



Research Paper

Parental Participation and Achievement of Pupils In Environmental Activities at Lower Primary Schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Parental participation is an important link in skills achievement by pupils learning Environmental Activities at lower primary schools in Kenya. Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and Ministry of education (MoE) encourage Parental participation for effective and efficient teaching and learning of various environmental activities skills for holistic development of pupils as members of society. Environmental Activities encompasses sub-strands such as social interaction skills, Entrepreneurship skills, and agriculture and soil conservation skills. This paper reports findings on parental participation and acquisition of **social interaction skills**. The study was informed by Systems theory. The study was conducted in three counties of Busia, Bungoma and Trans Nzoia, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample of the study was 1076 participants comprising 105 teachers and 25 Parents' Association representatives (PAs). Random sampling was used to select schools while purposive sampling obtained teachers and PAs. Questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers and interview guide was used with parents. The study yielded qualitative data that was analyzed thematically and quantitative data which was analyzed using IBMSPSS 28.0 statistics software. The study found out that Parents were not participating fully in assisting pupils in take home assignments aimed at acquisition of social interaction skills. It was found that majority of the respondents (52.17%) did not confirm parental participation using the required ways of assisting pupils in their take home assignments in social interaction skills. The study recommends further analysis of context to understand the factors that influenced the findings.

Key Words: Parental Participation, Achievement of Pupils, Environmental Activities, Competency Based Curriculum.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental Activities Study is an integrated Learning area comprising of Science, Social and Agricultural Activities. It is taught at lower primary school level of the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) education cycle. Every learner shall transition through a minimum of 17 levels, every level is a period of 1 year. The KICD has grouped them into 4 general categories: Early Year Education (Pre-Primary & Lower Primary), Middle School (Upper Primary & Lower Secondary), Senior School (Upper Secondary) and Tertiary Education (TVET or University).

In CBC, subjects have been replaced with what is referred to as Learning Areas. What was once called Topics are now known as Strands, sub-topics have also been replaced with Sub-Strands. CBC learners of the Lower Primary have a wide variety of learning areas: English Language Activities, Kiswahili Language Activities, Mathematics Activities, Environment Activities, Art & Craft, Music, Hygiene & Nutrition Activities, Movement Activities, Christian Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education and Hindu Religious Education.

There is Competency Based Assessment (CBA) which is a systematic process of gathering a learner's knowledge, skills and attitudes. Competency Based Assessment (CBC) focuses on assessment rather than examination. At Early Year Education (EYE) grade level, Pre-Primary 1 (PP1) and Pre-Primary 2 (PP2) learners are assessed internally by the school then transit to the Lower Primary Grade 1 and Grade 2. Pupils do not have

a national assessment. At Grade 3, learners take a school-based assessment but will not be used for ranking or placement after which they all proceed to the Upper Primary (KICD, 2017).

Scholars trace the idea of the competency-based curriculum to 1957 in the United States of America (USA). It developed as a reaction to the Soviet Union's launch of the first satellite (Hodge, 2007). In Australia, observed weaknesses in the skills level of the workforce following changes in the economy and the pace of technology led to the introduction of CBC in 1990 (Smith, 1996). In Africa, the competency-based curriculum was pioneered in 1998 in South Africa as a result of an acute shortage of professionals such as engineers, technicians and artisans. The adoption of this system was meant to change the attitudes of all South Africans and equip them with employable skills to cope with challenging issues in the 21st century (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019).

Other African countries have gone the CBC way. In Rwanda CBC was launched in April 2015. The new curriculum has been lauded for being less academic and more practical oriented, more skills-based and tailored to a working environment and daily life (REB, 2015). In schools where teachers used CBC techniques, learners enjoyed learning; attendance improved and pass rates increased. However, there were challenges like insufficient teaching and learning materials, large classes hindering effective delivery, lack of parental support and lack of enough qualified teachers to implement the curriculum (Urunana, 2018).

In 2013, the Zambian education system revised its curriculum from a knowledge-based one to a skills based one in a bid to prepare learners for future challenges in the rapidly changing world. The aim was to produce self-motivated, life-long learners, confident and productive individuals, holistic, independent learners with the values, skills and knowledge to enable them to succeed in school and in life (Zulu, 2015).

In a bid to prepare students for the impending challenges in the rapidly changing world, all East African countries and the entire world realized the need to reform their education systems to competency based with a common goal of providing quality education to its nationals. Unlike the content-based curriculum, in competency-based curriculum learners are equipped with values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and are also provided with competencies essential for future community service. Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019) posit that for learners to be termed as competent at anything, they must have knowledge in it, have appropriate skills for knowledge application and lastly possess the right attitudes that enable them to do it well. In addition, competency-based curriculum builds high order thinking in learners and therefore embraces Blooms Taxonomy.

