

Teachers' Awareness and Ability to Implement NACECE Curriculum In Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is based on a descriptive survey of the factors influencing the implementation of National Centre of Early Childhood Education (NACECE) curriculum in Kesses Division of Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The paper explores the teachers' competency and clarity on the NACECE curriculum implementation. The survey involved 32 out of 106 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres selected using simple random sampling. The respondents included parents and head-teachers from the selected schools, DICECE programme officer (1), Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) (4), District Education Officers (DEOs) (1), TAC tutor (1), who were sampled purposively. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, observation schedules, interview schedules and document analysis. Descriptive statistics, percentages and frequencies were used to analyze data. It was found that the Early Childhood Development curriculum by NACECE was not adequately implemented as it was initially designed and conceptualized. This was attributed to lack of clarity and awareness about the curriculum, lack of and poor usage of necessary facilities and materials among others. The study recommended that the quality of teachers to be employed in pre-schools be improved and regular seminars and refresher courses mounted for them to appraise their skills and knowledge. .

Keywords: teachers, awareness, ability, implement, NACECE curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The demand for Early Childhood Department (ECD) Services has increased considerably in Kenya as in the world over. In Kenya, the demand and increased interest in early childhood development programmes has been as a result of changing socio-economic conditions. Krystall and Maleche (1976) argue that the traditional weaning practices and childcare patterns have declined due to changing family structures and lifestyles. Empirical knowledge existing emphasizes the importance of early years of life in the physical, mental, social and emotional development of an individual. Research on brain development indicates that early years of life are crucial. Svensen (1998) reports that, according to the latest research on the brain, babies' brains begin crackling with activity before they are even born, and at the age of three, a child's brain has about one thousand trillion synapses which are twice as many as an adult's (MOEST Report, 2004, p. 7).

In addition to increased knowledge about the formative years, most parents in Kenya are interested in ECD services for giving children a head start in formal education. Having a good start for formal education is extremely important in Kenya where the education system is highly competitive and examination oriented. Indeed, there is total agreement that opportunities should be created for quality child development through ECD Education as a means of empowering today's children as leaders of tomorrow (Republic of Kenya Development Plan, 1997-2010).

Education in Kenya, as in the world over, is seen as a vehicle of social and economic development. Being a signatory to other world conventions and resolutions made by United Nations, Kenya has put in place policies which focus attention and commitment to goals and strategies that would ensure the survival, protection and development of children. One such initiative is the development of National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) in 1984 charged with the responsibility of ensuring the provision of quality education to the pre-schoolers. It was also in the view that early childhood Development and Education is crucial for human capital formation and for enhancing educability of children (World Bank, 1997). It is not enough simply to ensure that children attend school. The quality of education is also of paramount concern; it should be relevant to individual development and life (The State Of World's Children Education, UNICEF, 1999, p. 8); hence ensuring the right to education is a matter of morality, justice and economic sense (UNICEF, 1999).

In provision of ECD programmes, the government of Kenya has adopted the policy of partnership. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) was given the mandate to administer and manage early childhood development centres by the presidential circular Number One of 1980. On the strength of the circular the Ministry of Education formulated its functions which included:

- 1) Giving policy guidelines to sponsors, managers and the public on issues related to ECD centres
- 2) Train pre-school teachers
- 3) Develop ECD curriculum
- 4) Inspect and supervise ECD centres
- 5) Register ECD centres (Jadini Report, 1987)

Other functions as a result of expansion are community capacity building and mobilization, external programmes and documentation (Regional Conference, Mombasa, Kenya, 2002). Within the partnership paradigm, households, local communities and individual entrepreneurs continue to play a key role in the provision and development of ECD service for children below six years of age (Republic of Kenya EFA report, 2003, p. 9). However, the Ministry of Education's concern and involvement in ECD education underscored the fact that this level of education or sub-sector had been recognized as being instrumental in the development of a child's education. There is need therefore to provide quality education that would assist the child in later life.

