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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Resource Provision, Stakeholder Attitudes and Support for National Centre for Early Childhood Education (Nacece) Curriculum Implementation in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Early Childhood Development programmes promote the physiological and intellectual development of young children, preparing them for further schooling and productive roles in society. This paper discusses the parents' attitudes, availability of necessary facilities and materials and support given by education managers in the implementation of the NACECE curriculum. The study randomly sampled 32 out of 106 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. The participants included parents and head-teachers from the selected schools, District Centre for Early Childhood Education (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 using questionnaires, observation schedules, interview schedules and document analysis. Descriptive statistics, percentages and frequencies were used to analyze data. It emerged that the ECD curriculum by NACECE was not adequately implemented as it was initially designed and conceptualized because of lack of and poor usage of necessary facilities and materials among other reasons. The author recommends that training be given to education managers to enable them provide the required support, and the need for government to look into the remuneration of teachers to ensure a motivated workforce. The findings of the study would be of great benefit to all Early Childhood Education stakeholders since it operates within a framework of partnership.

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Introduction

Kenya's education system is basically a centralized enterprise; hence, the curriculum policies are centrally determined. Okech and Asiachi (1992) reiterate this by asserting that "In Kenya, with its highly centralized approach, policies and plans for implementation of new curriculum must come from government" (p. 90).

The Early Childhood Development curriculum is developed by the Kenya Institute of Education's NACECE, to cater for children from 0-8 years. The Institute's mission is to develop relevant quality curriculum and curriculum support materials for all levels of education except university (KIE, 2002, p. 20).

Curriculum implementation is viewed as a most critical stage since it determines the success or failure of the curriculum. Shiundu and Omulando (1992), state that "if the new curriculum project is not implemented, it could be described as a failure" (p. 179). Pratt (as cited in Bishop, 1986, p. 6) points out that, more good curricula sink without a trace on the shoals of implementation than on any other point. Such views imply that a successful curriculum implementation process should involve enacting it through concerted efforts by the implementers. It is on the foregoing view that Bishop (1986) suggests that the implementation phase of curriculum be regarded as a distinct process amongst other curriculum development phases. It is the professional responsibility of the teachers and education

managers, including other stakeholders, for example, parents to concertedly propel the curriculum to its logical accomplishment.

Shiundu and Omulando (1992, p. 177) view the task of curriculum implementation process as involving two main stages as follows:

- Changing attitudes of people, policy makers, administrators, teachers, teacher trainers, school quality assurance officers, parents the lay public and ultimately the learners
- Providing the materials and administrative means to make the process possible

Need for Support of Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of ECD–NACECE curriculum has seen many pitfalls, for example, lack of adequate facilities and material resources, limited community participation and low and irregular salaries for ECD teachers. These have degenerated into serious challenges that affect the attainment of Early Childhood Education goals, as outlined by NACECE. 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”. Kabiru and Njenga (2001) also note that quality service in pre-school is being hindered by lack of facilities necessary for holistic development, for example, play materials and nutrition and health support programmes.

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 look into the factors affecting the implementation of NACECE curriculum in ECDE centres in Kenya.

Availability of Facilities

The identification, preparation and provision of the required facilities and equipment are basic to the success of any curriculum improvement. According to Shiundu and Omulando (1992) “a new programme requires relevant and adequate facilities and must also be prepared and materials purchased to ensure the successful activation of the programme” (p. 178).

Bishop (1985) holds that the teacher’s ability to implement a curriculum innovation is a function of the availability of the tools for the job. The notion is further supported by Pscharopolous and Woodhall (1985) who argue that teachers need to have the tools to succeed. Robinson and Spodek (1965), however, caution that although the availability of certain kinds of materials in the classroom is not necessary for intellectual development, the existence of either certain pieces of equipment in the room or the development of specific kinds of experience will guarantee maximum intellectual growth in the children. To accomplish this, the teacher needs to synthesize a variety of experiences and use various materials concentrating on specific learning.

