

INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE ACTIVITY CURRICULUM AT PRE-PRIMARY LEVEL IN BUSIA COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The essence of language activity area in pre-primary is to develop oral, reading readiness and writing readiness competencies in order to lay the foundation for language acquisition. The Competency Based Curriculum advocates for a multilingual approach to language learning focusing on mother-language, Kiswahili and English in Early Year Education. However, the implementation of the language curriculum in Pre-primary is still faced with a myriad of challenges in terms of operationalization. In particular, the objectives focused on teachers' level of preparedness for language activity implementation. The study findings show limited teacher preparedness levels because they have received one Competency Based Curriculum training, however they indicated that they required frequent capacity building to acquire competence to teach language activities learning area on Competency Based Curriculum. The study recommends: contextualized teacher in-service training and professional development, alongside provision of adequate instructional resources for appropriate implementation of language activities learning area. The findings will aid Competency Based Curriculum developers in making informed adjustments with regard to teacher preparation requirements.

Key words: *Teachers, preparedness, Implementation, Language, Activity, Curriculum*

Introduction

Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) values the development and use of language in young children's learning. According to Kenya Institute Curriculum Development (KICD), (2017), children need to use language not only to express their needs, feelings and thoughts but also to make sense of what adults want them to do. They need language to communicate with others and participate fully in society. Therefore, more experienced language users like parents and teachers must provide children with opportunities to extend and enrich their vocabulary by engaging them in meaningful experiences. CBC has therefore expand the role of language from grade one.

Due to the expanded role of language, the CBC demands attainment of core competencies, values, life skills and citizenship during curriculum implementation. This calls for more skills and knowledge from the teachers to enhance implementation. According to KICD, (2017), language is a foundation for all other activity areas in the curriculum. Learning to learn as a core competence in CBC helps learners to build prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge

and skills in a variety of contexts. Learners therefore need language to build on their life experiences.

For an effective language education at the pre- primary school level therefore, teachers need to have the relevant skills and knowledge for better efficiency and effectiveness. The teacher's ability to deal with classroom issues directly affects student achievement. In the 21st century, a teacher must be able to engage all learners and sustain the types of activities that will lead to critical thinking and learning. With the enactment of 'No Child Left behind', thousands of schools across the nation have restructured their educational goals, objectives and initiatives to meet adequate yearly progress. With the direct relationship between effective teacher preparation strategies and learner achievement, there has been continued emphasis on deciding how to best to prepare teachers in the area of language curriculum implementation (Darling, Hammond and Bransford, 2010). This comes in handy due to the roll out of the CBC.

Teachers need significant knowledge and skills, ability to interact with all learners, setting manageable standards and choosing instructional materials that can accommodate learners at different levels. Furthermore, during evaluation, teachers should be able to develop valid rubrics for assessment (Sudha, 2018). A major problem world-wide in the field of language teaching is the popular belief that anyone who can speak a language can teach it. The fact is, however, that language teaching requires a special combination of knowledge and skills that is always hard to find, and finding teachers who have it should be the first concern of any good administration. Preparing a teacher of language during his or her initial teacher training involves providing him or her with certain types of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Language teacher training has to be a life-long process (Cameron, 2007).

Teacher preparedness on implementation of CBC is a priority. For the paradigm shift to CBC to be effective, teachers must make a good choice of instructional strategies they use in order to avoid monopoly in class and to be facilitators in order to enable learners engage and interact with knowledge with minimal supervision. The government should prioritize professional development that is focused on improving content understanding and that is of extended duration and time span that are more likely to report changes to knowledge and practice (Ondimu, 2018).

In fact, the curriculum reforms have dominated public debate in the recent past with Kenyans taking different positions. Majority of Kenyans testify that there are gaps as far as CBC is concerned. Furthermore, parents have been complaining about the much work to do in terms of assisting their children (Otieno, 2019). It is in view of the above findings that the current study sought to evaluate the implementation of language activity curriculum in pre-primary schools in Busia County, Kenya. The study specifically sought to establish the teacher's level of preparedness on the implementation of language activity curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

An external report by IBE-UNESCO (2017) revealed that teachers of Nyeri County, with regard to the new curriculum raised alarm over too much time teachers took in preparation thus compromising time for instruction. The report further revealed that teachers faced difficulty in constructing assessment rubrics. Furthermore, Waweru (2018) in his study on influence of teacher preparedness on implementation of CBC in public primary schools in Nyandarua North Sub-County, found out that teachers had not been adequately prepared in implementing CBC. More so, Nyandarua North Sub County training workshop for teachers on CBC, CSOs highlighted the fact that curriculum designs were distributed to schools without learners and teachers' guides. The teachers found it difficult to plan their lessons using the new designs and getting relevant content from the old course books, (Ondimu, 2018). It is therefore evident that more research is needed to inform the implementation of language activity curriculum in pre-primary schools in Kenya. Hence the current study sought to establish teachers' level of preparedness in the implementation of the language activity curriculum at pre-primary level.

