitment to the expansion of basic education. Between 1996 and 2015, the average years of schooling completed by those aged 18 to 30 increased from 5.8 years to 7.2 years. In addition, the primary school completion rate for the same age group increased from 70.4% in 1996 to 78.0% in 2015 (authors' own analysis).

We assess the collective distribution of educational opportunity using ordinary least squares (OLS) models, with educational attainment (measured by years of schooling completed) regressed on a vector of these demographic characteristics (gender, wealth and location) plus mother's and father's years of education. Separate models were run for each cohort. To disprove the MMI hypothesis, we would need to see a couple of results: first, reductions in the size of coefficients (or elimination of statistical significance) related to student gender, wealth and location; and second, decreases in the size of  $R^2$ , suggesting that, over time, student background characteristics are becoming less predictive of schooling attainment.

Table 2 demonstrates the influence of student demographic characteristics on years of schooling. The results show that the influence of gender has changed over time. Whereas females had, on average, 0.2 fewer years of education than males in 1996, they had 0.2 more years of education than males in 2015. Thus, controlling for other demographic characteristics, it appears that the educational expansion in Tanzania under EFA has had a positive impact on female participation in school.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the improvement in female educational attainment, we observe diminishing opportunities for poorer and rural students. In 1996, there were no differences in attainment between urban and rural students. However, by 2015, rural students had completed, on average, 0.5 fewer years of schooling than their urban counterparts. Moreover, the importance of wealth has intensified over time. In 1996, each increase in wealth quintile was associated with a 0.36 increase in expected years of education. By 2015, this had increased to 0.75.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that, all other factors held constant, the

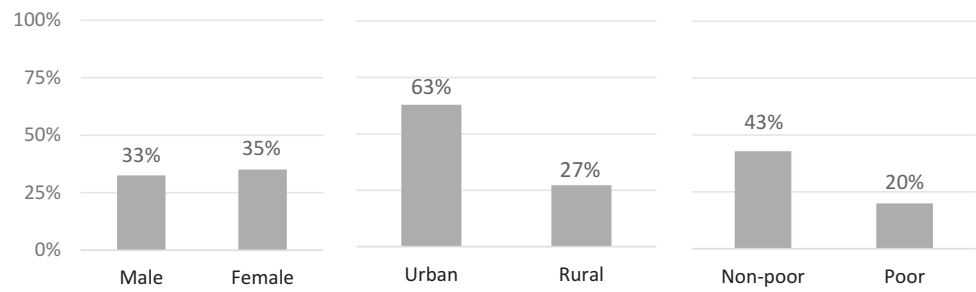
**Table 2.** Determinants of years of schooling, 18–30 year olds.

|                  | 1996                        | 2004                        | 2015                        |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Female           | <b>-0.233*</b><br>(0.139)   | -0.168<br>(0.200)           | <b>0.238*</b><br>(0.137)    |
| Rural            | -0.160<br>(0.201)           | -0.351<br>(0.267)           | <b>-0.538***</b><br>(0.199) |
| Wealth quintile  | <b>0.363***</b><br>(0.0622) | <b>0.978***</b><br>(0.0965) | <b>0.750***</b><br>(0.0722) |
| Mother education | <b>0.172***</b><br>(0.0265) | <b>0.0408*</b><br>(0.0219)  | <b>0.102***</b><br>(0.0247) |
| Father Education | <b>0.114***</b><br>(0.0244) | <b>0.195***</b><br>(0.0305) | <b>0.164***</b><br>(0.0232) |
| Constant         | <b>4.881***</b><br>(0.395)  | <b>1.461**</b><br>(0.605)   | <b>4.165***</b><br>(0.408)  |
| Observations     | 1,601                       | 2,061                       | 2,935                       |
| $R^2$            | 0.212                       | 0.257                       | 0.353                       |

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Note: Coefficients omitted for regional dummy variables



**Figure 1.** Tanzania preschool enrolment rates by gender, location and poverty status.

poorest students attain, on average, three fewer years of education than the wealthiest. The family background of parents is also consistently associated with the educational attainment of their children. Overall, educational attainment became more dependent upon students’ sociodemographic characteristics between 1996 and 2015, with growth in  $R^2$  from 0.21 to 0.35, suggesting a deepening of educational inequality over time.

