

## **Fostering Structured Play: Challenges and Solutions for School Administrators in Government Pre-Primary Schools of Longido and Monduli Districts, Tanzania**

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the challenges school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of Structured Play Activities in government pre-primary schools in Longido and Monduli Districts in Arusha Region in Tanzania and solutions to address the challenges. The study was guided by the systems theory proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1936. Convergent research design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, which enabled the triangulation of collected information, thus giving a detailed understanding of the challenges and their solutions. The sample consisted of 268 participants who were obtained through stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The instruments were validated by experts in the fields of research, administration, and early childhood education. Reliability was ensured using Cronbach alpha and triangulation techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated the challenges faced by school administrators in enhancing the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools, such as inadequate financial resources and scarcity of highly skilled educators. The study concluded that the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools is greatly impeded by financial limitations, which negatively affected the efforts to provide teaching and learning facilities appropriately. Additionally, the scarcity of highly skilled educators with expertise in pre-primary education presents a significant obstacle for administrators in the successful execution of organised play activities in government-run pre-primary schools in the districts of Longido and Monduli. To address these challenges, there is a need for the government to allocate a special budget for early childhood education, to employ qualified pre-primary teachers and to provide professional development to teachers.*

**Keywords:** school administrators, challenges, solutions, implementation, structured play activities.

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## INTRODUCTION

The structured play in pre-primary education is an effective approach to foster holistic development while preparing children for future academic and social success. It combines the joy and spontaneity of play with intentional learning outcomes, creating a supportive environment where children can thrive and grow. Although some of schools administrators encounter various obstacles, including a scarcity of highly qualified instructors, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and an unfavourable teacher-to-pupil ratio, leading to insufficient supervision. Numerous research conducted in diverse global areas have investigated the challenges faced by school administrators in pre-primary educational establishments and have put forth viable methods to mitigate these issues (Charles & Mkulu, 2020).

School administrators have legitimate power to influence effective teaching and learning at pre-primary, primary, and secondary education levels. This is clear in the national education policy, which guides the process and procedures for supervising primary education to improve the quality of education (URT,2014 version 2023). Based on the policy directives, the school administrators, who are the head teachers, academic teachers, and heads of departments, are responsible for supervising activities to ensure effective teaching and learning processes in their respective schools (MoEVT, 2014; ADEM, 2021). Similarly, the 2014 version 2023 Education and Training Policy recognizes school administrators as internal instructional supervisors, and their core function is to ensure that the curriculum is implemented according to the guidelines and procedures. Some of their supervisory functions include checking the preparation of lesson documents and conducting classroom observation (MoEVT, 2014; ADEM 2021).

The implementation of the 2014 version 2023 Education and Training Policy declared compulsory pre-primary education in all public schools, and each public primary school is required to establish pre-primary classes (URT, 2014 version 2023). The policy also emphasizes the application of structured play activities to enable children to interact with the materials and simplify the process of developing reading, writing and arithmetic skills (Mabagala & Shukia, 2019; Bakuza, 2019). The school administrators were also assigned additional responsibilities to ensure the effective implementation of structured play activities in pre-primary classes. Section 3.2.2 of the policy states that “Supervisory and administrative organs of education and training have a working relationship at all levels of education and training” (MoEVT, 2014). The policy also calls for school administrators to conduct assessments of the implementation of curricula at all levels to improve effectiveness in education provision (MoEVT, 2014). According to MoEST 2023 in QELP assessing learning outcomes for children is more effective when using plays/games instead of tests. Plays/games are like work to children because through playing they learn and vice versa. The main intention of performance assessment by using plays/games is to identify the child’s learning outcomes, the skills developed, and other skills that are to be developed. Furthermore, it focuses on what the child can do based on experience, needs and age. It is possible to assess

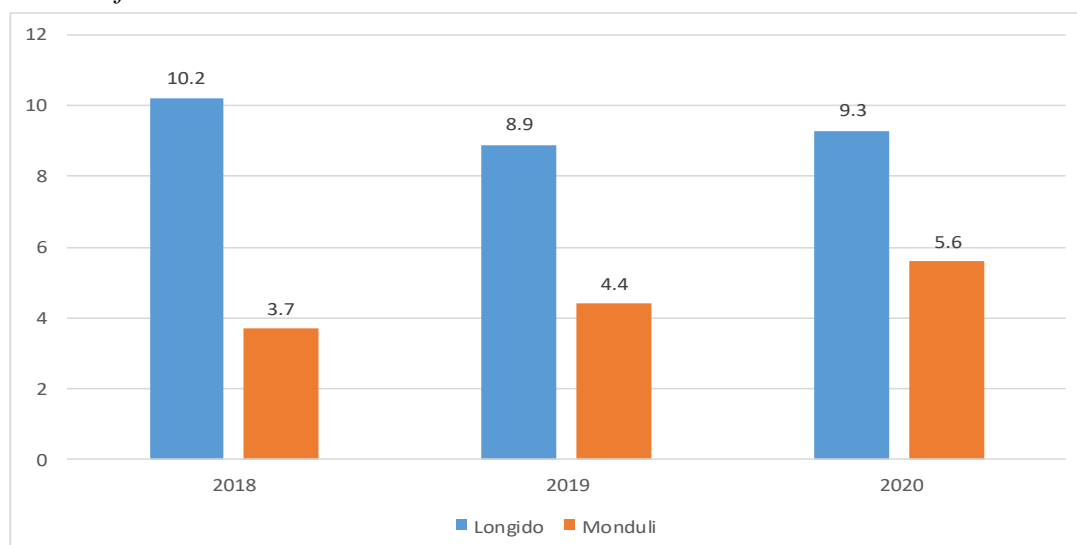
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what a child can do through interaction, communicating, and manipulation of materials from surrounding environmental, mastering artistic skills and mastering mathematical concepts. The assessment of a child's learning outcomes depends more on actions performed.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE), various barriers continue to hinder its effective implementation. It is still unknown whether education administrators in the Tanzanian context know their roles and perform them for the purpose of enhancing the implementation of structured play activities as recommended by the pre-primary curriculum since there is limited literature on this aspect. There is a growing concern about the implementation of structured play activities in public pre-primary schools. This is because of a steady increase in the number of Standard One (STD I) repeaters at the national level, from 68,571 in 2018 to 75,945 in 2021. The major reason for repeating was a lack of essential reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs) skills despite attending pre-primary education, which is a foundation for these skills (MoEVT, 2014; URT, 2018; 2019; 2020 and 2021). The same situation was observed in Longido and Monduli districts between 2018 and 2020, as illustrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Percentage of Standard One Repeaters among Pupils in Longido and Monduli Districts from 2018 to 2020*



Source: URT (2018; 2019; 2020).