In Kenya, the competency-based curriculum (2-6-3-3-3) is gradually replacing the content-based curriculum (8-4-4) that has been blamed for producing graduates with inadequate skills that do not meet the demands in the job market due to incompetence. The country still experiences inadequate skilled workforce to spur it towards the Kenya Vision-2030, yet many youths are still unemployed and therefore, it is only through education reforms that it will achieve its goals. Besides, it has been argued that the 8-4-4 curriculum had many flaws; it had shallow content, was examination based, misallocation of resources; high teacher learner ratios, inadequate teaching-learning resources and poor teacher training hence lack of teacher preparedness (Akala, 2021 as cited in Mwang'ombe 2021). These factors among others have compromised the effectiveness and education quality in the country hence the recommendation by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) for a paradigm shift in the curriculum. Competency based curriculum aims at equipping learners with the 21st century competencies; communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, imagination, digital literacy, self-efficacy and learning to learn.

Competency based curriculum engages learners with hands on activities and therefore is skill based and exposes learners to real-world experience. Unlike the 8-4-4 system where learners proceed to the next level based on examination performance, CBC gives learners an opportunity to progress through classes after mastering skills and competencies satisfactorily. CBCs learning outcomes dwell more on competencies which include knowledge creation, application, skill development and dispositions. To propel Kenya towards achieving Vision 2030, skilled workforce whom employers have questioned in the past will be required. Currently, the grade 4 learners in Kenya have acquired lump sum skills since the launch of CBC which will help in future nation building. For example, they recently carried out a nationwide cleaning exercise which was meant to inculcate the culture of community service as well as keeping a healthy and clean environment (Amunga, et al. 2020). This was in relation to learning and practising Environmental Activities skills pupils learn in school.

Enhancement of independent and critical thinking skills among learners is a plus that has come along with CBC that embraces social interaction skills as learned in Environmental Activities study as a strand. One of the subjects introduced in the curriculum is that of life skills which focuses on developing learners' psycho-social skills and knowledge that they can apply when dealing with life challenges and solving problems. This has not been the case in the past as learners have faced problem solving, decision making and critical thinking challenges due to lack of know how.

Bunyi (2013) asserts that the purpose of CBC is to help develop learners' skills such as critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, stress management, communication, assertiveness and interpersonal

relationships. Communication, collaboration and constructive feedback due to on-going formative assessments have improved in schools as a result of CBC. Since CBC is learner centred, teachers are just facilitators of the learning process and through learning activities; learners can communicate and collaborate with their peers effectively. This has resulted to increased productivity, learner engagement and self-efficacy.

Amunga et al. (2020) note that one of the best achievements of CBC is the amplification of learners' engagement because of them owning the learning process. Teachers are also able to give learners constant feedback since they have assessment rubrics to guide them in formative assessments. These rubrics can gauge whether the learner has exceeded, met or not met the learning expectations.

The goal-oriented nature of CBC is an amicable solution to the dominant examination-based system in Kenya. The offered courses, teaching and learning resources, and assessments are all aligned to well-defined goals and not examinations. This makes it more flexible and self-paced as the transition from one grade to the next largely depends on an individual learner's goal achievement or outcome. Examination malpractices due to fear of failure is therefore out-dated. In addition, CBC builds up on learners' prior knowledge which is particularly important in any learning process. Competency-based curriculum, as stated by Wangeleja (2010), is one which embraces knowledge construction and not knowledge transmission and there is a significant impact of prior knowledge in learning.

CBC has brought about tasks that definitely and ultimately require parental involvement in their children education as required in the curriculum. Among them is the Environmental Activities skills acquisition where Parents play a key role in the education of their children as they are supposed to make constant follow ups and assist learners in doing the assigned activities at home. According to Mwarari, Githui, and Mwenje (2020), the learner's future does not depend on teachers' efforts only but also to a greater extent is determined by parents as co-educators. With the introduction of CBC, therefore, the relationship between parents, learners and the teachers has been strengthened towards easier achievement of goals (Mwang'ombe, 2021).

The relation between parental participation and pupils' achievement has been of research interest for many decades. Although the idea of parental participation is encouraged by Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) very few efforts have been made to investigate relations between parental participation and student achievement (Ziwen et al., 2022). The larger study from which this paper is extracted was an attempt to investigate areas in which parents engage pupils in acquiring skills in environmental activities at lower primary school level in Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the systems theory by Bertalanffy (1928) as cited in Mukasa (2001), the systems theory postulates that a system consists of various components or sub-systems which must function together for the system to work seamlessly.

Other proponents of the systems theory are Mukasa (2001) and Qaphelisani (2021) who observe that a system's main attributes are interdependence, relationships and interactions among its components as well as feedback, adaptability and flexibility to the environmental contexts where adaptation makes elements to cope with the unexpected atrocities. And that, each part affects the functioning of the whole.

The systems theory was relevant to this study because, parental assistance to pupils was to be collaboratively done with teachers, and pupils. Take away assignments were worked on by the pupils with the assistance of parents who communicate with teachers to enable the assessment of pupils in realizing expected Skills in Environmental Activities. In assessment, the pupil was graded as below; approaching, meeting or exceeding expectation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was done under some limitations. Some respondents were suspicious of giving full information. To counter this, the researcher assured respondents that the information given was purely for academic purpose and was confidential. Some parents were illiterate to effectively respond to the interview schedule; therefore, the researcher engaged research assistants that understood the local language as interpreters.

