
**RESOURCE CAPACITIES SUPPORTING THEMATIC APPROACH IN TEACHING
ECDE CENTRES IN UASIN GISHU COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT: *Teachers are important resources in the teaching and learning process and should therefore be considered alongside other learning resources. They are the best recourses to be built into a particular teaching strategy designed to achieve a specific learning practice for instance thematic approach, without which can be administrative problem to head-teachers. Without adequate resource materials, it is a drawback to the implementation of new ideas and techniques. The study sought to investigate resource capacities of ECDE centers in supporting thematic approach in teaching in early childhood development centers in Eldoret Municipality. It was guided by Kurt Lewin's Three Stages of Change Model developed in 1954. The study adopted the Descriptive Survey research Design. The target population comprised 266 respondents comprising of 164 ECDE teachers, 82 head teachers and 20 Educational Officials. Stratified sampling was used to select thirty schools out of eighty two schools; Public and Private Schools which translated to 30% of the total sample population. Purposive sampling was used to select all the head teachers to participate in the study while random sampling was also used to select one ECDE teacher. Instrumentation included the questionnaire, interview guide and document analysis. Data was collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Majority of the ECDC's have inadequate resources and capacities both physical and human required supporting the implementation of thematic approach in teaching ECD children. The head teachers who supervise the curriculum in their schools are also not ECDE compliant hence, may not have be in a position to advice the teachers concerning the approach appropriately. The study recommended that ECDCs be equipped with adequate and developmentally appropriate materials and resources.*

KEYWORDS: *Resource, Capacities, Thematic, Approach*

INTRODUCTION

The role of Early Childhood Development and Education in laying the foundation for all levels of education cannot be over emphasized. However, as revealed by the following studies not all children access these crucial services. Stipek, (2005) points out that many States in America, which include New York, Oklahoma and Wisconsin have made strides towards universal pre-school education. The same study highlighted the social class disparities in pre-school participation which have not noticeably declined in America in the past decade. She adds that in France, England, Luxembourg and the Netherlands nearly all children from three to five years old attended publicly funded pre-schools. Pre-school attendance rates in Greece, Spain, German, Denmark and Italy range from 70 to 90 percent.

The World Conference in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 for the 10th anniversary of Education for All (EFA) reaffirmed its commitment to Early Childhood Education whose development was set as the first of the six Dakar EFA goals (MOE 2006). The conference observed that successful early

childhood care and stimulating programme lay the foundation for creativity, imagination, self-reliance and survival (MOE, 2006). Just as the foundation of a house determines the strength of the building, the foundation years of life determine the overall direction and characteristics of a life. This view is supported by Nasibi (2005). He saw the early years as critical for developing not only the child's body and healthy habits but also fostering good breeding through sports, games, plays and songs. This could lay foundation for wisdom, temperance, courage and justice which for him were cardinal virtues of the perfect citizen of the Republic.

Intervention measures should be implemented at ECDE level as is argued in the ECDE Policy Framework (2006) that during this period all the "critical windows of opportunity" are open and that these are the periods when children are able to learn and acquire certain knowledge, skills and attitudes very quickly with minimal effort. In many countries in Africa value primary education at the expense of ECDE education as was revealed by World Bank report (1997:1). In a vast majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, investment in human capital development which aims at primary school level, come too late. Yet attention to cognitive development only after the age of six or seven is not sufficient.

In Kenya Education Facts and Figures 2002-2008 further reveals that GER in ECD is still low at 62% compared to primary level at 109.8%. This problem has been aggravated with the advent of FPE in 2003. Starting formal education from ECD has been ignored especially among slum and ASAL communities in Kenya because ECDE is not mandatory and is not free (UNESCO 2005). With FPE programme teachers are forced to admit pupils in grades that they are not be delayed as is highlighted by UNICEF (2004:45) that: "Education system in the world over have paid a health price for the failure of the government to invest in children's earliest years... they are for ever playing catch up with problems that would have significant reduced if sufficient attention had been paid to children's early life".

Resources both physical and human are critical to early childhood education. Resources support quality teaching and learning. Planting an indoor classroom garden all year round provides preschool children with lots of science experience. Research has shown that. According to Barnett et al. (1995) high quality preschools play an important role in developing many of the cognitive and social skills that educators consider to be essential for school readiness. Historically, Montessori (1907) advocated for the prepared environment by providing a range of physical objects that were organized, and made available for free, independent use, to stimulate the children's instinct.

Kerich (1999) argues that when children are offered variety of objects and materials, they learn easily because these learning resources attract attention and curiosity. In environments with adequate variety of teaching/learning materials children's understanding of new concepts is enhanced. A major part of the success of a good school, therefore, is how well resources are acquired, managed and maintained.

