

Teachers' Involvement in Children's Transition from the Pre-primary to Class 1 in Soy Division, Eldoret West District, Uasin Gishu County

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Abstract

Transitions between Pre-primary and primary school can only be successful if a harmonious relationship exists between the role players influencing the course the child has to navigate. The teachers' involvement in children's transition from the Pre-primary to class One in Soy Division was the purpose of study. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory was used and descriptive survey design adopted. Simple random sampling used to select 14 private and 22 public schools. The respondents were head teachers, Parent Teacher Association chair-persons, class one and pre-primary school teachers from the sampled schools. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used in data collection. Obtained data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The use of play and the display of the children's work were the only teaching strategies almost equally used by the teachers in both the Pre-primary and Class One levels. The use of parents as resource persons was below average in the two class levels. The use of thematic teaching approach and the keeping of the children's health records were the strategies that were used mostly by the teachers of the Pre-primary school levels. Most of the teachers in the Pre-primary used the thematic teaching approach and also kept their children's health records as compared to the Class One teachers. Teachers in the lower primary need refresher courses so that they are able to understand the strategies appropriate for enhancing a smooth transition of children from pre-primary to class One. Ministry of Education in the county Government need to provide funds to schools to enable school administration play its role well.

Key Words: Transition, Early Childhood Education, Involvement, Teachers, Roles

INTRODUCTION

Transition refers to the process of change that is experienced when children move from one setting to another (MoEST, 2000). It involved the longer duration of time achieve such a change, spreading between ECDE entry and retention of child through the learning setting (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Teachers play an important role in supporting children and parents during transitions (Fabian and Dunlop, 2002). However, teachers training needs in ECDE centres have not been established. Both ECDE and primary school teachers are required to effectively implemented transition activities such as mutual visits before school starts and sharing information about children's life and development (Einarsdóttir, 2003), many children still experience problems when they proceed from Pre-school to primary school.

According to Neuman (2002) the contradicting views of the pre- primary and primary school teachers are the result of historical differences in the traditions and the

philosophies of the two institutions. Krogh (1994) studies revealed that, in USA Pre-primary children had activities that had freedom of choice, whereas in the primary school teachers chose the area that children needed to learn. This raised controversies as the teachers in class One mistook the children from Pre-primary as ill-mannered. The whole problem emanated from the fact that the class One teachers never understood the pre-primary school's teaching and learning philosophies and there was also lack of communication between the two areas. There was need to harmonize the two levels of teaching, not by making them indistinguishable, but by making sure that teachers on both ECDEE and primary school understand their importance, as this study will do. This is supported by UNESCO (1996) which points out that in France, the teaching team are qualified professionals who have been trained or offered skills which enable them teach all classes in a school setting.

During the Gabon conference of 2006 (Ngaruiya, 2006) the participants discussed features that defined effective schooling and these included community roles in education development, the school climate, culture and the teaching/learning environment. The discussions identified many ways in which schools (primary schools) were not ready for the pre-primary school children. Together with this was the long distance that children walked to the new school, large class sizes, inappropriate physical facilities, rote-based learning and shortage of the learning materials (Anold, Barlett, Gowani and Merali, 2006). To curb these challenges, the African governments should review the teacher training programmes and introduce new systems where primary school teachers can serve both the pre-primary and the primary school.

Primary school teachers often treat children as if they have no background skills or knowledge to bring to primary schools (Brostrom, 2002). For these reasons, Pre-school teachers have been noted to be apprehensive of closer ties with primary school teachers. This result in pre-schools losing their focus of developing pre-skills for literacy and Mathematics, which are imperative as a foundation for formal learning (Brostrom, 2002). Another possible solution to this conflict is to provide for pre-school to continue for slightly longer than at present, which would give pre-school teachers time to introduce pre-school children to the content they will face in class One.

