



Teachers' Perspectives on the Transition from Early Childhood Education to Grade One

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ABSTRACT

The transition from early childhood education (ECE) to Grade One is a critical phase in children's educational trajectories. However, evidence on teacher perspectives and pedagogical discontinuities between ECE and primary classrooms remains scarce in Zanzibar and similar East African settings. This study explored teachers' views of learners' readiness for Grade One and the challenges shaping this transition in Zanzibar. Using a qualitative descriptive design, six purposively selected teachers from pre-primary and lower primary schools in the Urban West Region participated in semi-structured interviews conducted in Kiswahili. Data were analysed through iterative thematic analysis, and trustworthiness was strengthened through collaborative coding, member checking, and systematic documentation of the research process. Five themes emerged: readiness was associated with early literacy, age, and socio-emotional independence; adjustment was marked by anxiety and uneven preparedness; pedagogical and language discontinuities shaped transition; overcrowding, limited materials, weak infrastructure, and insufficient professional support constrained teachers' practices; and participants recommended stronger alignment between educational stages, closer family-school collaboration, teacher training, and smaller class sizes. These findings position school transition as a relational, context-sensitive process shaped by the interplay of child preparedness, pedagogy, and institutional conditions, and offer policy and pedagogical directions for strengthening transition support in Zanzibar.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Grade One; School transition; Teacher perspectives; Zanzibar

ABSTRAK

Transisi dari pendidikan anak usia dini (PAUD) ke kelas satu merupakan fase kritis dalam perjalanan pendidikan anak-anak. Namun, bukti mengenai perspektif guru dan ketidaksinambungan pedagogis antara PAUD dan kelas sekolah dasar masih langka di Zanzibar dan lingkungan serupa di Afrika Timur. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pandangan guru mengenai kesiapan peserta didik untuk kelas

satu serta tantangan yang memengaruhi transisi ini di Zanzibar. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, enam guru yang dipilih secara purposif dari sekolah prasekolah dan sekolah dasar tingkat bawah di Wilayah Barat Perkotaan berpartisipasi dalam wawancara semi-terstruktur yang dilakukan dalam bahasa Kiswahili. Data dianalisis melalui analisis tematik berulang, dan keandalan data diperkuat melalui pengkodean kolaboratif, verifikasi anggota, dan dokumentasi sistematis proses penelitian. Lima tema muncul: kesiapan dikaitkan dengan literasi awal, usia, dan kemandirian sosial-emosional; penyesuaian ditandai oleh kecemasan dan kesiapan yang tidak merata; diskontinuitas pedagogis dan bahasa membentuk transisi; kepadatan kelas, keterbatasan bahan ajar, infrastruktur yang lemah, dan dukungan profesional yang tidak memadai membatasi praktik guru; serta peserta merekomendasikan keselarasan yang lebih kuat antara tahap pendidikan, kolaborasi keluarga-sekolah yang lebih erat, pelatihan guru, dan ukuran kelas yang lebih kecil. Temuan-temuan ini menempatkan transisi sekolah sebagai proses yang bersifat relasional dan peka terhadap konteks, yang dibentuk oleh interaksi antara kesiapan anak, pendekatan pedagogis, dan kondisi kelembagaan, serta memberikan arahan kebijakan dan pedagogis untuk memperkuat dukungan transisi di Zanzibar.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan anak usia dini; Kelas Satu; Transisi sekolah; Perspektif guru; Zanzibar

INTRODUCTION

Moving from early childhood education (ECE) to primary schooling is widely recognised as a critical phase in children's educational trajectories (González-Moreira et al., 2023; Hanifah et al., 2024), yet it remains marked by persistent global concerns about school-readiness gaps, discontinuities between early learning environments and formal schooling, and inequalities in transition experiences. Across many education systems, children move from play-based, flexible settings into more structured and academically oriented classrooms, a shift that requires adaptation not only to new learning expectations but also to unfamiliar social and physical environments. Within this process, pupils encounter new teachers, peer groups, and school routines, which may shape their transition experience. However, this period is often accompanied by anxiety and uncertainty for both pupils and parents (Moir & Johnson, 2021). In response to these challenges, recent research highlights the importance of schools providing timely information and support to families to facilitate smoother transitions (Gardezi et al., 2025). When effectively supported, this transition may contribute to improved school attendance, academic achievement, and longer-term educational engagement (Iacobescu, 2025).

