Devolved Governance and Quality of Pre Primary Education in Busia County, Kenya

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1.1 Abstract

The study examined the quality of pre-primary education in the era of devolved governance in Busia County, Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to: investigate the suitability of teaching and learning environment in public pre-primary education in Busia County, establish adequacy of teaching and learning resources in public pre-primary education in Busia County, and, ascertain the competency of pre-primary education teachers in Busia County. The study targeted all public pre-primary education teachers and all head teachers of public primary schools that hosted pre-primary education. Thirty six public primary schools were sampled randomly. Thirty six head teachers and one hundred and forty four pre-primary education teachers participated in the study. Head teachers were purposively sampled while pre-primary education teachers were randomly sampled. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Data was collected using questionnaire, observation schedule and document analysis guide. Data was analyzed using means, percentages and frequencies. Chi-square was used to test hypotheses at $p \leq 0.05$. The findings of the study revealed that teaching and learning environment in public pre-primary education was generally un-conducive. The study findings revealed that teaching and learning resources were inadequate and that pre-primary education teachers were fairly competent. The findings of the study revealed that majority of pre-primary education teachers unsatisfactorily used professional documents and that there was a significant relationship between pre-primary education teachers' training and teacher competence as measured by overall Education Quality Index whose evaluation indicators included use of professional documents, use of teaching and learning resources, teacher professional conduct, quality of teaching and learning, teacher mastery of content, teacher personality and demonstration of skills in feedback. The study specifically revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between teacher training and use of professional documents. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended urgent measures ought to be taken to improve pre-primary education teaching and learning environment. Stakeholders should mobilize resources to provide adequate teaching and learning resources and sanitation facilities in order to enhance the quality of pre-primary education.

Keywords: *Devolved, Pre Primary Education, Busia County*

1.2 Introduction

Quality pre-primary education plays a critical role in the growth and development of children by providing support to families. Koech (2010) noted, "Access to quality pre-primary education has potentially positive influences on the children's school readiness by providing them valuable educational and social experiences". According to the World Bank report (2006), "Decline in quality of home based parental care may be one of the factors contributing to rising under-five mortality rates, as well as growing concerns about the healthy psychosocial development of children around the world". The report further notes that children who access quality pre-primary education were likely to perform better in later schooling compared to those who access poor quality pre-primary education. Even though there is no consensus as to what constitutes quality pre-primary education, Wawire (2006) stated, "Quality pre-primary education encompasses a conducive learning environment and rich experiences that are beneficial to the child's growth, development and welfare". Some commentators have suggested that quality pre-primary education can be achieved by providing appropriate physical facilities, teaching and learning resources as well as employing qualified and competent teachers.

In the United States of America, pre-primary education policies and legislations include a whole range of government actions by the federal, state and sometimes the local governments to provide quality programs. Even though majority of children in preschool in the USA are in private schools and private providers dominate the delivery system, the government ensures equity in access to quality services through direct and indirect financial subsidies to private providers of education and care such as grants and tax incentives

and financial grants to parents. Government funded preschool programs serve children from disadvantaged families while private preschool programs supported by parents serve children from all backgrounds.

In India, policy for young children has been relatively well provided for by government, compared to other countries in South Asian. There is recognition of the importance of child development in the Indian socio-political context, as evident in the constitutional provisions. Legislative measures, policy frameworks and public initiatives put in place over the years for the protection, welfare and development of children exist. Equally, there are several provisions in the Constitution of India either as a Fundamental Right or as a Directive Principle of State Policy that have been used to promote pre-primary services in the country. As a Fundamental Right, the Constitution of India empowers the state to practice positive discrimination favoring economically and educationally weaker groups. This allows for special provisions for girls and children of disadvantaged social groups and children in difficult situations.

