

Full Length Research Paper

School based factors influencing implementation of early childhood development and education curriculum

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Conditions of learning are crucial in determining quality of education. There are real concerns raised by stakeholders regarding the quality of education in Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centers in Emuhaya District in Kenya. Factors contributing to poor implementation of the curriculum in the ECDE centers are yet to be established. The purpose of this study was to establish the school factors influencing implementation of ECDE Curriculum. The study involved 65 ECDE teachers drawn from 32 ECDE centres in Emuhaya District, Kenya selected by simple random technique. It was based on descriptive survey design. Data were collected by questionnaires and focused group discussion guide. The study found that lack of suitable teaching and learning resources, inappropriate diet, understaffing, inappropriate medium of instruction and teacher-child ratio, and poor grouping practices were the factors hindering effective implementation of the curriculum in ECDE centers. The study recommends that a program should be designed to build community capacities for the development and equipment of ECDE centres in partnership with the government and other stakeholders.

Key Words: ECDE Curriculum, Implementation, Learning conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) constitutes household, community and the state's efforts to provide integrated development for children from birth to the age of entry into primary school (Republic of Kenya, 1999). ECDE teachers deal with children aged between 3 and 6 years. Children who are below three years are generally taken care of by their parents/guardians and care givers/child minders at home.

Therefore, the emphasis on ECDE has been on provision of institutionalized education to children in the 3 – 6 years age group. Provision for institutionalized ECDE should cover children of 3 – 6 years of age because this is the stage where so many social attributes and personalities are formed (Farrant, 1986).

For average learners, at least one year of ECDE is adequate to provide a smooth transition from home to school life. In such schools, children are introduced to the kinds of experiences that help them to make fuller and

more efficient use of what, later will be taught in primary school (Farrant, 1986; Republic of Kenya, 1999).

In pursuit of more and better education for the children, the parents have increasingly used ECDE centres as a head-start, as most of these institutions concentrate on the 3RS (writing, reading and arithmetic) as preparation for entry into primary school. Furthermore, ECDE Curriculum aims to develop the whole personality of the child, which enhances physical, mental and socio-emotional attributes.

The general objectives of ECDE in Kenya are to:

- i. Provide education geared towards development of the child's mental capacities and physical growth.
- ii. Enable the child to enjoy living and learning through play.
- iii. Develop the child's awareness, self esteem and self-confidence.
- iv. Enable the child to develop understanding and appreciation of his/her culture and environment.
- v. Foster the child's exploration skills, creativity, self-expression and discovery.
- vi. Identify children with special needs and align them with existing services.

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- vii. Enable the child to build good habits and acquire acceptable values and behavior for effective living as an individual and a member of a group.
- viii. Foster the spiritual and moral growth of the child.
- ix. Improve the status of the child's health, care and nutritional needs, and link him/her with health services such as immunization, health check-ups and growth monitoring.
- x. Enrich the child's experiences to enable him/her to cope better with primary school.
- xi. Develop the child's aesthetic and artistic skills (ROK (1999; Republic of Kenya,1888; Republic of Kenya, 2008a; Republic of Kenya ,2008 b).

Kenya recognizes the importance of ECDE as the most important lever for accelerating the attainment of Education for all (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Republic of Kenya, 2006a). The government has further demonstrated its commitments to the well being of young children by signing various global policy frameworks such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 1990 Jomtien world conference on EFA, the 2000 World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal) and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These fora underscored the importance of EFA (Republic of Kenya, 2006b). Kenya has been helped by United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Bernard Van Lee Foundation (BVLF) and the Agha Khan Foundation, a lot remains to be done to train teachers and to establish additional schools (Odada and Otieno, 1990).

Despite all the benefits that may accrue from ECDE as stated above and the commitments made by the government of Kenya to achieve Basic Education for All (BEFA) through ECDE, there is still poor performance of ECDE sub-sector characterized by low enrolment of children and high rate of dropouts caused by school factors (Varld, 2008). Policy on Education, Training and Research (Republic of Kenya, 2005) supports this when it enunciates that in Kenya, efforts have been made to improve the quality of school factors influencing implementation of ECDE curriculum. In Emuhaya district, the situation has deteriorated to the extent that primary schools doubt the preparedness of children promoted from ECDE centres to primary schools (Republic of Kenya, 2009). This is attested by low enrolment and high rate of dropout of children, as statistics at Emuhaya district education office reveal that only 29% in 2005, 30% in 2006, 26% in 2007 and 27% in 2008 children accessed ECDE. Children who went through ECDE were not adequately prepared for entry into primary schools. Factors contributing to this situation are yet to be established.