Research on school transition across multiple contexts consistently indicates that the move from preschool to primary school is a complex process involving multiple developmental dimensions, rather than a single area of difficulty. Children may experience challenges not only academically, but also socially, emotionally, and linguistically as they adjust to new expectations and environments. For instance, a study by Al Wardi (2023) which was conducted in Oman, identified anxiety, low language proficiency, limited parental support, learning difficulties, speech delays, and socioeconomic disadvantage as key challenges affecting children's transition experiences. Similarly, Altun (2018) noted that children from diverse educational or home-based backgrounds may enter school with varying levels of preparedness, thereby shaping how they adapt to formal schooling. Taken together, these studies suggest that transition difficulties emerge from the interaction of multiple factors rather

than isolated deficits, requiring teachers to recognise and respond to diverse developmental needs during this period (Robayanti & Djoehaeni, 2024).

During the transition process, teachers provide a crucial support system for children, as they are directly involved in assessing pupils and supporting their adjustment to formal learning environments (Mirkhil, 2010). In this regard, teachers' roles can be understood within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which highlights how children's development is shaped through interactions within immediate settings such as the classroom. Thus, Grade One and pre-primary teachers play a central role in mediating children's experiences as they navigate new expectations and environments.

While González-Moreira et al. (2025b) highlight how teachers in Spain perceive transition as shaped by pedagogical and institutional discontinuities, contrasting play-based ECE with more structured primary practices, Erkan (2025), in a Türkiye-USA comparison, emphasises cross-cultural differences in teachers' views of school readiness, despite shared priorities such as following instructions and self-care. Taken together, these studies indicate that teacher perceptions of transition are context-dependent, influenced by institutional arrangements and differing educational priorities. Methodologically, they also vary, with qualitative approaches capturing in-depth experiences and quantitative designs identifying broader patterns. However, research on such perspectives in developing education systems remains limited. In response, the present study focuses on Zanzibar, where teachers' perspectives on transition are underexplored.

Globally, the conceptualisation of school transition has evolved in important ways. Early work framed transition primarily in terms of child readiness, focusing on individual competencies required for school entry (Peters, 2010). However, more recent scholarship has shifted towards a broader and more holistic understanding, emphasising the alignment between children and educational institutions (Harris et al., 2024). This perspective recognises school readiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing not only children's cognitive skills but also social, emotional, and contextual factors. Accordingly, readiness is increasingly viewed as an institutional and relational process, where schools are expected to adapt their structures, practices, and environments to accommodate diverse learners. Such an approach is consistent with ecological perspectives on transition, which highlight the interaction between children, families, and school systems in shaping transition experiences.

When entering Grade One, children are expected to demonstrate greater independence (Breuer & Tal, 2020), including regulating behaviour, following instructions, and completing tasks. While these expectations have long been recognised in the literature (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000), recent studies show that children's adjustment remains uneven and shaped by prior experiences and emotional processes (Martínez et al., 2024). When these competencies are still developing, the transition may be more demanding for both learners and teachers. Thus, strong collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to support adjustment (Nikmaturrohmah & Rahmadani, 2025). Such collaboration is considered essential for establishing shared expectations and facilitating smoother transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Moreover, research suggests that parents who visit schools and engage with teachers beforehand can ease children's transition and enhance their sense of comfort (Yorulmaz et al., 2022). Similarly, shared pedagogical understanding between ECE and primary teachers has been identified as a key factor in facilitating continuity across learning stages (Cui, 2023). From

the perspective of Joyce Epstein's framework of overlapping spheres of influence, such collaboration between families and schools, as well as among teachers, is central to supporting children's adjustment. In line with this, the role of teachers during the ECE-to-PE transition is critical in shaping pedagogical practices, expectations, and cross-stage collaboration (González-Moreira et al., 2025a).

To situate this study within its institutional context, it is important to note that Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous region of the United Republic of Tanzania, with its own administration of basic education, separate from mainland Tanzania (Juma, 2018). This distinct educational structure shapes how early childhood education and primary schooling are organised and governed, with implications for continuity, coordination, and expectations during the transition to Grade One. In the Zanzibar context, ECE (pre-primary/preschool) and Grade One (Standard One) are used interchangeably, as these terms reflect context-specific variations in educational nomenclature across Zanzibar's policy framework, school practices, and international literature and ECE-to-PE transition in this study refers to children's movement from pre-primary to primary education.