In Kenya, pre-primary education is recognized as an important lever for promoting the attainment of Education for All (EFA), Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) clearly assigns the management of pre-primary education to County Governments. In addition, Articles 4(1)(f), 53(1)(6) and 55(a) of the Constitution makes basic education a right to every Kenyan child. According to the Senate County Early Childhood Education Bill (2014), County Governments are required to ensure that all children within the County enjoy access to quality early childhood education irrespective of their economic, social or religious background. Additionally, County Governments are obliged to provide sufficient teaching and learning resources and maintain suitable learning environment for learners at that level. County Governments are further required to provide free and compulsory pre-primary education; formulate prograrnmes, legislations and policies for the realization of the right to pre-primary education. Furthermore, Sessional paper No. 2 of 2015 calls for provision of health and nutritional support of 0-5 year olds attending day care centers, and provision of free and compulsory pre-primary education. Since devolution of management of pre-primary education envisaged increasing access to quality pre-primary education, this study sought to establish the quality of pre-primary education under the management of the County Government of Busia County.

The promulgation of the constitution of Kenya (2010) clearly brought about a paradigm shift in the management of education sector in Kenya. Unlike in the past when the central government was in charge of all levels of education, the management of pre-primary education was transferred to county governments. It was widely anticipated that county governments would revitalize the long neglected sectors by providing sufficient access to teaching and learning resources, funding and support and maintaining an enabling environment. This study sought to establish the quality of pre-primary education in Busia County, Kenya.

1.3 Data and Methods

1.3.1 Study Location

The study was carried out in Busia County in western Kenya. The County consists of seven Sub Counties namely Nambale, Teso North, Teso South, Butula, Funyula, Budalangi and Matayos. Busia County is situated in the extreme western border of Kenya and borders Bungoma County to the north, Kakamega to east and Siaya to the south west and Lake Victoria to the south east and the Republic of Uganda to the west. The population comprised of all public pre-primary education teachers and head teachers in four hundred and thirty nine public primary schools in Busia County. The study employed a descriptive survey design.

1.3.2 Sampling and Instrumentation

A sample of thirty six public pre-primary education centers was considered for the study representing 8.2% of the target population. A sample of one hundred and eight (108) teachers and thirty six (36) head teachers was used. Head teachers were purposively sampled while random sampling was used to sample teachers who participated in the study. The study used observation schedule, questionnaire and document analysis schedule to collect data. The observation schedule was developed by the Teachers Service Commission

was made up of four point likert scale items, where 1=unsatisfactory, 2= satisfactory, 3= Good and 4= very good.

1.3.3 Data Analysis

Data was processed, coded and analyzed to address the research objectives. Descriptive analyses involving statistics such as percentages, frequencies, and means were used to summarize and describe quantitative data. Chi-square test of association was used to test hypotheses. The findings of the study were presented in tables and figures. Data analysis was performed by use of SPSS version 20.

1.4 Results and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed based on the objectives.

The specific objectives of the study were to: investigate the suitability of teaching and learning environment in public pre-primary education in Busia County, establish adequacy of teaching and learning resources in public pre-primary education in Busia County and, ascertain the competency of pre-primary education teachers in Busia County**.**

1.5 Suitability of Teaching and Learning Environment in Public Pre Primary Education

The first objective of the study sought to investigate the suitability of teaching and learning environment in public pre-primary education in Busia County. The findings of the study revealed that majority of public pre-primary education centers had inadequate provision of outdoor play material such as swings, ladders and climbers. According to Waithera (2015), "Play assists young children to develop a capacity to deal with stress and strain of life, acting as a safety value allowing the child to adjust and come to terms with fear and anxiety which would otherwise be overwhelming". The lack of outdoor play material suggested that the learning environment was unsuitable and this was likely to impact on identification and development of talents among young children, making learning experience less interesting leading to low school attendance.

