

## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF STAFFING ON LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES IN MERU SOUTH SUB COUNTY THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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### Abstract

*Due to the importance placed on education by governments around the world, many countries, Kenya included, have invested heavily on Early Childhood Development and Education. The Kenyan government envisages enhanced quality of education especially in Early Childhood Education. While the investments in education have been quite successful at expanding enrollments in education, for any given level of efficiency, increased enrollments require increased resources, in order to maintain quality of learning. If these resources are not forthcoming, the increase in educational quantity may come at the expense of quality. This study examined the perceptions of teachers regarding how staffing affects learning in Early Childhood Education Centres in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County. The study employed the descriptive survey research design. The target population for this study was 210 respondents. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain a sample size of 73 respondents. The data collection instruments were questionnaires and interview guides. Validity of the research instruments was ensured through the expertise of University supervisors. Reliability of the instruments was estimated by use of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and a correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The data were analyzed using percentages and frequency counts with the aid of SPSS version 20.0. The findings indicated that under staffing negatively affected the learning in Early Childhood Education Centres in Meru South Sub County. It was recommended that more Early Childhood Education teachers be employed to reduce the effects of staffing and improve learning in the Early Childhood Education Centres.*

**Key Words:** Staffing, Early childhood centres, Learning.

### 1. Introduction

Teachers are important stakeholders in a school. They form a fundamental resource in educational organizations. The professional role of a teacher is a demanding one and stretches from classroom teaching, curriculum development, examination processing, pedagogical material preparation and evaluation, to modelling the behaviour of the students and acting as role models to the society (Okumbe, 2001). The issue of staffing in public Early Childhood Education Centres in Kenya has received less attention by the government yet it falls within the framework of basic education. Very

few public primary schools have adequate trained Early Childhood Education teachers. This may influence learning negatively and requires to be investigated.

Bishop (1989) observes that rapid increase in school enrolment has resulted in large classes especially at the lower primary level. This has given rise to overcrowding which in turn can give rise to low pupil performance and less than desirable teaching. For example, the average pupil/teacher ratio in primary schools in Swaziland is 38:1. Having such large classes can be detrimental to the quality of teaching especially if the teacher is not qualified (Bishop, 1989). Olembo and Ross (1992) indicated that the number of public early childhood centres in Kenya was 13,400 with the ratio of teachers to pupils of about 1:50 which was higher than that recommended by UNESCO of 1:36. According to MoE (2011) there are about 40% early childhood trained teachers in Meru South District. There is need to investigate teachers perceptions on the effect of staffing on learning.

Researchers such as Ng'ethe (2004) and Asyago (2005) report that leaders had expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation of early childhood programme. This is because the government had failed to hire enough teachers to cope with the increasing enrolment of pupils in primary schools thus making it difficult for them to offer quality education. The Ministry of Education recommended multi-grade and multi-shift mode of delivery to cope with over enrolled classes and understaffed schools. This was done in oblivion that most primary school teachers had no skills for multi-shift and multi-grade teaching as well as skills to handle the early childhood curriculum. The curriculum requires that children be taught using thematic integrated approach which majority of the teachers who underwent P1 training have no knowledge of (Ong'ong'a, 2007). Therefore, this study examined the perceptions of teachers regarding how staffing affects learning in Early Childhood Education Centres in Meru South Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study was to determine how teachers' perceptions of staffing affects learning in early childhood centers in Meru South Sub County Tharaka Nithi County in Kenya.

## **3. Methodology**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey design was relevant to this study because it enabled the researcher to describe the state of affairs in schools by collecting data without manipulating variables. The target population for this study was 210 respondents comprising 90 Head Teachers and 120 Early Childhood Education teachers in Meru South Sub County. Stratified sampling and simple random sampling procedures were used to obtain a sample size of 73 respondents. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for collection of the required data. Expert opinions of University supervisors were engaged to ascertain the validity of the research instruments. Reliability of the instruments was estimated by use of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and a correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. The data were analyzed

using descriptive statistics including percentages and frequency counts with the aid of SPSS version 20.0. The analyzed data were presented on frequency tables.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

The following are the results of the study and the discussions of the results

##### **4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

This section presents a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The demographic characteristics included gender, academic qualifications, position held and length of service in the current responsibility. The participants for this study included 28 Head Teachers and 45 Early Childhood Education Teachers.