Apart from the relationship between primary school teachers and pre-school teachers, it is necessary for primary school teachers to actively promote the forming of new relationships between their children and those of the pre-primary. This will make the children leaving pre-school encounter a warm and secure environment in the primary school or class one class. Therefore, the success of the child's transition between pre-school and primary school depends on the primary school teacher's skill in establishing rapport, as well as the personalities of teacher and child, and on the teacher's relationship with other children (Cleave *et al.*, 1982). In conjunction with the child's family relationships, a good relationship with his teacher and schoolmates gave a good foundation that build an academic development in primary school.

The transition from Pre-primary to Class One may be traumatic for children because of issues such as moving out of an environment of autonomy (in pre-school) into one of conformity (in Primary school), a perceived lack of choice, and lack of explanation regarding what is happening. This may result in frustration and fear, which impact

negatively on the performance of the new Class One pupils (MoEST, 2000). Problem facing primary school teachers in Kenya is that many children are coming to Class One directly from home without having gone through pre-school. Primary school teachers' workload is increased, when they opt to cater for needs of the students left out of pre-school, as well as the more advanced students. Many pre-school teachers and school teacher's report that, a number of well- functioning pre-school children; actually seem to lose competencies during their transition to school (Brostrom, 2003).

Pre-primary school teachers described some children about to start primary School as independent, active, inquisitive and exploring people, who also functioned well with peers. According to Brostrom (2002), more coherent transitions can be achieved in part through a shared overall curriculum and coordination of teaching practices between primary schools and pre-school. It is important to create similarities between pre-school and Primary school to make it easier for children to recognize activities and feel confident in tackling challenges as they arise.

The primary school teacher could then use these artefacts to learn about the new pupils and also to build upon their previous shared experiences as a starting point for curriculum development. Other ways in which teachers can facilitate the process of transition are by involving the children as active learners and participants in the transition process (Ramey & Ramey, 1999).

Despite these recommendations, Pianta *et al.* (1999) consider primary school teachers, low in teaching experience and education, the lack of training or information on pre-school to primary school transition practices. However, the views of pre-school and primary school teachers also differ over the role of play in learning. Pre-school teachers always employ play-based methods of teaching and learning while primary schools are content-oriented and activities are teacher directed instead of being learner directed. These differences are echoed by teachers themselves, who feel that pre-school is a period of innocent playing and primary school is the beginning of serious times. These differences are also communicated to children who seem to view starting primary school as a turning point in their lives (Einarsdottir, 2003).

The use of play technique of learning should not be suppressed completely, as children's progress in Class One can be encouraged by making learning a fun activity. Primary school teachers' conception of learning is associated with reading and writing. Pre-primary school teachers, on the other hand, view their work as part of the continuity of learning across pre-primary and Primary school. According to them, learning starts right from pre-school with basic skills such as recognition of letters, shapes and colours, which are basic and foundational to the reading and writing processes (Einarsdottir, 2003).

This view is in agreement with MOEST (2000) which states that the teachers in the Pre-primary provide those activities which promote the children's holistic development. Tension between pre-primary and primary school continues as the result of a common belief that that real education begins at primary school. The Kenya vision 2030's plan is to integrate Early Childhood Education into the Primary school education and also modernize the teacher training. This plan is an avenue for a smooth transition between the two learning stages in a school setting since the teachers will be in a position to

handle the children in both the pre-primary and the primary class levels. Apart from that, the communication between the teachers in these two levels will be enhanced (Kafu Committee, 1998).

The Pre-primary school teachers seem to emphasize the child's holistic development whereas the primary school teachers emphasize the children's abilities to adjust to school, to fit in with other children and to function in class (MoEST, 2000). Thus if teachers are oblivious to their role as facilitators of transitions due to lack of information, it would be unfair to put the blame on their shoulders if the transition process does not go as planned. Therefore, this research will investigate whether the possibility of setting up a training forum to sensitize primary school teachers in Kenya on what they are required to do to ensure successful pre-school to primary school transitions has actually been done.