After examining the changes in educational opportunity during the post-EFA era, we turn to recent data on participation in ECE in Tanzania to determine whether access is similarly driven by student sociodemographic characteristics. To this end, we examine the distribution of preschool enrolment by student gender, location and wealth, again controlling for parent education. This entails simple comparisons of enrolment rates for each of these groups, in addition to an OLS model regressing preschool enrolment on the full set of student characteristics. Results show that access to preschool participation follows similar patterns to those found at the primary and secondary levels – namely, that participation is relatively equal between genders, but that urban students and wealthier students are far more likely to be enrolled at the early childhood level (Figure 1 and Table 3).

Lastly, using data from the 2014 Uwezo assessment, we explore these same characteristics as determinants of student math and Swahili achievement for students at age 7 (at the end of pre-primary) and age 16 (towards the end of lower secondary) using OLS models (Table 4). Results show that, at age 7, girls leave pre-school with a significant learning advantage over boys – on the order of 0.2 points (or 0.09 standard deviations).

**Table 3.** Determinants of pre-primary enrolment.

|                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Female           | 0.116<br>(0.103)     |
| Rural            | –0.652***<br>(0.136) |
| Household wealth | 0.422***<br>(0.0910) |
| Parent education | 0.740***<br>(0.178)  |
| Constant         | –5.618***<br>(1.275) |
| Observations     | 1,079                |

Robust standard errors in parentheses;  
\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$



**Table 4.** Determinants of student math and Swahili achievement, ages 7 and 16.

|                  | Age 7<br>(Math)             | Age 7<br>(Swahili)           | Age 16<br>(Math)            | Age 16<br>(Swahili)          |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Female           | <b>0.203*</b><br>(0.0893)   | <b>0.206**</b><br>(0.0727)   | −0.0728<br>(0.110)          | 0.0633<br>(0.0724)           |
| Rural            | <b>−0.217*</b><br>(0.103)   | <b>−0.187*</b><br>(0.0760)   | <b>−0.241**</b><br>(0.0919) | <b>−0.207***</b><br>(0.0599) |
| Wealth quintile  | <b>0.219***</b><br>(0.0350) | <b>0.160***</b><br>(0.0286)  | <b>0.188***</b><br>(0.0359) | <b>0.133***</b><br>(0.0242)  |
| Mother education | <b>0.117***</b><br>(0.0231) | <b>0.0809***</b><br>(0.0183) | <b>0.102***</b><br>(0.0245) | <b>0.0528***</b><br>(0.0158) |
| Constant         | <b>2.554***</b><br>(0.268)  | <b>1.889***</b><br>(0.206)   | <b>5.376***</b><br>(0.216)  | <b>3.996***</b><br>(0.141)   |
| Observations     | 3,077                       | 3,077                        | 1,758                       | 1,758                        |
| R <sup>2</sup>   | 0.200                       | 0.198                        | 0.100                       | 0.109                        |

Robust standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

Note: Coefficients omitted for regional dummy variables

However, within the cohort of 16-year-olds, there is no gender learning difference. There is a consistent learning disadvantage for rural students across subjects and age cohorts, with an average coefficient of  $-0.21$  (0.1 SD). In addition, there is a significant learning advantage for each increasing wealth quintile. At age 7, each increase in wealth quintile is associated with learning gains of 0.22 (0.1 SD) in math and 0.16 (0.07 SD) in Swahili. The effect is slightly smaller, although still significant, for 16-year-olds: 0.19 (0.08 SD) in math and 0.13 (0.06 SD). Finally, mother's education is significant across all ages and subjects. Overall, student background characteristics explain roughly twice the amount of variation in learning outcomes at the end of pre-primary ( $R^2 = 0.2$ ) than at the end of lower secondary ( $R^2 = 0.1$ ).

