RESEARCH ARTICLE

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION PEDAGOGY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of parents and perceptions of both parents and teachers towards early childhood development based on a study conducted among preschool parents and teachers at Mumias Town, Kenya. The descriptive research design was adopted. The data sources were: a parental involvement questionnaire for pre-school teachers, a parental involvement interview schedule for the pre-school parents, and document analysis. Simple random sampling was done for the pre-school parents and saturated sampling for pre-school teachers. Multiple data analysis methods were used. It emerged that both teachers and parents held positive perceptions towards parental involvement in early childhood curriculum development. Teachers indicated that their teacher-education courses did not equip them with knowledge and skills on parental involvement strategies while parents indicated that in most pre-schools, teachers had a negative attitude towards parental involvement in instructional activities. Parents were involved at the curriculum implementation level when they paid fees, provided teaching and learning materials, interacted with teachers, supported children with homework and assisted with child discipline at school. The study recommended, among other things, an adult literacy programme for pre-school parents; early childhood education parental awareness programme.

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INTRODUCTION

Parents and teachers are the key stakeholders in Early Childhood curriculum development, especially at the implementation stage. Parents are the primary caregivers of their children and central figures in the heart of their children's universe (Farquhar, 2003). They prepare their children for the transition to formal education. When they get involved in their children's schooling it has positive effects on the child's academic outcomes. Parents possess variety of skills, talents and interests that can enrich the curriculum, no matter how talented their children's teachers may be (Bryk, & Smith, 1990). Every issue, concern and educational goal involves the family of the child. Separation of the child from family is therefore impossible because every child is socialized in a family culture. Even those reared in an institution are affected by the culture of the institution. Step forward Research emphasizes in increased opportunities for children's success when the home and school work together (U.S Department of Education, 1997). There is no consistent agreement in what is meant by the term parent involvement (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2000). Several different terms, like-home-school partnerships, home-school collaboration and family involvement are often used interchangeably to describe the relationship between the parent and the school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001;

Christenson, Rounds & Gorney, 1992; Epstein, 1988). Furthermore, there is no one operational definition of parent involvement consistently used in the professional literature (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) or practice (Simmons, 2001). This means that parent involvement can be organized into two; school-centred parent involvement and home-centred parent involvement. School-centred parent involvement includes activities such as participation in classroom, social and service events, attending PTA meetings and attending and participating in school board meetings. Home-centred parent involvement is where parents do activities directly with their child, such as helping with homework, providing good nutrition and healthcare to the child, and attending one-on-one meetings with their teachers. This study examined the feelings of parents towards their own involvement in ECDE at home and in school. Many researchers have attempted to classify the types of parent involvement. Chavkin and Williams (1988) refer to six parent roles, thus parent as audience, home tutor, programme supporter, co-learner, advocate and decision maker. Epstein (1992) proposes five types of parent involvement: Reporting progress, Special events, Parent education, Parents teaching and Educational decision-maker. Parental involvement is particularly important in the case of pre-school children where parents are the prime educators and

Firstly, brain research findings indicate that the first three years of a child's life are crucial in terms of development. Parents play the central educational role in the early years and provide the stimulation, care and interaction required to ensure their children's rapid development. It is important that this parental involvement be continued through the period of more formal education. Secondly, parents prepare their children for the transition to formal education. Effectiveness of formal education is linked to the acquisition by a child of certain skills, such as socialization skills and readiness to learn. These skills are developed, not only in the formal education system, but also in the home environment. Thirdly, the benefits of participation by parents in a child's education outside the home are also significant even when high quality child care is provided. The weight of research indicates that parents make an irreplaceable contribution to the child's development, and their active involvement in their children's programmes outside the home greatly increases the likelihood of the child's success in later life (Berk, 2002).

Parents and teachers are expected to collaborate to ensure that the children receive appropriate care and that their development is enhanced (NACECE, 2001, p. 104). This has been supported by studies carried out by Henderson and Berla (1994), Hickman (1996), Chavkin (1989), Christenson (1995), Dauber and Epstein (1993), Dornbusch and Ritter (1998), Drake (1995), Griffith (1996), Prosise (1990), Reynolds (1992) and Brandt (1989), all cited in Berger (2000) which confirm that parental involvement in ECDE programmes has an enormous impact on the children's attitude, attendance and academic achievement. However, parents are often passive participants and rarely take part in making decisions about school programmes (Burden, 1995). Parental role in early childhood curriculum development involves parents helping teachers to prepare an anti-bias curriculum that brings social changes and ensures that the curriculum provides for all areas of the child's development through an integral approach. Other roles include making decisions, assisting teachers in instructional and non-instructional activities, passively participating in non-educational activities, attending special events and receiving progress reports about children. It should be child-centred, ensure children learn in a good hygienic and spacious environment. Parents should provide play materials for teachers to use. They should ensure that the schedule gives enough time to learn and rest (Hurlock, 1978). As Epstein (1995) argues, parents should be involved as classroom assistants and as organizers of school events. Further, establishment of a parent-centre, home visitor programme and action research teams that examine methods by involving parents can promote parent involvement. This will help involve parents in decision-making, planning, assessment and general curriculum development.

