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Challenges facing teachers in the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education in high schools in Kakamega County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Life Skills-Based Education (LSE) is a subject newly incepted into the new curriculum Kenyan High school curriculum. The subject is meant to enhance the learner's holistic growth in aspects such as their relationships with others, understanding of self and critical thinking in decision making. This study was set to investigate the challenges faced by teacher counselors in the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education in Kakamega County. The objectives of the study were; to establish teachers' personal capability in handling the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education, and to establish the challenges facing the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education. The study sampled 27 high schools from the county. The study design was a descriptive survey. Data collection was made possible by the use of questionnaires and document analysis. Data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics and was presented by way of pie chart and tables. The findings of the study indicated that indeed teacher counsellors faced a number of challenges such as lack of adequate training, less time allocation for syllabus coverage, heavy workload in other teaching subjects and inadequate teaching and learning materials. The study recommended that the government organize to build capacity for the build Life Skills-Based Education teachers, employ more teachers to ease workload and put in evaluative measures for the subject so that it is taken seriously by both the teachers and the students.

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Introduction

Young people and children face are many challenges which include conflicts, violence, and gender and ethnic discrimination among others. Life Skills-Based Education (LSE) is being adopted as a means to empower young people in challenging situations. Life Skills-Based Education refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors. It is also a critical element in UNICEF's definition of quality education (UNICEF, 2012). Initiatives to develop and implement Life Skills-Based Education in schools have been undertaken in many countries around the world. The need for Life Skills-Based Education is highlighted, directly and indirectly in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and a number of international recommendations.

Life Skills-Based Education was introduced into Kenyan Secondary and Primary Schools curriculum in the year 2008 to equip students and teachers with the adaptive abilities and positive behavior that would enable them deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (KIE, 2008). Sexuality is one of the key areas of Life Skills-Based Education, a major challenge to the students as they undergo developmental milestones. Although the Kenyan Government has declined to introduce sexuality education in schools, there is need for advocacy for comprehensive sexuality education in schools to equip the young pupils and students with knowledge and skills to make responsible choices in their lives particularly where there is greater exposure to sexually

explicit materials through internet and other media. Furthermore, effective sexuality education can provide young people with age appropriate, culturally relevant and scientifically accurate information.

For this to bear fruit, implementing a Life Skills-Based Education programme would require the introduction of teaching methods that may be new to teachers, and the success of the programme will depend very much on the availability of in-service training, as well as efforts to include training in participatory learning methods in teacher training colleges.

The proper teaching of Life Skills-Based Education will require input from the school and education authorities, for teacher training and the development of teaching manuals, as well as for the ongoing support of teaching programmes once they are in place. This investment is worthwhile considering that the potential gains of Life Skills-Based Education are so far reaching.

Apart from the impact on child health, there may be other benefits for the school as an institution. For example, evaluative studies of Life Skills-Based Education suggest that the methods used can help to improve teacher and pupil relationships (Michelli, 2012) and there are indications that Life Skills-Based Education lessons are associated with fewer reports of classroom behavior problems.

There are also research indications of improved academic performance as a result of teaching Life Skills-Based Education (Alison, 2006). Other positive effects include improved school attendance (Ruscoe, 2005) less bullying, fewer referrals to specialist support services and better

relationships between children and their parents. This study envisaged that if students in secondary schools in Kakamega Central Sub-county were equipped with Life Skills then the problem of high dropout rates and poor academic performance would be curbed. This would only happen if the Life Skills-Based Education lessons were taught as timetabled.

A Life Skills-Based Education programme will have to be proven worthy of the resources allocated to it. Process and outcome evaluation studies should be carried out, and results shared with all the relevant decision makers that could affect the future of the Life Skills-Based Education programme. A programme that has a component of ongoing assessment of its use and impact offers scope for keeping in touch with changing priorities, and is more likely to be modified and maintained over time. Well designed, tested and delivered Life Skills-Based Education programmes can achieve much in helping children and adolescents become more responsible, healthy and resilient both during childhood and as adults (Calderon, 2007).