According to Chepkwony et.al (2013) a school feeding Program (SFP) is an essential aspect of learning environment at pre-primary education. He notes that having a school feeding program contributes to child development adding that, "Parents should be fully involved in all procedures to ensure sustainability of the program to carter for children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds". The study findings revealed that majority (80%) of the schools did not have a sustainable School Feeding Program (SFP). In schools where SFP existed, parents were required to meet the costs by either paying cash or in-kind in form of foodstuffs such as beans, maize and millet. Children whose parents did not pay for the program were denied snacks as was the case in one school where the researchers visited at ten o'clock and found only about 25% of the children taking porridge while the rest stood aside watching with despair. In one of the schools, a teacher was asked why some children were not taking porridge; she responded "This program is only meant for those who pay for it." One of the head teachers noted also stated, "Most parents here are poor and are unable to support the program and under such circumstances we have no alternative but to send children home at about 12.00 noon".

The study further revealed that despite the heavy presence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved in provision of educational services and addressing hygiene and sanitation in primary schools in Busia County, majority of public schools lacked proper sanitation facilities such as toilets for preschool learners. In most schools, learners shared toilets with older learners and toilets were filthy posing a high health hazard to young children who visited the toilets without shoes. It was however noted that there were significant efforts by NGOs to provide for health care of children through de-worming programs and chlorination of drinking water. The main source of drinking water in majority of schools was a bore hole sunk within the school compound. The water points were however used by both the school community and surrounding families. Findings of the study indicated that in most schools, the hand pumps that were used to pump water from the boreholes were dysfunctional and needed urgent repair.

Except for schools where the County Government had constructed classrooms for pre- primary, in majority of the centers, children were learning under poor conditions, classrooms had dusty floors and poorly ventilated. In some centers, classrooms had not satisfied the safety requirements set by Ministry of Education. For instance, in some schools, classroom windows had metal grills and doors were not opening outside in accordance with the safety guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education This was similar to the findings by UNESCO (2006) conducted in Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and other countries in the region indicating that most pre-primary school children in these countries learn in deplorable conditions poor physical facilities. The findings of the study revealed that majority of pre-primary education centers had not provided for the three prerequisite levels of learning namely; baby class, middle and top class.

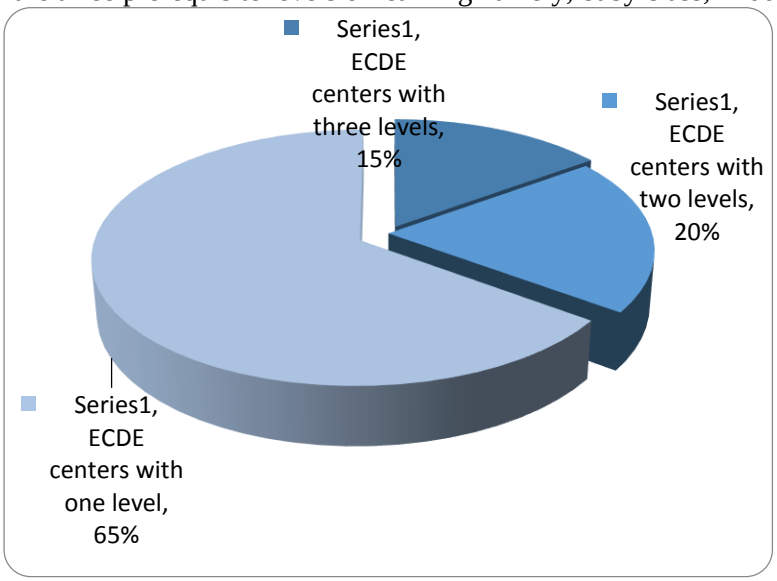

Fig 1: Distribution of pre-primary education centers according to established levels

Figure 1 indicates that majority, 70% of centers in Busia County were not operating the three levels of learning. In most centers, learners at different levels were lumped into one classroom each group facing a different direction. In other instances, a classroom was partitioned using cardboards, mats or old iron sheets. The lack of three levels seemed to hinder effective learning and progression.