Critical Issues on Parental Involvement in ECDE

It has been recognized that ECDE is very crucial in laying the foundation for the future development of the children. Effective ECDE Programmes are a matter of partnership between parents and teachers. As outlined in the Children's Act (Republic of Kenya, 2001), parents are expected to maintain and provide the child with adequate diet, shelter, clothing, and medical care, including immunization, education home but extends to their children's educational institutions. Nevertheless, the Children's Act does not state how parents should contribute to this education. Yet, for effective ECDE programmes to take root, parents need to be involved in their children's schooling further by participating in curriculum development activities. However, the nature of this involvement is not clear with regard to parents. The focus on the role of parents in ECDE comes at a time when early childhood education programmes increasingly involve children from single parent homes, recombined families, foster parent homes, extended families with relatives, orphans and vulnerable children and children in various difficult circumstances. In such circumstances parental role in ECDE may not be well defined or recognized. This study is intended to shed light on the role of parents in ECDE programmes and the extent to which they work in partnership with teachers in Mumias Town. This paper answers the following research questions in regard to parental involvement in early childhood pedagogical practices in Kakamega County, Kenya: Do parents participate at the macro, intermediate or micro levels of curriculum development? At what other levels are parents involved in their children's pedagogical practices? What is the nature of the participation if there is? What are their perceptions of their own involvement in early childhood curriculum development? What is the difference in involvement of different types of parents?

Levels of Curriculum Planning and Development

Asli (2006) suggests that if a curriculum programme of a school is to be co-ordinated, systematic or unified in any way, then curriculum planning is crucial. Curriculum planning refers to all the activities of organizing what should be taught, at what time, to whom and by whom. The sequence, scope and integration also must be considered. Marsh and Willis (1999, p. 186) have identified three levels of curriculum planning and development: macro, intermediate and micro levels. Some participants in curriculum planning and development are interested primarily in general policies (macro level), some in programmes (intermediate level) and others in specific lessons (micro-level). The macro level of curriculum planning and development is concerned with general policy. Teachers may or may not have been participants in the formulation of policy statements.

Macro Level (Policies)

At this level, official documents produced by the central curriculum development agency may contain policy statements about the curriculum that either limits the ability of schools to make their own policies or encourage them to do so. These policy statements pertaining to the curriculum may also be master plans for specific subjects or groups of subjects (Martin, Saif & Theil, as cited in Ramirez, 1996). The policy statements give direction to the curriculum. In Kenya, a National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework (MOEST, 2006) has just been launched. It provides a coordination mechanism and defines the role of parents, communities and other stakeholders in provision of ECDE services. It aims at investing in children in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of Poverty Reduction, universal school enrolment, reduction of child mortality and morbidity, maternal mortality, and creation of gender equality.

The policy therefore emphasizes child survival, growth, and development. It aims at all children realizing their full potential in life.

To ensure proper implementation of the ECDE Policy Framework, the Ministry of Education has come up with Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines for Kenya (MOEST, 2006). These guidelines aim at operationalizing the National ECDE Framework and the Childrens'Act (2001) by providing service standard guidelines which will ensure that all ECDE service providers including parents, communities, government ministries, Faith-based Organizations, Universities and the private sector provide quality, accessible and equitable ECDE services. The guidelines include a checklist for registration of an ECDE centre, monitoring tool for ECDE training centre for ECDE trainers, procedure for establishing educational and training institutions, screening tools for children with special needs, and application forms for establishing an ECDE centre. How these policies are interpreted at the local ECDE centre in as far as parents and teachers collaborate is the subject of interest to this paper.

Intermediate Level (Programmes)

The planning of programmes is the intermediate level of curriculum development. At this level, planners choose the subjects, allocate time, specify objectives, content and assessment measures and identify procedures to be followed for monitoring standards in schools and methods of teaching (Marsh & Willis, 1999). Curriculum guidelines are also analyzed at this stage. These contain detailed lists of goals and objectives, complete structure and sequence for the content to be taught, specific, highly detailed teaching units including tests and quizzes, and 'background information for teachers about the subject to be taught, including follow-up references. In Kenya, the Ministry Of Education through the Kenya Institute of Education has provided guidelines for Early Childhood Development Education in Kenya (NACECE, 2001; Oluoch, 2003). It outlines the National Goals of Education in Kenya, Objectives of ECDE, Rights of the child, children's needs, role of the family, importance of early years, major aspects of growth, development and learning, and general information for caregivers. It outlines the curriculum and teaching methods for children below 3 years and 3-6 years. Specific subjects and their requirements are also outlined. Thematic teaching method is recommended. The daily timetable, classroom plan, sketch plan for an ECDE centre are given. The roles of administrators, teachers, parents, PTA and their partnerships are outlined. The ECDE guidelines recommend that parents be involved in deciding the activities and services of the ECDE centre to ensure children receive appropriate care and that their development is enhanced. However, the extent of their involvement is still unclear and hence the need for the study.