Literature Review

At foundational level, literacy which is the ability to read, write and use language proficiently, aims at equipping the learner with basic skills in reading and writing and to aid in all other activity areas. Therefore, language will assist the learner to communicate with others as well as promote learning to learn. However, CBC is facing challenges in terms of implementation. International Bureau of Education (IBE)-UNESCO (2014), report on the implementation of the new curriculum states that despite the shift of the education system in Kenya from content based to competency based, various stakeholders claim that the shift has been hurriedly done without due consideration to preparing teachers adequately.

In Kenya, most parents are interested in pre-primary education services for they believe that these services give a head start for the children's later formal education. Opportunities should be created for quality child development through quality pre-primary education as a means of empowering children as responsible members of the society and future leaders, (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Furthermore, the current CBC is aimed at identifying the talents and interests of learners early enough to prepare them for the world of work, career progression and sustainable development.

When more attention is given to Early Childhood Education (ECD), holistic development of children shall be realized. Education is the avenue through which people in the society are prepared for the tasks at hand and those lying ahead. This is because any society or country should aim at providing an education that is relevant to the prevailing needs of the society, (Sinyei, 2011). The need for a relevant education in Kenya has necessitated the formation of various education commissions dating back from 1922 to 1999 and the current overhaul of the curriculum. These commissions stirred the development of ECD and its entire curriculum areas.

Language activity even with the CBC, forms one of the curriculum areas in pre-primary school. Therefore, as one of the activities in ECD, it needs effective implementation so as to foster holistic development. It being a medium of instruction as well as a subject plays a key role in the provision of pre-primary services given its dual nature, in education. It involves education in and through the different activities. These activities include listening, speaking, reading and writing (Otto, 2009). There is need therefore, to give more attention to language activity implementation for it is the foundation for children's holistic development in life.

In addition to pre-service training, the teacher should continue learning by way of workshops, in - service courses and extension courses provided. The components of language teacher training should provide the teacher with knowledge about the subject matter. Secondly, he or she should be equipped with language teaching skills and thirdly, the teacher ought to leave training with the correct attitude to language implementation. (Maina & Rosemary, 2019). This is because effective implementation of an innovation is determined by the capabilities (competence) of the implementers.

The effects of teacher training, the qualifications and performance of teachers, determine their ability to implement. Developing countries have been matters of considerable interest (Sinyei, 2011). In the case of educational innovations, teachers need to have the right skills and knowledge to impart them appropriately to the learners. Teachers are charged with the responsibility of creating conditions that are conducive to making the curriculum operational at the school level. This in turn will lead to effective implementation which calls for proper training of teachers to equip them with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes. There is need to continuously improve the quality of teacher training to enable teachers interpret the curriculum more effectively into practical terms.

The quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning therefore depends on the competence of the teacher. This competence is manifested through effective interpretation of curriculum components. The curriculum components include the stated educational purposes, selection and organization of learning experiences and the use of effective evaluation procedures, (Mose, 2017). Educational objectives are consciously willed goals and provide the criteria for selecting materials, outlining content and developing instructional procedures. A clear philosophy of education is a prerequisite for making value judgments about objectives. This philosophy of education is then broken down into more specific objectives.

In KICD (2017) pre-primary curriculum design outline the subject learning outcomes. These outcomes state that by the end of EYE; the learner should be able to: listen to and make different sounds in the environment; express self freely, listen to short stories and simple songs; respond orally to instruction; pass simple information; sort, match and name objects; read picture details and recite vowels, recognize colors, basic shapes and letters of the alphabet; model, color, draw, paint, trace, join dots and thread objects freely, recite poems and rhymes; solve riddles and

repeat tongue twisters; dramatize and role play events; recognize letters, sounds and syllables; arrange pictures of a story and read three to four letter words (KICD, 2017).

Teachers therefore need to be innovative enough and be clear on how to apply the guidelines given in the curriculum designs to their various settings to maintain relevance. Studies of teacher preparation should further be investigated to determine whether teachers are being prepared for the twenty first century classrooms. Teachers, learners and the environment have to be engaged during the learning process. This provides a basis for designing a formative and criterion referenced assessment, which is the bedrock of a CBC (Kranja, 2015). Are the teachers well equipped with all the above discussed competencies?