Considering the alarming rate of repeaters portrayed in Figure 1, it was worthwhile to raise questions whether pre-primary classes are taught to master the 3Rs or not. The poor performance suggested by these statistics also raises concerns about the effectiveness of school administration regarding their instruction supervisory approaches to pre-primary teachers to the implementation of structured play activities intended to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. What challenges could be faced by school administrators in the course of executing the expected duties? What could be the solutions to those challenges? It is from this background that the current study was conducted to find out the challenges school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of Structured Play Activities in

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government pre-primary schools in Longido and Monduli Districts in Arusha Region in  
Tanzania and solutions to address those challenges.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been an increase in the number of pupils repeating STD I in public primary schools in Tanzania, which has raised a concern among education stakeholders. Repetition occurs when STD I pupils fail to join STD II because they are unable to read, write or perform simple arithmetic skills. In the year 2020, more than 9% of the pupils repeated STD I in Longido and Monduli districts because of the lack of skills on the 3Rs as required by the Education and Training Policy of 2014.

To enhance the development of the 3Rs, the pre-primary curriculum emphasises the application of structured play activities, which involve teaching by doing. According to the competence-based curriculum for pre-primary education, the school administrators are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of structured play activities. School administrators are expected to exercise instructional leadership approaches to enforce effective teaching and learning through structured play activities.

Studies that assessed the implementation of structured play activities revealed a number of factors attributable to dismal performance at the pre-primary level. The factors included a lack of professional pre-primary teachers, poor infrastructures and a lack of teaching and learning materials. However, there is limited literature on the challenges school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of structured play activities with a view to enhancing the development of 3Rs among pre-primary pupils, specifically in Longido and Monduli districts in the Arusha Region. Therefore, the current study investigated the challenges school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools in Longido and Monduli Districts, Tanzania and solutions to such challenges.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

- a) What challenges do school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools?
- b) What could be done to address the challenges?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework encompasses the foundational structure that offers substantiation for a theory within the context of a research inquiry. Cohen et al. (2018) say a theoretical framework offers a comprehensive account of the presence of the research problem under investigation. The study was conducted based on the ideas and concepts of systems theory. The theory was first introduced by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1936. The notion of systems theory suggests that organizations are profoundly influenced by their external environment.

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The environment covers a wide range of entities that exert various economic, political, or social influences. As asserted by Bertalanffy (1968), the environment assumes a pivotal role in furnishing necessary resources that facilitate the functioning of an organization and contribute to its capacity to adapt and endure.

The system approach proposes that an organization can be conceptualized as a system that includes interrelated components that collaborate to achieve a common goal. All organizational systems operate based on three key aspects. The scholarly works of Hoy and Miskel (2012) and Mugenyi (2013) have examined the components of inputs, processes, and outputs that encompass the operational framework of organizations. In the context of education, the term 'inputs' pertains to the provision of teaching and learning materials, the oversight of teaching and learning activities, the monitoring of pupils' progress, and the facilitation of organized play activities in government pre-primary schools. The present study involved the identification of instructional supervision processes, including the observation of teachers inside the classroom, offering guidance to teachers, and assigning responsibilities. The term "outputs" under this paradigm refers to the observable outcomes that are produced by the process operating within the system (Okumbe, 2006). One notable advantage of the system theory lies in its capacity to facilitate the dynamic interplay among many constituent elements (Nicolescu, 2017). Therefore, school administrators engage in collaborative interactions with teachers to establish strategic approaches aiming at enhancing the overall quality of teaching and learning inside the educational institution. The applicability of the system theory to the study was also taken into consideration, as it offers the potential for school administrators to adapt their roles based on input received regarding the implementation of SPA.

One limitation of the system theory is the absence of a universally applicable guiding principle (Nicolescu, 2017). An active relationship among the implementers inside the organization is necessary, as it is contingent upon the subsystems. Each component should fulfil its designated role in order to achieve the objective. The application of the system theory in assessing the success of school administrators is contingent upon establishing a robust interdepartmental interaction (Straus, 2017).

The utilization of the system theory approach in this research was, therefore, pertinent based on its ability to guide educational administrators and instructors in the establishment of organized play activities based on the inputs, process, and ultimate outcomes. All of these processes exhibit interconnections with one another.

This study examines the tactics employed by school administrators to evaluate and analyze the requirements for organized play activities in government pre-primary schools. These strategies encompass the assessment of teaching and learning materials, teaching approaches, and the provision of sufficient and competent teachers. Teachers who operate in a favorable educational setting are able to generate anticipated outcomes through the implementation of well-designed play activities as instructional techniques. The performance of youngsters constitutes the outcomes. The researcher selected the system theory as a framework for the

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK study due to its alignment with the execution of SPA that aimed to integrate various systems, such as school administration, pre-primary teachers, and the kids. The system theory gave a base on which the researchers in the current study were able to examine the challenges school administrators face in enhancing the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools and even coming up with solutions to such problems

## **EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

### **a) Challenges of Implementing Structured Play Activities in Government Pre-primary Schools**

Saidon and Soh (2017) did a study to examine the importance of effective leadership in early childhood settings in Singapore. The researchers utilised a qualitative approach for their analysis. The research involved 30 proficient leaders from early childhood education centres who were chosen to partake in face-to-face interview sessions. The findings revealed that a significant concern identified was the necessity to proficiently harmonise administrative responsibilities and the supervision of a diverse labour force while simultaneously ensuring adherence to licensing regulations and fulfilling the quality certification criteria established by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA). Additional problems encompassed the requisite endeavours to enhance professionalism inside the centre and in the broader domain, the necessity for assistance in effectively addressing the needs of children with special requirements, and the imperative of meeting parental expectations. Nevertheless, the primary focus of the study was on pupils with special needs, which thus limited the generalizability of the findings to only this specific population. Hence, it was imperative to undertake this study within educational institutions, encompassing both pupils with and without special requirements, in order to ascertain the prevailing general and specific difficulties.



