

## Preparedness of ECDE teachers in the implementation of the ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County

Dr.Peter Mamuli Nyongesa  
Lecturer  
Department of Social Sciences  
School of Education and Social Sciences  
Kaimosi Friends University College

**Abstract**

Empirical research posits that Early Childhood Education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for both the physical and intellectual growth of a child. Devolution of early childhood education to county governments in Kenya therefore marked a new phase in the development of ECDE and added a new impetus to the quest to achieve quality ECDE curriculum implementation. The purpose of this study was to establish the impact of teacher preparedness on the implementation of ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County. The study adopted the theory of curriculum innovation to guide data collection process. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain a 30% sample size from a target population consisting of 750 ECDE teachers, 50 head-teachers, 30 Quality Assurance Officers, and 20 Curriculum Support Officers. Data was collected using questionnaires, and interview schedules. The collected data was analyzed using the descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages, which were later presented in the form of tables. The study found that contrary to the popular discourse espoused by different stakeholders about the perceived drastic improvement of the ECDE education sub sector that came as a direct result of devolution, in-service training, as a means through which teachers improve their performance, has not increased significantly under devolution. This is a point of concern because research has proven that there exists a strong correlation between a teacher's access to in-service trainings and their performance as curriculum implementers. The onus therefore, is on the county government of Vihiga to create an enabling environment where ECDE teachers have easy access to periodic in-service training to continuously better their practice.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Teacher preparedness is arguably the most important factor in the effective implementation of an ECDE curriculum. Training programs formerly focused on an ECDE certificate as a minimum requirement for teaching, but in the recent past, there has been renewed effort to make training an integral part of teaching practice to enhance not only the subject content delivery, but also the professional growth of the teachers. While it is within the purview of teachers to strive and reap from the benefits of career growth by continuously improving their skill sets in as far as curriculum implementation goes, the preschoolers' future academic achievement remains central to such endeavors. Consequently, the uptake of the ECDE program by the County Government after its devolution from the central government was viewed by educational pundits as a crucial step

towards improvement of ECDE curriculum implementation in Kenya. Heckman (2009) argued that fostering human capital should be at the forefront of an effective public policy. While teacher preparedness remains the focus of this study, it is arguably the most important factor influencing the performance of both preprimary and primary school learners.

According to Cave and Mulloy (2010), teacher perceptions regarding the implementation of an ECDE program might determine the necessary preparedness required for successful implementation of an ECDE curriculum in a given region. Black et al. (2017) agreed that ECDE is a developing aspect of education which requires fostering important aspects of the curriculum. Here, Smoke (2015) had a different approach. The author reported that devolution of early childhood education mitigated the deficiencies of curriculum implementation often experienced under the central government in the light of teacher factors which hindered the successful implementation of the curriculum. In corroboration to the findings of Egan (1998), Eshiwani (1983) emphasized that the teachers' level of training is among other factors which determine their preparedness to implement an ECDE curriculum. On the other hand, the early childhood education capitation has been investigated by many a researcher, where the arguments have been that capitation is among many other factors which prepare teachers for ECDE curriculum implementation. Shinali, Githui, and Kamau (2014) assessed early childhood development in Kenya, with Narok South sub-county as a case study and found that teacher preparedness is a factor which cannot be overlooked if ECDE curriculum would ever be successfully implemented by the devolved governments across Kenya.

Another publication by Shinali and Kamau (2016) highlighted the important role the devolved governments play in enhancing teacher preparedness through financing activities such as in-service training. On the other hand, Gichuba, Opasta, and Nguchu (2009) emphasized that additional training programs regarding the general methods of teaching are required to improve the teachers' ability to handle the challenges of ECDE curriculum implementation. Similar findings had been asserted seven years earlier by Kariuki (2002) who claimed that teachers' perception of preparedness towards ECDE curriculum implementation should be taken into account if the preschoolers have to benefit from an ingeniously prepared curriculum.