The pre-school period is strongly dominated by the need of material action upon objects. The non-availability of these materials and facilities may be one major constraint that may affect the change. A World Bank report (1997), Sessional Paper 1 (RoK, 2005, p. 31), and a Regional Conference held in Mombasa (Ministry of Education & Bernard Van Lee Foundation, 2002) identify scarcity of learning materials in the classroom as one of the most serious impediments to educational effectiveness.

The availability of instructional facilities and materials such as libraries, text books, wall charts, and toys, among others help facilitate the teaching/learning process. Fullan (1992) argues that the development or acquisition of quality material constitutes one set of major barriers that militate against any innovation. This paper, therefore, sought to find out whether or not the availability of materials and facilities and/or the lack thereof affects the implementation of the NACECE curriculum in Kenya.

Support by Education Managers

Curriculum change greatly depends on management support given to the implementers. Huberman and Miles (1984, p. 273) in the analysis of a number of case studies and specific innovations have found that the amount and quality of assistance provided to teachers is essential in addressing implementation problems. They contend that:

Large scale change bearing innovation lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that their users received once the change process was under way... The forms of assistance were various. The high assistance sites set up of external conferences, in-service training, revisit committee structures and team meetings. They also varnished a lot of on-going assistance in the form of materials, peer consultations and access

to external consultants and rapid access to central office personnel... Although strong assistance did not usually succeed in early implementation, especially for more demanding innovations, it paid handsome dividends later on substantially increasing the level of commitment and practice (p. 273).

Gross *et al.* (1971) suggest that the management must structure the process of deliberation within the curriculum system and must lead the planning process. Thus the manager has to anticipate implementation problems and consequently seek out and resolve the impediments to facilitate successful implementations. Being an implementation leader, the manager's functions are to co-ordinate or organize those organizational parts or elements that must operate in harmony in order to achieve implementation goals. Shipman (1994) argues that this involves the locating and organizing of necessary human, material, technical and financial resources establishing and facilitating organizational structures, locating, creating and operating an effective communicating network, and developing viable decision making procedures. The manager ought to be knowledgeable and aware of, and must understand the curriculum and the process of implementation. Only through understanding can the manager organize and direct necessary curriculum deliberations for successful implementation.

Gross *et al.* (1971) have carried out one of the most extensive studies that highlight the importance of support by management. In their study, the proposed change was for students to become self-directed learners with the teachers playing a supportive catalytic role. The respondents were generally receptive to the innovation but some months later it was found to have minimal impact. According to Gross *et al.* (*ibid.*), all barriers that serve as obstacle to the successful implementation of a curriculum innovation can be attributed to '... fundamental organizational condition...' It is, therefore, clear that teachers require support for quality professional development and effective implementation of an innovation.

Gross *et al.* (*ibid.*) further argue that it is a management's task to plan, support and monitor the innovation process and therefore, clarify the teachers' role, to provide access training for the new role, to ensure that the necessary materials are available, to modify the organizational arrangements and to devise feedback mechanisms. The existence of workable systems of feedback will ensure that difficulties are

pinpointed, analyzed, and appropriate steps taken to overcome them.

The head teacher is one of the people supposed to provide necessary support. Fullan (1992) states:

If there is any changing to be done, everyone is implicated and must face it in relation to his or her own role. In this network, because of the closeness to the classroom situation, probably the most powerful source of help or hindrance to the teacher is the school principal (p. 40).

The study sought to establish the kind of support given to the pre-school teacher by the head teacher of the school. The head teacher plays a central role for he is involved in the steering of the acquisition of resources and creating a congenial climate for teachers to work, besides working in liaison with the external managers who in this case include the District Quality Assurance Officers (QASO) and the DICECE officers. The principal is thus a guarantor of successful implementation.