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A study was undertaken by Gyeke (2018) within the African environment with the objective of examining the difficulties faced by pre-primary educators in Ghana when implementing play activities as prescribed by the curriculum. The present study employed a quantitative research design, utilising a sample size of 221 pre-primary teachers who responded to questionnaires. The study additionally noted administrative concerns, parental pressure, and grievances from administrators and directors as obstacles encountered in the adoption of organised play activities within educational institutions. The research conducted by Gyeke (2018) highlighted some obstacles associated with the implementation of SPA in pre-primary schools. However, it is important to note that the study solely relied on data acquired from instructors. Hence, obtaining the administrative challenges solely from the professors proved to be unfeasible. Relying solely on data gathered from teachers may not yield comprehensive insights into the most effective techniques for addressing the issues encountered by school administrators in promoting the successful adoption of SPA within their educational institutions. Hence, the present investigation gathered data from both educators and school administrators regarding the difficulties encountered in situ. However, the proposed recommendations had the potential to address the problems pertaining to implementation and administration successfully.

The study conducted by Ojuondo (2015) examined the impact of play on the linguistic abilities of preschool-aged children in the Kisumu central sub-county of Kenya. The research design employed in this study was a descriptive survey. The study sample consisted of 143 respondents who were recruited from a targeted population of 45 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centres in Kisumu. This included 45 head teachers, 380 ECE instructors, and 780 learners. The selection of participants was done using a purposive sampling approach. The results of the study indicated that pupils who engaged in various forms of play, such as manipulative, creative, dramatic, and physical play with play materials, demonstrated higher levels of achievement. This can be attributed to the fact that these pupils acquired listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through their interactions with teachers who actively participated in and guided the play activities.

In contrast, pupils who did not have exposure to any form of play did not experience the same benefits. One significant obstacle that curriculum implementers faced was the level of cooperation exhibited by parents and the community. However, it is important to note that this study only focused on early childhood education (ECE) centres that were privately owned or operated by individuals. Hence, the issues encountered in private schools may vary from those encountered in public schools as a result of administrative disparities. Hence, it was imperative to undertake a study in government pre-primary schools in order to examine the obstacles encountered by school administrators in effectively fulfilling their responsibilities towards facilitating the execution of organised play activities.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Shemahonge (2018) examined the implementation of early childhood education inside pre-schools located in Muheza, Tanzania. The research utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies for data gathering, focusing on a sample of 20 pre-schools affiliated with elementary schools. Data collection methods such as questionnaires, observation, interviews, and documentary reviews were employed in this study. The findings of the study indicated that the provision of educational services by early childhood education (ECE) centres in the Muheza district was characterised by substandard quality. This was primarily attributed to several factors, such as inadequate availability of teaching and learning resources, insufficient number of competent ECE educators, limited financial resources, and similar challenges. The primary obstacle encountered by early childhood education (ECE) centres in the Muheza district was determined to be a deficiency in ECE teachers, classrooms, and financial resources. The study conducted by Shemahonge (2018) highlights the obstacles that hinder the provision of high-quality education, including the lack of teaching and learning materials, inadequately trained early childhood education (ECE) teachers, and insufficient funding. However, further investigation was required to ascertain whether these challenges were associated with the responsibilities of school administrators or not.

The study undertaken by Mgata (2017) aimed to examine the role of school administrators in the delivery of pre-primary education in the rural area of Mbeya, Tanzania. The study's findings unveiled a multitude of challenges encountered throughout this process. It was observed that every primary school was discovered to have a pre-primary class in compliance with governmental rules; nevertheless, the implementation and enforcement of those regulations were beset with challenges. An insufficiency of educational spaces, well-trained instructors, teaching and learning facilities and appropriate infrastructure were noted to be challenges encountered in those schools. Moreover, the facilities, such as playgrounds, restrooms, and desks, were specifically designed to meet the needs of children at the primary level. One of the primary duties of school administrators is to ensure the provision of sufficient teaching and learning facilities in their respective educational institutions. The absence of such facilities is deemed to have an adverse effect on the implementation of structured recreational activities. This study highlights a knowledge gap on the efficacy of school administrators in performing their responsibilities of ensuring the provision of teaching and learning facilities in educational institutions. Hence, the current investigation was conducted to fill this gap.



Kihombo (2015) conducted a study that investigated the degree of teacher preparedness in connection to the implementation of a play-based curriculum in pre-primary educational institutions in Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative approach, employing several methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, and documentary analysis to collect data. The study's results revealed a significant favourable link between the curriculum designed for early childhood teacher preparation and the curriculum used in pre-primary education. In contrast, the curriculum of both programmes included a significant amount of content derived from the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE), with particular emphasis on the significance of play and its socio-cultural relevance. Numerous studies have demonstrated that play functions as the primary mechanism through which children acquire knowledge and skills, ultimately enabling them to reach their full potential. The early childhood teacher training programme faced several challenges pertaining to insufficient readiness in terms of the teaching personnel, educational resources, and instructional setting. Nevertheless, Kihombo's research predominantly centred on the challenges associated with various inputs, including teaching and learning materials, qualified educators, and facilities, while overlooking other contributing elements. Therefore, doing the current study was crucial in order to explore other factors that go beyond the inputs related to the three components of the system theory.

Hence, the inquiries above have revealed a multitude of challenges linked to early childhood education. The studies conducted by Saidon & Soh (2017), Shemahonge (2018), Ojuondo (2015), Mgata (2017), Kihombo (2015), and Gyeke (2018) all highlighted common challenges related to the integration of play-based teaching in early childhood education. However, these studies did not specifically address the unique obstacles encountered by school administrators in implementing SPA as a primary method for overseeing daily school operations. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to fill this research gap by investigating the challenges faced by school administrators in implementing SPA in government-run pre-primary schools in the Longido and Monduli districts.