The Ecological Systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) adopted. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex layers of environment, which are broken down into; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. These ecological layers build outwards depending on the influence they have on the developing child. Microsystem is composed of the school and the home, it was the immediate environment in which the growing child interact and establishes relationships with other role players. The second layer is the ecosystem, which consists of interrelationships that occur between the home and the school, this has to do with how they interconnect and communicate with each other for either the success or failure of the child. The Ecological Systems Theory used to find out how teachers involved in children's transition from the Pre-primary to class One in Soy Division, Eldoret West Sub-county.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey research. Descriptive survey research studies are those studies that utilized the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group. These are studies are concerned with specific predictions, with narration of facts and characteristics of an individual, group or situation. This design was used because it makes accurate assessment of the incidences, and also involves measurement, classification, analysis and interpretation of collected data. The study conducted in public primary schools in Eldoret West Sub-county, Uasin Gishu County. The study was undertaken in this area; since the researcher identified that class 1 had a high enrolment as compared to Pre-primary school levels.

The target population was 73 public primary schools, 47 private primary schools, 240 pre-primary and class 1 teachers and 120 head -teachers in the division. Basing on the thirty percent [30%] requirement, simple random sampling utilized to obtain a sample size of 22 public schools and 14 private schools, hence giving a total of 36 sampled schools. Purposive sampling was used to select one head-teacher and one PTA chairperson from each of the sampled schools and simple random sampling was used to select one Pre-primary school teacher and one class 1 teacher from the sampled schools.

The questionnaires, structured interview schedules and document analysis were designed and developed to gather the data. The questionnaires were administered to the Pre-primary and the class 1 teachers. Interview schedules were prepared and administered to

the head teachers and PTA chairpersons. To ensure consistency of instruments, same questions were posed to the respondents. For the instruments' validity, this was done basing on the research objectives. Data obtained was coded and analyzed to facilitate answering the objectives of the study. Data analysis was done basing on the descriptive survey research design where measures of central tendency were used. Data from the structured interview schedules was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Data presented using frequency tables, charts and percentages.

RESULTS

The findings showed that majority 77.8% of Pre-primary and 72.2% of Class 1 teachers were well prepared to handle the children during the transition process in schools. However, 3(8.3%) of the teachers in Pre-primary and 2(5.6%) of the class One teachers responded that they were not prepared to handle the children during transition. A total of 5(13.9%) and 8(22.2%) of teachers in Pre-primary and class One respectively responded that they were not sure of their levels of preparedness. The information on the teachers' preparedness is summarised in Figures 1 and 2.

