

PERSPECTIVES OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS ON THE USE OF THEMATIC INTEGRATED APPROACH IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to explore the Perspectives Preschoolers on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning. Objectives of the study were to examine perspectives of preschool teachers on thematic integrated teacher preparation, perspectives on actual teaching, perspectives on use of content activity areas and perspectives on thematic integrated assessment. This was a qualitative study with a phenomenological research design and the study was informed by progressivism theory as proposed by John Dewey (1859-1952). The target population was 489 consisting of 129 primary school head teachers and 129 preschool lead teachers, 230 pre-school teachers and 1 ECDE sub County Coordinator in Bondo sub-county. The sample consisted of 50 respondents that included 13 primary school head teachers, 13 Preschool lead teachers, 23 preschool teachers and 1 ECDE Sub county coordinator. Stratified, purposive and saturated sampling was employed in sample selection. In-depth interview, Focus Group discussion and observation method were employed to collect data. Validity of instruments was ascertained by supervisors while reliability of instruments was determined by use of a pilot study. Data was analyzed thematically as themes and sub themes emerged from the study. On the concern about thematic integrated teacher preparation the study found out that, preschool teachers do not regularly prepare thematic schemes of work and lesson plans. On the issue about thematic integrated actual teaching, the study findings revealed that preschool teachers used thematic integrated approach differently in actual teaching. On teaching across content activity areas, the findings showed that the manner in which preschool teachers taught across content activity areas differed from teacher to teacher. On thematic integrated approach, the study found out that preschool teachers assessed teaching and learning differently. Based on the findings, it was therefore concluded that, there is lack of uniformity on how thematic integrated approach is being used by preschool teachers. Therefore, the study recommended that, the Ministry of Education through the County Government should come up with criteria for using thematic integrated approach. A study on factors contributing to the preschool teacher's varied perspectives towards the use of thematic integrated approach would expound the current study.

Keywords: preschool, teaching, learning, study.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study:

Nasibi (2003) notes that there are two major teaching strategies; expository and heuristic. Expository is a teacher centred approach where the teacher imparts knowledge to the learners. On the other hand, heuristic is learner centred where learners are left to explore information on their own with the teacher guiding and sharing ideas with the learners. Were (2003) asserts that, heuristic approach readily addresses the needs and interests of the learners as the learner takes an

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active role in this lesson. Nasibi (2005) thematic integrated instruction method embraces heuristic approach where learning is based on themes which cut across all curriculum activity areas. In thematic integrated approach, knowledge is viewed as a whole avoiding compartment of knowledge into subjects.

Humphreys (1981) notes that globally thematic teaching, a common form of integration where the connections between subjects are explored and emphasized, it is acknowledged internationally as a beneficial tool for student learning. Humphreys further notes that, this is in contrast to the traditional way in which many school systems set up their curriculum, with each subject being taught as separate unit from the other with no commonalities.

Lipson (1993) notes that curriculum integration finds its basis in the commonsense wisdom of teachers, who are coping with an increased body of knowledge, large classes, and many mandates related to everything from drug awareness to HIV and AIDS to bus safety. According to Holbrook (2002) integrated approach addresses the need to become more holistic in coverage of National Goals of Education.

Hui-Hui (2011) in Minnesota, different teachers have different perceptions on integration leading to different classroom practices. Tamiru (2013) in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, the extent to which kindergarten teachers implement integrated curriculum was very low as they lacked professional skills in implementing the strategy. Ramokgopa (2013) in South Africa teachers lacked clear idea on integrating content across activity areas. Bamusiime (2010) in Uganda, found out that in most cases teachers do not use thematic integrated approach even though they understood it. Chikuluma and Mawere (2013) in Zimbabwe observation method as a way of assessing children is not often by used by teachers saying is doesn't address holistic needs of children. Vavrus (2012) assets that in Tanzania teachers did not implement learner centred approach as required by education policy due to large classes and exam oriented curriculum. In Kenya, Wesonga (2013) contends that teacher's ability to use content based instruction was low although the attitude was high. Ong'ong'a, Okwara, and Nyangara (2010) despite the availability of well prepared thematic integrated lesson plans, learners are rarely taught using thematic integrated approach. Wangeci (2014) pre-school teachers assess learners through examinations and assignments in a bid to force formal learning and competition.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