Micro Level (Classroom Lessons)

Whenever policies and programmes have originated from above, teachers must plan their activities around them for periods of time ranging from a full year course to a daily lesson of a few minutes. In individual schools and classrooms, teachers typically consult programme guides provided and then draw up their own specific curriculum plans in the form of lesson plans. A lesson plan is a document summarizing lesson objectives, content, activities for students, methods of instruction and forms of evaluating the students (Marsh & Willis, 1999). The lesson plans may be drawn up to cover not only daily lessons, but also the entire flow of classroom activities for a week, a month or even the entire year. It is at the micro level that general macro-level policies adopted by the country and the intermediate level programmes agreed upon by the school are transformed into the specific practices of individual teachers. This means that the teacher's interpretation of the policy dictates how much s/he conducts her\himself in the classroom. The teacher's level of education, training and attitude greatly determines their interpretation of policy (Berger, 2000). The teacher's willingness to cooperate with parents to deliver quality services to their children is crucial. Without proper training, teachers will not know how to use thematic teaching methods or involve parents in the development of play and learning materials or other relevant parental involvement activities (Ong'ong'a, 2004). Teachers should be fully in control of classrooms but be willing to welcome positive criticism from parents. The teacher needs to ensure that child-centred activities are put in place, whereby the child is left to explore their own environment as teachers direct them. However, in implementing ECDE policy in classrooms, pre-school teachers should contextualize it without altering the original policy. How this is done in the ECDE centres is the subject of this study. From the foregoing, it appears that stakeholders may get involved in curriculum planning at one level or the other. The above analysis of levels of curriculum planning provides a basis for analysis of parental involvement in curriculum planning and development in ECE.

Levels of Parental Involvement in ECDE Curriculum Development

As earlier stated, curriculum development may be perceived to take seven levels (Marsh & Willis, 1999, p. 203), namely receiving reports about their children's progress, attending special events for parents in school, raising funds for the pre-school, passively participating in educational activities, assisting in instructional and non-instructional activities, assisting teachers in instruction and making decisions. It is assumed that the desirability of parental participation moves from passive to active levels.

Receiving Reports about their Children's Progress

This is a very passive level of parental involvement in early childhood programmes. Parents assume that "the teacher knows best". Parents are notified of school events and their child's progress. The children take home announcements, report cards, memos and notices. Parents communicate with teachers over the phone. Teachers visit the children at home and parents may be invited to attend parent-teacher conferences at school. Face–to-face meetings are highly satisfying to parents because their questions about their children are answered immediately. Studies done by Coldron and Bolton (1991), as cited in Marsh and Willis (1999), indicate that some parents take advantage of such opportunities because of their busy daily schedules or their hesitance about appearing personally at school. These authors

recommend parent-teacher conferences, but add how conference activities should be organized. The teacher should write reports about each child. They should be receptive and open and not argue with parents about the child (Krogh, 1994). Teachers often complain that the parents they need most urgently to discuss their children's problems do not come to parent-teacher conferences. The basic responsibilities of families include providing for children's health and safety, developing parenting skills and child rearing approaches that prepare children for school and maintain healthy child development across the grades and building positive home conditions that support school learning and behaviour all across the school years. Parents have a responsibility to socialize children and inculcate in them life principles, spiritual and moral values for character development. They provide learning and play materials, link children to services and ensure early identification of disabilities, assessment and intervention. This study intended to find out the activities of parent-teacher conferences, how teachers communicate with parents and how involved parents are at this basic level. Home visits enhance communication because they make teachers understand every individual child's background (Epstein, 1992). Studies on home visits by Drake (1995), Halsey (2001), Love (1989) and Myers (1997) reveal that children who come from low-income homes often learn responsibility at a very early age, while children from high-income homes may have no responsibilities but greater academic advantages. This study investigated how teachers and parents employ home visits and how effective they are to the children's academic progress. It examined the income levels of parents and how they affect their perception of involvement in ECDE curriculum development and at what levels.

Attending Special Events for Parents

This is the second level of parental involvement in curriculum development. Parents come to school for special events designed for them such as picnics, work days (devoted to cleaning up and fixing up building and grounds), attend art shows, plays, concerts, science fairs, attend assemblies with their children, open house days and parents' evenings, to know one another and exchange views with teachers. Such events not only enable parents to observe special skills the children have achieved, but also provide an opportunity for teachers and parents to interact socially. These events help parents to establish better rapport with teachers for better quality ECDE centres (Marsh & Willis, 1999). This study intended to find out the events organized for parents in Mumias town pre-schools and the response of parents towards them. It examined the parents' knowledge of the importance of attending the special events and these events' benefits to quality ECDE programmes.