It is thus, as a result, paramount to improve quality of ECD education through the production and subsequent implementation of relevant curriculum, through NACECE. The Development of a rational ECD curriculum can be traced far back in the Gachathi Report of 1976. The report recommended that the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) develops and produces a curriculum and materials relevant to the Kenyan situation. The main objectives of Early Childhood, as stated in the ECD guidelines (2001), are to provide education geared towards development of the child's mental capabilities and physical growth; to enable the child to enjoy living and learning through play, to enable the child develop understanding and appreciation of his/her culture and environment, and to enrich the child's experiences to enable him/her to cope better with primary life.

The above objectives clearly underscore the fact that ECD education should be geared towards enhancing the development of an all round child. The ECD can thus be seen as being responsible for fostering the child's development including the affective, social, and physical as well as the mental development. It is thus imperative that the teachers and other care givers who work in ECD institutions have sound knowledge of how children grow, learn and develop. Apart from the teachers being equipped with necessary knowledge, they also need to be supported by the necessary support for effective implementation of NACECE curriculum. The NACECE curriculum contains six activities areas, namely language activities, mathematics activities, environmental activities, music and movement, creative activities, and physical outdoor activities.

Environmental activity area is divided into two: social activities and science activities, and seeks to enhance the child's awareness of the world around him/her. The curriculum activities are to enhance holistic development of the child; hence availability of materials is core in the effective attainment of objectives. In methodology, NACECE curriculum emphasizes the use of thematic teaching approach. It is an approach that links a single topic running through all the activity areas in a single day's programme of work plan or activity plan. The implementation of NACECE and any other curriculum relies majorly on the existence of a conducive environment and relevant elements. Kabiru and Njega (2001) state that "quality services of ECD centres are inadequate, many centres do not have facilities necessary for holistic development, they lack basic play materials, feeding programmes and still there are untrained teachers" (p. 17).

However, despite the significant achievements made, the government and funding agencies within the partnership paradigm for example, World Bank, Benard Van Lee Foundation, agree that there are challenges faced by the sector in curriculum implementation (World Bank Report, 1997; Regional Conference, Mombasa, 2002; Sessional Paper 1, 2005, p. 31). The following issues seem to emerge: that many parents of ECD children disapprove learning through play and that many parents prefer use of English as a medium of instruction in ECD centres instead of the language of the catchment area, and culturally relevant support materials are inadequate, limited community participation, lack of enough trained teachers and low and irregular salaries for ECD teachers.

These issues suggest that implementation of NACECE curriculum has not been efficient and effective enough to realize its objectives. Since children form the future of any given nation/society, it becomes paramount that all stakeholders provide them with quality education to exploit their full potential. Often, society considers children as future leaders, on whose sustainable human resource base would depend. It becomes important, therefore, that all resources be marshalled for their development in providing them with quality education.

In the same note, it is documented that Government budgetary allocation for ECD is about 0.1%, compared to other sectors for example the primary sector, 61%. It is also documented that the government has not been keen in funding early childhood education and in fact it has not been allocating any funds previously (Abagi, in Reform Agenda for Education, 2003, p. 59; National Action Plan on EFA, 2003, p. 9). Financing is a crucial resource in implementing a programme; hence it affects quality of a programme. Due to prevailing

poverty, many parents cannot afford to pay for ECD which affects implementation since the parent is the core financier in this sub-sector.

Critical Issues on Teachers' Ability on Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of ECD – NACECE curriculum has been manifest with many pitfalls, for example, lack of adequate facilities and material resources, limited community participation and low and irregular salaries of ECD teachers. This has degenerated into serious challenges that have affected the attainment of Early Childhood Education goals, as outlined in NACECE. As earlier indicated, the NACECE curriculum was prepared to provide relevance to the Kenyan pre-school child, but there seems to be certain factors affecting its implementation, resulting to poor quality.

