

Full Length Research Paper

Implementation of Early Childhood Education Programme in Government-Aided Primary Teachers' Colleges in Eastern Uganda: A Focus on Examining Core Competencies of Tutors

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Received 28 April 2020; Accepted 20 May, 2020

Early Childhood Education (ECE) has become a turning point and bedrock for the education systems of countries of the world. This paper provides a critical examination into Tutors' knowledge of core competencies in the implementation of ECE Programme in Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTCs) in Eastern Uganda. Kyambogo University in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) initiated a special Curriculum for PTCs to train specialists who ought to possess desired competencies. Core competencies in this paper include effective communication, problem-solving, innovativeness, manipulative skills, mentorship, and creativity. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study with purely qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Data instruments included an informant interview guide, observation guide, and document analysis guide. The study was done on a sample of 63 participants who included; 42 Tutors of ECE, 10 Headteachers, 10 College Principals, and 1 Commissioner in-charge of ECE at the MoES. Participants were selected from 10 PTCs under Kyambogo University and 10 Primary schools in Eastern Uganda. The purpose was to inquire and report whether tutors were competent enough to handle trainees in colleges as per the theme of the study. Knowledge on; direct instruction, drill and practice, discussion, discovery learning, and inquiry

approach were explored. Findings of the study revealed areas of weakness which required attention, for instance, the frequently employed methods of teaching were well known for enhancing teaching skills, stimulating the ability of teacher trainees to think for themselves, promoting teaching skills among tutors and routine teaching practice, on one hand. However, some of the approaches were reported to deprive teacher trainees of the ability to creative thinking. The study concluded that the intentions of the 2012 ECE curriculum regarding 'Hands-on-learning' were not being met because much focus was on passing written examinations. Recommendations were mainly in reference to the need to ensure that Tutors are exposed to Continuous Professional Development (CPDs) in the form of seminars, workshops, and conferences for purposes of capacity building. It is also recommended that the greatest percentage (75%) of the teacher trainees' ECE examinations should be on Practicum and the least percentage (25%) should be on theory in order to attract the implementers to pay much attention to practical, hands-on-learning'. Peer mentorship should also be promoted to empower champion tutors and trainees' support.

Keywords: Early childhood education curriculum, tutors, core competencies

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO Report (2013) states that caring for and educating young children is an integral part of human society that has evolved over time, and remains varied

across cultures, often reflecting family, community structures, plus the social and economic roles of women and men. Eddy and Matthew, (2016) noticed that it was

out of these responsibilities that ECE emerged as a field of study during the enlightenment in European Countries with high literacy rates.

Marope and Kaga, (2015) noted that before ECE became a policy in Europe, the United States and other countries, had had a national push for state and federal policy to address early years as a key component of public education. As a result, Senate Report (2013) indicates that the federal government under Obama administration made ECE a key tenet of America's education reform initiative, awarding \$500 million to states with comprehensive ECE plans.

According to Nutbrown and Clough (2013), since 1700s, ECE has always been targeted to provide some form of education for young children in kindergartens and nursery schools. In the same direction, Absolutnet, (2013) underlines the view that ECE normally focuses on learning through play to meet the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of children, in the prevalence of safe space, correct supervision and culturally-aware trained teachers who are familiar with Early Years Foundation.

Effective implementation of ECE follows Montessori's five principle approach which support natural development of children in a well-prepared environment. These principles are highlighted by Morrison, (2010) in Kipkosgei and Kabwos (2016) as; (1) Respect for the child; helping them to do things and learn for themselves to develop skills and abilities, (2) A sorbent mind; driving children's ability to learn on their teachers' experiences and environment, (3) Sensitive periods especially of writing to detect times of sensitivity and provide setting for optimum fulfilment, (4) prepared environment where they can do things by themselves, and (5), auto-education; such that materials are organized in a way to provide for; control of error, isolated quality, active involvement and attentiveness.

ECE curriculum implementation is a phenomenon that calls for a collaboration of different stakeholders so that, the fruits of the five Montessori principles can be realized effectively (Andreia and Mata, 2011). Tutors' pedagogical competencies are key among factors whereby, tutors need to be fully equipped with content knowledge, methodological knowledge, effective communication and classroom management skills to implement the ECE curriculum appropriately (Eberly, 2008). Competent tutors of ECE do not just transfer knowledge to teacher trainees (Vygotsky, 1998), rather, they strategies implementation of approaches that only enable their teacher trainees acquire skills which they can in turn use to teach primary school pupils and other learners in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres after their course (Andreia and Mata, 2011).