Raising Funds

This is the third level of parental involvement in ECD programmes. Parents should raise funds for the school. This is a factor taken care of by Parents-Teachers Associations. Resources are always scarce. Funds are often needed to purchase additional library books, sports equipment, desks, stationery and utensils for the children's meals. Parents are usually willing to raise funds if they will be put to good use. Most parents, however, pay school fees and are not willing to

be involved in how the funds will be used by the schools (Marsh & Willis, 1999). This study intended to find out ways in which parents raise funds for the pre-schools in Mumias town. It examined how they make follow-ups to monitor and evaluate progress in the pre-schools on how the money is spent for better academic achievement of their children.

Passively Participating in Educational Activities

Parents may participate in educational activities specifically intended for them. These activities include seminars and workshops dealing with topics such as values analysis, sex education and mathematics skills. These allow parents to learn about the teachers' point of view. Parents may also be allowed to observe classes informally. By doing this, they get first-hand experiences on problems that the teachers encounter with their children. This study also examined how parents hold seminars with teachers in the pre-schools in Mumias town to discuss the curriculum activities. It also examined whether or not parents are allowed to observe classrooms in the process of teaching and how teachers perceive it.

Assisting in Non-Instructional Activities

The fifth level of participation involves parents actively assisting teachers in non-instructional activities; these include organizing sports days, supervising students of field trips, researching library topic and preparing supplies and non instructional materials (Marsh & Willis, 1999). This study also intended to find out specific non-instructional activities in which parents are involved in Mumias town.

Assisting in Instructional Activities

Some parents get time to function as teacher aides. They learn teaching skills modelling, guest speaking, leading school trips, preparing teaching materials and maintaining student records. In this manner they organize sports days, supervise students on field trips, research library topics, prepare supplies of non-instructional materials, guide teachers in teaching skills, maintain student records and take up roles of guest speaking (Marsh & Willis, 1999). Parents possess a wide range of special skills that can be a welcome varied addition to the school curriculum. Furthermore, changes in employment patterns in the 1990s have enabled a number of parents to become available and willing to take some of these tasks. A study by Love (1989) describes a high school in which 18 parents each devoted half a day per week to teach Mathematics, Art, library, meeting and crocheting, job interviews, tennis, social studies, fitting and metal work and choir. Several states, including California, have undertaken formal programmes to involve parents at this level (Simmons, 2001). This study examined exactly what instructional activities the pre-school teachers in Mumias town involved parents in curriculum development.

Making Decisions

This is the seventh and most active form of parental participation in schools. In some cases Parents can be involved on school committees that screen candidates for teaching positions or make selections of curricula. The only more influential way for parents to participate directly in decision-

making for schools is to become members of the school boards and committees that exercise the legal responsibility for operation of local school districts (Marsh & Willis, 1999). This study intended to find out how parents get involved in screening applicants for teaching positions and how they choose the curriculum committees and curriculum activities.

Benefits of Parental Involvement in ECDE

A number of researchers and educational theorists have investigated and documented the benefits of parental involvement. All of them report that parental involvement does not only benefit the students but parents and schools as well. For students, parental involvement leads to a higher academic achievement, regardless of socio-economic status or racial background, or parent educational level (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Simmons, 2001). It also leads to better student attendance (Henderson, & Berla, 1994). Lower drop-out rates (Drake, 1995), more successful transitions to higher grades (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2000), higher rates of homework completion (Brandt, 1989), improved student motivation (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992), improved social functioning and increased self-esteem (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Parental involvement benefits parents in the following ways: (a) Increased understanding of the school (Southwest Educational Development, Laboratory, 2001) (b) Increased interaction between parents and their children for example, improved communication about homework (Epstein & Dauber, 1991) (c) Positive changes in parenting styles (Hornby, 2000) (d) Increased access to needed services like health and social services and increased levels of self esteem, self efficacy and empowerment (Davies, 1989) (e) Participating in their child's education may lead parents to further their own education (Haynes & Comer, 1996). Parents' involvement for schools leads to (f) Improved teacher morale (Leitch & Tangri, 1988) (g) Additional resources like parents are available for teachers so they can spend more time educating children (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Davies, 1989; Sutherland, 1991) (h) Sustained school reform efforts like increased accountability and design of school improvement plans. The parents ask questions about how their money is spent and this changes the whole set up positively (Lewis & Henderson, 1997) (i) Higher level of teachers' sense of effectiveness (Comer & Haynes, 1991) because teachers are directly accountable to parents (j) More successful educational programmes (Christenson, Rounds & Franklin, 1992).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey design. A parental involvement questionnaire was adapted from Epstein (1988) and adopted for this study. Documentary analysis was done in schools and education offices on parental involvement in ECDE. A questionnaire was administered to parents using face-to-face interview method. The questionnaire collected data on the socio-demographic characteristics of parents, levels of curriculum development, levels of parental involvement in early childhood curriculum development, and perceptions of parents of their own involvement in pre-school curriculum development. The researcher used purposive and multistage sampling technique to select 14 pre-schools for the

