



Teachers' Perception of Thematic Intergrated Approach in Teaching Learners in ECD in Wareng Sub-County

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ABSTRACT

The paper sought to establish teachers' perception of thematic intergrated approach in teaching learners in ECD in in Wareng Sub County. The study adopted the use of quantitative and qualitative research methodology (mixed approach of research methodology). This study was carried out in Wareng Sub-County in Uasin Gishu County. The research therefore sampled 43 Head Teachers and 85 ECD teachers ECD teachers since the larger the sample the higher the reliability. Stratified sampling technique was used to select the types of respondents in schools whereby 30% of the target population was selected as the sample size. The data collection instruments employed were; questionnaire, interview schedule and observation checklist. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and measure of central tendency (modes standard deviation and means) qualitative data was analyzed in tabular form. the study revealed that the school provides learners with age appropriate assignments and that the school provides learners with appropriate learning activities. In addition, the learners are provided with thematic activities that make the learner engage in authentic communication, the learners in these schools are provided with self-initiated learning activities that make them learn experimentally and the school provides learning materials like books and play materials to the learners. The study made the following recommendations; the head teachers need to ensure that the schools provide curriculum centered books that are appropriate for the learners' respective levels and the school should provide learning that accommodates individual learners and abilities.

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Introduction

According to Malaysia Curriculum Development Centre (2003) thematic approach is an effort to integrate knowledge, skills and values through learning and creative thinking using the theme. Teachers should encourage pupils to participate actively and physically in the process as a form of natural learning. Teachers should try to provide meaningful learning experience to the learners so that they do not only have fun but also show and display an interest in searching further from their own information. Learners should also be given an opportunity to be independent, explore and experience learning themselves. Thematic learning process will help learners to think creatively and critically. Thematic approach is the meaningful learning for learners because they learn to do independently. Learners with lower achievement always think that learning is difficult to be understood, feel anxiously to face teachers and friends and feel unhappy and embarrassed when they are in schools (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2002).

Since the inception of education in America, there have been attempts to restructure and reform the American traditional educational system. However, beginning in the 1960s, the idea of educational change started gaining momentum. 'Radical' educators understood that, even in the 1960s, the traditional system of education in America was failing its students.

They began the modern movement of educational reform that is still taking place today (Miller, 2000).

An ECEC policy began to emerge in Uganda in 1993 in response to the Education Policy Review Commission Report, which observed a lack of government control over the quality of the curriculum, teaching methods, facilities, age of entry, quality of teachers and pre-school charges levied (Uganda EFA Assessment Report, 2000). The report set out recommendations and guidelines to be followed to achieve EFA goals and targets. Since then, the government has committed itself to seeing early childhood education as crucial to the holistic development of the individual, a foundation for basic education, and the right of every child in the country and not the privilege of a few.

The standard guidelines for preschool education in Kenya recommend child-centred methods for children to enjoy their learning (Republic of Kenya, 2006). However, one contentious issue facing some preschool children in Kenya today, especially in urban centres, is an increasing focus on academic skills (Mbugua, 2004). Part of the focus on academic skills includes holiday tuition, even for preschool children (Waithaka, 2006). Although there seems to be no research to indicate the extent of bias for teachers to focus on academic skills, a study by Ng'asike (2004) might suggest that the problem exists and could be spreading. Therefore, the current study is in part an effort to explore children's educational experiences.

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Statement of the problem

According to Uwezo Report (2014) on learners' performance in primary schools, learners were asked to recognize number and perform basic calculations; addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Less than one in three children were able to pass the Swahili test (32%) and numeracy tests (29%). Only one in six passed the English test (16%). Less than one in six passed both the literacy and numeracy tests (15%). In the present-day world the statistics from the Uwezo report of 2014 is worrying it is a clear indication that the ECD centers are not living up to their purpose.