Kisitu, (2009) as quoted in Ejuu, (2012) states that Early Childhood Development (ECD) puts children on equal footing at such an early stage prior to starting primary schooling, regardless of the different conditions

under which children grow. In response to the Sustainable Development Goal number four (04) and as a fulfilment of the commitment to the Dakar Framework as well as in line with the EFA goals, the ECD policy was launched in Uganda in 2007 to streamline ECE programmes across the country (MoES, 2008; Ejuu, 2012).

In addition, many tutors of ECE were trained so many years ago before the introduction of the revised Curriculum in 2012. Teacher trainees in PTCs in Eastern Uganda at the same time lack appropriate reference materials for ECE, the trainee specialists at Grade III level are taught and examined theoretically as opposed to the intended practical learning. Majority of the Caregivers in the Early Childhood Centers in Uganda, therefore, lack legitimate professional training. At the same time, there is no adequate evidence to indicate how equipped tutors in colleges are with core competencies for implementing ECE programmes. Tutors' competencies handled in this paper relate to; knowledge on direct instruction, knowledge on drill and practice, knowledge on discussion, knowledge on discovery learning and knowledge on inquiry approach which are intended to facilitate trainees with the development of effective communication skills, problem-solving skills, creative thinking skills and manipulation skills acquired through Hands-on-learning. Effective implementation of ECE Curriculum is in line with the targets of the 21st century skills and the positive response to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey design with purely qualitative methods of data collection and analysis was adopted for this study. The adoption of the highlighted design was in line with Alley Dog.com (2017)'s establishment that, a cross-sectional design allows for studying people of different demographic characteristics at the same time. In addition, this design was chosen for being relatively quick and easy to conduct (no long periods of follow-up) in a sense that data on all variables is always only collected once and it also makes it possible for the researcher to describe the situation as it exists in the area of study. For purposes of convenience, logistics, geographical scope in terms of distance from one PTC to another in Eastern Uganda and time constraints, the researcher was able to zero down to the manageable population. The researcher was able to target 42 tutors of ECE selected from ten PTCs under Kyambogo University, 10 Headteachers, 10 College Principals, and 1 Commissioner in-charge of ECD at the MoES, totaling to 63 participants from whom the sample size was determined as illustrated below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(a)^2}$$

where n = sample size, N the total population targeted which was 1305 and e = percentage of error made in selecting sample (5% or 0.05), and 1 is representative of any likely omissions.

$$n = \frac{63}{1+63(0.05)^2} = \frac{63}{1+63 \times 0.0025} = \frac{63}{1+63.2} = \frac{63}{1.1575} = 54.4 \text{ or } 54$$

Principals were selected and used in the study because they were expected to directly oversee and supervise tutors of ECE, whereas, tutors of ECE were selected to participate in the study because they were at the forefront in as far as the implementation of ECE curriculum was concerned. As a matter of policy, the Commissioner in-charge of ECD in the Ministry of Education and Sports was involved in the study because of being one of the policy makers whose views were expected to have a significant bearing on the entire process of ECE Curriculum implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge on direct instruction

Interviews were predominant in seeking responses to this effect. Views of Principals in some colleges indicated that teacher trainees of ECE were trained in dealing with learners (infants) whose actions could be meditated upon by direct instruction from (an experienced person) superior. This method of ECE curriculum implementation was therefore, cherished by majority of tutors and principals in the colleges under study. From one of the principals during an interview session the following was quoted:

...the ECE Syllabus in PTCs is very wide therefore, tutors use direct instruction so as to be able to cover all the units and topics. Direct instruction helps majority of the tutors in wide content coverage to prepare teacher trainees for the Kyambogo University examinations, most especially the theory aspect which takes the highest marks (75%) and only (25%) for the practical exams! However, if it were possible that the practical aspect took the highest marks, then majority of the tutors of ECE would be applying other activity-based approaches/methods in teaching their teacher trainees who specialize in ECE being a 'Hands-on' learning area in nature... (Informant interview session with a Principal from one of the Colleges in Eastern Uganda, September, 2019).