study in categories of public and private pre-schools in Mumias town. A total of 153 parents formed the research sample. They were biological parents and guardians of pre-schoolers, excluding house helps. The researcher organized to interview them during parent-teacher conferences and when they brought children to school or picked them. Data collected was analyzed by the Statistical Package of Social Scientists and findings reported according to the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parental Involvement in ECDE Curriculum Development

In the second research question, the researcher examined the extent to which pre-school parents are involved in early childhood education curriculum development. The pre-school parents and teachers were asked about their parental involvement in early childhood curriculum development.

Levels of Parental Involvement

Parents were asked to state how they would like to be involved in curriculum development of their pre-school children.

Table 1: Parents' Perception on Levels of Parental Involvement (n = 153)

Level	Description	Mean rating
Level 5	Collect teaching/learning materials	2.84
Level 4	Organize a volunteer programme	2.51
Level 3	Help with fund raising events	2.45
Level 1	Be a classroom teacher	2.25
Level 6	Be a room parent to welcome others at school	1.99
Level 7	Serve on policy committees	1.97
Level 2	Make games for the classroom	1.91

The average means from the results indicate that parents would like to be involved in: collecting teaching and learning materials (2.84, Level 5), organizing volunteer programmes in schools (2.51, level 4), helping raise funds for the pre-school (2.45, level 3), being a classroom teacher or being involved in classroom activities (2.25, level 1), being a room parent to welcome others at school (1.993, level 6), serving on policy committees (1.97, level 7) and making games for the classroom (1.91, level 2). This differs with Marsh and Willis's (1999) ideas on levels of parental involvement in curriculum development. Marsh and Willis outline the various levels of parental involvement as: receiving reports about the child's progress (level 1), attending special events in the school (level 2), raising funds for the school (level 3), passively participating in educational matters (level 4), assisting in instructional activities (level 5), assisting in non–instructional activities (level 6), and making decisions in curriculum development (level 7). The results showed that that pre-school parents in Mumias town are actively involved in curriculum development by assisting in instructional activities, passively participating in educational affairs and raising funds for pre-schools. The least involvement is making decisions in the school and attending special events in the schools.

Roles of Parents in ECDE

Both teachers and parents were asked an open-ended question to enlist five roles of a pre-school parent. The specific roles were classified as either academic related or utility related.

The academic related activities that emerged included the following five items:

i. Listen to children read aloud.
ii. Read to the children.
iii. Assist the children in learning specific skills.
iv. Provide teaching and learning materials for teachers.

Utility related activities were:

i. Help with field trips or take children to the community to study.
ii. Rebuild or repair the school.
iii. Pay school fees.
iv. Provide physical facilities.
v. Pay salaries for teachers and support staff.

Other roles for the parents that emerged included provision of feeding programmes for the children and participation in its preparation, ensuring better health and nutrition of their children and taking them to and from school.

Table 2: Parents' Views on their Role in Early Childhood Curriculum Development

Activity	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Parents (n = 153)				
Pay School Fees	86	55.1	67	44.9
Provide food/snacks	82	51.8	71	48.2
Provide teaching/learning materials	18	15.5	135	84.5
School development	45	33.8	108	66.2
Support homework	25	23.6	128	76.4
Attend to child discipline	31	20.3	122	79.7
Take and collect child to/ from school	116	71.2	37	28.8
Provide labour in the school	17	14.5	136	85.5
Pay teacher salaries	40	30.1	113	69.9
Provide basic needs for the child	131	79.1	22	20.9

These results reveal that in as much as both parents and teachers agreed on the roles of parents in pre-schools, they disagreed on other issues. For example, both teachers, 75.9% (22), and parents, 55.1% (86), agreed that it is the role of parents to pay school fees for their children. Majority of the parents, 71.2% (116), and teachers, 69% (20), also agreed that it is the role of the parents to take and pick their children to/from school. Both teachers, 84.6 % (26), and parents, 79.1% (131), agreed that it is the role of the parents to provide basic needs for their children. However, in both cases, they were not in support of the idea of parents participating in school development matters like doing repairs, supporting their children in doing homework, attending to child discipline, providing labour in the school and paying teachers' salaries. Majority of the teachers, 65.5% (20), and parents, 66.2% (108), disagreed that parents should be involved in things like doing repairs of the school buildings and desks. Majority of the parents, 76.4% (128), and teachers, 82.8% (24), felt that it was not the parents' role to support their children with homework. It is interesting to note that in both cases parents, 79.7% (122), and teachers, 69% (20), felt that it was not the role of the parents to discipline their children. A possible explanation for this would be that the children spent