The study aimed to explore the influence of learning environment, grouping practice, teacher-child ration, medium of instruction, daily schedule, health and nutrition on implementation of ECDE curriculum.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) describe descriptive survey as collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. Descriptive survey design was chosen because it is appropriate for educational fact-finding and yields a great deal of information, which is accurate. It also enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions (Cohen et al., 2000). The research aimed at gathering accurate information and characteristics that are observable in school factors influencing implementation of ECDE Curriculum.

Sample and Venue

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 65 teachers drawn from 32 ECDE centres in Emuhaya district, Kenya, representing 33% of the study population. Simple random sampling was used because it is a technique in which every member has an equal chance of being selected (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Data Collection Instruments

Teachers' Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers regarding school factors influencing implementation of ECDE Curriculum. Both of them had open-ended and closed-ended items. Open ended questions gathered in depth information and were used so as to enable the researcher to gather data from a large number of respondents at a particular time (Ngumbo, 2006) while closed-ended questions gave out structured responses, which facilitated the ease of tabulation and analysis (Cohen and Manion, 1980). Teachers' Focused Group Discussion Guide was used to gather data from teachers which verified information obtained through teachers' questionnaires and gave additional information, which could not be captured in the questionnaires, as it is more flexible than questionnaires (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003).

Pilot study

To establish reliability of research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in 3 ECDE centres. It involved 7 teachers (4% of the study population) using test-retest method. The two tests were administered at an interval of

Table 1. Teaching and learning resources that constitute a learning environment in ECDE centres

Teaching and learning resources	Present		Not Present	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
Well ventilated classrooms	63	96%	2	4%
Child sized furniture	25	38%	40	62%
Spacious playground	65	100%	0	0%
Beds/beddings	2	40%	63	96%
Bathrooms	0	0%	65	100%
Nature table/corner	50	77%	15	23%
Toys and models	35	54%	30	46%
Charts and wall drawings	65	100%	0	0%
Playing equipment like see saw and swings	5	8%	60	92%
Safe and clean water	65	100%	0	0%
Toilet(s)	65	100%	0	0%

two weeks. This was done so as to find out whether the terms used resonate with teachers. The researcher also verified their content for accuracy, consistency, and ensured that ambiguous information was removed while deficiencies and weaknesses were noted and corrected in the final instruments. Teachers who participated in the pilot study were not involved in the final study. This method of establishing reliability of instruments was appropriate for the instruments that gather data which is qualitative in nature (Joppe, 2000; Creswell and Miller, 2000). For validity of the instruments to be ensured, three experts on the topic from Maseno University, examined the content of the instruments and advised the researcher on the content validity. Their feedback was used to revise the instruments.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher secured a research permit and research authorization letter from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology before proceeding to the field for data collection. The instruments were administered through personal visit on appointment with teachers. The questionnaires were filled by teachers in the presence of the researcher then a discussion with a few teachers was held in one of the ECDE centres.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics, namely frequency and percentage. Qualitative data was categorized and reported in emergent themes. As defined by Watson (1994), qualitative data analysis is systematic procedure followed in order to identify essential features, themes and categories. Data was then

reported in frequencies, percentages, verbatim quotations and tables.

RESULTS

Learning environment

Based on the responses of 65 teachers, learning resources that constitute a learning environment in ECDE centres were studied. The study findings were summarized in Table 1. According to the teachers, all ECDE centres had spacious playgrounds, charts and wall drawings, safe and clean water and toilets. Majority of ECDE centres had well-ventilated classrooms, nature table/corner as well as toys and models. Child-size furniture, beds/bedding, bathrooms, playing equipment like see saw and swings were missing at the majority of analyzed ECDE centers. An answer supporting inadequacy of teaching and learning resources in ECDE centres, obtained from focused group discussion was *"Teaching and learning resources in ECDE centres are inadequate in terms of both quality and quantity and sometimes we teach without them."* Another respondent stated: *"We lack time, money and skills of making and buying them because we lack support from both parents and government."*

Grouping Practices

The study found the majority of teachers in ECDE centres form learning groups based on ability and age (Table 2). Only 7 teachers (10.8%) form the recommended, mixed age learning groups as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of learning groups formed in ECDE centres

Learning groups	Frequency	Percentages
Age group	22	33.8%
Ability group	35	53.8%
Mixed age group	7	10.8%
None graded group	0	0.0%
None	1	1.6%
TOTALS	65	100.0%

