Factors Influencing the Choice of Approaches Used by Pre-School Teachers in Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract
The study investigated the influence of resource availability on the choice of teaching methodologies by pre-school teachers in Baringo District. Instructional resources are useful to facilitate learning as young children are fascinated by the objects in child-centered approaches as recommended by K.I.E and other institutions. However, there is a tendency by teachers to make frequent use of other teaching strategies which may not necessarily be particularly effective but may be occasioned by other factors. Specific objectives were to determine pre-school teachers' characteristics, influence of teachers' professional training on methods, influence of class factors on choice of teaching methods and influence of play activities on choice of teaching methods. The study was based on Piaget's theory of learning which asserts that children mental constructs are developed through their experiences in the environment and that experiences are necessary for intellectual development. The data analysis revealed that availability and adequacy of space and number of ECDE children had a great influence on the teaching methods teachers adopted. Inadequate finance, poor storage facilities and lack of commitment were sighted as reason for failure of the use of child centered methods of teaching. In addition most rural pre-school centers were managed by primary school teachers who showed less concern. Recommendations were made with respect to primary school teachers for the supervision of learning activities in the preschool. The government should urgently initiate systems to employ trained ECDE teachers who will be deployed to public centers to ensure quality and relevant education is provided to the young generation. Further in-service training courses to be reintroduces to refine and update teacher's skills.
Keywords: Education, Early Childhood Teachers, Child Centred, Facilities, Training.

Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Development is often misinterpreted to mean merely an academically oriented school program. In fact, the term is used to describe a range of services that promotes those conditions of socialization and education in the home, community that enhances a child's total development (Steiner Waldorf Education, 2001).

Education and care of young children is of crucial importance for their development. It ensures that children grow up into strong and healthy adults mentally, physically, emotionally and intellectually. Psychologists generally agree that the period below five years is critical in the development of a human being. Theories of intellectual development suggest that intellectual development takes place in stages. It follows therefore that certain concepts must be developed at particular periods in a child, failing which such concepts can be stunted or missed completely.

Orwa (1990) observes that the earliest centers were basically places where breastfeeding mothers could leave their children under the care of a custodian while they went to work. The centre was originally not meant for teaching or formal education. It was for this reason that they acquired the name nursery especially in Russia and in Eastern Europe. They were called kindergarten in Germany which translates into gardens for nurturing the children (Orwa, 1990).

According to the Council of Europe (1979) the first function of pre-school services developed to provide substitute care for children whose parents both worked or where conditions of home living were considered detrimental for development. The second trend was more positively educational and advocated the value of complementing children's experiences at home by providing carefully planned learning activities in the company of other children, which would promote all aspects of their personal development.

Homes (1997) agree with this by saying that the teachers' factors such as professional status and experience have been reported to be positive teachers' factors. Teachers' professional status is related to teaching behaviors and interactions they have with children. Teachers who are more experienced on early childhood education have positive relationships with their pre-school children as compared to their colleagues who are less experienced.

Schools for poor people often lack basic instructional materials. Textbooks often reach remote schools well after the beginning of the school year if they arrive at all (Tietjen, Raman, and Splaulding, 2003). In Kenya for example, for less than half of the seventh and eighth grade students' present in class had required text books (Lloyd, Mench and Clerk, 2000). Availability of books in general poses a challenge to education in the poorest developing countries. More than half of all the sixth grade students in eight countries participating in the southern and eastern Africa consortium for monitoring educational quality (SACMEQ) sample attended school without books. Providing books in second and third languages, especially those that are tailored to the language requirements of the minority groups, is out of the question. Even when basic textbooks are available, schools in poor areas often lack other instructional materials. Study of poor district in India found that while most schools in these districts have sufficient textbooks and learning materials for students, classrooms lack supplementary materials as teacher guides, dictionaries, maps, globes and instructional kits (World Bank, 1997).

The ECD policy frame work is based on principles that are universally accepted as forming the cornerstone of quality early childhood development. Among others it:

i. Ensures that holistic needs of young children are met to maximize the realization of their full potential

ii. Must be child centered recognizing the fact that children are voiceless but they are also active participants and learners must be involved in shaping the events that influence their lives.

iii. Must safeguard the rights and welfare of the child as per the children act of 2001

iv. Must recognize and appreciate parents and families as primary caregivers and health providers of their children and hence they need to be empowered and supported to ensure they are effective in their roles.

v. Must ensure non discrimination of children and families on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, economic status, disability and heath status.

This policy framework is important because currently there are gaps in the existing policy guidelines. It is also apparent that most ECDE centre's in public schools are not registered. Further information on the status of ECDE centers registration has not been captured in EMIS system. There is no data management of ECDE centers (Policy frame work, 2006). Most centers don't have their own management structures in place. Instead they rely on primary schools committees for their day to day activity support. Providing services without policy guidelines tends to compromise the coordination and provision of services utilization of resources and access and equity in the service delivery.