most of their time with the teachers, thus it is the responsibility of the teachers. A majority of the parents, 69.9% (113), and teachers, 96.7% (29), did not favour the idea of parents providing labour in the school. Both parents, 85.5% (136), and teachers, 81.3% (27), disagreed that it was the parents' responsibility to pay the teachers' salaries. A possible explanation could be that since both teachers and parents supported the idea of parents paying school fees, they expected the school administration to use that money to pay the teachers' salaries and employ support staff to do repairs in the schools. If Free Nursery School Education was in force, parents would not be expected to pay teachers' salaries, employ support staff to do repairs or pay children's fees. Few differences also emerged in regard to parental roles in the pre-school. The results reveal that whereas a half of the parents 51.8% (82) agreed that it was their responsibility to provide snacks for their children, 65.6% (20) of the teachers disagreed. Also majority of the parents, 84.5 % (135), were not in agreement that it was their responsibility to provide teaching/learning materials for their children while majority of the teachers, 86.2% (25), felt that the onus lay with the parents. A possible explanation to this would be inadequate knowledge on the responsibilities of a pre-school parent. Both teachers and parents would wish parents to be involved in the ECD curriculum development, but the specific activities have not been well defined. The ECDE curriculum guidelines and the ECDE Policy Framework should spell this out clearly.

Parental Involvement of Different Parent Groups

Pre-school parents were asked their opinions on how much positive involvement with pre-school different groups of parents would have. The responses were scored on a Likert scale as: Strongly Disagree (no involvement of any kind), Disagree (little involvement), Undecided, Agree (some positive involvement) and Strongly Agree (much positive involvement).

Table 3: Pre-school Teachers Opinions about Different Groups of Parents (n = 30)

Parent Group	Mean Rating
Parents employed fulltime outside home	2.30
Illiterate parents	2.00
Single parents	2.47
Young/ teen parents	2.63
Mothers	3.37
Fathers	2.96
Other adults who live with the children	2.72
Low income earning parents	2.53
High income earning parents	3.50

These results show that all pre-school parents in Mumias town showed a positive involvement though with differing degrees. The highest mean rate was the high income earners at 3.50, followed by mothers at 3.37, fathers at 2.96, adults living with the child at 2.72, young parents 2.63, and low income earners at 2.53. The lowest average mean was from illiterate parents at 2.00, followed by parents employed fulltime outside the home at 2.30, then single parents at 2.47. A possible explanation for the above would be that high income earning parents are able to be actively involved since they can provide requirements needed in pre-schools for their children. They are confident and in most cases are chosen on boards of governors' committees (Berger, 2000). Mothers are generally very close to their children. They provide a link between home and

school and they often work very closely with the teachers to ensure their children get used to the school to learn properly. Most of them could also be housewives to the men who work within the sugar factory or in offices in town and, therefore, have time to attend to the needs of their children in pre-schools. Fathers' involvement could be attributed to the taking and collecting of the child from school as they go/come to/from work. Another possible reason is that the parents work and live together and thus take it as their responsibility to support one another for the child's education. Illiterate parents may not be actively involved in ECDE due to their lack of confidence to deal with education matters. They could also be ignorant about the need to get actively involved in their children's schooling. Parents employed outside the home also had a low score on involvement, which suggests that they are too busy elsewhere to get involved with their children's schooling. Other parents might assume that as long as the child is taken to school, the teacher should take charge. This study therefore established that high income earners, mothers and fathers were actively involved in ECD than illiterate, young and parents employed fulltime outside the home. Income, literacy, age and sex of parents therefore determined their involvement in ECDE curriculum development.

Levels of Curriculum Planning and Development

Teachers were asked to state by ticking one specific statement how they got involved in ECDE curriculum development. Specific levels of parental involvement were specified as formulation of policies, formulation of programmes, classroom curriculum implementation and others.

Table 4: Specific Level of Parental Involvement in Curriculum Planning (n = 30)

Level of curriculum planning	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Policy formulation	1	3.7
Programme formulation	4	11.1
Classroom curriculum implementation	25	85.2
Total	30	100

The results reveal that majority of the parents, 85.2% (25), were involved in curriculum planning and development at the micro-level (classroom level). Few of the parents, 11.1% (4), were involved at the intermediate level of curriculum development thus syllabus formulation. Only 3.7% (1) of the parents were involved at the policy formulation level. These findings coincide with ECDE policy framework (MOEST, 2006). In Kenya, ECDE is based on centralized curriculum, which is planned at a multi-sectoral level and implemented by the Ministry of Education. The National Council of Children's Services co-ordinates and implements ECDE policy. The Ministry of Education, together with the ministries of Planning and National Development, Office of the President, Social Services and other stakeholders, have established an ECDE network which enhances the sharing of ideas and experiences for maximum resource utilization. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) is responsible for the formulation of the syllabus guidelines based on the general objectives of education in Kenya (Koech, 1999; Kipkorir, 1990, 1993). The syllabus encompasses the cognitive, psychomotor, emotional, language, moral and spiritual, aesthetic development and learning of the pre-schoolers. Parents and later pre-school teachers are the key players in the education and development of pre-school children. This syllabus outlined in the NACECE