Statement of the problem

A number of teachers in secondary schools have been given the responsibility to teach Life Skills-Based Education to their students, it might occur that little is being done. The Ministry of education hopes to achieve the objective of instilling in the students values that will enable them cope with life's never ending complexities. This has resulted in the introduction of the Life Skills-Based Education lessons in the secondary school curriculum. The study therefore aimed at identifying the challenges facing the teachers on this new task given to them by the Ministry of Education. Is the teaching of this new subject worth the efforts by the ministry? Does the ministry have to go an extra mile to ensure that the programme bears fruit? The study presumed that if Life Skills-Based Education was taught as expected by the Ministry of Education, then the skills acquired would help curb the dropout rates and improve academic performance. The skills taught in Life Skills-Based Education would enable a learner be able to understand themselves and their environment better. The student would truly benefit from the study therefore aimed at identifying the challenges facing the teacher counsellors and possible solutions to the problems faced so as to check on dropout rates and poor academic performance in the study area.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to establish the challenges facing teachers in the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education in high schools in Kakamega County, Kenya.

Literature Review

The Concept of Life Skills-Based Education

Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO, 2010). They represent the psycho-social skills that determine valued behavior and include reflective skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking, to personal skills such as self-awareness, and to interpersonal skills.

Practicing life skills leads to qualities such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, competencies to take action and generate change, and to capabilities to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be.

Life skills are thus distinctly different from physical or perceptual motor skills, such as practical or health skills, as well as from livelihood skills, such as crafts, money management and entrepreneurial skills. Health and livelihood education however, can be designed to be complementary to Life Skills-Based Education, and vice versa.

The benefits of Life Skills-Based Education are diverse. Life Skills-Based Education is the study of abilities for adaptive and positive behavior change that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Teaching of Life Skills-Based Education is aimed at equipping the learner with psychosocial competencies that would help him/her make informed decisions, solve problems, think creatively and critically, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and manage his/her life in a healthy and productive manner (KIE, 2008).

Core Living Values in the Life Skills-Based Education Curriculum are tailor made to suit the needs of the secondary student in Kenya.

Values are the principles and beliefs that influence the behavior and way of life of a group of people or community. The things, ideas, beliefs and principles that are of worth to a person shape his or her values (KIE, 2008). Students behave in a given way because of the values they hold about various issues in life. Sometimes these depend on their socialization at home and at schools.

These play a great role in determining their behavior and who they are generally. Suffice to say, this has a big impact on their academic performance.

Teacher Capability in Teaching Life Skills-Based Education

On a positive side, a curriculum with innovative instructional practices is enriched by the creativity and imagination of the good teacher. Negatively, it is vitiated by the limitations of poorly trained teachers. Therefore, however noble, sophisticated or enlightened proposals for educational change and improvement might be, they come to nothing if teachers do not adopt them in their own classrooms and translate them into effective classroom practice. Teacher participation and co-operation are essential for any successful innovation. Malm and Lofgren (2006) believe that the quality of teachers is one of the factors that affect levels of achievement in basic learning. For them, it is important, therefore, that teachers of high quality are produced. They argue that the teachers' performance heavily depends on the professional training, attitudes, academic background, education infrastructure of the institution, the type of leadership, the tradition of the institution including induction and staff development programs that are in place at a given time.

According to the Ministry of Education in Kenya, the teachers should be qualified and experienced in their disciplines and well informed in current research findings and any emerging trends in teacher education. The Ministry further points out that in-service education should continue to be enhanced and the courses planned in such a way as to benefit the greatest number of teachers. The aim of in-service courses, according to the Ministry, should be to improve the teachers' qualifications; to enlarge the scope of their work and to bring them up to date on new innovations and development in content and methods in their respective subjects. Harley, Barasa, Betram, Mattson, and Timm (2000) add that professionally qualified teachers are critical to the

provision and maintenance of quality and relevant education. Kimbui (2005) argues that if new strategies are to be introduced and sustained, this will mean making a deliberate effort of changing those involved in developing and implementing them, in particular, teachers. He strongly feels that there is need to intensify in-service programs for teacher education so as to assist the teachers adopt and adapt to the new ways of carrying out their duties.

Mbabazi (2013) points out that initial teacher training is not adequate for continued professional development. There is, therefore, need for regular in-service training for all teachers since they operate in a dynamic socio-cultural setting, which is subject to change. According to him, teachers should be given opportunities to acquire additional skills that would enable them to adapt to the changing environments within their profession and in society as a whole. The trend has been for teachers to expect centralized training programs. However, current trends globally are for teachers to be encouraged to take more responsibility in identifying their own training needs. The current study set to establish whether teachers in schools had received any training on how to handle Life Skills-Based Education Lessons, apart from the basic counselling skills learnt in their psychology classes in college.