Few studies have been done on the issue thematic approach. For example, Varun & Kalpana (2016) did a study on impact of thematic approach on communication skills in preschool at my sore district in the state of karnataka, India. Kon & Abdullah, Mohd, (2012) did a study on teachers' understanding and practice towards thematic approach in teaching integrated living skills (ILS) in Malaysia. Okoro, and Okoro, (2016) did a study on teachers' understanding and use of thematic approach in teaching and learning of social studies in rivers state. Chepkorir, Chepsiror and Too (2014) did a study on Resource Capacities Supporting thematic approach in teaching ECDE Centres in Uasin Gishu County. Ong'ong'a, (2007) did a study on selected factors influencing use of thematic approach by pre-school teachers in Kasarani Division, Nairobi Province. These findings dwelt on other aspects of thematic approach other than how integrated thematic approach has influenced learning at ECD centers. This has created a gap that the study intends to fill by carrying out a study on the use of thematic integrated approach on the development for primary learners in ECD centers in Wareng Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County.

Literature review

There have been studies done globally and locally on the aspect of thematic approach in teaching and learning of ECDE learners. For example, Varun & Kalpana (2016) did a study on impact of thematic approach on communication skills in preschool at my score district in the state of karnataka, India. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the thematic approach group and the traditional skill approach group students on post test score. The study suggested the importance of thematic approach to improve communication skills in early preschools. Kon & Abdullah, Mohd, (2012) in their study on teachers' understanding and practice towards thematic approach in teaching integrated living skills (ILS) in Malaysia found out that ILS teacher were often using thematic approach in teaching Integrated Living Skills.

In addition, Mohammed (2015) in a study on concerns of teachers and administrators regarding the methodology of the thematic integrated curriculum at the standard one level at a primary school in trinidad & Tobago found out that teachers and administrators shared the same concerns of time, resources, structure of the school, confidence in content areas, collaboration, and training and support. Varun (2014) found out in a study on Thematic Approach for Effective Communication in ECCE that Designing and implementing integrated thematic units for young children is a developmentally appropriate practice which is supported by both brain research and the psychology of learning. Thematic Approach gives the wide opportunity to the child to express themselves more according to age on set (Varun, 2014).

Moreover Okoro, and Okoro, (2016) did a study on teachers' understanding and use of thematic approach in teaching and learning of social studies in rivers state.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made: Special attention should be given to teachers' education by all stakeholders; Government should employ competent staff as well as funded programmes to enable the teachers select and use learning activities/approaches that will provide opportunities for the learner to concretize learnt concept. Regular symposium should also be organized for teachers to update themselves of the current trends in education.

In Kenya Chepkorir, Chepsiror and Too (2014) did a study on Resource Capacities Supporting thematic approach in teaching ECDE Centres in Uasin Gishu County and found out that 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 been in a position to advise the teachers concerning the approach appropriately. The study recommended that ECDCs be equipped with adequate and developmentally appropriate materials and resources (Chepkorir, *et al*, 2014). Ong'ong'a, (2007) did a study on selected factors influencing use of thematic approach by pre-school teachers in Kasarani Division, Nairobi Province. The results showed that teacher academic level and the type of training programme a teacher underwent; related significantly the use of Thematic Approach

The literature reviewed reveals that life skills curriculum has been introduced in the Kenyan school system. KIE has also developed syllabus, teachers' handbooks and training manuals. However, there is limited information on whether teaching of life skills has been fully embraced at the various levels of the school system and specifically in pre-primary schools. The literature has also revealed that a number of factors must interact in a dynamic way for effective implementation of a curriculum. These factors relate to initiation of the curriculum, adoption process, school related variables, as well as variables that relate to the teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted the use of quantitative and qualitative research methodology (mixed approach of research methodology). The researcher adopted descriptive survey method for the study. Kothari, (2003) describes descriptive survey design as a method used to collect detailed description of existing phenomena with the view of employing data to justify current conditions and practices or to make more intelligent plans for improving them. It was concerned with finding out the who, what, where and how of a phenomenon which is the concern of the study (Orodho, 2003). This design was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to assess the use of thematic integrated approach on the development for primary learners in early childhood education ECD Centers in Wareng Sub-County Uasin Gishu County.

The use of descriptive plan played an important role in describing the status of the utilization of thematic integrated teaching approach in ECD as it greatly increased their knowledge about what happens in schools. The design was intended to give relevant statistically significant information for policy implementation. A large number of respondents were involved to make the study fit descriptive survey study design. The design enabled the researcher to collect data from various ECD centers in Wareng Sub-County. The plan was also adopted because the people to be studied were too large to be observed directly.