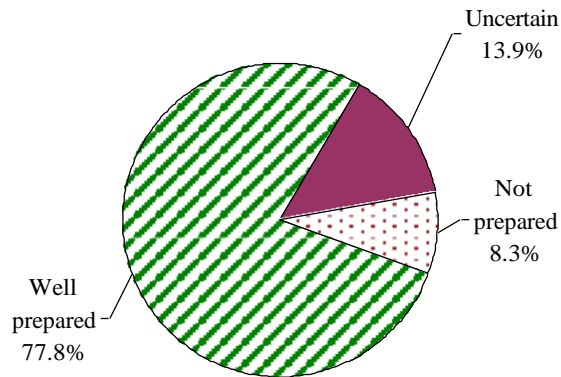


Figure 1. Preparedness of pre-primary teachers

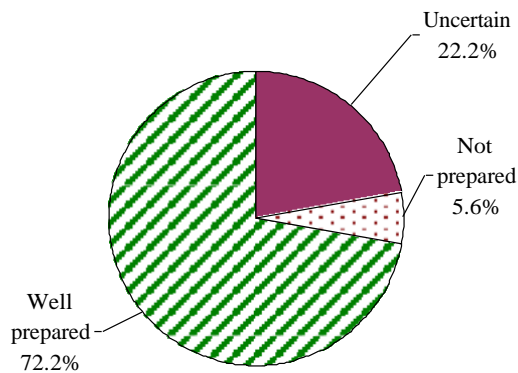


Figure 2. Preparedness of Class I teachers

Together with the teachers' competence level, the study also sought to establish the strategies which the Pre-Primary and Class One teachers use to promote a smooth transition between their class levels. Data obtained showed that all teachers in pre-primary and 30 (83.3%) in class One use play as a teaching method, 14 (38.9%) of Pre-Primary and 7 (19.4%) of Class One teachers use parents as resource persons. All the pre-primary school teachers and 10 (27.8%) of class One teachers used thematic teaching approach. On the strategy of keeping of the children's records, 23 (63.9%) of the Pre-primary and 18 (50%) of the Class One teachers responded that they used the strategy. A large proportion 27 (75%) of the Pre-primary school and 18 (50%) of Class 1 teachers said that they displayed their children's work. This information is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-primary and class 1 teachers responses on strategies which promote the children's transition from pre-primary to Class 1

Strategies/frequency	Pre-primary teachers		Class 1 teachers	
	F	%	F	%
Use play as a teaching method	36	100	30	83.3
Use of parents as resource persons	14	38.9	7	19.4
Use of thematic teaching approach	36	100	10	27.8
Keeping of the children's health records	23	63.9	13	36.1
Displaying of the children work	27	75.0	18	50.0

Head Teacher's Response on Strategies Which Promote the Children's Transition

When the head teachers were asked to specify whether the given activities took place in Pre-primary or class 1, the response obtained showed that, all teachers in pre-primary and 30 (83.3%) in class 1 use play as a teaching method, 14 (38.9%) of Pre-Primary and 7 (19.4%) of Class 1 teachers use parents as resource persons. All of the Pre-primary school teachers and 10 (27.8%) of class 1 teachers use thematic teaching approach. On the strategy of keeping of the children's records, 25 (69.4%) of the Pre-Primary and 18 (50%) of the Class 1 teachers were said to use the strategy. A large proportion 27 (75%) of the Pre-primary school and 18 (50%) of Class 1 teachers were reported to display their children's work. This information is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Head teacher's response on strategies which promote the children's transition from pre-primary to Class 1

Strategies	Pre-primary teachers		Class 1 teachers	
	F	%	F	%
Use play as a teaching method	36	100	30	83.3
Use of parents as resource persons	14	38.9	7	19.4
Use of thematic teaching approach	36	100	10	27.8
Keeping of the children's health records	25	69.4	18	50
Displaying of the children work	27	75.0	18	50.0

On the issue of teachers using parents as resource persons, the response obtained from the PTA chairpersons showed that the proportion of teachers who use the strategy is equivalent 13 (36.1%) to those who do not. The remaining group 10 (27.8%) were not certain if the teachers used the strategy as shown in Figure 3.

Importance of Parental Resourcefulness

When the PTA chairpersons were asked to state the importance of parental resourcefulness, 25 (69.4%) of them said that it helped motivate the learners, while 5 (13.9%) was the proportion that responded that it enhanced skill development. The rest 6(16.7%) were not certain of the importance of the strategy as summarized in Figure 4.