In Zanzibar, early childhood education is integrated into the basic education cycle, with official entry ages of four for pre-primary and six for primary education (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2006). Although enrolment has expanded to over 100 per cent, participation remains uneven, and transition conditions are marked by large class sizes, with a pupil-teacher ratio of 50.5, exceeding the national target of 31:1 (UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, et al., 2024). These structural constraints may contribute to early learning gaps, reduced participation, and longer-term educational challenges. Within this context, such conditions are likely to shape teachers' perceptions of school readiness and influence their ability to support children during the transition to primary education.

Despite increased policy focus on ECE, research on the transition to Grade One in Zanzibar remains limited. Empirically, there is a scarcity of context-specific studies examining this transition. Methodologically, existing research provides limited qualitative insight into how the transition is experienced in practice. From a perspective standpoint, teachers' views – particularly regarding how they perceive learners' preparedness for Grade One and navigate transition challenges – remain underexplored. As a result, current understandings of transition processes remain partial, constraining the development of targeted interventions, effective teacher collaboration, and curriculum alignment.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring teachers' perspectives on the transition from early childhood education to Grade One in Zanzibar's unique cultural and linguistic context. Specifically, it asks: (1) How do teachers conceptualise and identify indicators of learners' preparedness for Grade One? and (2) how do they experience and navigate transition-related challenges? By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, this study contributes to the literature by providing qualitative evidence from Zanzibar. This context remains underrepresented in ECE transition research, while also extending theoretical understandings of transition as a contextually shaped and relational process. In addition, the findings offer insights to inform policy, practice, curriculum alignment, teacher training, and future research on the ECE-to-PE transition in similar contexts.

METHODS

Type and Design

When aiming to clearly and directly describe a phenomenon, employing a qualitative descriptive approach is particularly appropriate (Sandelowski, 2000). Accordingly, this study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to provide a straightforward account of teachers' experiences and viewpoints. The study is also informed by an interpretivist orientation, recognising that meaning is socially constructed through participants' experiences within their context (Pulla & Carter, 2018), and therefore seeks to understand how teachers perceive the transition process in their specific context. In line with this approach, thematic analysis was used as an analytical framework to identify patterns within the data, while maintaining a close connection to participants' accounts.

Data and Data Sources

This study was conducted in the Urban West Region of Zanzibar, where six teachers (three from pre-primary and three from lower primary school) directly involved in the transition process were purposively selected to provide in-depth, context-sensitive insights. A purposive sampling strategy ensured that participants had relevant experience of the phenomenon under examination (Campbell et al., 2020). Although the sample size is small, it is consistent with qualitative descriptive research, which emphasises depth rather than breadth (Furidha, 2023). Therefore, this sample was considered sufficient based on the concept of information power, as participants possessed specific experience of the transition process and provided rich, detailed accounts relevant to the study aims.

This study adhered to established ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and were free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty. The demographic characteristics of the subjects are presented in **Table 1** (Pseudonyms were used to protect both individual and institutional identity). Participants' years of teaching experience and educational backgrounds differ, a factor that may shape teachers' perceptions of ECE-to-PE transition.

Table 1. The demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant Code	Teaching Level	Qualification	Years of Experience
ECE1	Pre-primary	B.Ed. (ECE)	17
ECE2	Pre-primary	Diploma in ECE	5
ECE3	Pre- primary	Diploma in ECE	23
PRI1	Lower primary	Diploma in Education	25
PRI2	Lower primary	B.Ed.	15
PRI3	Lower primary	Diploma in Primary Ed.	28