The significance of thematic integrated approach to enhancing teaching and learning at pre-school level cannot be over-emphasized. Locally, available assessment reports showed that school age children are not acquiring basic competencies in literacy and numeracy at the right age and grade. Therefore, many children join primary school without being cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially ready to start primary school life. Even though preschool teachers in Bondo Sub-County claim that they use thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning as recommended by the curriculum, little is known on how well they utilize the approach. It is against this background, that the current study is poised to explore perspective of preschool teachers in the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning.

1.3 Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of pre-school teachers on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning.

1.4 Objectives of the Study:

The following objectives guided the study:

- i) To examine perspectives of pre-school teachers on thematic integrated teacher preparation.
- ii) To establish perspectives of pre-school teachers on thematic integrated actual teaching and learning.

1.5 Research Questions:

The following research questions guided the study:

- i) How do preschool teachers perceive thematic integrated teacher preparation?
- ii) How do pre-school teachers perceive thematic integrated approach to teaching and learning?

1.6 Significance of the Study:

The study findings may be of benefit to various stake holders in preschool education sector such as Ministry of Education and County government, KICD, Headteachers teachers and parents.

The study focused on pre-school teachers' perspectives on thematic integrated approach to teaching and learning in Bondo sub-county. Specifically this study dwells in thematic integrated preschool teachers' perceptions on teacher preparation and pre-school teachers' perceptions on thematic integrated actual teaching.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The study was limited to Bondo sub-county so the study findings might not be over generalized. Cancelled appointments at the last minute especially with primary head teachers due to their administrative responsibilities that made them move a lot. This was overcome by making new appointments convenient to the respondent time and place.

1.8 Assumptions of the study:

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- i) That preschool teachers have perspectives in the use of thematic integrated approach.
- ii) That preschool teachers have perspectives on thematic integrated actual teaching.

1.9 Theoretical framework:

The study was informed by John Dewey's theory of Progressivism (1859-1952). According to Dewey, education came to be understood in progressive terms, as promoting the individual child's progress. Dewey reckoned that there is a correlation between the manner of conducting lessons and learning to enhance learning, the teaching method should be well-reflected. In learning process, Dewey emphasized on activity rather than passivity, correlation of subjects, theme approach and problem solving. According to Dewey, great attention should be paid to the child's physical needs, with greater use of outdoor activities which is practically and widely used in preschool curriculum where the preschool curriculum puts more emphasis on play. It strikes a blow to the separate-subject, text book dominated school curriculum and becomes foundational to integrated curricular efforts (Arcavi & Schoenfeld, 1992).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Thematic Integrated Teacher Preparation:

MacMath (2011) carried out a case study in a public secondary school in Ontario, Canada. The researcher described and analyzed teacher understandings of, and challenges with, the implementation and assessing of an integrated unit. While MacMath used a case study in public secondary school making it difficult for the findings to be generalized, the current study used phenomenological study with public pre-school teachers as respondents making it possible for the findings of current study to be generalized.

Buechler (2008) did a survey on three elementary schools within the State of Indiana on the effects thematic integrated instruction has on students and teachers. Qualitative data was collected to explore the positive effects of thematic integrated approach. The study was informed by classroom observations, teacher interviews, and telephone consultations with a total of 44 principals and superintendents, as well as 809 parent surveys with the Indiana school District.

Mijeong (2008) carried out a qualitative research interview on the experience of Korean elementary teachers on implementing integrated curriculum. Experiences of three elementary teachers in the form of a narrative text were presented resulting from analyses of their interview. Findings showed that, planning took a tremendous amount of time and energy, which made teachers feel overburdened. Eventually, the teachers reverted to more traditional forms of teaching. While Mijeong only used three elementary teachers as respondents making it difficult to get a variety of responses on the phenomenon under study creating the gap which the current study is aimed at addressing by using 50 respondents making it a large sample able to elicit variety and rich data.