From the above quotation, the direct instruction method was known and desirable to tutors because it enabled them to manage wide syllabus coverage. Worth noting also was that the ECE curriculum was referred to as a 'wide' learning area with inadequate staffing in the ECE Department across the PTCs in Eastern Uganda and yet,

there was pressure of the Kyambogo University (theory) Examinations which was reported to form the largest portion (75%) in the teacher trainees' course completion. In other words, knowledge of direct instruction method by the tutors of ECE provided a room for coaching and preparing the trainees more on their examinations than their professional pedagogical competencies to be applied in the field.

On the other hand, much as direct instruction was viewed as a convenient method of instruction by the tutors of ECE, it was also believed to have some negative aspects. One of the most worrisome aspects is that ECE curriculum implementation is meant to prepare teacher trainees to learn for themselves (learning how to learn) as one of the assumptions of Vygotsky's Socio-cultural learning theory emphasizes. According to the researcher, direct instruction which requires an instruction by some other person remains questionable in an effort to promote 'Hands-on-learning'.

Through observations made on lessons conducted under direct instruction, it was discovered that in the 58 out of a total of 61 lessons observed by the researcher, majority of the tutors of ECE happened to employ direct instruction with the help of Question and Answer technique to provoke teacher trainees' thinking skills more frequently than any other strategy across the lessons which were observed. The cross-validation of results helped the researcher to discover close similarities in the findings obtained using the informant interview and Observation Guide.

Among the notable views from the informant interviews were that principals in three of the colleges in Eastern Uganda also established that Tutors of ECE employed approaches which could ease teacher trainees' understanding of concepts in preparation for the National Examinations. As a result, the researcher probed one of the principals who shared the following observation in the quotation;

...Tutors skillfully use their experience to select content from the syllabus and break it into teachable subject matter. They also select relevant instructional materials to aid the prepared content. Consequently, the most user-friendly method they always apply is direct instruction. This method is considered easy for them to apply because it saves time and facilitates them to pass on to the teacher trainees their prepared subject matter in terms of notes and assignments or activities for the teacher trainees to do. Direct instruction, therefore, eases tutors' work in that they get to know that what they have prepared is delivered in order to prepare and deliver more, unit by unit, topic by topic and lesson by lesson ... (Informant interview session with a Principal from one of the PTCs in Eastern Uganda, September, 2019).

On the aspect of tutors' preparation to meet the expected Pedagogical Standards as stipulated in the (Kyu, 2012,

Revised ECE syllabus), the researcher made an initiative to cross-validate results using Document Analysis and the aspects of focus were those recommended for use in the Primary Teacher Education (PTE) curriculum namely; Early Childhood Education Syllabus for ECE, Early Childhood Education Modules for ECE, Early Childhood Education Assessment Records in ECE, Early Childhood Education Departmental Minutes and Reports. Findings made the researcher discover that much as all Curriculum components are emphasized by MoES, the ECE syllabus was used most frequently and Departmental Reports were least used in the PTCs under study. Worth noting also was that some tutors of ECE had encouraged their teacher trainees to copy notes from the available ECE Modules on claims that the available time was too inadequate to enable tutors cover all lessons as stipulated in the syllabus. The researcher wondered whether the ECE modules would be appropriate enough to substitute the tutors of ECE and facilitate legitimate learning!

In an effort to further cross-validate data, the researcher employed the Document Analysis Guide to further analyze the ECE Kyambogo University Revised syllabus of 2012, to establish the exact instructional methods recommended by MoES for use and the guidelines given to tutors in the implementation of the ECE Curriculum in PTCs. In the analysis of the (ECE Kyambogo University revised 2012 syllabus, p.5) the researcher discovered that the recommended teaching methods/strategies were; Project: Child study, material production, Brain storming, Task-based learning, Discussion, Micro-teaching, Demonstration, Role play, Guided Reading, Group work, Video vignettes, Circus, Case study, Jig-Saw, Storytelling, Think-Pair-share, Plenary Discussion, Dramatization, Debate and Puppety. The researcher wondered at the variety of methods indicated in the syllabus document yet, to the surprise of the researcher, tutors were able to apply very few in their practice as indicated in the findings. One of the principals were prompted to provide their views on what they saw and experienced in terms of teacher trainees' commitment to ECE curriculum implementation in terms of pedagogy. Through the informant interview sessions, majority of the principals stated that commitment of teacher trainees depended upon the method that a tutor of ECE used to deliver content. In the words of one of the principals, the following was quoted:

...No single method may be regarded to be better or worse than the other in terms of use for purposes of content delivery. What matters is the way the user for this case the subject tutor's competence in applying the selected method of instruction. Other additional conditions which matter may also include why, when, to whom, for what purpose, where and how to employ the method in question. For example, some people treat direct instruction as a teacher-centred approach but that

may not necessarily be true because the whole arrangement is dependent on how the learning activities are structured, the number of learners being handled at a time, the nature of subject matter, the available space and amount of time available. If well organized, therefore, Direct Instruction can be employed in a learner-centred manner depending on the experience and pedagogical competence of the user/tutor/teacher... (Informant interview session with one of the Principals in Eastern Uganda, September, 2019).

Based on the foregoing quotation, it is a clear indication and point of emphasis that direct instruction as a method of ECE Curriculum implementation was appropriate in some colleges, whereas, in others it was not. Secondly, it was also well clarified by the participant in the same interview session that depending on the pedagogical competencies and experience of a tutor, direct instruction may not necessarily be labeled as a purely teacher-centred method of instruction in implementing the ECE curriculum but tutors ought to use their professional experience to employ direct instruction in the ECE implementation in a learner-centred manner so as to be in agreement with Vygotsky's assumption that: when well facilitated, the trainees receive ample ready-made experience from the trainers/teacher educators, in this case, the tutor who is assumed to have accumulated vast experience over the years. Thirdly, the same participant provided a very strong view that no single method of teaching may be regarded better/worse than the other but it depends on the purpose for which it is selected to serve. The researcher's view is that for purposes of promoting Hands-on-learning, learner-centred methods of teaching are more appropriate than those that are teacher-centred in nature.

In this study, the approach used to interpret direct instruction was one that happened to be in line with Lucie, (2019) referring to it as a directed teaching method where a teacher stands in front of a classroom and presents the information or gives explicit, guided instructions to the students (learners). This kind of approach to teaching has positive and negative outcomes and in a study such as this one which handled issues of ECE curriculum implementation, a practical approach of teaching was required to have an active class in which acquisition of concepts and mastery of skills would be totally different from mere transfer of knowledge. The researcher also found out that the knowledge of tutors in the application of direct instruction method varied by work experience, in that, tutors who had worked for more than 10 years had an understanding and felt that direct instruction was a useful method for teaching basic skills, and that it works better in developing thinking skills. However, tutors of ECE who had qualified within 5 years to the time when the study was conducted indicated mixed feelings about the application of direct instruction. The researcher, therefore, discovered that the controversy

between the tutors who qualified 10 years ago onwards and those who qualified 5 years to the present time, posed a lot of questions to be desired. It implied that CPDs would be conducted to facilitate tutors of ECE to be on the same page in as far as pedagogical core competencies are concerned.

To the majority of the respondents, direct instruction was acknowledged as a usual teaching method by tutors to prepare teacher trainees for continuous assessment and national examinations. Various related studies also confirm that direct instruction is a useful approach whose methodology, teacher trainers [tutors] ought to know and apply in their instructional processes. A related case in point was in the findings of Edutopia, (2015) study who noticed that the use of direct instruction helps struggling readers to learn essential reading skills and strategies and that, it promotes easy understanding when a tutor is training/teaching learners. Edutopia (Ibid) adds that direct instruction helps to impart new information to students through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance to student learning. In addition, findings by Schuyler, (2011) also indicated that direct instruction is an approach used towards promoting peer tutoring which in turn enhances student-reading rate without increasing error rate. Implying, therefore, that direct instruction as a method in ECE curriculum implementation is relevant to tutors in enhancing all levels of teaching and learning. However, the researcher could also not ignore the views, ideas and opinions of the minority who possessed mixed feelings or who were reluctant to express their acknowledgement about the use of direct instruction given its gaps of depriving learners of the opportunity to creative thinking. The fact remains therefore, that some tutors were unwilling to treat direct instruction as a learner-centred approach. The argument of the minority was that if not well planned and used, Direct instruction may not appropriately promote 'Hands-on-learning' which was the target of Kyambogo University's effort to review the ECE curriculum in 2012. On the contrary, the research findings of Kodjo, (2019) confirmed that ECE pedagogy provides space for teacher trainees to engage in practical skills such as minds-on, easily acquired through direct instruction, instead of hands-on activity.