Adequate prior preparation before a teacher goes to class leads to good performance by the students. This promotes sequential presentation of concepts by the teacher to the learners. Always, prior preparation by the teachers leads to systematic delivery of concepts to pupils and enhances performance. Therefore, teachers' prior preparation if not sufficient could be a factor leading to poor performance by the students. This study envisaged that since Life Skills-Based Education was not examinable, the students ended up looking down upon the subject. Both individual teacher characteristics and collective or collegial factors play roles in determining implementation (Fullan, 2001). Some teachers, depending on their previous experiences and stage of career, are more self-actualized and have a greater sense of efficacy, which leads them to take action and persist in the effort required to bring about successful implementation. Fullan further states that since interaction with others influences what one does, relationships with other teachers is a critical variable. Change involves learning something new and therefore interaction is the primary basis for social learning. Mbabazi (2013) is also of the view that teachers constitute one of the most important groups of people who play an essential role in the realization of the country's educational goals.

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The major purpose of this design is the description of the state of affairs as it exists. This design is an important way for researchers to study relationships among variables and ways that attitudes and behaviors change over time (Stewart, 2004).

Sampling and Study Sample

The researcher used simple random sampling to pick two teachers who teach life skill-based education per school from 27 high schools in Kakamega County, hence 54 teachers and one principal per school. This made a total of 81 respondents from the schools.

Instrumentation

Teacher's Questionnaire

The researcher used a teacher's questionnaire as a tool to collect data.

The respondents responded to questions independently. The questionnaire was meant to establish the teacher demographic characteristics, their perceptions on teaching of Life Skills-Based Education, their capabilities and challenges faced in the teaching of Life Skills-Based Education.

Document Analysis

The study used document analysis to check on Life Skills-Based Education records such as timetables, teachers' workload, and record of work covered, lesson plans and schemes of work from the respective schools sampled for the study. This information was used to establish teacher perceptions and challenges in teaching Life Skills-Based Education.

Data Presentation, Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

Gender of the Respondents

Concerning gender, the responses revealed that of the 81 respondents who participated in the study, 43% were male while 57% were female. Table 1 presents this information.

Table 1. Gender of Respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	35	43
Female	46	57
Total	81	100

In studies that deal with demography, issues on gender become quite significant. In this study, the gender question was significant in that the females are more comfortable with guidance and counseling compared to males who view it as a woman's role. It is a well-known fact that men are often more reluctant than women to go into counseling or therapy. Sometimes they can think of counseling as a 'female' activity, and this is reinforced because fewer men train as counselors than women; making it a female dominated profession (New focus-therapy, 2014). Therefore, this could explain the larger number of females taking up Life Skilled-Based Education classes. Therefore, the percentage of females in the study (57%) and that of men (43%) will validate the question of challenges facing the teacher counselors in the teaching of Life Skilled-Based Education. The participation by both males and females helped the researcher to capture views that may be influenced by gender.

Age of the Respondents

The second feature in the demographic survey of the respondents was age. This was done to establish whether age of respondents had any bearing on teacher capability in teaching Life Skilled-Based Education and whether age had an effect on the challenges teachers faced in teaching Life Skilled-Based Education. Table 2 presents these findings.

Table 2. Frequency distribution on age of respondents.

Age bracket	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-35	11	14
36-50	33	41
above 50	37	45
Total	81	100

The findings indicated that most respondents were aged 35 and above hence able to handle learners from a parental viewpoint. Further, that there were respondents across all the age brackets enabled the researcher to obtain an all-round picture of the status of Life Skilled-Based Education with respect to age of respondents.

Teaching experience

Teaching experience has a direct bearing on the experiences of a teacher in relation to handling learners in the specific area of jurisdiction.

Mullins (2002) notes that experience make a teacher sharper and better, just like the older the wine, the sweeter it becomes. He further adds that employees with less years of experience can equally speak out on the strength and weaknesses of an organization, given that they still have zeal, fresh from college and are eager to see things done. This study sought to establish the number of years that teachers, principals and education officers had served in their current capacities. Figure 1 presents this information.

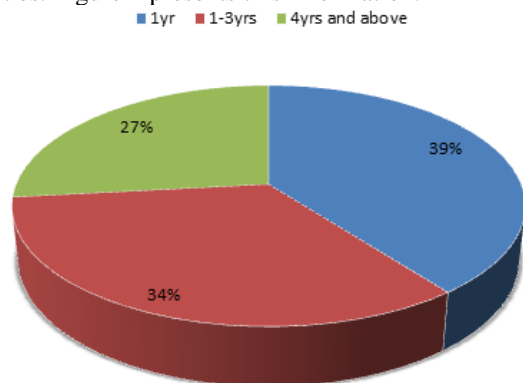


Figure 1. Years of Experience of Respondents.