Data collection technique

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, as this method is well-suited to participants who are comfortable speaking individually, able to articulate their views clearly, and willing to share their ideas openly (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Interviews were conducted online, with participants joining from quiet and private settings to ensure confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 35 to 45 minutes and was conducted in "Kiswahili," which is the national language of Tanzania, to facilitate participants' engagement

and ensure more detailed and authentic responses. The interview guide focused on teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in facilitating the transition, and all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Thereafter, the data were transcribed and translated into English to facilitate analysis, and all necessary care was taken to preserve the original meaning of participants' responses.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the data of this study. Using this approach, the researchers uncovered themes and patterns in the interview data, leading to a detailed understanding of the topic under study (Ncube & Musakanyi, 2025). In this regard, the thematic analysis was conducted iteratively. All six interviews were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. The researchers then collaboratively conducted initial coding, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached to identify meaningful segments relevant to the research objectives. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and developed into potential themes. Moreover, the themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure they accurately represented the data. They were further finalised through continuous comparison with the data to ensure coherence, distinctiveness, and alignment with participants' perspectives.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the results, the researchers also used credibility and dependability strategies. Credibility was demonstrated through repeated review of interview transcripts and the use of participants' direct quotes, thereby keeping the findings close to participants' own words. In addition, credibility was further ensured through member checking, in which the researchers invited the participants to verify the accuracy of summarised interpretations of their responses. Dependability was ensured through systematically documented research procedures, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and critically discusses the study's findings on teachers' perspectives and lived experiences of the transition from early childhood education to Grade One in Zanzibar elementary schools. The thematic analysis identified five interconnected themes, summarised in **Table 2** below.

Table 2. Summary of the Core Theme and Supporting Sub-themes

Core theme	Supporting sub-themes
Teachers' perspectives on the transition from Early Childhood Education to Grade One in Zanzibar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers' perceptions of readiness indicators for Grade One 2. Teachers' perceptions of children's adjustment during the transition to Grade One 3. Teachers' perceptions of pedagogical shifts between ECE and Grade One

4. Institutional and contextual challenges affecting teachers' practices during the transition
5. Teachers' suggestions for improving the transition to Grade One

Source: Author's analysis of interview data (2026)

1. Teachers' perceptions of readiness indicators for Grade One

School readiness has been mostly viewed as a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioural, and physical domains that, overall, prepare children to adapt easily to formal schooling (Astuti et al., 2023). Nonetheless, more recent perspectives extend this view by emphasising the readiness of schools, families, and education systems to respond to developmental diversity during the transition to Standard One. In relation to these broader conceptualisations, teachers in this study described their understandings of readiness based on classroom experience. However, these accounts should be interpreted as teachers' perspectives rather than direct assessments of children's developmental status.

The first key indicator emerging from the data is basic literacy as a prerequisite for school entry. Most participants consistently framed basic literacy skills such as letter recognition, early writing ability, and simple sentence formation as foundational. As PRI2 remarked, "*When you see a child who can already read and write sentences both in Kiwahili and English, you will know this child is ready for standard one*". Similarly, ECE1 emphasised pre-primary school attendance as a pathway to acquiring such skills. These accounts are consistent with emergent literacy perspectives, which position early literacy as developing before formal schooling (Khairunnisa et al., 2025; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

However, this emphasis on literacy may indicate a narrower interpretation of readiness that prioritises academic skills over other developmental domains. This pattern suggests a potential tension between holistic readiness frameworks and classroom expectations, where literacy may be foregrounded due to instructional demands.

Contrasting views also emerged regarding the role of age in determining readiness. PRI3 emphasised adherence to official age requirements, regardless of skill level, whereas PRI1 associated readiness with older age and greater capacity to sustain attention. These differing perspectives suggest that readiness is interpreted through multiple lenses, including policy requirements and developmental expectations, rather than as a fixed criterion. Nonetheless, these findings are consistent with Moyer & Gilmer (1954, p. 464), who argue that readiness is shaped not only by policy-defined age thresholds but also by developmental capacities, since children around the age of six may still display high levels of physical activity, making prolonged sitting and sustained attention challenging in formal classroom settings.

In addition, teachers identified independence and social competence as important markers of readiness. Participants frequently referred to children's ability to manage personal care, maintain hygiene, and interact with peers and teachers as indicators of preparedness. For example, PRI2 highlighted communication and self-care, while ECE2 associated readiness with emotional adjustment, particularly separation from caregivers.

While these accounts underscore the importance placed on socio-emotional and behavioural competencies, they should be interpreted with caution, as they reflect teachers' perceptions rather than direct observation of children's behaviour. Moreover, such expectations may also be shaped by classroom management demands and institutional norms. This aligns with research suggesting that readiness includes social adaptability and self-regulation (Hapsari et al., 2019), although these characteristics may vary across contexts.