However, little is known about the type of support the supervisors provide to the pre-school teachers. It is, therefore, important to establish whether or not these managers provide the necessary support for curriculum innovation that can be promoted if the managers are knowledgeable and play complementary roles. It is also vital to examine the kind of support the pre-school teachers receive from Education managers that is the Quality Assurances and Standard (QASOS), Teacher Advisory Centre Tutors (TACS) and DICECE officers.

Attitude

Hawes (1979) underscores the need for changing people's attitudes to favour the implementation of any particular innovation by noting that:

In the very simplest analysis, the task of curriculum implementation can be said to involve two main processes. First, changing the attitudes of policy makers, administrators, teacher trainers, supervisors, teachers, parents and ultimately the learners; secondly, provide the materials and administrative means to make this possible (p. 119).

Positive attitudes do not only influence the willingness of people to implement but also the pupil's willingness to learn. Researches carried out indicate that there is a positive correlation between teacher's attitudes and their teaching methods (Bennet, 1976; Ashton *et al.*, 1975).

The role of attitude as a factor influencing the implementation of a programme has also been highlighted in a number of other researches. Smith and Keith (1971) carried out a study which revealed that the innovating institution was isolated from its environment; consequently, the middle class which surrounded the school did not like the innovation they saw in their midst. They, therefore, developed a negative attitude towards the innovation.

Fullan (1992) also examined a large-scale attempt in Ontario, Canada to implement the widespread use of micro-computers in classrooms and schools. From the study, only twenty percent of the elementary and secondary teacher population was enthusiastic or moderately committed to computer usage. The other eighty percent were basically uncommitted. In the words of one of the officials, they “still face a tremendous problem with teacher attitudes about use of technology.

From the study, Fullan (1992) observes that “There is still fear that implementation could be stymied by entrenched view about the structure of the curriculum and opposition to change.” It is, therefore, crucial to examine the attitude of teachers, Quality Assurance Officers and especially the parents who directly fund Early Childhood Education in Kenya.

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether or not essential conditions were present in effective and quality implementation of NACECE curriculum. It sought to examine the factors that influence the implementation of NACECE curriculum in Kesses Division of Uasin Gishu County. The main interest of this paper, therefore, is the parents’ attitudes, availability of necessary facilities and materials and support given by education managers in the implementation of the NACECE curriculum.

Limitations of the Study

NACECE has other components, such as, community capacity building and mobilization, health and nutrition, but the study considered only the curriculum component of NACECE programmes. In addition, the conclusions drawn from the study were solely based on the responses of the sample population, and its generalization to other parts of Kenya may not of necessity hold. This limitation can only be overcome when considered that there is some degree of resemblance with respect to implementation because of the national nature of the NACECE curriculum.

The study was also confined to NACECE providers and not any other early childhood education

providers for example Montessori curriculum. The reason is that NACECE is a national curriculum having a linkage to the mainstream Education system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Kesses Division, Uasin Gishu County, 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

Availability and Use of Materials

The identification, preparation and provision of required facilities and equipment are basic for successful implementation of the NACECE curriculum. Shiundu and Omulando (1992) suggest that, a new programme requires relevant and adequate facilities. Even before its implementation, physical facilities must be prepared and materials purchased to ensure the successful activation of the programme. Most pre-schools in Kesses Division lack the basic facilities and yet they have high enrolment.

Beaty (2000, p. 49) underscores the importance of teaching and learning resources in an early childhood classroom. She notes that the physical arrangement of materials determines what will happen; it conveys to the children what they may or may not do and what is expected of them. Young children require a variety of materials to facilitate their learning. The attention

span of children is very short; as such, they get bored very fast and the only way to sustain their interest and curiosity in learning is by providing a variety of materials. This, however, is not the case in Kesses Division. From observations made, most schools lacked the required facilities and even those that were available were not in regular use.