A qualitative study was done by Mansour (2015) on science teachers perceptions regarding STEM education and identifying factors that facilitate or hinder such forms of instruction in Saudi Arabia. Findings showed that all teachers

expressed concerns that they are underprepared to use STEM integration same time the findings indicated that teacher's preparation on integrating STEM subjects was very poor. Teachers did not have sufficient understanding of STEM integration. While Mansour investigated the perceptions of 23 science teachers on STEM integration leaving out other subjects the current study explored the perception of 50 respondents in integrating all activity areas to fill the gap.

Shana (2014) investigated elementary pre-service teacher's perceptions on thematic unit instruction in Florida. The teachers showed biggest concern on extra time involved in planning each lesson plan or unit noting that is so involving and a tiresome exercise.

Ngussa, Makewa and Allida (2016) conducted a study on integration of moral values in secondary school humanities curriculum in Tanzania. Findings revealed that teachers did not thoroughly plan by integrating moral values into subject matter but simply mentioned them by passing. The study focused on secondary school and narrowed the study to integration of moral values in humanities but the current study focused on preschool and investigated integration across all learning activities aimed at bringing out a comprehensive picture on thematic integrated approach.

2.2 Perspectives of Pre-school Teachers on Thematic Integrated Actual Teaching and Learning:

Miller, Wake, Whittingham (2016), collaboratively investigated teachers attitudes towards art integration involving 23 elementary teachers from six school in Arkansas. A survey design was used while observation and interview were the instruments used to collect data. The findings showed that even though, teachers have positive feelings about art integration, majority of teachers rarely integrated the arts into their curriculum in lesson development citing reasons of limited time, pressure of standardized tests and lack of confidence due to limited training in the arts. While Miller et al. Employed survey design to investigate art integration.

Shiple (2014) using a qualitative research survey investigated teacher's experiences and obstacles they face as they implement thematic integrated approach into their literacy instruction in Ashford University. The researcher interviewed six ECD teachers who had at least two years experience in teaching young children. Face to face interviews were conducted with open ended questions and lesson plans were also collected. Result showed that teacher's perceptions on thematic integrated approach were consistent and positive. The interview results indicated that every teacher faces barriers in the classroom when implementing thematic integrated approach. Teachers expressed large classes as a challenge and inadequate time in teaching an integrated unit. Shiple did a survey design with interview and observation as tools for collecting data but the current study did a phenomenological design with focused group discussion as an extra tool for collecting data.

Rismiati (2012) did a non-experimental research design study on primary grade teachers concerns regarding the implementation of integrated thematic instruction in Indonesia. Convenient sampling method was used to select 150 primary grade teachers who constituted the population. Questionnaires were used to collect data which was analyzed by the use of ANOVA test, multiple regression, and descriptive methods. The results indicated that, an increase in the number of students lowered the degree of teacher's implementation of integrated thematic instruction in their daily classroom practices. Risiati's target population was primary teaches and used only questionnaires to collect data while in the current study, pre-school teachers were the targeted population and three instruments were used for multiple sources of data increasing reliability.

Allybokus (2014) examined teachers understanding and implementation of learner centred teaching approach in elementary schools in Mauritia. The study used social constructivism approach. Questionnaire, semi-structured interview, focus group and classroom observation tools were used to collect data. The findings showed that exam oriented education system shaped teachers understanding and practice of learner centred approach making teachers to partially use learner centred approach and teacher centred approach while conducting lessons. Allybokus focused on elementary teachers' use of learner centred approach without spelling out details of activities as they progress during the lesson creating a knowledge gap on preschool teacher's use of learner centred approach which the current study aimed at filling through observation of lessons in classroom to capture the actual implementation to realise firsthand and more accurate data.

Okoro and Okoro (2005) carried out a study on Teachers Understanding and Use of Thematic Approach in Teaching and Learning of Social Studies in Nigeria. Findings showed that teachers understanding of thematic approach in teaching

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social studies are not sufficient. Okoro and Okoro investigated junior secondary school teachers understanding and use of the thematic integrated in teaching and learning social studied while the current study will study pre-school teachers perspectives in the use of thematic integrated approach. Okoro used only questionnaire to collect data while the current study used three instruments; interview, observation and focused group discussion yielding rich and detailed data to inform the study.