Study Area

A research site is defined as the single organization/area responsible for conducting the research at a Particular locality (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2009). This study was carried out in Wareng Sub-County in Uasin Gishu County, in North Rift Kenya. It extends between longitudes 340 50' and 340 57' East and latitude of 00 3' South to 00 1' North and its surroundings enjoy the best weather which is relatively moderate to medium high in terms of rainfall and temperatures. Wareng Sub-County was of interest due to its proximity and the researcher's knowledge of the entire sub-county in geographical detail. The County was selected to establish the status of the application of thematic teaching approach in ECD centers following the Uwezo Report (2012) which stated that more than two out of every three pupils enrolled at Standard 3 level in East Africa fail to pass basic test in English, Kiswahili or numeracy set at the Standard 2 level and improvements in basic literacy and numeracy occur only slowly as children progress through the education system, implying that the quality of learning remains slow throughout primary school. Few studies based on status of the application of thematic teaching approach in ECD centers has been conducted in the area, therefore necessitating the researcher to undertake the study in the area.

Target population

The target population was 426 comprising of 142 head teachers and 284 ECD teachers as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Target Population.

Strata	Target Population
ECD teachers	284
Head Teachers	142
Total	426

Source: Wareng Sub County Education Office (2015)

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) sampling is a careful selection of sub group from the accessible population so as to be a representative of the whole population with relevant characteristics. By selecting some of the elements in the population, conclusion about the entire population can be drawn. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) about 10 percent of the target population is enough for a descriptive study but according to Best and Kahn (2011), the best sample population is that which covers at least 30 percent of the total population.

The research therefore sampled 43 Head Teachers and 85 ECD teachers since the larger the sample the higher the reliability. Stratified sampling technique was used to select the types of respondents in schools whereby 30% of the target population was selected as the sample size. The target group was stratified into three categories that is, head teachers, teachers and ECD Parent representative.

Table 2. Sample size.

Strata	Target Population	Sampling Procedure	Sample Size
ECD teachers	284	284×30%	85
Head Teachers	142	142×30%	43
Total	568		128

The method was aimed at ensuring the researcher obtains opinion about the use of thematic integrated approach on the development for primary learners in early childhood education ECD Centers in Wareng Sub-County in Uasin Gishu County. This is shown in table 2.

Research Instruments

Questionnaire

According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), the questionnaire is an instrument suitable for obtaining information from a large group of respondents. During the study, the data was collected from various schools over a short period. According to Kothari (2008), questionnaires are usually free from interview bias as the answers are absolutely in the respondent's opinion and view.

The questionnaire choice was based on the fact that they are free from bias as the respondents gives well thought out answers. It was appropriate for literate, educated and co-operative respondents where in this case all respondents in the study are considered meeting this requirement. The researcher conducted closed ended questionnaires for the headteachers and parent representatives as shown in Appendices I and II respectively. It permitted the examiner to sketch conclusions based on comparisons made from the responses.

Interview Schedule

Orodho (2008), postulates that a lot of citizens are eager to converse orally than in script and they would supply information more willingly and fully than on a questionnaire. The advantages of using a prearranged dialogue were the level of incomplete questionnaires were reduced. It ensured that answers can be reliably aggregated and that comparison can be made. A prearranged interview plan was used to gather information from the teachers as summarized in Appendix III. The interview schedule design was structured according to research objectives.

Observation Checklist

Observation checklist helped to ensure consistency and completeness in carrying out a task. Borg and Gall (2003) suggest when observing classrooms that the disruption caused by an observer be considered. However, descriptive and reflective field notes were taken immediately after the walk-through of each classroom. The data collection was made by observation of status and availability of the teaching and learning materials. The participating teachers were informed a week prior to observation. Each item on the checklist was observed and recorded.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Kothari (2004) this step is key in investigative and social science explore in guaranteeing that all pertinent information was caught for making correlation and dissection. After all data had been put together, the researcher conducted information cleaning, which involved classification of un finished or inaccurate answers and corrections to develop the eminence of the answers. The research yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and measure of central tendency (modes standard deviation and means) qualitative data was analyzed in tabular form. Tabular analysis is commonly used in analysis of qualitative research (Braun, Virginia; Victoria Clarke, 2006). It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording Pattern (or "themes") within data (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksmann, 1997). Themes are pattern across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question (Fereday, Jennifer; Elimear Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The themes become the categories for analysis. After the analysis, data was presented in frequency tables.