Since the Kyambogo University's revised ECE curriculum of 2012 expects tutors to focus their knowledge on methods which lead to hands-on-learning, then, the use of direct instruction which is majorly used to prepare teacher trainees for passing written examinations, depending on its application seems to be contrary to Kyambogo's intentions! At the same time, tutors' knowledge of the ECE pedagogy as revealed by the findings of this study, may not be congruent with Vygotsky's Socio-cultural learning theory which advocates for methods which promote hands-on-experience and mentorship. Instead of supporting Kyambogo's intentions as stipulated in the revised ECE

curriculum and are in agreement with Vygotsky's Socio-cultural learning theory assumptions which were employed to guide this study, again findings from Carlsson et al. (2015) make matters worse by observing that, like all debates in education around philosophical and instructional approaches, no one actually adheres to either approaches 100% [completely] at a time. To the researcher, the implication is that a variety (eclectic) of methods is desirable for balanced concept development in ECE curriculum implementation, since learners are also dynamic in nature.

Establishing tutors' knowledge on drill and practice

Drill and practice as a method of teaching is normally used by tutors of ECE to prepare teacher trainee specialists. It is characterized by systematic repetition of concepts. In this arrangement, the tutor's aim is to employ repetitive exercises on specific concepts or skills for purposes of achieving mastery. It is employed as a reinforcement strategy to master concepts in a repetitive manner. According to the findings of this study, Drill and practice is a method of ECE Curriculum implementation which was also to some extent largely used by tutors in PTCs in Eastern Uganda. A number of comments were made on some of the views given by Principals. The researcher prompted one of the principals who shared the following views as quoted:

...Given the inadequate staffing and time, majority of the ECE tutors employ drill and practice, [chalk and talk] methods of teaching. They normally employ such methods to enable them cover much content within a short time. They also endeavor to prepare their teacher trainees for the G.III Kyambogo University examinations. However, it is true that we (College Administrators) always emphasize to tutors to use learner-centred methods of teaching which help students to master concepts but as long as a suggested method requires much preparation in terms of instructional materials and also consumes much time, majority of tutors always decline to employ such a method. (Source: Informant interview session with a Principal from one of the Colleges in Eastern Uganda, September, 2019)

From the quotation, it was realized that much as drill and practice could inform a fairly effective ECE curriculum implementation as reported by some tutors, it was at the same time not a favorable approach in some colleges. Incidentally, tutors who cherished drill and practice did it for purposes of coaching and preparing teacher trainees for the National examinations of Kyambogo University, an arrangement which was contrary to the intended concept of 'Hands-on-learning.' On contrary to the observation of a principal who supported Drill and Practice in his college, another principal of a different college was

prompted by the researcher to share an experience and she had a different opinion about the use of Drill and Practice as follows in the quotation:

...The disadvantage of Drill and Practice is like a beautiful tree which may look strong by appearance while in the actual sense, has no taproot! Teacher Trainees who are prepared using Drill and Practice may be able to master certain concepts for a while but after their examinations, such concepts may disappear! My opinion would be to emphasize on practical methods such as project and other practical strategies such as exhibitions and projects which promote a lot of 'Hands-on-learning' other than methods which merely facilitate students to pass examinations but may have very little impact on the professional competence of the teacher trainees... (Opinion of a Principal in Eastern Uganda during an informant interview session, September, 2019).

The foregoing principal's opinion indicated as if Drill and Practice may mainly be appropriate when students are being prepared for examinations but not legitimate in building the professional pedagogical competence of a teacher trainee who is supposed to be practical in nature.