### **b) Solutions to the Challenges faced in the Implementation of Structured Play**

In the Asian context, a study was undertaken by Lin and Goh (2017) to assess the quality of pre-primary education through the utilisation of a qualitative research approach. The research findings indicated that educational institutions must establish and implement leadership and management structures that are both acceptable and effective in order to effectively tackle the challenges presented by social dynamics, including population growth and societal issues. The alterations must adhere to the stipulations set forth by the community. The study aimed to investigate the effects of leadership and management restructuring as a potential approach to improving the provision of high-quality education in government-operated pre-primary schools throughout Asia. The study's qualitative character imposes limitations on the generalizability of the findings, particularly in relation to their usefulness within the Tanzanian context. Qualitative studies are not specifically designed to produce findings that can be generalised to a larger population. Therefore, the identified gap necessitated the

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current research in order to uncover alternative strategies that might effectively manage the existing challenges.

Mohammed (2016) did a study to examine the impact of Supervisor Support (SVS) on the affective commitment of staff members working in early childhood centers located in Malaysia. The research design employed in this study was correlational. The data collection was carried out using two study instruments, namely the "Principals' Supervisory Role Questionnaire (PSRQ)" and the "Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ)." The research findings indicated that supervisors engaged in classroom visitations to observe both instructors and pupils, offering principals a valuable means to evaluate the curriculum and analyse the educational experience of the pupils. The implementation of workshop methodologies as a supervisory tool facilitated a forum for the collective identification of problems and articulation of solutions within a group context. Basing on the findings from the reviewed study, various strategies can be employed to enhance the involvement of school administrators in promoting the successful execution of SPA by pre-primary educators in their educational institutions. Moreover, the scope of school administration encompasses not just head teachers but also academic instructors and members of the school quality assurance team. Therefore, the current study was conducted to examine the need for the development of generally applicable solutions for school administrators.

Yin et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine the behavioral purpose of kindergarten teachers in utilizing play-based learning and to explore its relationship with organizational and individual factors. The data was obtained from a representative sample of 542 kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong. The analysis utilized structural equation modelling to examine the direct and indirect effects. The conducted research unveiled a positive association between principal instructional leadership and teachers' intentions to utilize play-based learning. The relationship between trust in colleagues and teacher self-efficacy was found to be significant, both through direct observation and indirect measures. The research suggested the creation of conducive organizational conditions to enhance teachers' self-efficacy, hence promoting the integration of play-based learning in kindergarten settings. The study underscored the importance of head teachers in promoting professional development endeavors for kindergarten teachers, with the objective of enhancing the use of play-based learning methodologies. Within the context of Tanzania, school administrators consist of head teachers, academic teachers, and those who are part of the internal school quality assurance team. The reviewed study focused only on heads of schools. The current study went a step forward by including all school administrators in developing efficient strategies for addressing the challenges faced in implementing SPA in pre-primary educational institutions while considering various administrative categorizations.

Bawani et al. (2021) utilized a phenomenological research methodology to investigate the effects of teacher training within the specific setting of Botswana. The study primarily centered on examining the viewpoints of the participants in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the essence of the issue being investigated. The study sample consisted of three individuals serving as reception teachers, two individuals serving as head teachers, and two individuals serving as education officers. The selection of participants for this study was

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK conducted from a sample including three government pre-primary institutions. The study utilised a comprehensive methodology that incorporated in-depth interview guides, document analysis, and observation approaches. The findings of the study indicated that teacher professional development had a substantial impact on the effective implementation of the pre-primary curricular framework in Botswana. Therefore, the research highlighted the importance of offering professional development opportunities to pre-primary educators to improve their efficacy in the educational setting. In the context of Tanzania, school administrators are responsible for supervising the implementation of SPA within pre-primary classrooms. The administrators are also responsible for assessing the educational needs of their teachers and subsequently offering recommendations on their professional development. Educators are required to be up-to-date with current methodologies related to the implementation of play-based learning.

Additionally, they must proficiently assess the acquisition of skills and competencies, as well as skillfully supervise pupils throughout play-based activities. In the context of Tanzanian government pre-primary schools, the implementation of SPA faces various challenges. However, there is a shortage of comprehensive information regarding the fulfilment of school administrators' responsibility in advising and granting permission to teachers for professional development training. Therefore, the current study was conducted to fill this gap in the research.

The reviewed scholarly research in this section has given a lot of input, which is appreciated by this current study. The studies by Lin & Goh (2017) and Mohammed, (2016) analyzed the managerial obstacles faced by educational administrators in pre-primary educational institutions situated in various geographical areas. These studies highlighted several issues and put forth prospective ways to mitigate them. The tactics encompassed the organization of workshops, changes in leadership, and the use of research methodologies. While the prior research has effectively identified different approaches to tackle the barriers faced by school administrators, there has been a lack of specific focus on potential remedies for the challenges related to the involvement of school administrators in implementing SPA. Moreover, some of the reviewed studies, such as Bawani et al. (2021), utilized qualitative methodologies, employing small sample numbers, hence limiting the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to assess several approaches that may be employed to effectively address the challenges faced by educational administrators while implementing SPA in the Longido and Monduli districts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted the mixed methods approach, which allowed for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. A convergent design was employed, which involved the concurrent collection of qualitative and quantitative data during the same phase of the research process. This design was used since it allowed triangulation of the collected information to enable the drawing of meaningful and more valid conclusions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cresswell, 2023).

The target population for the current study consisted of 104 head teachers, 104 academic teachers, 416 ISQAT members and 193 subject teachers from public pre-primary schools in Longido and Monduli districts (URT, 2020).

From this population, stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample of 268 respondents using the Yamane formula ( $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ ) for sample size determination and the margin of error of 0.05 (Mweshi, 2020). The use of stratified sampling enabled the researcher to select schools from rural and urban areas of the two districts. Simple random sampling was used in order to minimise bias in the process of selecting the sample. Each school had an equal chance of being selected from each category. Criterion purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their position and administrative roles. The study sample consisted of 34 heads of schools, 34 academic teachers, 136 ISQAT members and 64 pre-primary teachers.