(2001) guidelines for ECDE in Kenya stipulates the activities that children are expected to learn at different developmental stages. Thematic teaching is the approach of teaching pre-scholars because it is child-centred. The roles of all ECDE stakeholders are outlined therein. Teachers only receive guidelines on how to implement the curriculum, thus supporting Goffin and Wilson (2001), who say that teachers are mere technicians who implement others' educational ideas. Parents who might have been involved could have participated in baseline surveys carried out by the KIE from time to time on what should be included in the curriculum, time allocated and adaptability of children to the curriculum. Pre-school parents in this study indicated great involvement at the classroom level. This is the curriculum implementation level. The teachers interpret the curriculum and decide what to be taught and what to be omitted (Marsh & Willis, 1999; Coleman, 1991). They use their own experience and knowledge (Lortie, 1995). Parents are involved by sending their children to ECD centres, assisting in provision of playing and learning materials, paying fees, raising funds for the pre-schools, initiating and participating in the feeding programmes, ensuring that the children are immunized. They also have to take the children around the community, repair the school buildings and equipment. They are also expected to discipline their children, may assist with the homework, provide the basic needs of the children, attend school events and serve on the PTA committees. All these activities, coupled with proper communication between parents and teachers, make classroom learning comfortable and effective. Parents hand over their children to the teacher entrusting them with the care. The Ministry of Education should decentralize curriculum development of ECDE so that the teachers and parents as the main stakeholders participate at all levels of planning and development according to their context. ECDE curriculum should ensure that it is indigenized and made culturally acceptable for all parents to participate.

Perceptions of Parents of their Own Involvement in Early Childhood Curriculum Development

The next important research question aimed at investigating parents' perceptions of their involvement in Early Childhood Education Curriculum Development. The pre-school parents were asked to indicate their own involvement in early childhood curriculum development. The results in the table reveal that the parents held very positive opinions towards their involvement in curriculum development with a mean of 3.85. The dimensions of involvement included: type 1 dimension: basic obligations of parents (parents preparing children for school and building positive home conditions that support school); type 2 dimension: basic obligations of schools (communication between the school and home); type 3 dimension: parent involvement at school (volunteers assisting in the school and other related areas like raising funds, participating in clubs, repairing the school buildings, participating in provision of snacks/food for the children); type 4 Dimension: parent involvement in learning activities at home (parents assisting in monitoring their children at home); type 5 dimension: parent involvement in governance and advocacy (parents having participatory roles on boards and committees). The average mean score for all the dimensions ranged between 4.38 and 3.46. Their perceptions towards involvement in dimension 1, the basic obligations of parents, was significantly high at 4.38, followed by type 2 dimension,

basic obligations of the school, at 4.11. This implies that parents want to provide the basic needs for their children, take care of their welfare and provide a good transition for them to school. It could also mean that the parents highly value communication between the school and the home. They expect the teachers to give them a progress report about how their children are performing, problems encountered by the child or teacher in school, tell parents how to assist their children and also share experiences with teachers that can help the child. These findings imply that according to parents, the basic obligations of the teachers and parents are crucial and should be mutual for quality academic excellence of the children.

Table 5: Perceptions of Parents towards their Own Involvement in ECD Curriculum

Dimension of involvement	Mean Score
Type 1 Dimension	4.38
Type 2 Dimension	4.11
Type 3 Dimension	3.46
Type 4 Dimension	3.59
Type 5 Dimension	3.72

The results also reveal that the perception of parents toward type 3 dimension - parent involvement in the school - was rated lowest. This means that in as much as parents held positive perceptions towards their own involvement in the curriculum development, they were not keen on getting into the classrooms as volunteer teachers. They were not enthusiastic about raising funds, doing repairs in the school or participating in clubs within the school. This implies that parents feel that getting into classrooms to teach their children is taking over the teachers' role. Questioning a teacher may be seen as disrespectful and an infringement on the teacher's expertise (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). It is intimidating to teachers. It can also be interpreted to mean that parents feel their role ends at home and school roles were for pre-school teachers. Some of the parents may not have the skills and know how on dealing with children in the classroom. Their lack of enthusiasm on raising funds for the pre-schools and doing repairs could mean that they feel these activities should be done by the school management. The government of Kenya should allocate funds to pre-schools education in the same way it has done for primary and secondary education. Parents from the private pre-schools could be feeling that the money they pay as school fees should cater for all the financial needs of the pre-school.