The importance of training was further emphasized by Rima (1997) who posited that early childhood education personnel's preparedness determines the future success of the learners. In the same vein, Rodriguez et al. (2014) argues that ECDE teacher training prepares such professionals in planning for the cognitive needs of the preschoolers, hence contributing successfully to the implementation of the ECDE curriculum. This is, in part, the reason UNESCO (2004) declared the need for revised ECDE policy across the globe to improve subject content delivery by the teachers. The UN (2016) report put forward a strong case for the need for all nations to start approaching education at all levels as a requirement for lifelong development and learning. Furthermore, Wakhungu (2019) reported that implementing early childhood education training programs has its fair share of challenges and to surmount these challenges, all the stakeholders should have a unity of purpose if they are to achieve their set objectives. Wakhungu (2019) also emphasizes the need for continuous in-service training which she believes enhances leadership competencies in primary schools for successful implementation of ECDE curricula.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by curriculum theory where the teachers must draw from a wider body of knowledge to create a close relationship with knowledge to enhance the teaching experience. The teacher must have knowledge about the subject content which is obtained through training, and the context of a classroom within which the teacher interacts with the learners. Preparedness, therefore, is an important factor in the curriculum implementation process bearing in mind that knowledge is

dynamic in nature and teachers would always interact with different groups of learners and teaching contexts, requiring the teachers to adopt different teaching methodologies. Accordingly, the teacher must innovatively grow their knowledge base by constantly gaining knowledge in-situ through practice, or through retrospect. The theory emphasizes that the teacher should develop a close relationship with knowledge to innovate for curriculum implementation.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This section covers the research methodology used in the study. It highlights the target population of the study, the research design, and the sampling technique. While quantitative, mixed methods and qualitative research designs are available to researchers, Arya, Antonisamy, and Kumar (2012) argued that it is the appropriate choice of any of the aforementioned research designs that would result in collecting useful data which is key in any empirical study. The purpose of the study was to investigate the level of preparedness of ECDE teachers in the implementation of the ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County. Therefore, a descriptive survey design was found appropriate for the study because of its ability to yield large volumes of data for analysis. In the same vein, Draker, Rancilio, and Stafford (2017), emphasized that a research design influences the decisions taken by the researcher which include, amongst other things, the appropriate sample size for the study. The target population comprised of the five Sub-counties in Vihiga County (Emuhaya, Vihiga, Hamisi, Luanda, and Sabatia), with respondents being drawn from ECDE teachers, Curriculum Support Staff, and Quality Assurance Officers, totaling to 2,300. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling methods were used to determine a thirty percent (30%) sample size from the target population. The collected data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Qualitatively, emerging themes were sorted and analyzed for trends, while quantitative analysis employed the use of percentages and frequencies to a larger extend, and ANOVA for determination of significance of the findings. The following section presents the results and discussions of the findings regarding teacher preparedness and its effect on the implementation of ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County.

### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This section covers the interpretation, analysis, and presentation of the findings of the study in as far as ECDE teacher preparedness in Vihiga County goes. Several variables were used as a measure for achievement of the research objectives. Firstly, the teacher factors which reflect the preparedness of the ECDE teachers were considered. Here, the analysis was pegged on the findings of Wakhungu (2019) who proposed that ECDE teachers are an inalienable pillar for the implementation of the Curriculum by both central and devolved governments. Therefore, teacher factors considered for this study included the ECDE subject content preparedness, the areas of in-service training attended by the teachers, in-service training, and the number of in-service training attended by the ECDE teachers.

#### **A. PREPAREDNESS THROUGH IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

In-service training has been hailed by many educators and educational opinion leaders as the cornerstone for preparing ECDE teachers towards curriculum implementation. Consequently, this aspect of teacher preparation sort to establish whether a difference exists between ECDE teachers who have attended an in-service training besides the normal academic achievement at a minimum of an ECDE certificate level and those who had not. This variable specifically sought to establish the respondent's opinion regarding the necessity of in-service training to the effective implementation of an ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County. Table 1 below shows the results from the respondents.