### Critical Discourse Analysis

Education policy at the national and international levels is meant to effect positive change in desired academic and social outcomes. The previous section demonstrated the elimination of certain gender-based inequalities in conjunction with a deepening of wealth-based and location-based educational inequalities over the past two decades in Tanzania. This section presents the findings from our CDA of roughly 20 key documents influencing Tanzania's education policy. In particular, we focus on whether prior and existing policies specifically target disparities in educational opportunity in regards to gender, location and wealth. The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the relationships between policies governing the education system and the outcomes produced.

### *Influence of international aid and development partners: compulsory and institutional power*

Tanzania's early post-independence discourse surrounding the provision of social services was founded upon Julius Nyerere's African socialist ethos of *Ujamaa*, which placed high value on the availability of education for establishing a socioeconomically independent post-colonial nation (Mushi 2009). To this end, prior to any significant external influence by international institutions, Tanzania's early policy texts shaped an independent socialist regime of educational governance – one that problematized the country's

colonial past and aimed to use education as a mode of fostering 'social goals of living together and working together for the common good' (Nyerere 1967).

However, during the global financial crises of the 1970s and 1980s, structural adjustment (SAP) and economic stabilization policies prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund led to the encroachment of international policy prescriptions – a clear form of compulsory power – as an effort to reduce overall government expenditure on social services. Evidence of these structural adjustment mechanisms are evident in Tanzania's national education policy in 1995, which advocates for an increased role for the private sector, the reduction of government subsidies to the education sector, as well as the 'introduction of cost recovery and cost sharing measures', including user fees at the primary education level (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Culture 1995). These are strong examples of compulsory power at work, with the content of Tanzania's own education policy-making showing clear influence from its funders rather than from the newly developing discourse on human rights and universal education access that was in its infancy under the recently-ratified EFA agenda. The existence of these cost-sharing mechanisms aligns well with the patterns in the quantitative data seen above – in particular, the growing disparities in educational attainment between wealth quintiles from 1996 to 2004.

The influence of compulsory power on the development of strategies and policies for education matters for a country like Tanzania, whose educational operations depend in no small part upon funding from external donors. In the last three years, the operation of educational programs in the country was funded in part by grants of \$95 million from GPE, \$104 million from the United Nations and \$100 million from the World Bank. Taken together, these grants of \$299 million represent 21.2% of the annual \$1.41 billion national budget for education. It is not unlikely that the strategies and programs developed for the purposes of these grants reflect more the priorities of the sponsoring organizations than they do of the operating country. For example, the process for receiving funding from GPE requires adequate demonstration that the proposed educational programs align with the GPE's own strategic priorities (Global Partnership for Education 2013a). Moreover, likely the same would be said for any funds being received from the UN and the World Bank.

Nyerere inherited a philosophy towards education similar to what we find across countries today – one focused on training for the skills and knowledge necessary for high performance in the modern economy. However, he viewed education as having considerable value above and beyond its ability to drive economic growth, its purpose being to transmit 'the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society' to the next generation, and to prepare its young people for society's future maintenance and development (Nyerere 1967). The institutional power within the more recent global education discourse has substantially influenced Tanzania away from this holistic educational philosophy. No longer is education identified as the tool for instilling a broad set of values for the future members of Tanzanian society, but the aim of education has been narrowed – seen strictly in terms of its instrumental economic role (Robeyns 2006) to prepare workers for the labor market. Tanzania's policies now see high-quality education and training as being necessary 'to develop sufficient *human capital*' for responding to forces of globalization and competition, which have 'forced' developing and developed countries to either change or strengthen policies, programs, and

strategies to be able to withstand the competition of economic and social sustainable development (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2014). Nyerere recognized that colonial education in Tanzania was deliberately used to replace traditional values and knowledge with those legitimized by the nation's colonizers. In a post-colonial Tanzania, concerns remain as to whether education is being used as a tool to instil the values desired by Tanzanian culture and tradition or whether these are being replaced with the dominant knowledge and values of the Western influencers who dominate the global discourse.