The NACECE curriculum recommends that the teaching and learning resources be sourced from the surrounding, that is, locally made, to enable the child relate learning to his/her environment. However, this was not the case in most schools in Kesses Division. The wall charts available in most schools were purchased and not prepared by the teachers.

The display and storage of learning and teaching resources affect their use. The findings from this study show that most schools had storage facilities, but, the stores mainly kept the primary section materials while those of ECD centres were tacked away in sacks, which confirmed their irregular usage. According to the NACECE, curriculum learning/teaching resources should be displayed in the classrooms as established learning centres or activity area corners or centres. As earlier mentioned, the display of learning/teaching materials in the classroom prepares the learners for the lesson. It was observed that most sampled schools had poor classroom material display arrangement due to lack of adequate materials and also minimal classroom space due to high enrolment. It is due to this short-coming that indoor free choice activity was not effectively carried out in most schools of Kesses Division.

According to NACECE, an ideal classroom should be spacious enough with a maximum enrolment of thirty children, but it was observed that some schools had enrolment as high as fifty in a classroom. The NACECE curriculum recommends that pre-school teachers must equip learning centres/activity areas with appropriate materials that children can choose and use in a self-directed manner during the indoor free choice activity. The NACECE curriculum recommends learning through play, which can only be effective through availability of a variety of teaching/learning materials. Beaty (2000) underscores the importance of play:

Play is a need of every child ...And we observe children at play, we often see enjoyment and delight. Because of this fun aspect, adults sometimes think of play as a form of amusement or fun only; not as something to be taken seriously. However, play is an important

childhood activity that helps children master all development need (p. 57).

The importance of materials and facilities in the implementation of innovations has already been emphasized in this paper. Children use toys and learning materials as a link between themselves and the environment. These toys and materials provide them with means to express feelings, concerns and interests and at the same time enable the children to explore, familiarize and eventually understand unfamiliar objects when they interact with them.

Young children are makers and doers and draw upon a rich imagination to create in conventional as well as in less traditional ways. For example, whether shaping clay into a rough pot, digging and moulding wet sand, fashioning a car from milk boxes or making a doll from cloth rags, children are using physical skills to explore their world. As such, children develop their imaginative discovery and creative skills through the use of learning, fosters healthy growth and development. Children should be provided with appropriate materials, guidance, stimulation and care. Teachers should use the materials, places and people in the local area to help facilitate learning.

Teachers should encourage parents and other people to help the ECD centres by giving materials, making equipment, letting children visit places of interest and coming to the ECD centres to help children learn something special. There was very little evidence from the study to show the involvement of parents in the preparation of materials. In fact, some of the parents felt that it was the teacher's responsibility to prepare materials as they were paid to teach.

The head teachers of primary schools should come in more strongly to support the ECD teachers to organize regular meetings with parents to sensitize them on importance of materials in ECD centres. The ECD teachers are on their own in dealing with issues relating to materials preparation. Material development days should be set aside and parents should be involved in the preparation. Through such an approach, parents will be able to experience what their children are being taught in school, hence develop a sense of appreciation.

The development of teaching materials should be further enhanced through regular meetings and workshops organized by the Teachers Advisory Centre Tutors (TACTS) at appropriate levels for example zonal or divisional education levels. Through such interactions, teachers from different

schools will also share ideas on material development. This kind of networking will go a long way in enhancing quality and effective implementation of the NACECE curriculum.

The remuneration of ECD teachers should also be improved to motivate them develop materials. The study found out that due to poor remuneration of teachers, there was a high turnover of trained teachers, which lead to teachers manning large classes. Some ECD teachers preferred maintaining large classes because it meant higher pay. This high child-teacher ratio impedes the implementation of the NACECE curriculum. This scenario found in most ECD centres can only be improved if the government can employ ECD teachers. This in essence will improve the implementation of the NACECE curriculum.