Taken together, these findings indicate that teachers' conceptualisations of school readiness are multifaceted but not always consistent, reflecting an interplay between policy expectations, pedagogical demands, and classroom experience.

2. Teachers' perceptions of children's adjustment during the transition to Grade One

Participants described the early transition period as marked by behavioural disruption and emotional distress. Interview data indicated that children were perceived to experience crying and anxiety, which teachers interpreted as part of the adjustment to a more structured and demanding classroom environment in Standard One. As ECE3 explained, *"In the first months, children may cry, resist sitting, or struggle to communicate basic needs."* Similarly, PRI2 noted that some primary teachers adopt stricter approaches, reflecting expectations of greater maturity. While these accounts point to emotional and behavioural challenges, they should be interpreted cautiously, as they reflect teachers' perspectives rather than direct assessments of children's internal experiences. Classroom expectations and differences between pre-primary and primary environments may also shape these patterns.

Existing studies similarly suggest that children may be vulnerable to stress during school transition (Merabishvili & Gogotishvili, 2025), and that unaddressed anxiety can intensify over time (Parent et al., 2019). However, when considered alongside participants' accounts, adjustment appears to be influenced not only by individual factors but also by institutional conditions, including pedagogical practices and classroom expectations.

Participants also perceived that prior early learning experiences shape differences in preparedness at school entry. Teachers described children who attended pre-primary education as more confident academically and socially, whereas those without such exposure were often viewed as less prepared. For instance, ECE1 noted that children entering from pre-primary settings *"already know how to read and write."* At the same time, PRI3 suggested that those without such experience may take longer to adjust to routines and self-regulation. These accounts reflect teachers' comparative expectations rather than direct measures of learning outcomes, indicating that perceived differences in adjustment may also be influenced by how readiness is defined within classroom contexts. Parental decisions regarding preschool attendance, as highlighted by ECE3, further shape these perceptions.

These perspectives are consistent with evidence linking participation in pre-primary education to improved developmental outcomes (UNICEF, 2024a). However, differences in adjustment may not be attributable solely to pre-primary participation, as broader contextual factors such as home environment, school practices, and teacher expectations may also contribute.

A further theme relates to children's adjustment to structured routines and physical environments. Teachers reported that longer instructional hours and reduced play

opportunities in Grade One are associated with restlessness and fatigue. As PRI2 noted, *"In pre-primary, children have time to rest, but in Standard One it becomes a continuous study routine."* These accounts suggest that adjustment challenges may reflect shifts in institutional expectations between pre-primary and primary education, rather than solely children's capacity to adapt. While adaptation to routines is associated with school readiness (Hapidin et al., 2025), the intensity of these routines may itself function as a transitional demand.

Collectively, these findings indicate that teachers understand adjustment as a multifaceted process shaped by behavioural, emotional, and contextual factors. Variations in their accounts further suggest that adjustment is not only located within the child but emerges through the interaction between children's prior experiences and the expectations of the receiving school environment.

3. Teachers' Perceptions of Pedagogical Shifts Between ECE and Grade One

Participants reported that the transition from playful, sensory-based learning in early childhood education (ECE) to a more formal, task-oriented approach in Standard One is often perceived as creating a learning gap. As PRI3 noted, *"In pre-primary, children learn through songs and drawings, which is different from Standard One."* Similarly, PRI2 indicated that children encounter more complex writing tasks upon entry to primary school. These accounts suggest that teachers interpret differences in pedagogical approaches as a source of difficulty during transition. However, such perceptions may also reflect contrasting expectations between educational levels rather than limitations of play-based learning itself.

While participants tended to position ECE practices as insufficient preparation, alternative perspectives emphasise that play-based learning supports foundational cognitive and socio-emotional development that may not be immediately visible in formal academic tasks. In this sense, the perceived "learning gap" may partly arise from differences in instructional emphasis rather than children's readiness. These concerns are consistent with findings on curriculum misalignment (Rosmayasari, 2021) and challenges in moving from emergent to conventional literacy practices (Rohloff et al., 2023).