Table 3. Teacher: child ratio present in ECDE centres basing on age

Teacher: child ratio	frequency	percentage
(3-5 years -1:10 and 6-8 years -1:15)	6	9.2%
(3-5 years 1:11-above and 6-8 years 1:16-above)	50	76.9%
Mixed age -1:8	0	0.0%
Mixed age 1:9-above	9	13.9%
TOTAL	65	100.0%

Table 4. The Medium of instruction used by teachers in ECDE centres

The medium of instruction	frequency	percentages
Luhya only	13	20.0%
Kiswahili only	24	36.9%
Both English and Kiswahili	16	24.6%
Kiswahili, English and Luhya	12	18.5%
TOTALS	65	100.0%

Teacher: Child Ratio

Data show that most of the ECDE centres had a teacher: child ratio of 1:11 and above for 3-5 years old children, and 1:16 and above for 6-8 years old children (Table 3). Teachers who participated in the discussion had the following responses on this subject:

"We are not comfortable with the teacher: child ratio in ECDE centres because the population of children in classes is too big for us to manage."

"We only encourage this ratio in class just because what we want is money although it can not allow us to attend to learners' individual differences adequately."

Medium of Instruction

The study sought to find out the medium of instruction used by teachers in ECDE centres. The findings were summarized in Table 4, which reveals that 52 teachers (80%) use English, Kiswahili or a mixture of English, Kiswahili and Luhya other than using the recommended,

mother tongue (Luhya) as the medium of instruction in ECDE centres while only a few teachers (20%) use the recommended language (mother tongue) as a medium of instruction. This was further confirmed by question item 3 on the Teachers' focused group discussion guide which sought to find out the reason(s) as to why teachers tend to use both Kiswahili and English as the medium of instruction other than using Luhya (vernacular) language in ECDE centres. Teachers who participated in the discussion said: *"Parents insist that their children should be taught in both English and Kiswahili but not in vernacular (Luhya) language."*

"Our centres have children from various ethnic communities who have come to stay with their relatives as they learn in these centres."

"Our centre has children from both Luhya and Luo communities as it is found on the Western/Nyanza provincial boundary."

Daily Schedule

The study sought to find out whether ECDE teachers had recommended daily schedule for ECDE in their centres. The data analysis shows that all teachers who participated in the study had the recommended daily schedule for ECDE in their centres (Table 5). Majority of teachers said that they do not follow the daily schedule strictly (Episten, 1995).

Health and Nutrition

Findings regarding type of diet that constitutes a feeding program in ECDE centres are summarized in Table 6. All the teachers who participated in the study taught in ECDE centres which do not provide a balanced diet in their feedings programs. Majority of teachers (72%) reported that their centres provide unbalanced diet while eighteen teachers (28%) said that their centres do not provide meals (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

This study found many deficiencies in analyzed centres, which may prevent successful implementation of ECDE curriculum, including lack of required learning resources and facilities, types of learning groups that are not recommended, failure to use learners' mother tongue, understaffing and lack of balanced diet for feeding children.

Young children acquire knowledge in ways that are significantly different from the way older children learn, they learn by manipulating, exploring and experimenting with objects. They learn most exclusively by doing and through movements (The National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990), creation of a sustainable learning environment helps deprived children to improve in their academic performance (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992).

The physical environment, which includes the classroom setting as well as the outdoor setting, should provide opportunities for the ECDE children to explore and learn. The International Association for the Education of Young Children (1991) states that the quality of the physical space and material provided affects the level of involvement of the ECDE children and the quality of interaction between the teacher and the children. The Nebraska Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Education (1994) describe an appropriate learning environment for the ECDE children as the one that provides time opportunities for children to experience and respond actively to their world. It should be social in nature providing secure and stimulating climate for all children. Lombardi (1992) notes that ECDE learning environment should be based on development

appropriate practice. This means that an ECDE classroom should respond to the natural curiosity of young children, reaffirm a sense of self and promote positive dispositions towards learning.

Data analysis in Table 1 shows that out of the 65 teachers who participated in the study, majority (96%) reported that their centres had well ventilated classrooms. This shows that most ECDE classrooms were suitable for ECDE Curriculum implementation. It is expected that a room suitable for provision of ECDE should be well ventilated, spacious and well aerated with proper roof (Republic of Kenya, 2006b).

Most (62%) of the teachers did not have child-sized furniture. This could not promote effective implementation of ECDE Curriculum. This is contrary to the policy that play and learning equipment for ECDE centre shall be age and developmentally appropriate in terms of child size, brightly coloured, adequate, safe and securely fixed to protect children from injury (Republic of Kenya, 2006b).