Kabiru (1992) points out that “among the problems retarding the development of pre-school education in Kenya is support materials. Teachers cannot effectively implement the NACECE curriculum unless they are given tools of trade that are facilities and materials”. In implementing an innovation, Gross *et al.* (1971) posit that factors such as clarity and awareness of curriculum, teacher competence, support by management, availability of facilities and materials and the attitude of stake holders have an influence on the outcome of an innovation. There is need, therefore, to examine the factors affecting the implementation of NACECE curriculum in various ECDE centres in Kenya.

Factors Affecting Curriculum Implementation

The concept of curriculum implementation involves putting into practice an espoused idea or concept. Otunga (1993) posits that “once a programme has been implemented, it is important that it is supervised” (p. 118). In Kenya, the work of curriculum supervision is the duty of Quality Assurance Officers (the Inspectors of Schools) and DICECE officers at the local level. Goodland and Kein (1970), however, have found that some of the most recommended curriculum innovations are either dimly conceived or not properly utilized in the schools claiming their use. Verspoor (1986) observes that education is littered with the remains of programmatic innovations that have not been appropriately implemented. The question to be asked then is: why do such promising innovations fail to be implemented as conceptualized and designed? Both Fullan (1993) and Gross *et al.* (1971) have identified a number of factors that would explain the lack of proper implementation of such educational innovations. Teacher competency and clarity on NACECE curriculum are the only ones discussed in this paper.

Teacher Competency

Perhaps, there are no educational personnel that are more significant in curriculum implementation than teachers. Shiundu and Omulando (1992) argue that “to most teachers, implementation is their legitimate role in curriculum development” (p. 224). Their reference to the teacher and curriculum is that:

After a consensus is reached as to what will go into the curriculum of the educational system the next important step is to avail this curriculum package to the educational system, a process that is known as curriculum implementation... various personnel are involved, but perhaps the one whose role is most important in seeing that programmes are successfully implemented is the teacher, who organizes the learning environment for the benefit of the pupils who must experience curriculum.

The teacher can be regarded as an indispensable catalyst to any educational change or innovation. The teacher plays a crucial role in the care and development of children in ECD centres. Bishop (1985) contends that: “specialists and experts may select the objectives and plan the general advance, but it is the teachers in the classroom who are the assault troops” (p. 189). Shiundu and Omulando (1992) came up with a contemporary adage that: “no education is better than its teachers” (p. 178).

Children at the pre-school stage almost entirely depend on their teachers to guide and scaffold them in their learning activities. Apart from the difference in their power structures in determining which activities are undertaken, teachers are left to interpret and to implement the curriculum. ECD in Kenya seeks to develop the child holistically. The growth and development processes include all aspects of growth, that is, physical, mental, social, emotional, moral and spiritual and aesthetic dimensions, hence it demands that teachers should have a sound knowledge of how children grow, develop and learn (KIE-ECD Guideline, 2001, p. v). In the same view, Hawes (1979) contends that implementation of curriculum change depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes fostered during initial training. Indeed, training of teachers and curriculum development must be close and constant.

Training is acknowledged as important in preparing teachers for their work since. It equips them with necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for them to perform their duties competently. The Ministry of Education, Kenya, in its quality framework, notes that among the characteristics that shape teacher quality are: the formal educational attainment, the teacher training attainment, the experiences gathered by the teacher, the subject mastery and the

availability of the teacher (MOEST–Report on sector review and Dev., 2003, p. 62).

The Ominde Commission Report of 1964 observed that the provision of an all educated and competent teaching force is by far the most important contribution that the government of Kenya can make to schools. It further observed that while the main problems in Kenya were those of quality and quantity, improvement in both was a necessary prerequisite in improvement of education. Teacher training is indeed one of the nerve centres of an educational system. The World Bank (1997), in a staff appraisal report, notes that pedagogical and practical skills in Early Childhood Development are important for the effectiveness of ECD teachers and their capacity to deliver a quality ECD programme. In Britain, Goddard and Leask (1992) report about implementation of “language across curriculum” (p. 205); this was relatively unsuccessful. This comprised a set of changes that required all teachers to have sound knowledge of language and its acquisition, and for teachers to understand how to apply it to work in all fields. This failure was attributed to the fact that not all teachers possessed the necessary level of knowledge and skills. This deficiency could professionally be dealt with through teacher education and in service. As the authors point out, “Curriculum is often de-skilling – teachers have to change the practice with which they are familiar and become familiar with new methods, content and resources. An essential stimulus to curriculum change is compatible in-service training”.