1.6 Adequacy of Teaching and Learning Resources in Public Pre Primary Education

The study findings revealed that teaching and learning resources which learners themselves could use such as realias, nature corners and picture charts were inadequate. In addition, the study findings revealed that text books were also grossly inadequate or unavailable to the extent that the recommended 1:1 pupil-textbook ratio had not been attained. The lack of teaching and learning resources was a clear indication that learning environment in pubic pre-primary education centers was unfavorable. The study findings further revealed that the problem of inadequate teaching and learning resources in public pre-primary education centers was further aggravated by high losses and pilferage due to lack of storage facilities. Majority of the pre-primary education centers lacked bookstores and in cases where efforts to acquire some text books other teaching and learning material, the study findings revealed that teaching and learning resources were poorly maintained and most of them were torn up and kept in cupboards found in the head teachers' offices or in a makeshift store room.

1.7 Competency of Pre Primary Education Teachers

The third objective sought to investigate the competency levels of pre-primary education teachers. Bhagarva and Parthy (2011) stated, "Competency is a combination of attributes underlying some aspects of professional performance". Competency is generally associated with teachers' professional performance and quality of education. Chapman and Mahlck (1997) reported a consistent and a statistically significant positive relationship between training and teacher competency. In view of this, it is a mandatory requirement by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) for all pre-primary education teachers to have undergone training.

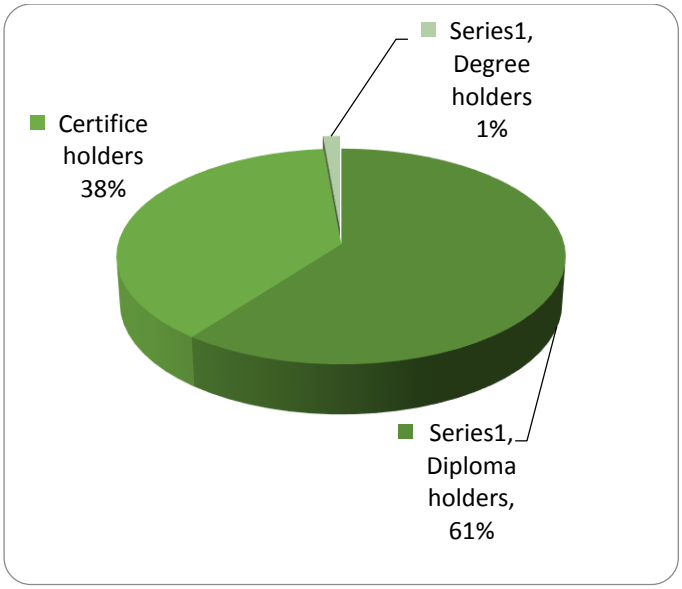

Fig 1.1: Distribution of pre-primary teachers according to training

The data presented in Figure 1.1 depicts that 61% of the pre-primary education teachers had diploma training. This finding suggests that based on the basis of training, majority of the pre-primary education teachers could be said to have competency.

An alternative approach to determine the competency of a teacher is the use of Education Quality Index (EQI). Education Quality Index provides a holistic measure of a teacher's overall performance based on a comprehensive set of indicators and evaluative criteria. The EQI generally pinpoints the areas of strengths as well as those that need support and improvement. The EQI score is generated by observing the teacher on a combination of predetermined competency indicators that are measured on a scale of 1-4, where 1= unsatisfactory, 2= satisfactory, 3= good and 4 = very good. on a scale of that include; In this study, teachers were assessed based on seven competency indicators which included; preparation and use of professional documents, use of teaching and learning resources, teacher professional conduct, quality of teaching and learning, teacher mastery of content, teacher personality and demonstration of skills in feedback. The study findings revealed that the average EQI was 2.897. This suggests that pre-primary education teachers' competency level was fairly satisfactory. Based on the two measures, namely training and Education Quality Index, there was no doubt that pre-primary education teachers had attained some level of competency.

The study sought to establish the relationship between pre-primary education teachers' training and the general Education Quality Index (EQI). The null hypotheses being tested was H01: There is no significant relationship between pre-primary education teachers' level of training and EQI. Table 1 presents the chi-

square tests for the association between pre-primary education teachers' training and the overall Education Quality Index (EQI).