### *International EFA frameworks*

The initial global agreement on EFA was established in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. The overwhelming priority identified within the agreement was an emphasis on providing quality education for *all children*. This included identification of additional needs for some specific demographic groups, including the poor, rural populations, indigenous peoples and ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities (UNESCO 1990). This offers an indicative representation of what EFA initially set out to do, while also serving as an example of the approach taken within the majority of international EFA frameworks – namely, that the need for supporting specific underserved populations is identified, yet specific strategies and targets for the purposes of meeting these goals are left absent. The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action outlined the EFA priorities for the years 2000–2015, identifying six goals with accompanying targets for setting policy agendas. These goals included specific language highlighting the needs of vulnerable populations – girls, ethnic minorities and children in difficult circumstances – at the ECE and primary school levels. However, the agreed-upon targets associated with these goals provided guidance only on overall expansion at each of these levels; targets included a doubling of the number of ECD programs by 2006 and the provision of universal enrolment in quality primary education by 2015.

In only one area did this EFA policy outline targets for a specific at-risk demographic group, with goals to reach gender parity in the areas of primary school completion and transition by 2015. From this early date in the EFA movement, gender became the primary point of focus for eliminating educational disadvantages. It seems readily apparent that the EFA discourse over the past 2.5 decades has been immensely successful at promoting awareness and buy-in for gender equity within education; it is difficult to find an education policy or strategy after 1990 (in both the global and national policies) that does not focus on gender parity/equity as a significant priority. This fact lines up with the data on access in Tanzania under EFA, which shows smaller (or lack of) disparities by gender – a likely result of the decades-long emphasis on providing girls with access to quality educational opportunities. For at least the next decade, all other forms of educational inequity would be identified in language, but ignored in actionable targets, with the outcome being that country policies rarely considered programs tailored to the specific needs of demographic groups besides girls.

After gender, the type of disadvantage that gets the most explicit discussion in the EFA frameworks is disability. In particular, in more recent years, the needs for students with disabilities are being increasingly highlighted and strategies for better serving these students are being suggested. This is critical to the future success of the EFA

movement, as disability is one of the most difficult barriers to overcome in accessing educational opportunities (World Bank 2018).

Today's global EFA efforts are governed by the 2015 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. This policy attends to the expansion of quality ECE and primary education in both specific and general terms. The Incheon Declaration addresses gender inequalities in education, going beyond parity in important ways to include the elimination of gender biases and discrimination, and working to alter cultural and social norms surrounding gender, which have substantial impact on the success of girls and women in education and beyond (Chisamya et al. 2012). Beyond gender, countries are urged to disaggregate data for the purposes of tracking and thus better support additional underserved groups in education.

What is most noteworthy about the Incheon Declaration is that it goes to greater lengths than any of the previous EFA frameworks to outline specific targets for overcoming demographic disadvantages in access to quality education, including reaching parity in access for students in rural and urban locations, for those in top and bottom wealth quintiles, for indigenous students and for those in conflict-affected areas. These types of targets are the first of their kind within the global EFA policy discourse, and they hit right at the heart of some of the most pressing constraints to educational access across countries (including Tanzania) (World Bank 2018). Hopefully, the inclusion of such targets is indicative of the future progress of education expansion in low-income countries across the world.

***Early childhood education within the EFA frameworks.*** Overall, the earlier EFA frameworks devote a small share of attention to early childhood, relative to basic education. The 2000 EFA policy takes a step forward in identifying specific targets for the expansion of early childhood services (twice the number of ECD programs by 2006 and universal participation by all children aged 3 to 6 by 2015); however, it does not consider the possibility that ECE participation may suffer from the same types of disparities that exist at the primary level. Thus, there is no focus on gender or any other specific demographic groups and their needs at the early childhood level. Moreover, given the extremely low levels of pre-school participation in 2000 (in 2004 the gross enrolment rate in Tanzania was only 23%), the Dakar goal surrounding universal access by 2015 was likely far too ambitious.