Similarly pre-school teachers were generally poorly equipped as parents did not think it was their responsibility to provide materials and equipment. The pre-school project surveys found most of the pre-schools in Kilifi were poorly furnished and equipped. This finding is supported by Njonjo's findings in Nairobi where most Harambee schools had very poor physical facilities and the blackboard was the only teaching aid available.

The study set to investigate how the various resource constraints influence the choice of teaching methodologies by pre-school teachers in Baringo district.

The study investigated how various resource availability influence the choice of teaching methods by pre-school teachers in Baringo district. Its main purpose was to;
The following objectives were used for the study;

1. To determine the pre-school teachers' characteristics in terms of gender, age, academic qualifications and teaching experience.

2. To find out the influence of the teachers' professional training on the teaching methods used.

Theoretical Frameworks
This study was guided by Piaget's theory's (1964) of Cognitive Development and functionalism theory of learning. Piaget's theory expounded by Wadsworth (1984) asserts that children's mental constructs are developed through their experiences in their environment. The theory holds that, the cognitive structure develops valiantly or sequentially and interactively from the concrete to the more abstract one. Four major stages of development are identified:

- The sensor-motor stage- birth to about 2 years
- Pre-operational period- approximately 2 to 7 years
- Concrete-operational stage- 7 to 11 years
- Formal-operational stage- 12 years onwards.

Piaget's theory emphasizes that the child is not simply a passive organism that responds to any stimuli that occurs, but is an active organism. The activity of the child to learn more of the subject matter presented increases as he progresses through the different stages of cognitive development.

Therefore when a teacher decides to use learning resources of teaching, he has to take into account the learner's stage of cognitive development, if the learners are going to benefit from them. There is also the implication that some learning resources are better adapted than others in the presentation of subject content, to individuals of varying stages of cognitive development.

In the realm of education, Piaget stated that:
'….so we need pupils who are active, who learn early to find out themselves partly for their own spontaneous activity and partly through material used and set up for them, who learn early, to tell what is verifiable and what is simply the first idea to come to them' (Piaget, 1964:5 in Mwamwenda, 1989:7)

Piaget's theory suggests that the teaching methods and materials should be consistent with the children's level of conceptual development. Regarding school experiences and cognitive development, Piaget wrote:

'Experience is always necessary for intellectual development. But I feel that we may get into illusion of being submitted to an experience that is sufficient for a subject to disengage the structure involved. But more than this is required. The subject must be active, must transform things and find out the structure at his own actions on the objects (Piaget, 1964:4 in Wadsworth, 1984:195).

According to Piaget, cognitive re-organization resulting from assimilation and accommodation can come about only through actions of the child. Thus actions, physical or cognitive must occur if cognitive/re-organization is going to take place. Piaget asserts that assimilation and accommodation of actions are always under internal control (equilibration) and the re-organization of cognitive structures in a particular way, which can never be ensured by external organization of experience. Throughout the stages of concrete operations, the manipulation of objects and materials dealing with concepts to be learned is most important. During this stage, concrete experiences that results in reflective abstractions generate conceptual development (Wadsworth, 1984).

Methodology
Research Design
The researcher adopted a survey design and employed a descriptive approach. Orodho (2005) says that a survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals while Mugenda (2003) looks at survey as an attempt

to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. Ogula (1998) defines descriptive research as the systematic collection and analysis of data in order to answer questions or test hypothesis concern bartering the current status of an education programme, project or activity.

Descriptive survey design is used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret for the purpose of clarification. It's also intended to produce statistical information about aspects of education that interest policy makers and educators. Data was collected by means of questionnaires, an observation schedule and an interview schedule for the head teacher. The research aimed at obtaining information in relation to how various resource constraints influence teaching methodologies used by pre-school teachers

The Locale of the Study
The study was conducted in Kabarnet town municipality and Kabartonjo division of Baringo district. The locale of the study was chosen because the researcher is familiar with the area. Secondly, Kabarnet town municipality and Kabartonjo division had easy accessibility.

The two were used as a representative sample of urban and rural cases of pre-schools in Baringo district. This also helped to curb the limitation of time and finances on the part of the researcher.

Target Population
The study targeted pre-schools in urban and rural areas in Kabarnet town municipality and Kabartonjo division. The target population was 103 pre-schools, 206 pre-school teachers. The study concentrated on pre-school teachers handling children from 3- 6 years old.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure
Stratified sampling and simple random sampling was used to sample the population. Thirty percent of the 103 schools were sampled. Two teachers per school in the selected sample were used to fill the questionnaires. To decide on the pre-schools to participate in the study, a list of all pre-schools within Kabarnet town municipality and Kabartonjo division was obtained.

Stratified sampling was used where schools was categorized into urban and rural and the public and private in each case. Each case, that is, public or private in urban or rural was sampled separately through simple random sampling. Pieces of papers containing names of schools in each case was folded, placed in the respective boxes and shaken thoroughly. The researcher would then pick the folded papers from each box randomly to represent the schools to be sampled.