The instruments used in data collection included questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaires containing both open and close-ended questions were distributed to pre-primary teachers, academic teachers and the ISQAT members by the researcher. Respondents were given enough time to read and write their responses by either ticking the responses of their best choice or writing what they considered to be relevant in the space provided. The filled questionnaires were then collected on the same day for analysis.

Headteachers were interviewed face-to-face in the head teachers' offices. Each interview session took a maximum of 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Kiswahili language in order to provide more freedom to participants to air their views, opinions, and experiences. Clarifications on the questions that were not clearly understood were made by the researcher. Tape recorders or notebooks were used to record the conversations.

Prior to data collection, the tools were prepared by the researcher and validated by three experts in educational research, school administration, and early childhood education. The experts provided suggestions for improvement, which were incorporated into the final version of the instruments. The tools were then piloted in four pre-primary schools, two from Longido and two from Monduli. The pilot test aimed to ascertain whether the tools could adequately yield the data required, improve their clarity and reduce ambiguity to the targeted respondents. Data from the pilot study were analyzed in accordance with the research question. Most of the items in the instruments were well answered, indicating that the respondents understood them in the anticipated manner. However, a few necessary adjustments were made for those which seemed to be unclear. After that, the data collection proceeded after obtaining permission from relevant authorities and consent from the targeted respondents.

The quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive with the aid of SPSS computer software version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to compute the means, frequencies and percentages. Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Coding and theme development was done using Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. The themes

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emerging from the data were identified based on the research question. Tables were used to summarize the quantitative data while verbatim quotations supported the qualitative data. The researcher adhered to the ethical principles in all stages of the research process.

## STUDY FINDINGS

### Challenges Facing the Implementation of Structured Play Activities

The first section of the research question examined the challenges faced by educational administrators in their endeavours to enhance the execution of organised play initiatives within government-operated pre-primary schools situated in the Longido and Monduli areas. The research involved ISQAT, academic instructors, and pre-primary educators who completed questionnaires, while interviews were carried out with school leaders. In the case of the surveys, a set of ten statements was employed, each accompanied by a five-point rating scale. This scale allowed respondents to identify the extent of various obstacles by selecting from options such as "very big challenge," "big challenge," "moderate challenge," "small challenge," and "very small challenge." The quantification of replies involved the utilisation of numerical values ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 denoting a very small challenge and 5 indicating a very big challenge. The scale used in this study categorised mean scores into different levels of challenge. Specifically, a score ranging from 1.00 to 1.79 was classified as connoting a "very small challenge," while scores between 1.80 and 2.59 were categorised as a "small challenge." Scores falling within the range of 2.60 to 3.39 were considered to indicate a "moderate challenge." Still, scores ranging from 3.40 to 4.19 were classified as a "big challenge." while scores falling between 4.20 and 5.00 were categorised as indicating a "very big challenge." The mean ratings for each statement among the respondents were afterwards computed in order to gain insight into the difficulties encountered by school administrators in improving the execution of organised play activities (Pimentel 2019).

The mean scores for each statement were calculated for the three groups of participants, and the overall mean scores were also computed. Table 1 displays the mean scores of responses collected from Academic Teachers, Pre-primary Teachers, and ISQAT.

**Table 1**

*Mean Score for the Academic Teacher, pre-primary teachers, and ISQAT Responses on Challenges Facing the Implementation of SPA (n = 205)*

Challenge Facing the implementation of Structured Play activities	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	Grand Mean
i. High teacher-pupil ratio in pre-primary classrooms	4.69	4.68	4.62	4.66
ii. Inadequate teaching and learning resources for	4.65	4.82	5.0	4.82

SPA					
iii.	Lack of awareness among parents on the importance of structured play	4.62	4.74	4.55	4.64
iv.	Lack of classroom management skills among pre-primary teachers	3.99	4.47	3.87	4.11
v.	Lack of cooperation between implementers	3.75	4.06	3.43	3.75
vi.	Lack of professional teachers for pre-primary education	4.66	4.94	4.15	4.58
vii.	Lack of skills in competence-based curriculum	4.05	4.18	3.72	3.98
viii.	Lack of support from external administrators	4.09	4.53	3.98	4.20
ix.	Limited time allocated for SPA	4.55	4.76	4.77	4.69
x.	Overcrowded pre-primary classrooms	4.66	4.71	4.55	4.64
<b>Average Mean Score</b>		<b>4.37</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>4.26</b>	<b>4.41</b>

**Source:** Field data, (2022). *Key:  $X_1$  = Mean Score for Internal School Quality Assurance Team Members;  $X_2$  = Mean Score for Academic Teachers;  $X_3$  = Mean Score for Pre-Primary Teachers.*

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that the average mean score for all ten statements was 4.41. This suggests that the majority of respondents perceived the items on the Likert scale as significant challenges for school administrators in their efforts to facilitate the implementation of SPA in their respective schools. The results indicate that school administrators faced numerous challenges in their efforts to improve the implementation of organised play activities within schools. According to the data presented in Table 1, seven out of ten challenge items were found to have mean scores ranging from 4.20 to 5.00. This range suggests that these obstacles were considered very devastating for school administrators in their efforts to promote the effective implementation of SPA within their educational institutions. The identified challenges consisted of a shortage of teaching and learning resources specifically tailored for SPA, a limited time-frame allocated for such activities, a high teacher-pupil ratio within pre-primary classrooms, overcrowded classrooms, lack of awareness among parents regarding the significance of structured play, a scarcity of qualified educators specialising in pre-primary education, and a lack of support from external administrative entities.



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### **Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources for Structured Play Activities**

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that the average score obtained for this item was 4.82, implying that it falls under the category of significant challenges. The inadequacy of resources within government schools poses a constraint for school administrators in their efforts to ensure the effective implementation of SPA by pre-primary teachers. The data collected from interviews with head teachers confirmed that insufficient resources were a significant constraint on pre-primary teachers' ability to execute SPA effectively. The remark by one of the heads of schools during the interview attests to this:

The money we receive is not enough. We cannot buy some needs. The needs have increased a lot compared to the years 2018 and 2019, so the capitation grant that we get is not enough. (*Head Teacher 19, Personal Communication, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2022*).