Abuga *et al.*(2016) carried out a study on the effectiveness of thematic teaching approach on developing reading skills among preschool children in Manga Sub-county, Nyamira County Kenya. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target populations for the study include 120 ECDE teachers and 800 pre-schoolers. It used cluster and simple random sampling techniques in obtaining a sample size. Data was collected by the means of questionnaires and observation checklists. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. With the qualitative data, the researcher used analytical technique including quick impressionistic summary, thematic analysis and content analysis. Quantitative data was coded and entered into computer for analysis using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) the findings showed that 68% of teachers always use thematic integrated approach however, 19.9% and 4% used the approach sometimes, rarely and never respectively. Abuga *et al.* used questionnaire and observation to collect data while the current study used interview, observation and focused group to collect data to fill in the gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design:

Research design is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). In qualitative research, the information obtained from the participants is not expressed in numerical form (Kothari, 2004). Phenomenological design is a descriptive study of how individuals experience a given phenomenon and the essence of the lived experiences on a given phenomenon by an individual or many individuals.

3.2 Area of Study:

This study was conducted in Bondo sub-county in Siaya County, Kenya.

3.3 Target Population:

The target population was 489 consisting of 129 primary school head teachers and 129 preschool lead teachers, 230 pre-school teachers and 1 ECDE sub County Coordinator in Bondo sub-county.

3.4 Sampling Techniques, Sample Size and sample for study:

The sample consisted of 27 respondents that included 13 primary school head teachers, 13 Preschool lead teachers, 23 preschool teachers and 1 ECDE Sub county coordinator chosen through stratified, purposive and saturated sampling techniques.

3.5 Instruments of Collecting Data:

The instruments of data collection were interview schedule, focus group discussion and classroom observation schedule.

3.6 Validity of Instruments:

Validity of an instrument is improved through expert judgment of the two supervisors.

3.7 Reliability of Instruments:

Reliability was ascertained by the use of pilot study. Trustworthiness and authenticity of research instruments were addressed through Guba and Lincoln research paradigm(2005).

3.8 Data Analysis:

Data analysis involved qualitative data analysis was done on the basis of themes and sub themes that emerged from the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

4.1 Results and discussion on Perspectives of Preschool Teachers on Thematic Integrated Teacher Preparation:

The first objective of this study was to examine perspectives of preschool teachers in thematic integrated teacher preparation. From the collected data various recurring views concerning thematic integrated planning emerged. From the coding process, three major themes evolved: hectic and tiresome, lack of training and mastery of content.

4.1.1 Hectic and Tiresome:

Hectic and tiresome in this case refers to the state of being tedious, boring and confusing. From the collected data through the use of in-depth interview majority of the informants said that scheming and lesson planning thematically was quite involving and that it took more time compared to single subject approach as represented by the following statement,

Thematic means learning based on themes capturing various activity areas. Preschool trained teachers do make schemes of work and lesson plans but not regularly. They repeatedly use the same schemes and lesson plans without updating them citing that the approach is quite involving. Making both schemes of work and lesson plans is long and tedious (INT8).

Findings from Focused Group Discussion also revealed that majority (16 out of 20) of the trained preschool teachers understood the meaning of thematic integrated approach but echoed that thematic integrated preparation was very tedious.

Thematic integrated approach means teaching under a major theme connecting all activities. Making schemes of work and lesson plan is too demanding and weary. As teachers we only have the syllabus and Handbook which only gives us themes and learning activities for various lessons. So it is upon the teacher to generate objectives making regular planning very difficult (FGD1).

Another informant lamented that,

While planning I find it difficult connecting the lesson with some activity areas. For example when I am handling the topic Utensils and am expected to link it with body fluids in Life skills or prophets in Religious Education; it is real difficult (FGD1).

Another informant interjected the colleague with a frowned face and sustained that,

It is not easy lesson planning daily. It is too detailed and the fact that you have to relate it with other activity areas makes it cumbersome. Thematic lesson plans demand a lot of creativity in connecting activities, composing songs, looking for right tunes and rhymes with poems is too much (FGD2).