Findings
School Details
Question item number one (1.1) of the questionnaire sought to find out the status of the school. The analysis of the data showed that 9(29%) of the pre-schools are public in rural set up, 6(19%) are private in rural set up, 4(12.9%) are public within the municipality and

12(38.7%) are private within the municipality. These findings reveal that most of the pre-schools are private and are found in the urban setup. These schools are attached to a primary school and are administered by the primary school head teacher. Republic of Kenya (2006) reports that the government appreciates that pre-school forms the foundation of education of the children hence encourage that ECDE centers should be attached to the primary schools where the primary school head teachers are authorized to supervise the center as extension to their school. This shows that learners are able to access pre-school however the quality may be low since this schools charge very low fees which is affordable by the parents.

Teachers Details
The first objective sought to determine the pre-school teachers' characteristics in terms of Gender, age, academic qualifications and teaching experience.

Pre-school teacher characteristics in terms of Gender
The study sought to find out the pre-school teachers characteristics in terms of gender. The results are presented in table 4.2.1 below. The analysis of the data showed that the bulk of pre-school teachers are females 52 (88.1%) while males comprised 7(11.9%). This indicates that female pre-school teachers are more than males thus there's gender imbalance.

This may be attributed to the reluctance of the male teachers to take up pre-school teaching job which may seem to them to be feminine. This confirms earlier researches done which revealed that most of the pre-school teachers or otherwise called caretakers were mostly women because they could nurture children and give them love, attention, care and other requirements Godia (1990). From time immemorial, early childhood workers have been women and the trend has not changed. Mothers as first educators identify, recognize and respond to the children's needs with more ease than men.

Pre-school teacher's characteristics in terms of Age
The study sought to find out the pre-school teachers' characteristics by age. The analysis of the data revealed that the age bracket of most pre-school teachers are between 26-30 years 27 (44.3%) and ages 21-25 16(26.2%), between ages 31-35 were 14(23.0%), above age 35 were 3(4.9%) while below age 20 was 1(1.6%). Therefore majority of pre-school teachers are between the ages 26-30 followed by ages 21-25. Pre-school teachers below the ages of 20 are the least. The study indicates that presumably majority of the pre-school teachers may choose pre-school teaching as a last resort due to unemployment.

Pre-school teacher's characteristics in terms of Academic Qualifications
The study also sought to find out teachers qualification and professional qualifications. Teachers' qualifications play an important role in teaching because they influence instructional competence and may also determine the existence of instructional problems in the classroom context. The analysis of the data showed that majority of pre-school teachers were O' level/KCSE holders 23 (37.7%), A-Level were 19(31.1%), diploma holders were 9(14.8%) while CPE/KCPE and Degree holders are the least 5 (8.2%). This may be explained that most of those that joined pre-school teaching may be those who had lower grades in secondary school and could neither join university, diploma colleges or P1 teachers' course. Further, those with A-level academic qualifications may be those who failed to pursue other

forms of academic progression. The table reveal that most of the teachers have good academic qualifications hence can easily be trained the children.

Conclusion

From the research findings, majority of the pre-school teachers were found to be women. Most of the teachers were relatively young as only the minority was above thirty-five years old. A high percentage of teachers had a reasonably good academic background with the majority having had attained an 'O' level education and few degree holders. Most of the teachers were found to have had a teaching experience of two years and above. Except for few cases majority of the teachers had undergone professional training, which was DICECE, Montessori or both.

The institution one had attended had a great influence on the approaches he or she adopted in teaching. The availability and adequacy of classroom space, teaching/learning facilities and the number of children a teacher handled were also found to have had great influence on the teaching methods the teacher adopted. Availability of play facilities was crucial as it determined children's socialization, coverage of activity areas and development of psychomotor skills.

Most of the primary school head teachers showed less concern for the pre-school section in their schools. Only they were able to get the schemes of work, lesson plans and record of work covered from the teachers, they seemed contented. They made little or no effort to personally go into the classes to assess how the teachers taught or the areas that required attention. It was also found out that inspector from DICECE hardy visited some preschools for inspection purposes.

Some school teaching, mainly to enable them get s employed both the Montessori and DICECE methods of teaching, mainly to enable them get as many children as possible. This implies that they employed both DICECE and Montessori teachers who actually blended what they had the school was neither a pure DICECE nor Montessori. To provide learning facilities for the two systems was quite difficult and the children did without some of the essential facilities.

Implications of the study

The choice of the teaching methods adopts has a lot of impact on a child's learning and the subsequent developmental stages. Teachers should be well prepared and equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills during their training so as to be able to prepare the children for a worthwhile future. The untrained teachers in some of the pre- schools lacked the necessary skills to handle the children's learning. They may not be trusted to deliver the relevant content appropriately. There is therefore need for such teachers to undertake the in-service training courses to refine their teaching skills. This will ensure that they will continue to employ the recommended teaching methods.

Recommendation

Pre School teachers should conduct regular checks of the lacking and damaged teaching materials and play facilities so that they can organize for their replacement to ensure that gaps are not created while teaching the children.

Teachers should make maximum utilization of the local environment to develop and make maximum utilization of the local environment to develop and make improvisation of teaching and learning materials.

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