Figure 1 indicates that the highest percentage of respondents had 1 year of experience, followed by respondents with 1-3 years of experience at 34% and finally the respondents with 4 years and above made 27%. The findings indicate that the researcher was able to gather information across the board from teachers who were experienced to those least experienced on the challenges facing teacher counsellors in the teaching of Life Skilled-Based Education.

Challenges facing Life Skilled-Based Education teachers

The researcher sought to establish what challenges were interfering with the teachers' personal capability to handle Life Skilled-Based Education classes. From the findings in table 3, it is evident that teacher counselors were not comfortable in teaching Life Skilled-Based Education. The most challenging for the respondents was the mode of lesson allocation 76 (92%). The respondents felt that the lessons were allocated unfairly and this de motivated the teachers who took up the classes as they felt incapacitated to handle them. Teacher workload was also another significant challenge for the teacher counselors at 74 (89%). This, combined with the fact that time allocated for the lesson was limited is sufficient for the study to conclude that the teacher counselors in the study area faced challenges that hindered them from teaching Life Skilled-Based Education.

Table 3. Challenges Facing Life Skilled-Based Education Teachers.

Challenges facing teachers of Life Skilled-Based Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less time to teach/ 40 minutes per week only	64	77
Mode of lesson allocation de motivates the teacher	76	92
Adequacy of teaching and learning resources is below teacher expectation	46	55
Values of the community defy those taught in LSE	19	23
Teacher workload/ teacher student ratio make it difficult for syllabus coverage in life skills education	74	89

Non examinable nature of Life skills education affects attitude and commitment to teaching life skills education	78	94
Lack of in service for LSE teachers to enable them cover the syllabus adequately	68	82
Total	83	100

Ways of enhancing teacher capability in teaching Life Skilled-Based Education

The study having established that indeed there were a number of challenges facing the teaching of Life Skilled-Based Education, there was need to consequently identify possible solutions to the challenges faced. The teacher respondents suggested that teachers of life skills education should not be allocated other teaching subjects apart from Life Skilled-Based Education to ease the workload problem. The government should in-service teachers on the Life Skilled-Based Education syllabus by taking them through a counseling course before they handle the subject. The evaluation aspect missing in the Life Skilled-Based Education syllabus should be made such that there is a scheme used by the teacher to check on the learners' progress after having undergone Life Skilled-Based Education. The teaching and learning materials need to be availed to the teachers in good time and the ministry to recommend the right books among the many available on the market. The communities around the school be sensitized on the changing needs of today's' adolescent, hence the value in teaching the Life Skilled-Based Education syllabus.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

Summary

The study established that there were a number of challenges facing teachers of Life Skilled-Based Education in the teaching of the subject. The most significant of the challenges was heavy workload and so this resulted in poor quality teaching. The mode of Life Skilled-Based Education lesson allocation to teachers was also a challenge given their heavy workload. The lack of proper training was also a challenge for the teachers. The time allocated for the lessons was insufficient for adequate syllabus coverage in Life Skilled-Based Education. Since the subject was non-examinable, the attitudes of the teachers were negative, and so this affected the teaching and learning of the subject. The final challenge was the inadequacy of the teaching and learning materials for Life Skilled-Based Education which made learning difficult.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following conclusion was made. The teachers have little capacity to handle the Life Skilled-Based Education because of inadequate training, heavy workload and inadequate teaching and learning facilities for Life Skilled-Based Education.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since the study found out that the majority of teachers in sampled schools have a heavy workload, which negatively affects the teacher capability to teach Life Skilled-Based Education, the study recommends that the government should recruit more teachers to ease the workload of Life Skilled-Based Education teachers. This will safeguard the quality of Life Skilled-Based Education classes offered in public high schools.

2. Since it was found that teacher capability influenced teaching of life skills education to a great extent, the study recommended that the Ministry of Education should review the curriculum being used in the teacher training colleges with a view of making it suit the teacher counselors by including details in the training of counseling. This would meet the demands of the teacher of Life Skilled-Based Education in the field.

3. The number of lessons allocated for Life Skilled-Based Education be revised upwards to cater for the wide syllabus.

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