Study Findings

The practical application of formal schooling and training will mainly be manifested through the teaching and learning experiences initiated and carried out by the teacher for the learners. In measuring this objective through the questionnaire, teachers were requested to state their professional status and academic qualifications in items 1 and 2 and further state whether they were pursuing further studies or not. Their responses are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' Professional Status and Academic Qualifications

Teachers' characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Professional Status		
Certificate in ECDE	25	71.4
Diploma in ECDE	10	28.6
Highest Academic Qualification		
KCSE	30	85.7
KCPE	05	14.3
Pursuing Further Studies		
Diploma in ECE	05	14.3
Degree Course	01	2.9
Not studying at that time	29	82.9

As reflected in Table 1, the findings of the study revealed that all the teachers who participated in the study were trained teachers with some pursuing further studies at that time. Majority 25(71.4%) of the teachers had trained as certificate holders in Pre-Primary teacher education. The least 10(28.6%) of the teachers were diploma holders. Majority 30(85.7%) of the teachers had attained form four level of Education with only a few 5(14.3%) who had attained KCPE level of Education.

Majority 29(82.9%) of the teachers were not pursuing further studies. This would enhance their knowledge and skills and hence improve on curriculum delivery.

Availability of Seminars and Workshops

To assess the attendance of seminars and workshops for pre-primary teachers in language activity, the pre-primary teachers were asked to indicate the types and nature of seminars, workshops or any other in-service courses they were exposed to, and indicate the perceived degree of usefulness and frequency of each. Their responses are reflected in Tables 2.

Table 2: Teachers' Attendance of Seminars and Workshops

Attendance of Seminars and Workshops	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Attended seminars or workshops	15	42.9
Did not attend seminars or workshops	20	57.1
Frequency of supervision		
Many times	1	2.9
Occasionally	22	62.8
Never	12	34.3
Frequency of attendance of seminars/workshops		
Many times	5	14.3
Occasionally	10	28.6
Never	20	57.1
Usefulness of training		
Agree	15	42.9
Uncertain	17	48.6
Disagree	3	8.5

In Table 2 it is evident that the majority 20(57.1%) of the teachers did not attend any seminar or workshop in language activity. Seminars or workshops equip teachers with knowledge and skills needed in language activity teaching and learning. During such courses, teachers meet and interact with each other analyzing their strengths and weaknesses. Facilitators help teachers in their weak areas in terms of preparations needed so as to enhance curriculum implementation.

With the introduction of the CBC in Kenya, none of the practicing teachers had gone through the curriculum during their time in college. There is need therefore, to train and retrain the pre-primary teachers on how to implement the revised curriculum. During the interview session, teachers acknowledged that they still have challenges with the complexity of terminologies used. It was therefore, difficult for most teachers to give meaning to competency-based policies through their

classroom practices. The teachers further indicated that they had only attended a one-week seminar organized by the county government of Busia in Kakamega town.

According to the DICECE coordinators and ESQAC interviewed, they indicated that they organized for seminars and workshops for the pre-primary language teachers on a regular basis. This is contrary to the frequency of attendance as cited by the teachers in their responses in the questionnaire. Majority 20 (57.1%) of the teachers responded that they had never attended any seminar or workshop. The teachers need continuous training in order to boost their skills, knowledge and change their attitudes positively towards their profession. The certificate pre-primary school teacher holders need to pursue Diploma courses.

According to the findings, 20(57.1%) of the certificate holders were not studying at the time of the study. Likewise, 9(25.7%) of the Diploma holders were not studying. This implies that the teachers were not improving their skills and knowledge through training. The least number 1(2.9%) of the teacher who was pursuing a degree in ECD in Kenyatta University looked confident and knowledgeable. Her lesson preparations and presentations looked commendable. She integrated digital learning in her lessons.

The teacher borrowed the tablets from the grade one learners in the feeder primary school and taught the pre-primary 11 class on “*the family*”. The lesson was enjoyable and she further projected members of the family as; ‘*father, mother and children*’. This helped the children to mention various members of their family in comparison to those photographs projected to them. The video clips made learning very enjoyable.

The above contradiction is an indication that the DICECE coordinators were not being sincere in their reporting. They were out to please the researcher. It is their responsibility to organize for such seminars and workshops and thus did not want to admit failure. They further mentioned that one of the supports that they gave to pre-primary institutions was organizing for seminars and workshops.