Another head teacher added:

The challenge is the lack of capital. Although there are some innovations, we have insufficient money. We keep on wishing to do things, but we are very affected by our limited financial resources. (*Head Teacher 9, Personal Communication, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2022*).

Financial constraints hinder the ability of head teachers to develop and coordinate a wide range of educational projects efficiently. The efficacy of any implementation strategy devised by school administrators may be undermined if the requisite resources are not sufficiently allocated. The assertion made by the user is additionally supported by Bertalanffy's (1968) system theory, which argues that inputs play a vital role in the efficient operation of a system. The availability of instructional materials and educational resources plays a vital role in facilitating the effective execution of structured play initiatives by educators in pre-primary settings. The absence of these essential inputs may have a detrimental effect on the implementation of organised play activities. The study conducted by Mghasse and William (2016) in Tanzania yielded similar findings, suggesting that a considerable proportion of pre-primary schools encountered a shortage of essential teaching and learning resources. As a result, certain educational administrators opted to borrow these resources from the primary division, which, in fact, is not proper as the resources for the pre-primary possess distinct attributes that are exclusive to the domain of pre-primary education. Hence, the utilisation of resources derived from basic education may not be deemed a feasible approach for augmenting the implementation of planned recreational endeavours. The effective implementation of organised play activities in pre-primary education requires focus to be put on the availability of educational materials and resources. The study conducted by Mabagala and Shukia (2019) revealed that a considerable proportion of educational institutions faced a shortage of learning resources, hence impeding the successful execution of a play-oriented pre-primary curriculum. One of the key duties of school administrators is to guarantee the availability of educational materials and resources for pre-primary education. Nevertheless, the absence of these resources in public schools suggests a deficiency in the support from external entities, including the central government and other benefactors, in furnishing the

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essential resources to these schools (Bakuza, 2019). This particular situation adversely affects their ability to facilitate the implementation of structured recreational activities within educational establishments, as the utilisation of such activities requires the presence of diverse resources.

The lack of adequate educational materials and resources has been recognised as a limiting factor in ensuring the effective implementation of SPA. During the interview, the head teachers voiced substantial concern about the lack of essential resources. According to a personal communication on October 13, 2022, one of the Head Teachers mentioned the absence of some items, such as an abacus, ado domino, and drums, in schools. Another head teacher noted that an additional challenge arises from the inadequate provision of facilities in schools, such as games (Head Teacher 26, Personal Communication, October 31, 2022). The scarcity of resources presents difficulties for educational administrators in effectively incorporating organised play activities into the pre-primary curriculum. In a study conducted by Shemahong (2018), it was found that the execution of early childhood curriculum within ECE centres exhibited a generally inadequate performance, primarily attributed to several obstacles such as insufficient financial resources, limited availability of teaching materials, and a lack of classroom facilities.

Moreover, the challenge above has been extensively recorded in multiple nations, including Nigeria and Malaysia (Obiweluozor, 2015; Abbas et al., 2016). The scarcity of resources in many nations has had a negative impact on the adoption of organised play activities. On the other hand, it has been noted that certain nations, such as the United States and New Zealand, have implemented strategies to guarantee the accessibility of essential instructional resources for pre-primary education, as documented by Mligo (2018). Therefore, the insufficiency of educational resources in specific countries, such as Tanzania, can be attributed to the inadequate implementation of duties by school administrators, resulting in a shortage of resources inside educational establishments. According to Mgata (2017), the implementation of pre-primary education is the duty of school administrators. Insufficient performance in this position may impede the achievement of various aspects of pre-primary education, including the supply of instructional materials and resources.

### **Limited Time Allocated for Structured Play Activities**

The second challenge was the limited time allocated for SPA, which falls within a very big challenge with a mean score of 4.69. This suggests that government pre-primary schools do not dedicate sufficient time to the implementation of organised play activities. The limited amount of time available for pre-primary education may be attributed to the insufficient participation of pre-primary teachers in the development of school timetables. TIE's (2016/2019) study recommended that pre-primary classrooms provide an atmosphere that includes designated learning corners. These corners should encompass many areas of learning, such as numeracy, science, home, and art. For the pupils to effectively participate in these corners, adequate time is required for their engagement in play-based activities. Lucia (2016) observed a minimal level of pupils' engagement in SPA during class time due to the

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limited time allocated for such activities. The constrained duration allocated for organised play activities has a detrimental impact on the endeavours of school administrators to execute these programs in government pre-primary schools effectively.

Ndijuye et al. (2020) also observed comparable results within the Tanzanian context, revealing that despite the emphasis placed on play-based learning activities in the pre-primary curriculum, government schools in Tanzania face challenges in effectively implementing such activities due to a lack of guidelines on their proper utilisation. This suggests that the pre-primary curriculum lacks specific guidelines regarding the allocation of time for play-based learning. This scenario puts school administrators and pre-primary teachers in a very precarious situation when determining the appropriate amount of time to allocate for SPA when preparing the pre-primary education timetable. This may result in a limited allocation of time for these activities, hence posing challenges in implementing them effectively.

### **High Teacher-Pupil Ratio in Pre-primary Classrooms**

The third challenge encountered by school administrators in the course of implementing SPA was the high pupil-teacher ratio. According to the standards set by Tanzanian government, the optimal ratio of instructors to pupils for pre-primary education is 1:25 (URT, 2020; URT, 2023). However, during the observation of the session, the researcher saw that in the majority of classrooms, the child count exceeded 25, while there was only one teacher present. The observed situation really makes the full realisation of the SPA goals a mere dream. In some instances, school administrators are compelled to review pupils' notebooks in order to assess the successful implementation of organised play activities due to the limitations imposed by large class sizes. According to Lin and Goh (2017), effective enhancement of pre-primary education necessitates the implementation of measures to regulate the enrolment of pupils. The high pupil-teacher ratio is a challenge for school administrators as it limits their ability to effectively oversee teaching and learning activities, including the implementation of SPA.