The teacher’s centrality to change process necessitates a well designed and well implemented teacher training programme. Verspoor (1986) emphasizes that “successful educational change is built on effective training. A well-designated and effectively implemented programme is elemental in the successful implementation and institutionalization of change programmes” (p. 92). Teachers’ participation in curriculum implementation involves employing their dexterity in assembling and arranging teaching aids. The NACECE curriculum emphasizes the use of locally available materials, which basically depends on the teacher’s creativity to source the materials and use them appropriately in teaching ECD activities.

On the whole, teachers’ impact on the curriculum depends largely on the teacher education. Hawes (1979) contends that:

There is no conceivable way in which curriculum implementation can be divorced from the process of teacher education. The teacher in school interprets the objectives and content in the curriculum plan and manages the learning situations

through which intention is translated into actual practice (p. 121).

Teacher training and in-service education are in this regard important components in facilitating the implementation of an innovation. The teachers’ direct role as implementation agents dictates that they receive appropriate training. Training prepares the teachers to deal with emerging challenges and hence makes them competent.

Clarity

Clarity deals with the purpose of the innovation and the roles of those involved in the implementation of the innovation. Lack of clarity negatively affects implementation. This may arise due to unclearly stated goals or means of implementation. If the curriculum is not well explained, it cannot be understood by the implementation agents and, consequently, rejection rather than implementation occurs. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) advance the notion that the clarity or explicitness of a curriculum is significant in facilitating its use. Bermant and McLaughlin (1978) add credence to this when they observe that the success of innovation projects is attributed to the clarity of goals among other factors. The issue of clarity is quite important more so in the interpretation of objectives. Hawes (1979) contends that “the teacher in the school interprets the objectives and content in the curriculum plan and manages the learning situations through which intentions are transformed into actual practice” (p. 121).

Gross *et al.* (1971) contend that clarity is related to ability. In their study of the Cambire schools, “catalytic role model in the USA,” they established that among the reasons of its failure was the lack of clarity. This was seen with regard to what was required of the innovators, teachers which, according to them, were stated in general terms thus risking misinterpretation. Unless the teacher is thoroughly clear about what is to be done, he/she will not be able to implement the innovation effectively. Hirst (1975) thus argues that “it is absolutely vital to ensure that all projects participants are clear about the nature of the project goals and objectives, how it is planned to achieve them and most important what exactly is expected of them” (p. 10).

Quite often, projects experience difficulties because the major participants are ill informed about innovation objectives. Poter (1980) expresses similar sentiments and argues that the clarity of objectives and teacher’s involvement contributed positively to the implementation process. Fullan (1992) points that teachers may not see the need for a change that is being advocated if they are not clear about what they ought to do. He contends that lack of clarity about what teachers need to do when implementing a

curriculum discourages them from using the curriculum. The teachers would rather continue teaching what they are familiar with than attempt an innovation they are not clear about. Diffusion of goals and not being specific about means of implementation represent a major problem at the implementation stage, teachers and others find that the change is not clear as to what it means in practice. It is on the basis of this that this paper examines the clarity of the Early Childhood Developments objectives as stated in ECD guidelines to the teachers, hence determine the extent to which policy and practice is achieved in the implementation of NACECE curriculum.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Kesses division of Uasin Gishu County of Rift Valley Province. The district consists of 7 educational divisions, and 19 zones. Kesses Division is the largest among the divisions and consists of four educational zones, namely Timboroa, Tulwet, Cheptiret and Kesses. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Participants in the study were drawn from 106 ECD centres in Kesses Division; a sample of 32 pre-schools was secured from the total number of pre-schools in the division. Other participants were the zonal Quality Assurance Officers (QASOs) (4), the DICECE

programme officer (1), the District Education Officer (1), 32 parents selected from the sampled pre-schools, and 32 pre-school teachers representing the 32 pre-schools sampled. The author used random sampling in order to obtain pre-school representing the four zones in the Division. The author used questionnaires, interview schedules, observation schedules and document analysis to collect relevant data. The data was analyzed by use of frequency distribution, calculating the percentages and tabulating them appropriately. It was used to describe the data collected on the research sample. The data interpretation and report writing was from these statistical tools that the author used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Clarity and Awareness of the NACECE Curriculum