All teachers (100%) who participated in the study reported that they had spacious play ground in their ECDE centres. This promoted implementation of ECDE Curriculum in line with The National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990) view that a good learning environment for small children must have a spacious play ground.

Only two teachers (4%) said that their ECDE centres had beds or beddings. This has a negative effect on the implementation of ECDE Curriculum. ECDE centres should have beddings, kitchen, appropriate toileting and sanitary facilities (Epstein, 1995).

There were 50 teachers (77%) who reported that their ECDE centres had nature corners and tables is an indication that most of the ECDE centres have nature corners/tables which enhances implementation of ECDE Curriculum as the International Association for the Education of Young Children (1991) states that the quality of the physical space and material provided affects the level of involvement of the ECDE children and the quality of interaction between the teacher and the children.

There were 35 teachers (54%) who reported that they had toys and models in their centres. This is an indication that, most ECDE centres have toys, charts and other related learning aids which encourage implementation of ECDE Curriculum as young children acquire knowledge in ways that are significantly different from the way older children learn, they learn by manipulating, exploring and experimenting with objects. They learn most exclusively by doing and through movements (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990).

All the teachers (100%) who participated in the study reported that their centres have charts, wall drawings and other related learning aids. This encourages implementation of ECDE Curriculum as creation of a sustainable learning environment helps deprived children

Table 5. How Teachers use ECDE Daily Schedule

Use of Daily Schedule	Frequency	Percentages
I follow it Strictly	24	37.0%
I do not follow it strictly	41	63.0%
Totals	65	100.0%

Table 6. The type of diet provided in ECDE centres

Type of diet Provided	Frequency	Percentages
Balanced diet	0	0%
Un-balanced diet	47	72%
Meals not provided	18	28%
TOTALS	65	100%

to improve in their academic performance (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992).

Only 5 teachers (8%) who participated in the study reported that their ECDE centres have playing equipments like see saw, swings and other related equipments. This inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum as Lombardi (1992) notes that ECDE learning environment should be based on play and development appropriate practice.

All the teachers (100%) reported that their centres had safe clean water and toilets. This reveals that ECDE centres have safe clean water and toilets which encourage implementation of ECDE Curriculum as the Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Education (1994) recommends that ECDE centres should have beddings, kitchen, appropriate toileting and sanitary facilities.

In summary, the study findings revealed that all 65 teachers (100%) who participated in the study reported that their centres did not have all the required learning resources and facilities suitable for ECDE in their learning environment. This inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum. Koech Education Report (Republic of Kenya, 1999) supports this when it reports that many ECDE centres in Kenya are characterized by inadequacies in basic facilities such as; properly ventilated classroom, furniture suitable for children, kitchen, safe clean water, play ground and toilets, few have adequate qualities of instructional and play material.

This implies that teachers do not have adequate teaching and learning resources to enable them implement ECDE Curriculum effectively, this affects implementation of ECDE Curriculum negatively as creation of a sustainable learning environment helps deprived children to improve their academic performance (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992).

An important organizational issue in ECDE is grouping children (Katz, 1992). The study sought to study whether ECDE teachers form learning groups.

Majority (98%) of the teachers formed learning groups. Learning groups in ECDE centres promoted implementation of ECDE Curriculum (Gaustad, 1992). For effective implementation of Early Childhood Development and Curriculum, one must attend to grouping patterns within the classroom because grouping of children for learning in ECDE centres allows the teacher to choose grouping strategies that facilitate learning for each individual child. Since only 7 teachers formed mixed age groups, this inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum because mixed age grouping is particularly appropriate for young ECDE children (Gaustad, 1992).

Teacher: child ratio is important in the implementation of ECDE Curriculum. The younger the child the more important is to have adequate number of staff in the classroom (The National Association of Elementary School Principal, 1990), appropriate staffing pattern vary according to; the age of children, the type of the program activity, the inclusive of the children with special learning needs, the time of the day among other factors. Appropriate teacher: child ratio encourages the bonding of children and teachers.

Table 3 reveals that majority, fifty nine teachers (90.8%) had un-appropriate teacher: child ratio (a larger number of children against one teacher than the recommended) in classes while only six teachers (9.2%) had an appropriate teacher: child ratio in classes as Republic of Kenya (2006a) recommends that an appropriate teacher: child ratio for ECDE children to be 1:10 for three to five years old, 1:15 for the six to eight years old and not more than 1:15 for at risk children.