The ECD guidelines were seen as an important resource for effective implementation of NACECE curriculum, since they carry the curriculum package required for delivery to the child. This study found out that most schools lacked this important resource; other schools were using old guidelines dating from 1997, while KIE had published revised ones from 2001. The DICECE programme officer corroborated this fact and indicated that, for schools to have the guidelines they had to purchase from the curriculum development centre in KIE. For effective implementation of the curriculum, ECD guidelines should be supplied to schools by KIE just like other syllabus in the other sub-sectors of education mainstream; that is, the primary and secondary sub-sectors. In general, the study found that the lack of adequate materials and facilities was ranked by the sampled population as the most serious problem affecting implementation of NACECE curriculum.

Support by Education Managers

The findings from the study established that ECD teachers did not receive adequate support from education managers to enable them implement the NACECE curriculum. The majority of the teachers in the sampled schools indicated they needed more help from educational managers, since the help provided was not adequate; yet without adequate support, very little can be achieved.

For effective supervision and support, it is important that education managers be knowledgeable, aware and must understand the curriculum and process of implementation. It is through such understanding that the manager would be able to organize and direct the necessary curricular deliberations on the successful implementation.

This, however, was not the case with most of the education managers in Kesses Division. This may be attributed to several other factors. One being the attitude of education managers who regard ECD education as not being as important as the primary education. These officers, thus need to be sensitized and retrained in order for them to assist in the implementation of the NACECE curriculum. The head teachers, being the school-based managers, need to be motivated through inclusion of ECD centres into their responsibility allowance package. The importance of the role of management in the implementation of innovations is highly understood. It, therefore, implies that if the necessary support is provided by the education managers and all other factors that have been identified are dealt with, then the implementation of NACECE curriculum is bound to improve.

Attitudes of Parents and Teachers

Parents in Kesses Division of Uasin Gishu County have a negative attitude towards ECD education as seen in their irregular visits to the ECD centres to check on their children's progress. The payment of levies to the pre-school is also very poor; they also do not actively participate in matters relating to pre-school despite the government having provided free primary education. In fact, free primary education contributed to their poor attitude to pre-school, since some parents preferred their children to remain at home and join primary school when they are old enough (age seven). Parents should be encouraged to participate in pre-school activities and be empowered on issues related to child growth and development. They must be willing to initiate feeding programmes in the pre-schools as a sign of positive attitudes and support for schools.

As for the teachers' attitude, the study found that teachers are positively inclined towards supporting the NACECE curriculum. Due to the partnership policy adopted by the government on the provision of ECD services, there is need for a forum where parents can be sensitized on their roles and be made to understand the needs and goals of early childhood education so that they do not view play activity as a waste of time.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lack of adequate facilities and the unforeseen negative impact of the implementation of free primary education are key factors hampering the effective implementation of NACECE curriculum. Furthermore, the lack of motivation of teachers due to poor pay and the non-payment of responsibility package to head teachers further affect successful

implementation of NACECE curriculum. This scenario is worsened by high turnover of trained teachers and the high children-teacher ratio. In addition, lack of policy also has contributed to poor implementation of the curriculum and lack of linkages by service providers. As such, much needs to be done to overcome the identified barriers that hinder the successful implementation of the NACECE curriculum.

The government should extend free education policy to ECD and increase its budgetary allocation to the sub-sector to improve on the existing facilities. The quality assurance and standards officers (QASO) should also ensure quality service in the ECD through regular supervision of the pre-school centres. They should ensure that all ECD centres adhere to the basic requirements for the establishment of pre-schools as set by the Ministry of Education.

In addition, linkage should be established to ensure that all service providers of early childhood education give quality services appropriate to the principles of child growth and development; so that parents do not over demand on academic basis.

There should be both large and small interior units, generous outside areas and plenty of storage space for equipment and materials. Large areas with interior and exterior are needed because young children are naturally active and need spacious area for flexibility. Large areas always provide as much as flexibility as possible for the staff and the helpers to work with small groups on different activities at the same time.

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