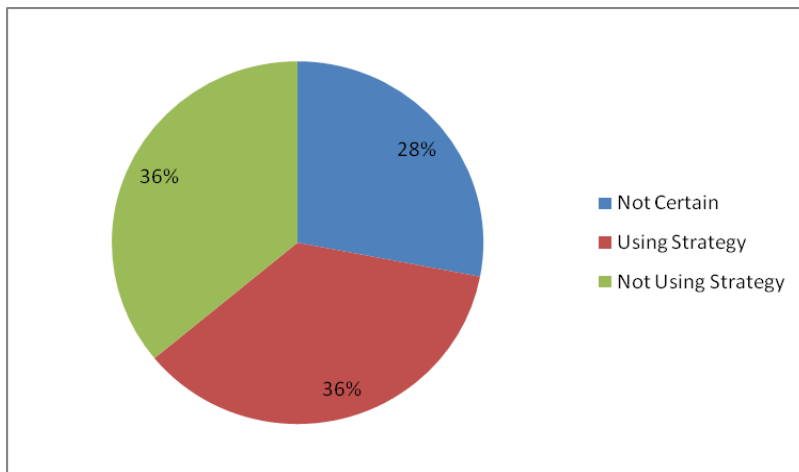


Figure 3. Use of parents as resource persons

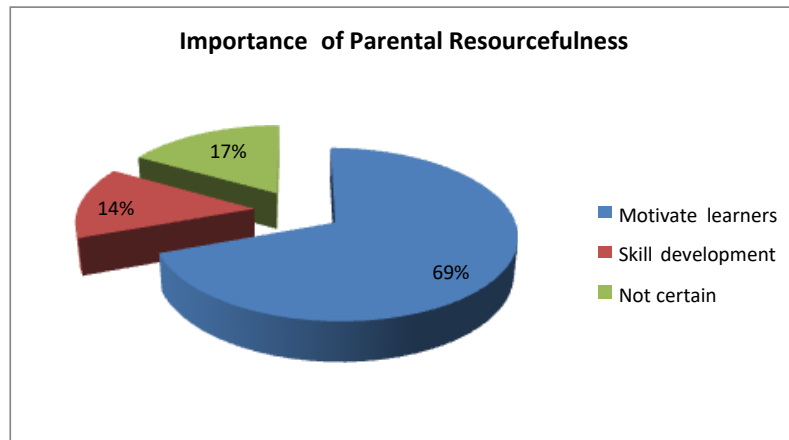


Figure 4. Importance of Parental Resourcefulness

Data obtained from these respondents, showed that the use of play in the two class levels was the only strategy that offered a situation that was similar to the children moving from Pre-Primary to Class One. From this, it was therefore concluded that the use of play promotes the children's transition process in Soy Division as this concurs with (Brostrom, 1999) who argued that play promotes the children's holistic development.

DISCUSSIONS

From the study, the use of parents as resource persons, the use of thematic teaching approach, keeping of the children's health records and the display of the children's work showed some disparity between the two class levels. The findings agrees with Einarsdottir, (2003) and MoEST(2000) who viewed the differences between the teaching strategies in Pre-primary and Class One as a factor that makes the children see the transition as a total turning point and not a continuity. Brostrom (2002) advocated for a harmonious relationship between the two class levels. To emphasize this, it stressed the importance of a shared overall curriculum and coordination of teaching practices. The teachers' preparedness to handle the children during the transition process from the Pre-primary to Class One in this study was identified as a factor affecting transition. The teachers do not use parents as resource persons. According to Krogh (1994) the use of parents is a component which makes the children feel happy, relaxed and secure in school. From the PTA Chairperson's response it was revealed that parents understood that their resourcefulness motivated the learners. This therefore means that teachers need to establish that closeness or a relationship between themselves and the parents of the children they teach.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study established that, the use of play and the display of the children's work were the only teaching strategies that were almost equally used by the teachers in both the Pre-primary and Class One levels. The use of parents as resource persons was below average in the two levels. The use of thematic teaching approach and

the keeping of the children's health records were the strategies that were used mostly by the teachers of the Pre-primary school levels. Most of the teachers in the Pre-primary used the thematic teaching approach and also kept their children's health records as compared to the Class One teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Teachers in the lower primary needs refresher courses so that they are able to understand the strategies appropriate for enhancing a smooth transition of children from pre-primary to class One.
- ii. There is need for the pre-primary school levels to be integrated into the primary school cycle as this would help teachers from the two class levels work in unison.

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BIO-DATA

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