This was further confirmed by question item two on the Teachers' focused group discussion guide which sought to find out whether ECDE teachers were comfortable with the teacher: child ratio in their ECDE centres. This type of un-appropriate teacher: child ratio affects implementation of ECDE Curriculum negatively.

The medium of instruction in ECDE centres in rural

areas is a sensitive issue which should be addressed with a lot of seriousness. The learner's mother tongue or the dominant language within the ECDE catchment area should be used as the medium of instruction in order to ensure smooth transition from home to institutionalized learning with Kiswahili being used as the medium of instruction in urban areas where population is made up of people from different ethnic and racial groups. This study considers Luhya language as the mother tongue and the dominant language within Emuhaya district since the district is a rural area. Our findings show that most teachers do not use the recommended medium of instruction (mother tongue) in ECDE centres, which also inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum (Republic of Kenya, 1999; Republic of Kenya, 2008a).

Koech Education Report (Republic of Kenya, 1999) concurs with this when it states that the medium of instruction and communication in most ECDE centres in rural areas is problematic. Given that English is the medium of instruction from primary grade 4 upwards some parents are pressurizing for the adoption of English and Kiswahili in rural ECDE centres.

Majority of teachers said that they do not follow the daily schedule strictly. The common reason for not following the daily schedule strictly was due to understaffing in the ECDE centres. This implies that most ECDE teachers do not follow the recommended ECDE daily schedule strictly hence discouraging proper implementation of ECDE Curriculum as Dodge and Colker (1992) note, the importance of consistency in the daily routine when they point out that, young children feel more secure when they can predict the sequence of events and have some control over their environment. A consistent schedule also helps to build trust in the learning environment (Epstein, 1995).

Good health and adequate nutrition are positively related to pupil's success in learning. A nourished (healthy) child has a higher learning capacity than the one who is malnourished (unhealthy) (Republic of Kenya, 1998).

This study revealed that most of the ECDE centres do not provide children with a balanced diet. This inhibits implementation of ECDE Curriculum as Cheruiyot and Kosgei (2000) note; a balanced diet is very important to every child's health since malnourished children have little resistance to infections, therefore they often fall sick, not active, less alert, unable to concentrate and are less motivated to explore the environment around them. Some of them tend to be absent frequently from school because of lack of food to eat overnight and in the morning and frequent hospital visits for treatment. This does not concur with Republic of Kenya (2006b) which recommends that; ECDE centres should provide children with a snack preferably enriched porridge at break time, where the centre is full day in addition to the snacks, lunch compromising balanced diet shall be provided.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following are the conclusions of the study:

(i) All the teachers (100%) who participated in the study did not have all the required learning resources and facilities suitable for ECDE.

(ii) Majority of teachers (89.2%) do not form the recommended; mixed age learning groups in their centres, this discourages effective implementation of ECDE Curriculum.

(iii) Majority of teachers (90.8%) had inappropriate teacher: child ratio (a larger number of children against one teacher than the recommended) in classes.

(iv) Majority of teachers (80%) use other languages (Kiswahili and English) other than using the learner's mother tongue (Luhya) which is also the dominant language within the ECDE centres' catchment area as the medium of instruction. This inhibits Curriculum implementation process.

(v) All the teachers (100%) who participated in the study had a recommended daily schedule for ECDE in their centres although majority of them (63%) do not follow it strictly due to understaffing.

(vi) All the teachers (100%) who participated in the study came from ECDE centres which do not provide a balanced diet in their feeding program for children. Majority of teachers (72%) who had a feeding program in their centres provided porridge (carbohydrates) only to children which can not alleviate the malnourished and the hunger stricken children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends that:

(i) A program should be designed to build community capacities for the development and equipment of ECDE centres in partnership with the government and other stakeholders. This will ensure that ECDE centres have adequate facilities and other learning resources.

(ii) Teachers should be encouraged to form a variety of appropriate learning groups in ECDE centres basing on the nature of children in terms of age and individual learning differences of children.

(iii) ECDE centres should be well staffed so as to maintain an appropriate teacher: child ratio.

(iv) ECDE teachers should be sensitized to value mother tongue as the only right medium of instruction to be used in ECDE centres found in rural areas.

(v) ECDE teachers should be sensitized on the importance of having and following the recommended daily schedule strictly in the ECDE centre.

(vi) ECDE centres should provide a balanced diet in their feeding programs to alleviate the hunger stricken

and the malnourished children who have poor background.

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