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
In-service training is a pillar for ECDE curriculum Implementation	16	53	10	33	0	0	3	10	1	4
In-service training adds value to ECDE qualification	14	46.7	13	43.3	0	0	2	6.7	1	4
ECDE children performance increases with ECDE teacher in-service training	10	33	15	50	0	0	3	10	2	6.7
In-service trainings have increased under the devolved government	16	53	10	33	0	0	3	10	1	4
I would recommend in-service training to a colleague.	19	63.3	6	20	0	0	5	16.7	0	0

Table 1: Opinion of respondents regarding in-service training

Table 1 reveals that many ECDE teachers, QUASOs, and CSOs value the need for in-service training besides ECDE academic qualifications for effective ECDE curriculum implementation across Vihiga County. Two results are outstanding according to Table 1. Firstly, 53% (n=16) of the respondents strongly agree that in-service training is an indispensable part in the implementation process of an ECDE curriculum in Vihiga County. These results corroborate the findings of Manduku, Ruto, and Maritim (2017) who emphasized that in-service training prepares an ECDE teacher for the diversity of a preschool class, considering the diverse needs of each learner and their mixed abilities. Secondly, most respondents (63%, n=19) strongly agreed that they would recommend in-service training to colleagues who would have hitherto not attended any such training. In the same vein an interview with a Curriculum Support Officer yielded the following:

*“We have noted increased motivation among teachers who have attended in-service training. Most of such teachers go as far as innovating with their own teaching and learning materials to the benefit of the learners. However, the in-service training facilitators should improve the program to accommodate more ECDE teachers.”*

These findings are in tandem with the assertions of Kimosop (2019), who argued that ECDE training alone is not sufficient to prepare ECDE teachers for the implementation of an ECDE curriculum. The strong agreement that in-service training has increased drastically under the devolved government fortifies Smoke's (2015) findings that devolution of ECDE has provided solutions to many teacher-preparedness challenges which were rampant under the central government. Similarly, a considerable number of respondents agree that in-service training increases the performance of preschoolers. For instance, a staggering 33% (n=10) strongly agreed that preschoolers who are taught by the ECDE teacher who had attended in-service training attain higher performance. This is contrary to 50% (n=15) who agreed that in-service training for ECDE teachers improves the performance of the ECDE learners.

Conversely, a small percentage of respondents (6.7%) strongly disagreed that there was any correlation between in-service training for teachers and the performance of preschoolers. These results corroborate the findings of Rodriguez et al. (2014), who argued that cognitive planning and other school-based factors combine with teacher preparedness to determine the performance of

preschool learners. Table 1 further reveals that 16.7% (n=5) of the respondents disagree that they would recommend ECDE in-service training to a colleague. One of the ECDE teachers noted:

*“We have for a long time made recommendations to the County Government to conduct in-service training mostly at the ECDE centers. The former system which was used under the central government still applies, where trainees meet at a central point to train. This system is not attractive.”*

The foregoing sentiment also supported by the data above, shows that the county government of Vihiga needs to do more to make in-service training not only to be attractive to teachers but more accessible to them with the understanding that the trainings add value to their practice and ultimately benefit the preschoolers. Table 1 further reveals that respondents were aware of every aspect of the ECDE in-service training because none indicated being ‘Not Sure’ across all variables investigated under this category.

### B. THE NUMBER OF IN-SERVICE TRAININGS AS A FACTOR OF TEACHER PREPAREDNESS.

This section establishes the impact of the number of in-service trainings an ECDE teacher attends on curriculum implementation in Vihiga County. Section A highlighted the importance of in-service training on implementation preparedness of ECDE teachers, but this section investigates if there is a relationship between the number of in-service trainings and the level of preparedness of teachers. Taking cognizance of the claim that the number of in-service training might not matter beyond the professional training of an ECDE teacher informs the basis of this analysis. On the contrary, this analysis sought to establish if the number of in-service trainings makes an ECDE teacher a better implementer of the curriculum. Table 2 below shows the impact of in-service training on ECDE teacher preparedness.