In further cross-validation of results, the researcher employed the Participant Observation Method to establish the extent to which tutors of ECE applied Drill and Practice in teaching the teacher trainees in the PTCs under study. In the researcher's further interaction with the tutors of ECE, Drill and Practice was also one of the methods employed to a great extent. To the researcher, tutors of ECE were compelled to employ drill and practice basing on the pressure for preparing teacher trainees for the written examinations of Kyambogo University which are academically very competitive.

In a related study, Edward and Christine, (2011) for instance also explain that drill and practice help learners to master materials at their own pace through repetitive reinforcement tools depending on the recognition of the type of skill being developed and the use of appropriate strategies to develop such given competencies. According to the available information, it is clear that majority of tutors of ECE who are currently in PTCs in Eastern Uganda trained many years ago, before Kyambogo University introduced the new ECE curriculum content in 2012, some tutors, therefore, lack the required skills on how to modify drill and practice in a learner-centred manner. In some related studies, it was also established that drill and practice reinforce learning just as it is spelt out in (Kropf, 2017) using the old adage "practice makes perfect" is applicable to teaching, and instruction incorporated practice and drills for students to memorize or adopt concepts. To the researcher, drill and practice may depend largely on the effective planning of the teacher/tutor so as to yield meaningful learning in that if not well applied, drill and practice may encourage rote/parrot learning.

Establishing tutors' knowledge on discussion

Through discussion, teacher trainees are expected to discover connections between concepts and ideas and also to judge what they know based on what they discover from tutors and their colleagues during a lesson. More still, the study aimed at establishing whether through discussion, teacher trainees' thinking could be challenged to facilitate learners to explore topics and concepts deeper in order to get the real insight. Almost half the number of tutors of ECE happened to be positive to the statement and by implication; the few tutors who employed Discussion as a method of implementing ECE curriculum in PTCs, reported that it brings teacher trainees at the center of the learning process and creates a platform for them to analyze issues. It is different from direct instruction, which is so engaging to the tutors. Although, Discussion method was appreciated by majority of tutors of ECE as suitable for promoting collaborative learning, it was also viewed as time consuming most especially in a situation of teaching big classes.

More findings revealed that discussion method clears assumptions and opens doors to critical and creative thinking. In addition, it was also reported that discussion creates an opportunity to think critically and question assumptions. As teacher trainees interact with one another, each seeks to make factual presentations to avoid criticisms from colleagues. The idea of interactive learning makes the findings of this study to be in line with Vygotsky's Socio-cultural learning theory which was adopted to underpin this study. In other words, discussion encourages a high level of critical thinking and reasoning and this is what is expected of ECE specialists. Results in support were balanced among tutors of various years in terms of working experience but majority of the tutors who disagreed had a working experience of 10 years and above. The opinions and arguments of the minority who got opposed rotated around discussion method not being favorable for the time-taker (slow learners) and also consuming a lot of time and difficult to conduct with big classes. The researcher's idea was that the advantages of discussion method which include provoking effective communication and problem-solving skills are in line with the 21st century education which is the turning point world over.

The findings of this study are also in agreement with Larson, (2013) who identifies that discussion method engages students in a lesson to learn academic content by encouraging verbal interactions. He also adds that discussion enhances the desired outcome for students to team up and learn more effectively. In a related study still, Alister and Sufumi, (2016) enumerated several advantages associated with discussion when he tutored 20 adults in English Language and yielded positive results. The researcher respects the ideas of Larson in that discussion empowers students to gain confidence in

sharing their experience with others.

Establishing tutors' knowledge on discovery learning

Principals of PTCs in Eastern Uganda were engaged in informant interview sessions on, what instructional methods were commonly applied by tutors of ECE in their Colleges.' Majority of the participants rotated around Lecture method, Demonstration, Question and Answer technique and the least number of participants mentioned Discovery and Discussion as methods commonly applied by tutors in their Colleges. In further interview engagements with Principals one of them stated as indicated in the quotation:

...When our tutors of ECE are verbally asked about suitable methods that are learner-centred of teaching desired in a College, majority always mention them but when it comes to the application of such methods during ECE curriculum implementation, very few if not none may be willing to employ them! Through interaction with the tutors, majority claim that learner-centred methods such as discovery, project and discussion are participatory but require a lot of preparation and time which they claim to be inadequate due to inadequacy in staffing and wide syllabus coupled with pressure from the Kyambogo University theoretical National Examinations which teacher trainees ought to pass at 40% pass mark across the 13 learning areas at first year and 9 learning areas at final year passed at 50% each subject. Such situations compel majority of tutors, those of ECE inclusive to get so much inclined on coaching instead of mentoring... (A Principal's statement during an informant interview session in one of the PTCs in Eastern Uganda, September, 2019).