From the research, it was found that the majority of the teachers were not clear of some of the NACECE curriculum objectives as stated in the ECD guidelines. In addition, certain activity areas of the curriculum were not clear to the pre-school teachers in Kesses Division of Uasin Gishu County. The findings teachers’ clarity of NACECE curriculum objectives are summarised on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Clarity of NACECE Objectives

	OBJECTIVES	CLEAR		NOT CLEAR	
		FREQUENCY	%	FREQUENCY	%
1.	To provide education geared towards development of the child’s mental capabilities and physical growth	32	100	0	0
2.	To enable the child to enjoy living and learning through play	25	78.1	7	21.5
3.	To develop child’s self-awareness, self-esteem and self confidence	28	87.5	4	12.5
4.	To enable the child to develop understanding and appreciate his/her environment and culture	27	84.4	5	15.6
5.	To identify the child with special needs and align him/her with existing services	9	28.1	28	71.9
6.	To enable the child to build good habits and acquire acceptable values and behaviour for effective living as an individual and other members of a group	25	78	7	22
7.	To foster the spiritual and moral growth of the child	26	81	6	19
8.	To improve the status of the child’s health, care and nutritional needs, and link him/her with health checkups and growth monitoring	4	12.5	28	87.5
9.	To enrich the child experiences to enable him/her to cope better with primary school life	31	96.9	1	3.1
10.	To develop the child’s aesthetic and artistic skills	31	96.9	1	3.1

Lack of clarity and awareness was also pointed out by some of the headteachers and quality assurance officers interviewed. They argued that they could not supervise the curriculum effectively since there were some aspects in the NACECE curriculum that were unclear to them. The above shows that the implementation of the NACECE curriculum would not be effective. The teacher is charged with the responsibility of imparting knowledge according to the objectives and content of the curriculum. According to Hawes (1979), the teacher in the school is supposed to interpret the objectives and content in

the curriculum plan and manage learning situations through which intention is transformed into actual practice.

When an innovation is introduced, teachers need to be initiated. Urevbu (1985) maintains that no new curriculum can achieve the desired results unless among other things, the teachers to implement it are properly initiated in it. Initiation in this case creates awareness and correct interpretation of the objectives and content of the curriculum and most important, what is expected of the teachers. Problems

experienced by pre-school teachers in their attempt to implement the NACECE curriculum may be attributed to failure to have the teachers well initiated in the curriculum, and partly due to their low academic qualification. The ECD teachers need both pre-service and in-service training to enable them implement the NACECE curriculum. The in-service programmes can be organized at zonal levels to enable the teachers share their various experiences from their pre-schools. The teachers can equally develop some interest and hobbies upon which to build further competence.

For effective supervision of a curriculum implementation it is of paramount importance that those charged with the responsibility be clear and aware of the innovation. The quality and assurance officers (inspectors) are in a better position to judge whether the curriculum goals are being implemented in totality (Okech & Asiachi, 1992, p. 125). The Ministry of Education (2004) outlines the functions of the inspectorate on ECD programmes, one being maintenance and improvement of education and professional standards in pre-schools. From such a function, quality of teaching and learning is maintained and enhancement of effective implementation of curriculum is realised. The quality assurance and standards officers need to be empowered to enable them supervise the NACECE curriculum more effectively. Most of those interviewed lacked awareness and clarity of the curriculum.