The 2014 Muscat Agreement was the first of the international EFA frameworks to suggest that countries should identify their own specific targets in terms of rate of ECE participation (UNESCO 2014). Also for the first time, specific demographic challenges at the ECE level were identified. Goals for participation across gender are to be set and tracked by individual countries. There is also a general mention of the 'most marginalized', without any explicit direction on how to focus on those marginalized or even who they are. However, as discussed above, the 2015 Incheon Declaration offers a much more direct approach for setting specific targets for the ECE level, including (i) shares of children of ECD-age who are developmentally on track in learning and socioemotional well-being, and (ii) participation rates in ECE, by sex (UNESCO 2015b). In addition, ECE progress should be tracked (and parity reached) in the areas of gender, location, wealth, disability, indigeneity and conflict by the year 2030.

### *Addressing equity in the Tanzanian national policy documents*

As early as 1995, Tanzanian policy documents begin to identify certain at-risk groups who experience greater challenges to education participation. One of the stated objectives of the education policy is to ‘promote and facilitate access to education to disadvantaged social and cultural groups’. Moreover, responding to the challenge of gender equity, the policy offers a set of specific strategies, through which the access of girls to basic education may be positively affected. In terms of redressing educational inequalities outside of gender, however, the policy has little to offer.

In general terms, the earlier Tanzanian policy documents mirror quite well the language and targets set within the global EFA frameworks. That is, nearly all of the national policies and educational plans highlight the need to address disparate access across social groups, but rarely do they involve practical measures for improving access or quality for these groups. However, on a more promising note, a few of the recent policies and strategies get closer to the approach of the 2015 Incheon Declaration. The importance of eliminating social disparities is outlined, with attention to individual groups, and specific actionable targets/strategies are offered to move the country closer to these intended outcomes. The 2006 Poverty Reduction Strategy sets specific targets for the improvement of enrolment, attendance and completion of primary school for orphans, vulnerable children and children with disabilities (United Republic of Tanzania 2006). The 2008 Education Sector Development Program offers plans to implement some promising interventions for addressing specific inequities, including community-funded school feeding schemes and scholarship grants to pupils from low-income households (United Republic of Tanzania 2008). Lastly, the 2013–2016 GPE education program outlines approaches for narrowing access and learning gaps for marginalized and hard-to-reach children, girls, indigenous, rural students, linguistic minorities and students with disabilities (Global Partnership for Education 2013b).

### *Early Childhood Education*

Today, Tanzania has higher participation in pre-primary education than any of its East African neighbors; although, at 30% net enrolment, the nation remains far from achieving universal pre-primary access (Table 5). The country’s regulatory environment establishes a clear political commitment towards the expansion of ECE. In 1995, the Tanzanian government, assuming the responsibility to educate children between 5 and 6-years old, incorporated two years of non-compulsory pre-primary education into the formal education system (Mtahabwa and Rao 2010). This policy mandated each public primary school to have at least one pre-primary classroom for children to attend without any cost; however, there is evidence to suggest that implementation of this policy has been lagging on both the availability of classrooms and free attendance (World Bank 2012). The 1995 policy stops short of addressing the challenges of particular demographic groups in accessing ECE or identifying strategies for reducing inequities in access.

Tanzania’s 2000 Education Sector Development Plan furthers the country’s objectives for expanding ECE services by requiring each primary school in the nation to establish at least one preschool unit to be run by professional teachers. Furthermore, in the 2014 policy, the state instituted a new policy of at least one year of free and universal pre-primary education (Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2014). However, with respect to the expanded participation at the early stages, there is no

**Table 5.** Pre-primary net enrollment rates, select East African countries.

|                     | Tanzania   | Kenya | Ethiopia | Zimbabwe | Rwanda | Uganda | Burundi |
|---------------------|------------|-------|----------|----------|--------|--------|---------|
| Net enrollment rate | <b>30%</b> | 29%   | 29%      | 25%      | 16%    | 14%    | 8%      |

Source: (World Bank 2018)

consideration of potential constraints to school access across demographic groups apart from gender and disability. The 2006 Poverty Reduction Strategy outlines operational targets for general expansion of the early childhood sector, but without respect to particular groups. The operational targets of ESDP 2008–2017 aim for at least 50% of children receiving two years of pre-primary education by 2012, but again, do not focus on any specific groups.