The foregoing views of one of the participants, moreover a top College Administrator (Principal), raised a lot of worries in the researcher in that, much as majority of the tutors of ECE had demonstrated a lot of knowledge about their competence in learner-centred methods of implementing the ECE Curriculum, informant interview findings indicated that the application part of what they knew was non-existent in majority of the colleges under study. In further cross-validation of results, the researcher was able to conduct participant observation initiatives to observe some lessons for tutors of ECE and teachers of lower primary who had already qualified with specialization in ECE. Surprisingly, majority of the lessons observed by the researcher projected neither application of Discussion nor Discovery methods of teaching, thereby, making the views of one of the Principals true. The researcher wondered why some participants (College Administrators) during the informant interview sessions insisted that their tutors of ECE applied learner-centred methods of teaching and yet, on

the ground, majority of the tutors employed teacher-centred methodologies. In the analysis of the researcher's findings, it was discovered that either some Principals did not carry out their supervisory role of lesson observation to discover how tutors were teaching or they wanted to cover up tutors in defense of the image of their respective colleges. The true findings which were directly observed by the researcher during lesson observation caused worries in that the teacher trainers (tutors) who would be the senior advocates of the learner-centred methods of teaching were instead doing the opposite, then how sure could one be that the teacher trainees would apply what they did not see their superiors/mentors do, so as to emulate them?

Discovery learning is yet another aspect of ECE pedagogy which tutors are expected to be aware of. The study results revealed that tutors of ECE possessed knowledge that discovery learning helps to identify reality in hard tasks around them, rids teacher trainees off negative attitudes towards a subject, increases teacher trainees' motivation, enhances positive behaviour in class and narrows the 'master and novice' gap between teacher trainees and tutors, thus promoting empowerment in learning how to learn. This is in line with Mayer, (2016) who postulates that discovery learning helps to build ground for acquisition of skills as it involves students' interaction with the world by exploring and manipulating objects, wrestling with questions and controversies, or performing experiments. In other words, discovery learning does not only involve use of materials which encourage active engagement but also promotes motivation, autonomy, responsibility, independence, creativity, problem-solving skills and tailors learning experiences in a positive direction. The implication that the researcher got was that if teacher trainers (educators/tutors) apply the discovery method of tutoring, teacher trainees are likely to adopt a task oriented type of learning.

Establishing tutors' knowledge of inquiry approach

As a follow-up to check on the already qualified teachers of ECE in the field, a total of 10 interview sessions were held with Head-teachers who possessed qualified teachers of ECE (classes 1-3) whose schools were randomly selected. The intension was to establish the relationship between what the teachers of ECE had learnt at college and what they were doing in the field. On the basic parts emphasized in the ECE curriculum at PTC level, majority of the Head-teachers highlighted Content more than Methodology. Still, majority of the Headteachers reported that their teachers found the theoretical content aspect fairly easy to implement but practicum was still challenging. The least number of Headteachers mentioned contemporary cross-cutting

issues in ECE, for example, teaching children with Special Educational Needs.

In addition, results obtained using Document Analysis Guide to follow up tutors' knowledge of the inquiry approach indicated that majority of the existing Curriculum Documents used by tutors of ECE did not highlight the use of inquiry approach!

The researcher was able to access copies of the Kyambogo University Revised PTC Syllabus, ECE Modules, tutors'/teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans and instructional materials. The purpose was to find out what was officially recommended and what was being applied in reality in terms of approaches of teaching. In the (Kyu ECE revised 2012 syllabus, p.5) the recommended teaching methods/strategies did not surprisingly include inquiry approach! In the researcher's view, inquiry would be helpful in stimulating critical thinking skills among the teacher trainees. The views of the researcher happen to be in line with Waesiera, (2018) who asserted that by applying inquiry-based learning, the senior-subordinate gap reduces and learners are in position to freely consult with their teachers [tutors] and vice versa. In such an environment, management of classroom becomes simple and almost effortless because trainees become friends to the tutors and vice versa. The only unfortunate bit was that, tutors who employed inquiry-based approach in the implementation of ECE curriculum in the PTCs under study, were the minority.