Standa (1980) put it in a seminar paper that more attention is required to the provision of adequate facilities and resources and opportunities for teachers to share ideas on the use of available, accessible and appropriate resources in the solution of educational problems. Moreover, a new

programme requires relevant and adequate facilities even before implementation a syllabus (2008), and handbook. According to Kochar (1990), a teacher who has adequate and relevant teaching materials and facilities will be more confident, effective and productive. In effective implementation, learning materials and the human resource are very important variables. These materials include physical facilities found in the school as well as teaching and learning materials which contribute to the process of implementation.

Physical facilities, teaching and learning resources are basic to the process of implementation of a new Programme. The success or failure of the implementation of a programme may well depend on the availability or non availability of instructional materials and facilities. Standa (1980) put it in a seminar paper that more attention is required to the provision of adequate facilities and resources and opportunities for teachers to share ideas on the use of available, accessible and appropriate resources in the solution of educational problems.

Oketch and Asiachi (1992) contend that it is the kind of resources available that have great implications on what goes on in schools today. Eshiwani (1993) observes that the expenditure on instructional materials pupils and the management efficiency of material per pupil may boost school achievement, similarly, Shiundu and Omulando (1992) ascertained that a new programme such as thematic approach requires relevant and adequate facilities. Furthermore Mukwa and Patel (1979) argue that resource materials help the learners to understand the subject being studied and to achieve the specific objectives constructed from the content.

Heinnioch (1988) also asserts that teachers are important resources in the teaching and learning process and should therefore be considered alongside other learning resources. They are the best recourses to be built into a particular teaching strategy designed to achieve a specific learning practice for instance thematic approach, without which can be administrative problem to head-teachers. This is clear evidence that without adequate resource materials, it is a drawback to the implementation of new ideas and techniques.

ECD eligible centers are required to establish an ECD Centre Management Committee (CMC) who will be fully accountable for the use of the CSG (MOE, 2007). The identified CMC go through a process of training as spelt out in the Management Hand Book. Before funds can be sent to an ECD centre, the Management Committee must prepare an ECD Improvement Plan (IP) which explains how the centre will use the CSG to improve enrolment and improve the quality of education by providing resources. The IP must then be formally presented and approved at a special meeting of parents and community members (MOE, 2007). The centers are allowed freedom of choice to spend within fairly liberal parameters set by MOE with the grant channeled to their centers through banking system. The grant spending is intended to reflect the centre needs as defined by the CMC (MOE, 2007). These needs include learning resources among others.

The MOE (2008) spells out the procedures of expenditure in terms of eligible and no eligible items. Eligible items are as follows: Purchase of teaching and learning materials, purchase and/or construction of new classroom furniture, rehabilitation/repair of existing classroom furniture rehabilitation/repair of permanent and/or semi-permanent classrooms., rehabilitation/repair of toilets, construction of new toilets, construction of new permanent classroom (with joint funding

from the community, augmentation of one or two full-time ECD teacher salary at a maximum of Kshs. 2,000 per month per teacher and of basic construction tools and materials for volunteer of community labour. The CSG is managed at three levels, MOE head office, District Education Office and at the community which includes the ECDE centre level (MOE 2007).

The MOE is charged with national co-ordination of the CSG, providing support to districts and national programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. It designs programmes, distributes guidelines, organizes the training of implementers and manages disbursements. The District Education Officers (DEO's)/ Municipal Education Officers (MEO's) together with local leaders identify needy areas within their jurisdiction, train and implement at district levels, provide advice and general support to the ECDE centres and the community. The success of the grant is dependent upon the relationships and operations of the above parties.

Successful education programmes require well trained teachers active learning techniques adequate facilities and learning materials and an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming. However informal investigations using school documents, teacher assessments and professional experience in Eldoret Municipal reveal that resources are inadequate, teacher pupil ratio is high. According to Kochar (1990) a teacher who, has adequate and relevant teaching materials and facilities will be more confident effective and productive.