Teachers further described a shift toward increased academic demands in Standard One. ECE was characterised as focusing on foundational skills through play, whereas Standard One was associated with reading complete sentences and independent writing. As ECE2 explained, *"Children learn to combine syllables, but in Standard One they are expected to form full sentences."* These accounts indicate that teachers perceive a rapid escalation in expectations, particularly for children without prior ECE experience. Meanwhile, this perception may also reflect how academic progression is defined within primary classrooms. Thus, what is described as a "steep transition" may also represent differences in pedagogical goals between educational levels. This aligns with Williams et al. (2022), who note that children's transition experiences vary depending on prior exposure.

Moreover, participants identified the language of instruction as a challenge during transition. Teachers reported that children moving from English-dominant pre-primary settings to Kiswahili-based primary classrooms may experience confusion. For example, PRI3 noted that instruction shifts predominantly to Kiswahili, while PRI1 highlighted the use of code-mixing in classroom practice. These accounts suggest that teachers perceive linguistic

shifts as influencing comprehension and participation. However, these interpretations should be treated cautiously, as they are based on teachers' perspectives rather than direct evidence of learning difficulties. In addition, code-switching may function not only as a source of difficulty but also as a strategy to support understanding in multilingual contexts. The impact of such shifts may therefore depend on how language practices are implemented in classrooms (Sikhwari, 2025).

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers experience transition as a shift between differing instructional approaches rather than a coordinated pedagogical process. This pattern reflects variations in how teaching and learning are conceptualised across educational levels. Consistent with Harju et al. (2023) transitions may at times be treated as administrative progression rather than pedagogical continuity. In line with scaffolding perspectives, abrupt changes in instructional practices and language may reduce the support available for bridging expectations, although the extent of these challenges likely varies across contexts.

4. Institutional and Contextual Challenges Affecting Teachers' Practices During the Transition

Overcrowded classrooms emerged as a major challenge affecting teachers' ability to support children during the transition. Participants consistently highlighted the difficulty of providing individualised attention, particularly for learners entering Standard One with diverse levels of preparedness. As ECE3 noted, "*Class size increases from about 35 in pre-primary to up to 60 or more in primary,*" while PRI1 emphasised the challenge of attending to many learners. These accounts suggest that teachers perceive large class sizes as limiting opportunities for individualised support and shaping children's participation and adjustment. However, these interpretations reflect teachers' experiences and may not uniformly represent all children's outcomes, as the effects of class size can vary depending on classroom practices and available support (Hidayah & Utami, 2024; Marais, 2016).

Resource constraints were also identified as a key barrier. Teachers reported shortages of teaching aids, textbooks, and learning materials, which they associated with difficulties in delivering engaging and differentiated instruction. For example, PRI3 indicated that limited textbooks must be shared among large groups, while PRI1 highlighted the practical challenges of distribution. These accounts suggest that teachers perceive resource limitations as restricting instructional effectiveness, particularly for children requiring additional support during transition. At the same time, such constraints may reflect broader systemic factors beyond individual schools, and their impact may vary across contexts (Alberca, 2025).

Inadequate classroom infrastructure further emerged as a concern. Participants described shortages of basic furniture, with some learners sitting on the floor, which teachers associated with reduced comfort and participation. While these accounts highlight concerns about learning environments, they should be interpreted as perceptions of conditions rather than direct indicators of children's academic capability. Nevertheless, they point to the importance of physical environments in shaping transition experiences.

During interviews, participants also reported limited professional development related to transition support. Teachers described the absence of structured programmes, suggesting that supporting children's adjustment often depends on individual initiative rather than institutional guidance. As PRI2 explained, support relies largely on the teacher's own efforts

to understand and assist learners. While this may reflect variability across schools, the consistency of these accounts indicates a perceived gap in systematic preparation for managing transition processes.

In addition, limited teacher support and collaboration were identified as challenges. Participants highlighted the absence of teaching assistants and the difficulty of managing large classes alone. PRI2 emphasised the need for multiple teachers to balance instruction and behaviour management, whereas ECE1 described more supportive staffing structures in pre-primary settings. These differences suggest that teachers perceive disparities in staffing across educational levels as influencing their capacity to support learners. Alongside this, such perceptions may reflect expectations shaped by prior teaching contexts.