Their perception towards type 4 dimension - parent involvement in learning activities at home, like helping the children with homework - was low at 3.59. This could imply that the parents feel that teaching of the children is solely the duty of the teachers. It could also imply that parents are too busy to help their children or they do not have the professional knowledge that is necessary to help the child. They could also be finding it rather odd to give pre-school children homework, yet a pre-school should be a socialization place, a place that prepares the child for primary school. Some could be taking the children to pre-school for their safety and play and not for academic work. More research needs to be done in regard of this. Type 5 dimension – parent involvement in decision-making roles - took a middle position on the continuum at 3.72. This means that after parents look at their role and that of teachers as crucial in ECDE curriculum development, they would also wish to be involved in the decision-making process

at the school in terms of the class size, daily schedule, what children learn, snacks, recruitment and remuneration of the teachers. It is important that parents know what early childhood curriculum entails. This will go a long way in fostering effective partnership with teachers for quality early childhood curriculum development and education programmes.

CONCLUSION

In regard to parents, the study concluded that most pre-school parents were actively involved in ECD curriculum development were literate married mothers of a young age. Illiterate and poor parents were the least involved in ECD curriculum development. Some curriculum activities were more important than others like teachers contacting parents about students problems or needs, teachers providing ideas to help parents talk with their children about school, involving parents in collecting teaching and learning materials, parents providing good health and hygiene for children, asking parents to get involved in the feeding programmes of their children, assigning homework that involves parents and conducting all conferences with all parents. Classroom activities are important for the parent to get involved but teachers avoid parental dominance in classrooms alluding that parents do not know how to deal with pre-school curriculum matters. Teachers and parents need to understand how to foster a partnership that will lead to realization of good academic achievements for their pre-school children. Pre-school parents' roles in curriculum development are : Listening to children read aloud, read to children, assist children to learn specific skills, provide teaching and learning materials for teachers, repair the school buildings and equipment, pay school fees, pay teachers salaries, provide basic needs for the children and take as well as collect the children from school. However, parents were not in support of the idea of parents repairing school equipment and buildings, paying teachers' salaries, supporting their children in doing homework and attending their child discipline. The government has to pay and maintain the pre-schools. Pre-schoolers are too young to be bogged down with homework. Parents also expect teachers to deal with child's discipline. Parents should be involved in ECD curriculum development but they do not know the specific activities that they should be involved in.

RECOMMENADTIONS

From the foregoing discussion the following recommendations are made with respect to parental involvement in ECDE:

I.   The government should enforce Adult Education classes in Mumias town so that parents of pre-school children can become literate and in turn help their children with homework.

II.   A parenting awareness programme on the importance of ECDE, and parental involvement in pre- school curriculum which should be aired on radio in both the national language and local dialect. This should be sponsored by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Ministry of Education.

III. Parents' role in early childhood curriculum development should be clearly defined to both parents and teachers during the parent-teacher conferences or during Parent -Teacher and Administration meetings.

Parents should:-

i. Have access to information and basic tools that will enable them to become more actively involved in collaborative and decision-making activities with full knowledge of the facts of the collaboration so that they don't feel excluded.

ii. Endeavour having access to resources and tools that enable them to participate in their children's education which may seem impenetrable because they feel they do not have the education to do so.

iii. Ensure that the right of every child irrespective of gender or disability is protected. See themselves as invaluable partners, facilitators and educators since they have the community's culture, value, norms as a right, regardless of their difficulties in expressing their needs and opinions.

iv. Be aware of the resources available within the community and the ability to harness these resources toward the needs of their children.

v. Have an opportunity to share their questions and opinions about their children's welfare at care centres and schools and participate in activities aimed at strengthening collaborations.

vi. Be able to offer support to the collaboration based on the skills they possess.

To do all the above, parents should be fully involved in ECD curriculum by doing the following:

i. Assist children in cognitive development when at home.

ii. Serve as volunteers in the classrooms or pre-school sections

iii. Organize school meals for children with contributed food materials from their farms thus provision of snacks.

iv. Construct play and instructional materials needed for children's physical and cognitive development from available materials

v. Assist in clearing the environment of the school to achieve high hygiene and sanitation.

vi. Monitor, evaluate and deal with other learning concerns.

vii. Provide security to oversee the safety and security of school property

viii. Be apart of growth monitoring group.

ix. Be involved in decision-making on issues concerning improved service delivery in pre-schools

x. Report to the teachers the progress of the child at home.

xi. Establish a board of trustees in the schools within the community.

xii. Share observations with staff concerning children's developmental patterns and behaviour, to help individualize the approach in the home visit and in the program setting.

xiii. Endeavour to be part of curriculum reforms for children

xiv. Assist in development and implementation of curricula which for infants and toddlers is based on relationships, routines and daily experience.

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