Oketch and Asiachi (1992) contend that it is the kind of resources available that have great implications on what goes on in schools today. In view of the above, Eldoret Municipality being an urban slum with many children in the streets has inadequate play facilities and infrastructure (Education Department Report 2009) despite the provision of community support grants (CSG) to Public ECDC's by the government. The teacher pupil ratio is high with over 1:30, which is a problem to the adoption of thematic approach. Thematic approach is pegged on adequacy of resources and teacher preparedness. In the ECDE context the activity areas, will be understood better by the children relating to the activities the child is given to undertake. It is clear therefore that lack of resource materials and facilities frustrate teachers and diminish their motivation more so in the early childhood sector where the foundation of learning is being laid. This is also a stage, where children learn by being actively involved in the learning process by example, counting in mathematics activity area. However, it should be noted that the teacher is a major resource without whose contributions other resources cannot be effectively used. This prompted the researcher to investigate resource capacities of ECDE centers in supporting thematic approach in teaching ECDE centres. Therefore the present study is designed to investigate resource capacities of ECDE centers in supporting thematic approach in teaching ECDE centres in Eldoret Municipality, Rift Valley, Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on Kurt Lewin's (1954) Three Stages of Change Model. The Unfreezing stage is probably one of the more important stages to understand in the world of change people live in today. This stage is about getting ready to change. It involves getting to a point of understanding that change is necessary and getting ready to move away from current comfort zones. This first stage is about preparing people before the change (and ideally creating a

situation in which they want the change). Unfreezing and getting motivated for the change is all about weighing up the 'pro's' and 'con's' and deciding if the 'pro's' outnumber the 'con's' before you take any action. The thematic approach in ECDCs is a new innovation and teaching methodology recommended by MOE in the ECD Service Standard Guidelines for Kenya (2006). The teachers who have trained in the NACECE/DICECE model understand the approach, while those who trained under other programmes like Montessori may not fully understand the approach. Therefore, all teachers should understand that change is inevitable, and should be embraced.

Transition is the inner movement or journey people make in reaction to a change. This second stage occurs when they make the changes that are needed. People are 'unfrozen' and moving towards a new way of being. This is not an easy time as people are learning about the changes and need to be given time to understand and work with them. Support is really important here and can be in the form of training, coaching, and expecting mistakes as part of the process.

The final goal is to 'refreeze', putting down roots again and establishing the new place of stability. In practice, refreezing may be a slow process as transitions seldom stop cleanly, but go more in fits and starts with a long tail of bits and pieces. There are good and bad things about this. It's often at this point that people laugh and say that practically there is never time for this 'freezing' stage. And it's just this that's drawn criticism to the Kurt Lewin's model. In today's world of change the next new change could happen in weeks or less. There is just no time to settle into comfortable routines. This rigidity of freezing does not fit with modern thinking about change being a continuous, sometimes chaotic process in which great flexibility is demanded. This model applies to the education sector in terms transition from traditional methods to new innovations such as the thematic teaching approach.

The first stage is about getting ready to change. It involves getting to a point of understanding that change is necessary and getting ready to move away from our current comfort zone. The second stage occurs as we make changes that are needed and move towards a new way of being, and the third stage, refreeze and establish a new place of stability

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive survey research design consisting of fact gathering. Kothari (2004) and Ngechu (2003) explain that descriptive statistics include measures of central tendency which describe a sample or a group of individuals. They describe "what is and what happened". Descriptive survey research was intended to produce statistical information about aspects of education that interests policy makers and educators.

The target population comprised 266 respondents comprising of 164 ECDE teachers, 82 head teachers and 20 Educational Officials. The ECDE teachers were included in the study because they are the implementers of the curriculum. The headteachers are the supervisors of the curriculum while the Educational Officers are the overall supervisors of the curriculum implementation. Stratified Simple random sampling was used to select thirty schools out of eighty two schools; Public and Private Schools which translated to 30% of the total sample population. This ensured equitable representation of the population in the sample hence, subgroups were proportionately

represented. Stratified sampling was used to select thirty schools out of eighty two schools; Public and Private Schools which translated to 30% of the total sample population. Purposive sampling was used to select all the head teachers to participate in the study while random sampling was also used to select ECDE teacher. The study used questionnaires, observation checklist, interviews and document analysis. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques which included percentages, frequencies and tables. The data was also inferred to show any level of significance between variables. The data collected for the purpose of the study was adopted and coded for completeness and accuracy. Method of data presentation included use of frequency tables, modes and percentages.

RESULTS

When an item on the Resource Capacity of ECDE centres was analysed the respondents results revealed that half of the teachers 30(50.0%) understood the concept of thematic approach while the remaining 30(50.0%) had no idea of the approach. Majority of the teachers 46(76.7%) did not support the implementation of the thematic approach, while the remaining 14(23.3%) did support the implementation of the approach. Majority 41(68.3%) reported that they did not have adequate teaching and learning materials while 19(31.7%) did agree that they had adequate materials. Majority (65.0%) of the respondents did not have teaching learning materials appropriate to thematic teaching approach, while 21(35.0%) reported that they had teaching, learning materials appropriate to thematic approach.