II. METHOD

Research aim: The aim of the research was to investigate ways through which parents participate in CBC and achievement of pupils in Environmental Activities at lower primary schools in Busia, Bungoma and Trans Nzoia Counties, Kenya. To achieve this aim, the study posed the following research question: How do parents assist pupils acquire social interaction skills at lower primary schools in Busia, Bungoma and Trans Nzoia counties?

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample of the study was 1076 participants comprising 1051 teachers and 25 Parents' Association representatives (PAs). The respondents were asked questions on how parents assisted pupils in the following aspects of social interaction skills and findings were as summarized below:

- i) parents appropriately used digital devices in assisting pupils' complete social interaction skills take-home assignment
- ii) parents worked closely with the teachers and the school to impart values and attitudes to pupils
- iii) parents monitor pupils academic progress and put interventions to ensure improvement in the child's achievement
- iv) parents are involved in providing informal education at home and in the community
- v) parents show dedication in their children's learning through availing themselves during parents' meetings
- vi) communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful
- vii) parents provide an enabling environment that is conducive to learning and to motivating learners to fulfil their potential

Random sampling was used to select schools while purposive sampling obtained teachers and PAs. Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from teachers and interview guide was used with parents. The study yielded qualitative data that was analyzed thematically and quantitative data which was analyzed using IBMSPSS 28.0 statistics software. This paper reports results for paused question.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results of the study were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of Parental participation and Pupils' Achievement Social Interaction Skills

ANSWERS	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi	vii	Mean	MEAN PERCENTAGE	MEDIAN
SD	184	123	136	69	102	69	176	122.7142857	17.97	123
D	61	375	273	123	260	246	297	233.5714286	34.20	260
U	123	0	68	123	0	123	68	72.14285714	10.56	68
A	246	123	136	314	102	123	122	166.5714286	24.39	123
SA	69	62	70	54	219	122	20	88	12.88	69

The initial D stands for Disagree, U (Undecided), A (Agree) and SA (Strongly Agree).

The results in table 4.2 indicated that parents were not participating fully in assisting pupils in take home assignments aimed at acquisition of social interaction skills. It was found that majority 52.17% of the respondents did not confirm parental participation using the required ways of assisting pupils in their take home assignments in social interaction skills. A minority 37.37% of respondents agreed to have participated in the mentioned ways of assisting pupils in achieving social interaction skills through accomplishing take home assignments for assessment by the teachers. There were those respondents who constituted 10.56% that remained undecided. These results indicated a divided opinion on parental participation in enabling pupils acquire social interaction skills.

These results were in contrary to the expectations and requirements of the KICD (2019) that, schools' main objective was to have an all-round personal development of a child and according the CBC, parental participation was important to ensure pupils acquired desired skills and competences for their holistic development. Parents had to work collaboratively with teachers for an effective and efficient learning of Environmental Activities aimed at enabling pupils to fit in society at the end of their education. Only a small portion of parents seemed to understand and agreed with the KICD.

These findings were in agreement with Kimathi (2014) in the study on parental involvement in primary standard three pupils reading at home in Igembe South Constituency, Meru County, Kenya which established and concluded that parental involvement in children's reading at home in Igembe South Constituency was very low.

The results were also in agreement with evidence from the study by Koskei (2020) on Teacher competence as a cornerstone on Implementation of competency – Based curriculum in Kenya a case of lower primary schools in Nakuru county that indicated that most parents are generally opposed to being involved in their children's tasks explaining that they have paid fees and sent children to school to be taught by teachers.

More evidence of agreeing with the results here is further given by the print media where according to the report in the Standard newspaper, Parents stormed a presidential Rally in Bungoma on August, 28, 2022 claiming that they were tired of hard take home assignments referred to as homework.

The results were also in disagreement with the observation by Zipporah, (2020) in the study titled, facing academic problems longitudinal relationship between pupils- parental engagement a new normal in the competency-based curriculum in Kenya where it was observed that, when a parent is engaged in the child's

learning, they work closely with the teachers and the school to impart knowledge, skills, competencies, values and attitudes to the child. They also monitor the academic progress of the child, identifying areas of weakness and together put interventions to ensure improvement in the child's achievement. When parents are involved to provide informal education at home and in the community, this complements and supplements what the child learns in school.

IV. CONCLUSION

Parents were not participating fully in assisting pupils in activities aimed at acquisition of social interaction skills. It was found that majority of the respondents (52.17%) did not confirm parental participation using the required ways of assisting pupils in their take home assignments in social interaction skills. A minority 37.37% of respondents agreed to have participated in the mentioned ways of assisting pupils in achieving social interaction skills through accomplishing take home assignments for assessment by the teachers. There were those respondents who constituted 10.56% that remained undecided. These results indicated a divided opinion on parental participation in enabling pupils acquire social interaction skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS

On the strength of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i) Provision of learning resources and educational media by the government to reduce burden of buying by parents.
- ii) Sensitization of parents on their role in supporting learning of their children in Social Interaction Skills.

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