Teacher Competency in Curriculum Implementation

The findings from the study indicated that most teachers were form-four granduands; the number of standard eight granduands was equally high. The study further showed that the majority of the teachers had undergone training. Table 2 below summarizes the professional qualification and teaching experience of the teachers involved in NACECE curriculum implementation Uasin Gishu County.

Table 2: Professional Qualification and Teaching Experience

Professional qualification	Number	Percentage %
Early childhood the service certificate course.	17	53.1
ECD 5 weeks in-service course untrained.	2	6.3
Untrained	13	40.6
TOTAL	32	100.0
Teaching experience	Number	Percentage %
Between 1-2 years	2	6.3
Between 2-3 years	4	12.5
Over 3-5 years	4	12.5
Over 6 years	22	68.8
Total	32	100.0

Training is acknowledged as important, preparing teachers for their work since it equips them with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them perform their duties competently. The quality of teachers largely depends on their level of education and training. Dunkin and Biddle (1970) hold that, teacher competence, flexibility and ability to innovate largely depend on their level of education. As for the teachers in Kesses Division of Uasin Gishu, it was established that the majority had attained secondary level of education. However, most teachers had low grades such as D plain. With such low grades, most teachers experienced difficulties in implementing the NACECE curriculum. This was specifically more pronounced in environmental science activities which largely depend on the creativity of the teacher.

KIE (1992) observes that the quality of programmes services offered to children is low due to the type of pre-school teachers available. This is so because, as earlier stated, teachers determine the quality of services provided. Shiundu and Omulando (1992, p. 178) came up with an adage that, 'No education system is better than its teachers.' This is true with respect to NACECE curriculum implementation. To improve the quality of education at pre-school level, there is need to engage the service of people with sound academic background. At the same time, teachers need to be motivated through better remuneration but it emerged from this study that pre-school teachers are poorly paid, others often go without salaries.

On the other hand, in-service teacher training is necessary, particularly when a new approach to learning has been adopted. The in-service courses prepare teachers for new tasks demanded by the syllabus. Similarly, to increase teacher skills and knowledge there is need to organize workshops. These seminars and workshops are equally necessary for educational managers some of whom are not knowledgeable in the NACECE curriculum. The findings in the study revealed that only DICECE officers are knowledgeable and aware of what is required. Most of the other education officers were not well acquainted and yet they are supposed to monitor and evaluate the NACECE curriculum. The study also found that seminars, workshops and in-service courses were not organized at any given time. This further limits the effectiveness of the teachers and education managers in helping teachers improve their teaching of NACECE curriculum. The pre-school teachers in Kesses Division perceived in-service courses as valuable in equipping them with new skills and techniques for teaching.

This, therefore, serves to underscore the need for such courses to be mounted on a more regular basis in order to assist teachers cope with demands of NACECE curriculum. From the preceding, it can be

inferred that curriculum implementation, its failure or success, is largely a function of teachers, other things being equal. How then will the teachers' curriculum implementation function be improved?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study, there is a high likelihood that teachers who are trained leave the service for those untrained because of low salaries. In spite of early childhood curriculum being well-designed and conceptualized, lack of clarity and awareness about the curriculum on the part of the teachers coupled with lack of professional supervision by education managers has hindered its implementation. However, one positive thing is that teachers were positively predisposed to NACECE curriculum, and to the belief that the curriculum has objectives that are attainable. Nevertheless, it is clear that the NACECE curriculum has not been effectively implemented in Kesses Division. Due to lack of clarity and awareness by both the implementers and curriculum supervisors, there is need for regular workshops, seminars and refresher courses to update the concerned pre-school teachers and education managers on new development in early childhood education.

In addition, there is need for formation of flexible policy guidelines that will regulate academic qualifications and remuneration of ECD teachers. As such, harmonized terms and schemes of service for ECD teachers should be established. It is also paramount that more materials on ECD NACECE curriculum be documented and utilised, especially on environmental science activities. The ECD guidelines also should be supplied to schools just as it is done with other sub sections of the education sector. Finally, there is need to create awareness on how children learn best during formative years, through which community and parents participation will be strengthened and roles be clearly spelt out.

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