### **Lack of Awareness among Parents on the Importance of Structured Play Activities**

The fourth challenge was a lack of awareness among parents on the importance of SPA. Interviews with head teachers showed that there had been little cooperation from parents with regard to the implementation of SPA. For instance, one of the head teachers said, "The biggest challenge is the lack of cooperation with the parents; although we are trying to do so, the cooperation of the parents is very little" (*Head Teacher 1, Personal Communication, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2022*). Another head teacher remarked,

Finally, it is awareness of the environment in which we operate. Sometimes, we have to use extra energy to ensure that we get the beneficiaries and even the parents to help each other in terms of needs. Not every parent participates in supporting the efforts initiated by the school administration (*Head Teacher 16, Personal Communication, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022*).

Moshel and Berkovich (2021) underscore that parental cooperation is essential for the effective implementation of SPA in pre-primary education. Despite the importance of cooperation between school management and parents in implementing SPA, there are still some parents who insist on academic achievement rather than allowing their children to learn skills through SPA (Gyeke, 2018). Similarly, Saidon and Soh (2017) showed the importance of involving parents in the effective teaching of pre-primary pupils since parents can help to communicate the specific needs of their children. Since money sent by the government is not enough to cover all the needs of pre-primary schools, head teachers are compelled to involve parents to make some contributions. However, not all parents see the importance of such contributions, which affects the implementation of SPA. When parents fail to collaborate with the school administrators, it negatively affects the teachers' ability to address the needs of pupils, hence affecting the child's participation in SPA

### **Shortage of Professional Teachers for Pre-primary Education**

Another challenge was the shortage of professional teachers for pre-primary education, as indicated by the mean score of 4.58. This means that most of the public pre-primary schools are in short of professional teachers who have specialised in pre-primary education. Heads teachers also echoed this challenge during the interviews. One of the heads of schools said, "I have been the head teacher of this school for three months; when I came here, we didn't have a preprimary teacher; I had to take a class two teacher to help us teach the preprimary pupils" (*Head Teacher 16, Personal Communication, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022*).

Another head teacher had this to say:

The teachers we have were not trained to teach in pre-primary classes; most of them were grade "A" teachers prepared to teach primary school pupils. The government has not trained teachers for those children; they are teaching but do not have formal training. (*Head Teacher 9, Personal Communication, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2022*).

The informants' responses indicate a shortage of qualified educators for pre-primary education within public school settings. The requirements for pre-primary education may differ from those of primary school. Consequently, it is imperative to have educators who possess specialised training in instructing at this particular educational level. The employment of teachers who possess inadequate abilities in pre-primary education has the potential to exert a detrimental impact on the execution of organised play activities. The assertion stated by Mghasse and William (2016) suggests that the absence of adequately trained educators in pre-primary education hinders the efficacy of organised play activities in public primary schools.

### **Lack of Support from External Administrators**

Another challenge identified was the lack of support from external administrators, as indicated by the grand mean score of 4.20. Lack of such support makes it difficult for the administrators to perform some of the duties which need support from external agencies. For instance, if the head of the school reports a teacher who is not effective in their duties to higher authorities and such higher authorities do not respond on time, it may exonerate the negative impacts of such inefficiency.

Apart from the seven challenges that were categorised as very high challenges, other challenges that respondents put forward were a lack of classroom management skills among teachers with a mean score of 4.11, a lack of skills in competence-based curriculum with a mean score of 3.98 and lack of cooperation between implementers with the mean score of 3.75. Just like the aforementioned challenges, these challenges exert pressure on the school administrators when it comes to the implementation of the SPA.

Data from qualitative and quantitative instruments concerning the challenges faced by school administrators in ensuring the implementation of SPA showed a high degree of agreement. In contrast, all the respondents indicated that the implementation of SPA in public pre-primary schools is highly challenged. Also, data from lesson observation showed inadequate teaching and learning resources, limited time allocated for SPA, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of professional teachers for pre-primary education. Poor cooperation between teachers and the community, together with the lack of awareness of parents regarding the importance of early childhood education, was also indicated by the teachers, quality assurance team members, head teachers, and academic teachers (New Zealand Government,2018).

### **Strategies to deal with the Challenges facing the Implementation of Structured Play activities**

The primary objective of the section was to identify recommended approaches for addressing the challenges encountered by school administrators in their efforts to improve the execution of SPA in government pre-primary schools in the districts of Longido and Monduli. Educators, scholarly instructors, and members of the School Quality Assurance Team (SQAT) were administered an open-ended questionnaire with the purpose of eliciting their comments. Several recommendations were provided; however, the researcher singled out the primary solutions as outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Academic Teachers-primary Teachers and ISQAT on the Strategies to Deal with the Challenges Facing School Administration in the Implementation of Structured Play (n = 205)*

Suggested Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
i. Provision of playing materials	76	37.07
ii. Ensuring the presence of playing grounds	44	21.46
iii. Employment of qualified teachers	31	15.12
iv. Professional development courses	20	9.75
v. Provision of adequate infrastructure	14	6.83

**Source:** Field data (2022).



### **Provision of Play Materials**

According to the data presented in Table 2, it was found that 37% of the respondents recommended the provision of playing materials as a potential strategy to address the challenges faced by school administrators in promoting the effective implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools located in the Longido and Monduli districts. During the lesson observation, it was noted by the researcher that a significant number of pre-primary classes lacked sufficient play resources, such as an abacus, dominos, puzzles, a T-Total, a Letter Tree, and a Number Mat. This might explain why the provision of such materials was considered to be among the major solutions. The pre-primary curriculum is highly based on play activities, but the implementation of such activities demands the presence of playing facilities. Ngole and Mkulu (2021) highlight that play is the best teaching method that can enhance the development of skills for pre-primary pupils. The presence of playing materials facilitates teachers in making use of such activities in their lessons.