Table 1 Resource capacity of the ECDE centres

Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly agree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Understand the concept of thematic approach	0	0	7	11.7	23	38.3	23	38.3	7	11.7
Support implementation of thematic approach	14	23.3	10	16.7	22	36.7	9	15.0	5	8.3
Have adequate teaching and playing materials	5	8.3	20	33.3	16	26.7	4	6.7	15	25.0
Teaching materials are appropriate to thematic	0	0.0	20	33.3	19	31.7	13	21.7	8	13.3

The study established that the resource capacity of ECDCs in Eldoret Municipality was inadequate to support thematic approach in teaching. Furthermore the study established that majority of the

teachers did not support the implementation of the approach. Moreover majority of the ECDCs' did not have adequate teaching and learning materials .The materials found in the ECDCS were not appropriate to support thematic approach in teaching early childhood development education.

DISCUSSION

From the research findings, the ECDE centers have inadequate human and material resources. Adoption of a new innovation such as thematic approach largely depends on the head teacher, centre management committee and the ECDE teacher. They support the innovation by providing adequate teaching and learning materials, appropriate to the approach. In addition in situations where there are inadequate materials will hinder implementation of the approach. The findings of the study on Resources are not consistent with Asia chi (1992) who asserted that the kinds of resources available have great implication on what goes on in schools today. However, as noted by Njenga and Kabiru (2001) the provision of quality services in Early Childhood Education are hindered by lack of facilities necessary for holistic development.

Moreover, for effective instruction in teaching to take place an appropriate method of teaching and adequate materials must be developed and effectively used .The findings of the study are also not in agreement with (Granthan –McGregor et al ,2007) a group of scholars, who argued that lack of resources hinder stimulation in the early years and furthermore fail to fulfil children's development potential .In addition , Kochar (1990) observed that a teacher who has adequate and relevant materials and facilitates is more confident ,effective and productive in the classroom. Equally, the study findings contradict with Montessori (1907) who advocated for a prepared environment ,with a range of physical objects organised and made available for free independent use ,to stimulate children's instincts.

In addition, the study findings are not in agreement with Kerich (1999) who argued that when children are offered a variety of objects and materials, they learn easily because the learning resources attract children's attention and curiosity. Also environments with adequate and varied teaching and learning materials, enhance children's understanding of new concepts, such as thematic teaching approach. Furthermore, the findings of the study are in agreement with the words of Botham (1967) which stated that ``No technique should be neglected or left untried. Sometimes the most unlikely aid may be the most effective.

Shiundu and Omulando (1992) as noted by Koskei (2007) in a Thesis' A survey of the Factors Influencing the Implementation of NACECE Curriculum in Kesses Division of Uasin-Gishu, Kenya noted that a new programme requires relevant and adequate facilities. Both physical facilities and materials must be prepared before the inception of the programme. The responses on the Headteachers, understanding of the concept of thematic approach indicate that majority of the head teachers lacked knowledge of the concept hence their support for implementation is minimal. Worse still, they play the supervisory role in our schools.

Motivation is a key process in teaching and learning because it inculcates interest, enjoyment variety, novelty and curiosity in learning. Teachers can increase motivation in class by being concerned about both physical appearance of the classroom, the comfort of the learners and using

interesting methods among others. Provision of materials is equally important in motivation of young children. Materials in the ECDE centres were seen to be inadequate too.

However, in cases where materials were inadequate majority of the teachers agreed that adoption of thematic approach was limited. As observed in the ECDE classroom most had displayed old and worn out materials which were not pleasant, storage too threatened the quality of the materials as most of them were stored in carton boxes which made their use short-lived. From the foregoing information resource capacities of ECDE centres need to be urgently addressed in order to support the growing number of children being prepared for entry to primary schools.

CONCLUSION

The study findings showed that many teachers did not either neither understands thematic teaching approach nor practised using it in their schools. The teachers did not therefore support implementation of the approach because they had many reasons one of which was found to be time consuming and required adequate preparation in terms of collection and or development of materials .In addition the teachers attested that they did not have teaching materials which were appropriate to the adoption of thematic approach. Material provisions help in stimulating young children's physical, mental, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development. Materials do not need to be expensive, locally available materials can be used hence making them cheaper. When children actively engage themselves in the manipulation of play activities they use most of their senses. Majority of the ECDC's have inadequate resources and capacities both physical and human required supporting the implementation of thematic approach in teaching ECD children. The head teachers who supervise the curriculum in their schools are also not ECDE compliant hence, may not have be in a position to advice the teachers concerning the approach appropriately.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Since early childhood development education requires a large variety of materials, there is need for stakeholders to provide adequate storage to enhance their use and durability.
- 2) The community should be sensitized on the importance of learning resources in the ECDC's in order to be fully involved in the collection, development, purchase and donation of materials for the children.

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