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The number of in-service trainings thoroughly prepares teachers for ECDE curriculum implementation	15	50.0	10	33	1	4	3	10	1	4
Many in-service trainings are important for ECDE professional growth.	16	53.3	12	40.0	0	0	1	4	1	4
ECDE children’s performance increases with the number of ECDE teacher in-service trainings	16	53	10	33	0	0	3	10	1	4
The number of in-service training has increased under the devolved government	13	43.3	13	43.3	1	4	2	6.7	1	4
I would attend more in-service training to improve my ECDE content delivery capacity.	20	66.7	8	26.7	0	0	2	6.7	0	0

Table 2: Impact of the number of in-service trainings on teacher preparedness

Table 2 reveals a mixture of responses regarding the respondents’ perceptions on the number of in-service sessions and their impact on teacher preparedness. Preparedness was investigated as a factor



of thoroughness, and the first item rated the impact of the number of in-service trainings on thoroughness of ECDE teacher preparedness. The data confirms that 50% (n=15) of the respondents strongly agree that the number of trainings indeed prepare the teachers for the implementation of the ECDE curriculum. Comparatively, only 4% (n=1) of the respondents strongly disagreed that the number of ECDE in-service trainings thoroughly prepares the teachers for ECDE curriculum implementation. The high rates of affirmation regarding the importance of in-service training to the preparedness of the teachers corroborates the assertions of Shinali, Githui, and Thinguri (2014) who posited that ECDE programs such as refresher courses have a positive impact on the preparedness of teachers regarding ECDE curriculum implementation at all stages. One CSO noted:

*“I have been working in the ECDE sector since the days of the central government and I can surely attest that the devolved government’s ECDE in-service programs are turning out to be the best. Many ECDE teachers can handle the challenges of curriculum implementation with confidence: that is admirable progress.”*

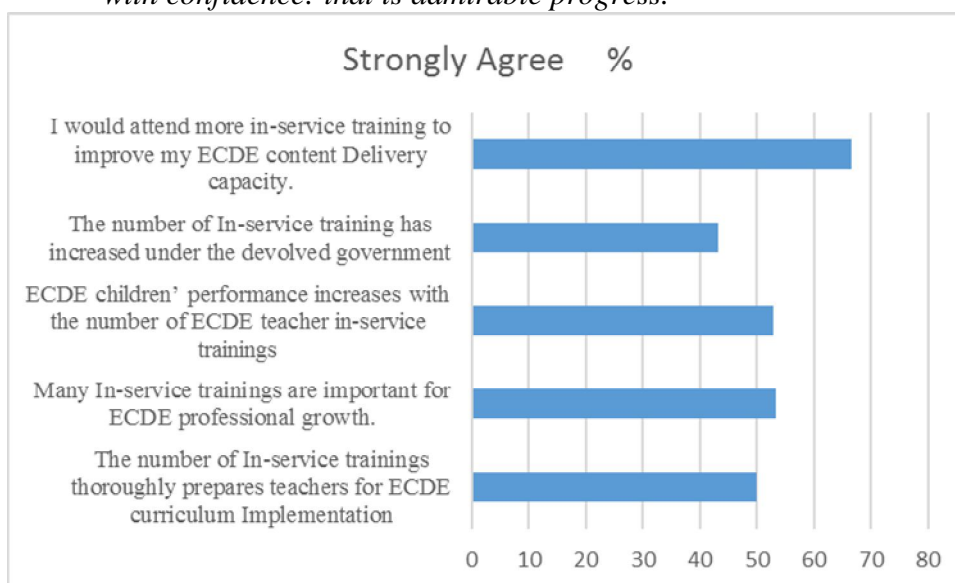


Figure 1. Graph showing the ‘Strongly Agree’ trends of the respondents.

Additionally, 33% (n=10) of the respondents agreed that in-service training is one among many other programs which empowers teachers to meet the challenges of ECDE curriculum implementation. On the contrary the 10% (n=3) of the respondents who disagreed that such programs are not helpful in their intended purpose to prepare the ECDE teachers for curriculum implementation is a point to ponder. This is in addition to 4% (n=) of the respondents who disagreed that the programs do not thoroughly prepare the teachers for effective curriculum implementation. One ECDE teacher said:

*“I agree that such programs thoroughly prepare the teachers for the ECDE curriculum implementation. I however, cannot apply that statement in a holistic sense regarding the number of years someone has worked in the ECDE sector. There are more experienced teachers who can easily handle the challenges of ECDE curriculum yet they have attended fewer in-service training programs in their lifetime as ECDE teachers.”*