### **Ensuring the Presence of Playing Grounds**

The second strategy was ensuring the presence of playing grounds. During the interviews, the head teachers reiterated this issue. The head teachers acknowledged the lack of such resources in their respective schools, and they thought it was important for the government to provide such facilities. For instance, one of the head teachers said, “The government should ensure that such playing facilities are available in her schools; if you look at many private schools, these things are there, but many government schools do not have these things” (*Head Teacher 16, Personal Communication, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022*).

Such a response implies that the government needs to ensure that the schools have all the required facilities for teachers to effectively implement the recommended SPA when teaching pre-primary pupils. Due to the nature of the pre-primary curriculum, the pupils need to learn through play inside and outside the classroom. For the pupils to play outside the class, there should be playgrounds. During lesson observation, it was observed that most of the schools had playgrounds, but they were not specific for pre-primary pupils.

According to the systems theory, the inputs are necessary for the successful implementation of a system (Bertalanffy et al., 1968). Therefore, by ensuring that the schools have SPA facilities, the school administrators can monitor the way the teachers make use of the available facilities to engage the pre-primary pupils in SPA.

### **Employment of Qualified Pre-primary Teachers**

One of the options indicated by the respondents for addressing the issues faced by school administrators in improving the execution of SPA in pre-primary schools is the recruitment of skilled teachers. The pre-primary curriculum exhibits distinct characteristics in comparison to the primary school curriculum, mostly due to its emphasis on play-based learning. Hence, it is important to provide teachers with specialised training pertaining to the distinct characteristics of pre-primary education. One of the significant obstacles faced by school



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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK administrators in facilitating the deployment of SPA is the absence of certified teachers for pre-primary education. During the interviews with school officials, it was noted that the recruitment of competent instructors is a viable strategy for addressing the obstacles encountered in facilitating the effective implementation of SPA.

### **Provision of Professional Development Courses**

The provision of professional development courses can address two aspects, one updating the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of teachers who specialised in pre-primary education and to imparting knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to teachers who were not trained as pre-primary teachers thus making them capable of implementing the SPA. During the interviews with the head teachers, complaints were registered about not having these training sessions for quite a long time. For instance, one of the head teachers said

The government has not conducted seminars for pre-primary teachers for a long time now. In this school, the teachers have not received training at all. Therefore, let the government, through the district education office, see the need to conduct seminars and workshops for the teachers (*Head Teacher17, Personal Communication, 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2022*).

The problem of implementing SPA in government pre-primary schools has been highlighted in the literature. The need for training is very much emphasised by researchers such as Ndiujye (2020), who said it is crucial to provide pre-primary teachers with the necessary knowledge and abilities in pre-primary education. The urgency for professional development courses among pre-primary teachers is necessitated by the very fact that a majority of them lack formal training specific to the pre-primary level of education. This particular circumstance may hinder their capacity to execute organised play activities. Therefore, educators must engage in professional development programs in order to augment their expertise and understanding of instructional strategies, evaluation methodologies, and effective classroom management strategies for young learners in pre-primary education.

### **Allocating a Budget Specifically for Early Childhood Education**

The Interviews with head teachers brought out this specific solution, which seems to cover numerous shortfalls experienced in pre-primary schools in Longido and Monduli districts namely allocation of a budget specifically for early childhood education. The head teachers acknowledged that there was no specific budget that had been set to cater to early childhood education, and therefore, they argued for the government to set such a budget and send money to the schools. For instance, one of the head teachers had the following to say:

As I said before, the government does not allocate money specifically for early childhood education. The lack of that amount has made early childhood education face many challenges, as many things depend on the availability of money. Therefore, it is good for the government to set aside a special budget for primary education (*Head Teacher 17, Personal Communication, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2022*).

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The head teacher's response implies that a predominant obstacle to the successful implementation of SPA in pre-primary schools is the insufficiency of financial resources. Consequently, the head teacher suggested that the allocation of sufficient finances towards early childhood education might potentially mitigate or eradicate these difficulties. Another head teacher made similar observations, which are expressed in the following statements.

The biggest challenge facing play-based teaching is the lack of money. Therefore, there is a need for the relevant authorities to see this problem and allocate money specifically for the aspects related to the teaching of pre-primary education pupils (*Head Teacher 9, Personal Communication, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022*).

This further demonstrates that the provision and distribution of sufficient financial resources to educational institutions for early childhood education is widely regarded as a significant approach to addressing the difficulties encountered by administrators in effectively executing organised play activities within their specific schools. According to Bakuza's (2019) findings, the Tanzanian government has mandated the provision of pre-primary education in the country; however, it has not yet allocated the necessary funds to support the adequate delivery of quality instruction to pre-primary pupils. Hence, to help the school administrators get out of the mess they have found themselves in, it is pertinent that the government allocate funds in the national budget specifically designated for this sector, which should afterwards be disbursed to educational institutions.

The research findings indicate that both qualitative and quantitative data support the proposals provided by respondents regarding the solutions to the issues faced by school administrators in effectively implementing SPA in public pre-primary schools. The provision of playing materials, ensuring the availability of playing grounds, employing qualified teachers, offering professional development courses, and provision of suitable infrastructures are essential components for academic institutions. All these solutions can be actualised if the government dedicate a special budget for pre-primary education to the national budget.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, the study concludes that the implementation of SPA in government pre-primary schools is greatly impeded by financial limitations, which present a substantial obstacle to the endeavours of school administrators in this domain. The limited availability of financial resources poses a hindrance for administrators in their efforts to provide teaching and learning facilities appropriately. Additionally, the scarcity of highly skilled educators with expertise in pre-primary education presents a significant obstacle for administrators in the successful execution of organised play activities inside government-run pre-primary schools in the districts of Longido and Monduli.

In the specific context of pre-primary education in Longido and Monduli Districts, it is evident that school administrators frequently fail to adequately perform their obligations

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK related to the facilitation and supervision of organised play activities. The onus of incorporating teachers into the decision-making process rests with school administrators. The limited acceptance of SPA by teachers has been attributed to the absence of teacher involvement in decision-making pertaining to their implementation.

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that pre-primary teachers should not only wait for the school administrators to provide the resources needed for implementing SPA but rather should make use of locally available(improvise) resources in making the teaching aids that can be used to facilitate the implementation of SPA.

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