Extending the above concern, limited collaboration between teachers and parents was also identified as a barrier. Participants reported inconsistent parental engagement, particularly after children enter Grade One. While teachers associated this with challenges in children's adjustment, these interpretations should be approached cautiously, as broader socio-economic and contextual factors may shape parental involvement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that transition challenges are not only pedagogical but also embedded within broader institutional and relational conditions. From an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), the reported constraints reflect disruptions across interconnected systems, including classroom environments and home-school relationships, which collectively shape children's adjustment during transition.

5. Teachers' Suggestions for Improving the Transition to Grade One

In response to the identified challenges, teachers provided several context-specific recommendations to strengthen transition practices and better support children as they enter Standard One. These suggestions reflect participants' experiences within their respective school contexts and should therefore be interpreted as practitioner-informed perspectives rather than universally generalisable solutions.

Participants emphasised the importance of structural alignment between pre-primary and primary education to enhance continuity. Teachers suggested that integrating both levels within the same institution could facilitate collaboration and information sharing. As PRI1 noted, "*Teachers can work together to understand children's behaviour and development,*" while PRI2 highlighted the value of consulting pre-primary teachers about learners' needs. These accounts indicate that teachers perceive institutional continuity as supporting smoother transitions. However, the effectiveness of such alignment may depend on broader organisational conditions, including coordination and resource availability (Dârlă, 2020; UNICEF, 2024b).

Parental engagement was also identified as a key factor in supporting transition. Teachers emphasised the role of parents in assisting with learning activities and maintaining communication with schools. For example, PRI3 stressed the importance of parental support, while ECE2 described learning as a shared responsibility between teachers and parents. These perspectives suggest that teachers view home-school collaboration as central to children's adjustment. However, such interpretations reflect teachers' expectations and may not fully capture the diverse circumstances shaping parental involvement. These findings align with research emphasising the importance of home-school partnerships (Novitawati et al., 2025)

and with Epstein's framework, which conceptualises children's learning as a shared responsibility between home and school (Epstein, 2010).

Participants also highlighted the need for targeted professional development to support transition practices. Teachers emphasised the importance of training to address children's emotional, behavioural, and academic needs during school entry. These accounts suggest that existing support structures are perceived as insufficient. While professional development may enhance teachers' capacity, its effectiveness likely depends on its design and implementation (Esposti & Cigala, 2025).

In addition, class-size reduction was proposed as a strategy to improve instructional quality. Teachers indicated that smaller classes would enable more effective classroom management and individualised support. As ECE1 suggested, class sizes similar to pre-primary settings would be more manageable, while PRI3 linked smaller classes to improved teaching conditions. These accounts reflect teachers' perceptions of class size as a key factor shaping their practice. Thus, their suggestion reinforces Bowne et al.'s (2017) argument that lower child-teacher ratios strengthen teachers' capacity to provide individualised support and manage classroom processes more effectively. However, such recommendations may also reflect ideal conditions, as their implementation is often constrained by broader policy and resource limitations (Velasquez & Carbonell, 2025).

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' perspectives on the transition from pre-primary to Standard One in Zanzibar, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the relatively small sample size may limit the transferability of the findings. Second, the study's focus on the Urban West Region may not fully capture transition experiences in rural or less-resourced settings. Third, as the data rely solely on teachers' self-reports, the findings reflect participants' perceptions and may not fully represent children's actual experiences or behaviours.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that, within the Zanzibar context, teachers perceive the transition from ECE to Grade One not merely as grade advancement but as a shift in pedagogical expectations, instructional practices, and classroom dynamics. Participants consistently framed school readiness in terms of literacy, age, and socio-emotional competence, while also describing uneven adjustment among children, including anxiety and behavioural disruption. These findings highlight that transition experiences are shaped not only by children's preparedness but also by schools' capacity to provide supportive entry conditions, particularly in contexts characterised by overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and insufficient professional support. Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding school transition as a relational process, where children's adjustment reflects the interactions among individual preparedness, pedagogical practices and institutional context. Practically, the findings suggest that improving alignment between pre-primary and primary education, strengthening family-school collaboration, and enhancing teacher support may promote more consistent and responsive transition experiences. Finally, given the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample drawn from the Urban West Region, these results should be interpreted cautiously. Future research could expand to diverse regions of Zanzibar, employ mixed

methods to triangulate teachers' perspectives with children's experiences, and examine the long-term effects of transition practices on learning and socio-emotional outcomes.

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