According to Table 2, there is also a closer link between the readiness of the ECDE teachers to attend in-service training and the belief that it leads to professional growth. The results show that 53% (n=16) of the ECDE teachers strongly agreed that professional growth is linked to the ECDE programs that the County Government sponsors to help teachers successfully implement the curriculum. These findings corroborate a report by Shinali and Kamau (2016) which alleged that

ECDE in-service programs have a big impact not only on the service delivery of the teacher but also on the improvement of ECDE curriculum implementation.

A point to note from Table 2 is the affirmation that in-service programs help the preschoolers improve their performance. The study found that 53.3% (n=16) of the ECDE teachers strongly agree that such programs have a positive impact on the performance of the ECDE children. These results are supported by the responses obtained from the participants who strongly agreed (66.7%, n=20) they would attend more in-service training when given an opportunity.

Conversely, Table 2 shows responses opposed to the popular notion that the number of in-service trainings have increased under the devolved government. Fewer respondents (43.3%, n=13) strongly agree that the devolution of ECDE has led to an increase in the number of ECDE in-service training programs. Notably, an equal number (n=13, 43.3%) of the respondents agree that such programs have increased. Interestingly, 4% (n=1) were not sure of the allegation that ECDE in-service programs have increased since the inception of the devolved government. Additionally, Table 2 reveals 6.7% (n=2) of the respondents contradict such allegations. Notably, the table illustrates further that 4% (n=1) of the respondents strongly disagree that such programs have skyrocketed with the help of the devolved governments, compared to when ECDE was under the central government. One Quality Assurance Officer noted:

*“There is no doubt the number of in-service programs have increased under the devolved government. But the rate of increase has been slower than many people expected under devolution.”*

The above quote validates a report by Ngode (2014) who emphasize that the content of in-service programs is more important than their number. Thus, attending many in-service training sessions do not guarantee a positive impact on the level of preparedness of the teachers to meet the challenges of ECDE curriculum implementation. However, educational pundits believe that the education sector in the global south and especially early childhood education is on the right trajectory with many African countries in sub-Sahara Africa investing significant resources to achieve universal basic education ( Garcia and Neuman, 2010)

Importantly, Table 2 has illustrated that the number of in-service programs have a positive impact on the preparedness of ECDE teachers regarding curriculum implementation. Therefore, the results from Table 2 affirm the findings of Table 1, which show that in-service programs provided by the County Government of Vihiga play a significant role in enhancing ECDE teacher preparedness and curriculum implementation. However, the contrary opinion espoused by some respondents that there has been a marked increase in ECDE in-service programs since ECDE was devolved to the counties should not be overlooked by the research fraternity.

## V. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

ECDE teacher preparedness is a collection of many factors related to both subject content and supplementary in-service training. Additional training through in-service training programs prepares ECDE teachers to face possible challenges that may be encountered during the curriculum implementation process. The study revealed that there is a relationship between ECDE teacher preparedness and in-service training. However, the data revealed varying opinions about the role of in-service training in enhancing the teacher's performance. Some participants showed strong support for in-service training presenting it as a crucial part of teaching practice, while others expressed disagreement. For instance, the study showed that many ECDE teachers generally agree that in-service training adds value to their ECDE academic qualification. Additionally, the study revealed that ECDE teachers who have undergone an in-service training have confidence that it improves the performance of teachers which makes them give the preschoolers a better learning

experience. The interview extracts with CSOs and QUASOs corroborated the allegations of the ECDE teachers who attached a premium on in-service training because of its proven contribution to the improvement of the teaching practice of a teacher. Nevertheless, the study illustrated that contrary to the popular discourse about the perceived increase in in-service trainings presumably spearheaded by the county governments; a lot needs to be done to improve access to such trainings the outcome of which would be an improved service delivery on the part of the teacher. The County government of Vihiga should take cognizance of the important role the in-service training play in the improvement of the quality of education and allocate a significant portion of its education budget to the training programs.



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