Findings

Contributions of thematic approach on the teaching of learners in ECDE centers

This section tackles the objective on the contributions of child-centered approach on teaching of learners in ECDE centers in Wareng Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County. The results were in form of Likert scale whereby 5.0-4.51 represented strongly agree, 4.5-3.51 represented agree, 3.5-2.51 represented neutral, 2.5-1.51 represented disagree and 1.5-1.0 represented strongly disagree.

Head teachers' perception on contributions of thematic approach on the teaching of learners in ECDE centers

This section answers the question on the contribution of child-centred approach on teaching of learners in ECD centers in Wareng Sub-County Uasin Gishu County. The results were in likert scale format whereby 5.0 -4.51 represents strongly agreed and 4.5-3.51 represent agreed, 3.5-2.51 represent neutral, 2.5-1.51 represent disagreement and 1.5- 1.0 represent strong disagreement.

Table 3. Head teachers' agreement level with statements on contributions of child centered approach on the teaching of learners in ECDE centers.

Statements	Mean	S.dev
The school provides learners with appropriate learning activities.	4.7	0.1
The school provides learners with age appropriate assignments	4.8	0.7
The learners are provided with thematic activities that make the learner engage in authentic communication	4.1	0.3
My school provides learning materials like books and play materials to the learners	3.8	0.3
The learners in my school are provided with self-initiated learning activities that make them learn experimentally	4.0	0.6
Average	4.28	

According to the findings indicated in Table 4.8, the head teachers strongly agreed that the school provides learners with age appropriate assignments and the school provides learners with appropriate learning activities as shown by a mean of 4.8 and 4.7 respectively. In addition, the head teachers agreed that the learners are provided with thematic activities that make the learner engage in authentic communication, the learners in my school are provided with self-initiated learning activities that make them learn experimentally and the school provides learning materials like books and play materials to the learners as shown by a mean of 4.1, 4.0 and 3.8 respectively. On average the finding shows that most of the headteachers agreed that child-centered approach influence the teaching of learners in ECDE centers because learners are provided with appropriate learning activities, age appropriate assignments, thematic activities and self-initiated learning activities that make them learn experimentally.

This is in agreement with Andieme (2016) whose study dwelt on the effect of child centred methods on teaching and learning of science activities in pre-schools in west pokot county, Kenya. Andieme (2016) found out that there existed significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) between four child centered approaches and pupils teaching and learning of science in public early childhood education centres. For instance, use of child discovery ($r = 0.370$ and $p = 0.001$) and activity based approaches ($r = 0.360$ and $p = 0.001$) had higher correlations compared to child interest ($r = 0.215$ and $p = 0.007$) and child needs approaches ($r = 0.181$ and $p = 0.024$).

The study concluded that teachers' use of child-centred approaches affected pupils' acquisition of science skills in

schools (Andieme, 2016). In addition, Elvis (2013) found out that the mean scores results demonstrate that teacher-student interactive method was the most effective teaching method, followed by student-centered method while the teacher-centered approach was the least effective teaching method.

Conclusions

The perception of teachers on thematic approach on the teaching of learners in ECDE centers in Wareng Sub-County, the study revealed that the school provides learners with age appropriate assignments and that the school provides learners with appropriate learning activities. In addition, the learners are provided with thematic activities that make the learner engage in authentic communication, the learners in these schools are provided with self-initiated learning activities that make them learn experimentally and the school provides learning materials like books and play materials to the learners.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations;

- The head teachers need to ensure that the schools provide curriculum centered books that are appropriate for the learners' respective levels.
- The school should provide learning that accommodates individual learners and abilities

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