The participants indicated their gender and the results revealed that there were 67% male and 33% female head teachers. The Early Childhood Education teachers were represented at 41% males and 59% females. There were also 67% male and 33% female Early Childhood Education officers. Regarding academic achievement, majority of the participants with 79% of the head teachers and 85% of the Early Childhood Education teachers had a P1 Certificate. The rest of the head teachers (21%) and Early Childhood Education teachers (12%) held a Bachelors Degree. Majority of the Head teachers (80%) had worked for more than five years while 85% of the Early Childhood Education teachers had a work experience of more than five years.

As indicated in the demographic information, the participants were qualified teachers and had necessary experience to carry out the teaching obligations. The length of time spent in an organisation leads to the development of shared understandings and experiences (Smoley, 1999). Similarly, increased tenure in an organization is positively related to effectiveness and performance (Mahoney, 1988). In addition, Borman (1993) and Schmidt (1986) state that work experience improves performance but only indirectly via relevant knowledge and skills because prior work experience provides the opportunity for individuals to acquire relevant knowledge and skills that in turn enhances performance in the teaching and learning process.

##### **4.2 Teachers Perceptions on the Effect of Staffing on Learning among Children**

Teachers are important in a school as they form a fundamental resource in an educational organization. The teachers were required to indicate the level of agreed with statements about the effect of staffing on learning in the Early Childhood Education Centres. Information in Table 1 illustrates the teachers' responses.

**Table 1: Teachers' Responses on the Effect of Staffing on Learning**

Statement	SA		A		FA		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
There are adequate teachers for all subjects in my school	0	0	0	0	35	54	10	15	2	31
Frequent transfer of teachers has affected learning	45	69	14	22	6	9	0	0	0	0
Teachers have high work load that has compromised education quality	34	52	31	48	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teachers are overwhelmed by large class sizes	0	0	29	45	22	34	14	22	0	0
Some lessons are not taught due to understaffing	35	54	19	29	11	17	0	0	0	0
Teachers are always punctual to attend classes	10	15	15	23	40	62	0	0	0	0
Adequacy of teachers in my school ensures syllabus coverage	0	0	0	0	0	0	42	65	2	35
The school requires more teachers	50	77	15	23	0	0	0	0	0	0

Key: SA - Strongly Agree, A - Agree, FA - Fairly Agree, D - Disagree, SD - Strongly Disagree

The information in Table 1 indicates that there were no adequate teachers in Early Childhood Education Centres and this interfered with syllabus coverage. This is depicted by majority of the respondents who disagreed that there were adequate teachers in their schools and that adequacy of teachers in the schools ensured syllabus coverage. The teachers were in agreement that frequent transfer of teachers affected learning, high workloads for teachers compromised the quality of education, large classes overwhelmed teachers and that some lessons were never taught owing to understaffing in the Early Childhood Education Centres. These results concur with the findings of Ng'ethe (2004) and Asyago (2005) who found that the increasing enrolment of children in preschools was making it difficult for teachers to offer quality education. In addition, all the teachers agreed that Early Childhood Education Centres required more teachers.

The teachers were also asked to indicate the challenges facing staffing in Early Childhood Education Centres. The responses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Teachers Responses on Challenges Facing Staffing in Early Childhood Education Centres**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Serious teacher shortage	36	55.0
Heavy workloads among the few teachers	20	31.0
Employment of form four leavers	7	11.0
Multi grade teaching	2	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings indicate that the most pressing challenges to staffing in Early Childhood Education Centres are serious teacher shortage and heavy workloads among the few teachers. These challenges tend to negatively impact on learning in the Early Childhood Education Centres. The findings of this study contradict results from Edmonds (1981), Kirk and Jones (2004) and Daggett (2005) in their studies conducted in developed countries who established that learning takes place in what they refer to as 'effective schools'. These effective schools are usually characterized by: strong instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and having a climate of high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of learner progress, positive home-school relations, and opportunity to learn. Lezotte (2010) argued that these correlates of effective schools are powerful indicators of successful places where all children learn, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity.

## 5. Recommendations

It was recommended that the Government needs to employ more qualified teaching personnel in order to deal with the problem of high pupil-teacher ratio. Provision of enough funds so that schools can meet other challenges was also necessary to augment the efforts of the human resource for efficacy of learning process in the Early Childhood Education Centres.

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