The DICECE co-coordinator for sub-county 2 had a report of one of the seminars they had last, but it had been organized by the ministry of education. The facilitators were officers for quality assurance from the MOE and liaised with the county government. All 15 (42.9%) of the teachers who acknowledged attendance of seminars and workshops cited a sensitization workshop organized by the Ministry of Education (MoE) on 31st to 7th August 2016. The seminar was aimed at implementing the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool (KSRAT)

Another seminar cited was organized long way back in 2009 again by the Ministry of Education. The most recent seminar was organized by the county government in 2017 to enhance the implementation of the CBC. Ideally, since pre-primary education has been devolved, it is the responsibility of the county government to organize for seminars and workshops for pre-primary

teachers. Regarding the usefulness of training to teachers, Majority 17(48.6%) of the teachers were uncertain about it. This is due to the fact that many of them had never attended such trainings before.

Unfortunately, there was only one ESQAC officer for ECD in the county. When interviewed, he said that seminars and workshops are very vital in improving curriculum implementation but; his office was yet to organize for one. He had the following suggestions to make. “I wish the County government would help me organize for one so that we can have it as a start....”

In terms of supervision, majority 22(62.8%) of the teachers acknowledged having been supervised occasionally. The least 1(2.9%) of the teacher said she had been supervised many times. However, these findings are also contrary to the response given by the ESQAC officer who acknowledged that they supervised curriculum implementation.

At some point the ESQAC officer said, “My main responsibility is to monitor curriculum on a daily basis. I am in the field every four days in a week.” He however cited lack of finance to access the schools as a great challenge. He said, it at times forces him to use his own finances to reach the schools. Some schools are also inaccessible due to poor road network in the county. Infact, the researcher proved this while trying to reach Osieko pre-primary school in Bunyala Sub-County. The researcher had to postpone the journey because the wind was very strong and the boat riders said it was risky to cross at that particular time. Another problem that the ESQAC officer cited in terms of supervision was lack of personnel. He noted that he was alone in the county, and has to get help from the Quality Assurance and Standard Officers employed by the MOE.

Supervision of Curriculum implementation is an exercise that requires adequate personnel, time and finance. It is a rigorous exercise that involves monitoring and evaluation of various teacher records and finally observing the teaching and learning process in the classroom. A school may require more than five officers, who may take the whole day in a school in order to come up with a comprehensive report that would help improve quality.

Internal supervision may be peer based or may be done by the head teacher. From observation, the general practice was that the head teachers were part of the teaching staff loaded with lessons on the time table to teach. It seemed a little difficult to conduct internal supervision effectively since each of the teachers (including the head teachers themselves) seemed to be busy working with their learners in their designated classes.

Head teachers need to have the expertise in providing human relations and leadership using motivational techniques combined with technical-rational authority as defined by the logic and scientific research. With this in mind, the head teachers can be able to supervise effectively and at the same time carry out their core duty of teaching. External supervision should ideally be done by

specialists in a given area such as language activity in pre-primary school in the present study. It should focus on what the teacher already knows, the development of teaching skills, the teacher's ability to make more informed professional decision to problem-solve better and to inquire into his or her own practice.

During the interview with ESQAC officer, it was noted that there was only one such personnel in the County. This made the work of supervision very difficult. Furthermore, the officer said, "I did not train in Early Childhood Education and no induction has been done..."

This implies that the officer lacked relevant skills in the area. However, teachers stated various ways in which their head teachers support them in language activities. These ways included provision of activity books, the syllabus, hand books, exercise books for scheming and lesson planning and facilitating them during seminars and workshops.

Conclusion

The study established that all the teachers who participated in the study were trained teachers and some were pursuing further studies. However, the study also revealed that most of the teachers had not attended seminars or workshops to provide them with pre-requisite skills and knowledge needed to implement the CBC. In terms of supervision the study revealed that teachers were frequently supervised. This enhanced the implementation process of language activity curriculum.

Busia County government needs to liaise with MOE and mount more seminars and workshops to re-tool the pre-primary teachers on the CBC so that they acquire competencies in implementing the curriculum. These seminars or workshops need to be subject based.

Recommendation

Teachers need to be re-tooled with knowledge and skills in CBC so that they become competent. In language activity area, teachers need to know how to draw schemes of work and lesson plans from the curriculum designs. They should be trained on how to develop the core competencies basing on the specific learning outcomes. Teachers also need training on how to assess the learners by rating their abilities on various strands and sub-strands learnt. In order to achieve this objective, the study recommends provision of capacity building opportunities by KICD, TSC and the County Government. Refresher courses on language learning should be regularly organized for teachers to improve in their knowledge and pedagogy.

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