Table 1: Chi-square tests of association between pre-primary education teachers training and Education Quality Index (EQI)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig(2-sided
Pearson Chi-square	9.267	6	.159
Likelihood Ratio	9.001	6	.174
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.030	1	.082
N of Valid cases	144		

Chi-square 9.267*; 6 (df) Cramer's 0.179 p>0.05

With a chi-square of 9.267, Cramer's 0.179 (p=.159), the results presented in Table 1 revealed that there was no significant relationship between the general Education Quality Index and pre-primary education teachers' level of training. This finding probably implies pre-primary education teachers who had higher training and teachers who with lower training had near equal competency. This finding was surprising since it was highly expected that the teachers with higher qualifications would be more competent than their counterpart with lower qualifications. The study findings contradict Sammons et al., (2002) in a study of the impact of professional training of pre-primary education teachers on quality which showed that higher proportions of staff with lower qualifications predicted poorer child outcomes on social relationships compared to their counterparts who were under the care of teachers with higher qualifications.

The study sought to establish the probability of using professional documents among trained teachers. Table 2 presents the pre-primary education teachers training by probability of using professional documents.

Table 1.1: Probability of pre-primary education teachers using professional documents

	Use of Professional Documents				
Level of Training	***Unsatisfactory***	***Fair***	***Good***	***Satisfactory***	***Total***
Diploma	73.6 (64)	8(7)	16.1(14)	2.3 (2)	100(87)
Certificate	74.5 (41)	12.7(7)	7.3(4)	5.5(3)	100(55)
Degree	100 (2)	0 (0)	0	0	100(2)
Total	74.3(107)	9.7(14)	12.5(18)	3.5(5)	100(144)

Note: Number in parentheses ( ) are total number of teachers/caregivers in each category

The results presented in Table 1.1 depict that 73.6 % of diploma teachers unsatisfactorily used professional documents compared to 2.3% diploma teachers who satisfactorily used professional documents. The

findings of the study revealed that the use of professional documents was unsatisfactory among 100% of the graduate teachers.

Finally, the study sought to establish the relationship between teacher training and use of professional documents. The null hypothesis being tested was H01: There is no statistically significant relationship between pre-primary education teachers training and their use of professional documents. Table 1.2 presents the chi-square tests for the relationship between pre-primary education teachers' training and use of professional documents.

Table 1.2: Chi-square tests for relationship between teacher training and use of professional documents

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig(2-sided
Pearson Chi-square	4.528	6	.506
Likelihood Ratio	5.088	6	.533
Linear-by-Linear Association	.251	1	.516
N of Valid cases	144		

Chi-square 4.528*; 6 (df) Cramer's 0.125 $p<0.05$

From the findings presented in Table1.2, Chi- square 4.528, Cramer's 0.125, p= 0.506, the study revealed that there was a no statistically significant relationship between pre-primary education teachers training and use of professional documents. The implication of this finding is that pre-primary education teachers with higher training appeared less competent in use of professional documents than their counterparts who had lower training.

1.8 Summary and Conclusions

The findings of the study revealed that learning environment in pre-primary education was generally unconducive due to inadequacy of teaching and learning resources, inappropriate sanitation facilities and congested classrooms. The study findings also revealed that majority pre-primary education teachers were trained and fairly competent but there was no statistically significant relationship between the level of pre-primary education teachers training and the use of professional documents and this therefore negatively impacting the quality of pre-primary education.

1.9 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that;

i. Stakeholders should take appropriate measures to provide adequate teaching and learning resources for pre-primary education in Busia County.
ii. The County Government through the quality assurance and standards department should ensure that teachers use professional documents.
iii. Measures should be taken to improve the sanitation facilities in public pre-primary education centers.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Azida Ali (Former County Executive Committee Member-Education and Vocational Training), Joel Jeffreys Barua (County Chief Officer- Education), Douglas Barasa (Director ECDE), Leonard Opollo (Director Vocational Training), Joseph Ochieng

(CQASO), William Makori (CQASO), Fredrick Odeyo (DQASO) We also acknowledge the financial support by the county government of Busia through the Department of Education and Vocational Training.

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