An effort was made to tap the views of the Commissioner in-charge of ECD at ministry level. On the contrary to the views of the Principals who wished that the practical component of the ECE Curriculum ought to be more emphasized than the theory, the Commissioner made comments which implied that every part of the ECE Curriculum possessed equal importance, therefore, tutors of ECE ought to emphasize all aspects of the curriculum as stipulated in the teaching syllabus for PTCs. Through continuous probing and paraphrasing, the researcher requested the Commissioner to direct his experience on the prevailing situation of what was happening in the Colleges of Eastern Uganda regarding tutors' core competencies in implementing ECE curriculum. In response, the Commissioner observed that tutors of ECE needed Continuous Professional Development workshops, seminars and conferences in order to have their capacity built. The researcher was in support with the observation of the Commissioner in that tutors who for example, qualified 10 years ago could not easily catch-up with the demands of the reviewed ECE curriculum of 2012 unless they undergo appropriate CPDs.

Conclusion

Use of direct instruction leaves teacher trainees in a dilemma especially considering the fact that it hardly tolerates slow learners (time-takers) and yet, the main

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aim of ECE pedagogy is to apply approaches which provide for all categories of learners in an effort to acquire and master desired concepts. Drill and practice method was helpful in preparing teacher trainees for their written examinations; however it was associated with depriving students of their chances to achieving creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Tutors' knowledge on discussion method aided tutors to register achievements in enhancing connections between ideas and concepts, use of verbal and nonverbal cues which encouraged participation and brought about a sense of ownership of lessons among teacher trainees. The only concern however, was that very few tutors in fact the minority employed discussion method. In Colleges where tutors allowed teacher trainees to apply discovery learning, critical thinking was enriched and tutors also demonstrated awareness that discovery approach enabled teacher trainees to engage in critical thinking. The major concern however, was that very few tutors put attention on methods which could promote practical skills because of the examination pressure. Basing on the findings of the study, it hereby also concluded that majority of the tutors of ECE trained many years ago before the current ECE curriculum was reviewed in 2012 by Kyambogo University, therefore, they lack appropriate knowledge and skills of implementing it to achieve the, 'Hands-on-learning.' It was finally concluded that the methods of teaching employed by majority of tutors in PTCs in Eastern Uganda could not contribute much to the enhancement of Hands-on-learning which was intended by Kyambogo University and MoES as stipulated in the review of the 2012 PTE Curriculum.

Recommendations

Basing on the fact that implementation of ECE curriculum still projected gaps in the selected PTCs under study in Eastern Uganda; it was therefore recommend that;

- (i) Use of low/no cost instructional materials from local resources are recommendable for promotion of Hands-on-learning' as intended by MoES in the ECE Curriculum implementation to facilitate mastery of desired concepts by the learners.
- (ii) Application of eclectic approaches with a variety of activity-best methods of teaching should be popularized among the PTC tutors for improved ECE Curriculum implementation, targeting the development of 21st century skills such as creative thinking, effective communication and problem-solving.
- (iii) Considering the fact that many tutors trained many years ago before the review of the current ECE Curriculum which promotes 'Hands-on-learning', there is

a very crucial need to build their capacity through Continuous Professional Development (CPDs) in form of seminars, workshops and conferences ranging from Wambi et al. 31

national to class-based and subject-based levels.

(iv) Since more attention is paid to the written (pen & paper) National examinations constituting 75% thereby rendering the practicum redundant, let the programme be redesigned to instead revert the practical examinations to constitute the 75% and the other component (pen & paper) to take the 25%.

(v) By the fact that results revealed some few tutors who were handling the implementation of ECE Curriculum in the right direction, let PTCs make deliberate arrangements to empower the few expert (champion) tutors carryout a peer mentorship programme to continuously build the capacity of their colleagues.

Declaration

We, members of the research team hereby declare that this study is our original research piece of work and we, therefore, accept to have it published in the Direct Research Journal of Education and Vocational Studies.

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