### Conclusion

During Africa’s colonial era, schools and universities were a primary mechanism of social stratification and reproduction – according to Foster, ‘rather powerful independent forces in the creation of new and emergent groupings based on the variable possession of power, wealth, and prestige’ (Foster 1980). Nyerere’s education sought to overturn these colonial interests and turn the education system of Tanzania into a vehicle for producing more equitable social outcomes, in line with his *Ujaama* socialist philosophy. The post-1990 EFA effort in Africa has sought to turn schools into a means of reducing social inequalities. In particular, early childhood education – given its large and lasting effects on the emotional, social and cognitive development of children – has the potential to be a significant equalizer of life opportunities.

However, to date, the EFA agenda has not produced the desired reductions in social inequalities in Tanzania, with the exception of increased opportunity for girls. The groups that experience the greatest disparities in access to education are groups of children who live in geographically rural locations, those who live in lower income households and those with disabilities. The findings from our quantitative analyses suggest that social inequality is persistent across time and consistent across access and learning outcomes at the early childhood and basic education levels. These results align with the CDA of the global and national policy documents, which find educational inequalities have been prioritized in language, but for most of the initial EFA era, did not find their way into the final targets and strategies in any meaningful manner (again, with the exception of gender). MMI predicts that education systems will perpetuate inequitable access amid schooling expansions. Thus, without targeted action towards at-risk social groups, simply expanding the education system will fail to reduce social disparities. However, the EFA and SDG initiatives strive towards facilitating government action to support the reduction of social disparities. Given the prior heavy emphasis on the elimination of gender disparities in education, these initiatives have seen substantial progress both inside and outside Tanzania. However, the evidence presented here suggests that a lower relative priority on wealth and geographic risk factors has been associated with continuing – and sometimes widening – gaps across these social groups. Given the resilience of these education inequalities, it would appear that policy capable of removing social barriers to educational opportunity requires more attention to specific at-risk student populations.

For the most part, the policy approach to ECE expansion appears to be following the path taken previously by the EFA model at the basic education level, with explicit targets set for expansion of services in general, and little attention to the needs of the most disadvantaged populations. If this strategy is carried forward, we would expect the most vulnerable to be the last to receive these critical services, with the subsequent impact of perpetuating deficiencies in cognitive and socioemotional development, as well as future academic achievement.

Of all the education strategies analyzed, the 2013–2016 GPE program provides the most explicit approach toward supporting these particular disadvantaged groups, aiming to expand ECE for disadvantaged and marginalized populations, hard to reach areas, children with disabilities and special learning needs, orphans and vulnerable children and children from poor families. However, even in this case, there is more in the way of language on desired outcomes than specific targets suggesting how to reach those outcomes. In any case, we are hopeful that this may signal an improvement in the coming years in identifying those children most at risk of educational disadvantage and considering programmatic approaches for increasing their opportunities within the system. Clearly, more effective policies would entail better targeting of disadvantaged students from the very beginning.

Of course, our research design does not allow us to draw causal links between the existing policies in the international discourse, in Tanzania's own policy documents, and the observed outcomes of expanding educational disadvantage. However, we believe the evidence presented is at least indicative of a potential relationship. Moreover, if policy does in fact influence the outcomes of access to quality ECE and basic education, there is reason for optimism regarding the future of educational expansion in Tanzania. More recent policy discourses at the international and national levels are calling increasing amounts of attention to the needs of at-risk groups. And more importantly, these discourses are increasingly identifying specific targets and strategies necessary to redress the educational inequalities within the system.

## Notes

1. We use UNESCO (2007) definition of 'basic education' which includes education at the primary and secondary schools levels.
2. Result is significant at  $p < 0.1$ .
3. It is important to note, however, that the wealth coefficient decreased nearly 25% between 2004 and 2015.

## Disclosure statement

No conflicts of interest.

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