During classroom observations, it was observed that quite a number of lead teachers had thematic integrated schemes of work and lesson plans prepared by TAYARI programme. Only 4 out of 11 pre-school lead teachers had own prepared current schemes of work and lesson plans.

In another classroom observation, the respondent availed old schemes of work and lesson plans which seemed to have been in use for a long time since they were worn out. On asking, the informant argued that,

I have been using these documents for four years now. The content does not change as we keep on repeating same activities year in year out. Furthermore, making both schemes of work and lesson plans ni kazi nyingi sana na hakuna wakati vile niko na watoto wengi 65 (it is too much work and I don't have time because I handle a large class of 65 learners), (OB5).

The representative statements are clear that majority of informants understood the approach but expresses fear regarding scheming and daily planning noting that it is tiresome and too demanding on creativity in generating objectives per lesson and connecting activity areas. The informants felt that thematic integrated approach is too detailed and therefore it consumed a lot of time. Consequently, pre-school teachers neither schemed nor lesson planned regularly as only 4 out 11 lead teachers had up to date records. This sentiment had been echoed by Mijeong (2008) in Korea who argued that, planning took a tremendous amount of time and energy, which makes the teachers feel overburdened. Shana (2014) in Florida and Mligo, Mitchell and Bell (2016) in Tanzania also acknowledged that teachers showed a lot of concern on the extra time and the level of creativity needed in planning and that teachers did not plan thematically since they felt that connecting some activity areas was almost impossible.

4.1.2 Lack of Training:

Lack of training refers to lack of knowledge and skill pertaining to thematic integrated teacher preparation which entails scheming and lesson planning. From the collected data, cases of pre-school teachers' inability to plan thematically came up from quite a number of informants. The in-depth interview informants championed that thematic integrated scheming and lesson planning requires proper training for one to be equipped with necessary knowledge and skill to be able to prepare appropriately. For example, an informant had the following to say,

I did ECDE Diploma and honestly, I can confirm that without undergoing the training one cannot scheme and lesson plan thematically due to lack of knowledge and skill. It is a technical approach that needs training (INT2).

Another administrator had the following to say concerning the training of preschool teachers,

Thematic integrated approach is where learning is organised under themes. It is a good approach but technical in scheming and lesson planning requiring one to undergo training to be able to use it. Like in my school I have two teachers and only the trained teacher is able to prepare thematically (INT10).

In Focused Group Discussion, the trained teachers who were the majority understood what thematic integrated approach means. Concerning their experiences on thematic integrated scheming and lesson planning the informants confirmed that lack of training of some of their colleagues hindered teacher preparation. When asked one informant shot up and explained that,

I am the only trained teacher in my school. One colleague is undergoing training while the other one is not trained at all. Kwa hivyo ni mimi tu ndio naelewa thematic na ninaifundisha in PP2 peke yake (it is me only who understands thematic and I use it to teach the PP2 only) (FGD2).

Another informant in focused group slowly confessed that,

I am a form four leaver, the head teacher requested that I come and assist the children. Lakini ukweli ni kwamba hizo vitu sielewi hata. Inafaa mtu aende training kwanza (the truth is that I don't understand those things, it is necessary that one undergoes training first), (FGD3).

During classroom observation it was noticed that, teachers had the schemes of work and lesson plans which were thematic though not updated. And when asked their experience, out of ten informants. Seven tallied that thematic integrated scheming and lesson planning is complex requiring training.

It is apparent that, thematic planning needs one to undergo training and acquire knowledge and skill on how to plan thematically. This response is connected to the philosophy of Frobel (1782-1852) who emphasized the training of early childhood teachers saying that teachers need to be trained so that they are given knowledge and skills to handle young children.

4.1.3 Content Mastery:

During the interview, six out of 10 informants debated that the creativity and extra effort required when preparing lead to increased understanding of the content to be taught by the teachers hence a more successful lesson. The informants had the following to say concerning the same.

As a teacher I know that the more time and effort taken in scheming and lesson planning should promote mastery of content making teaching of the lesson flow, enjoyable and more productive. In fact, by the end of the day, when a teacher starts teaching, the teaching flows the whole day finally saving more time (INT5).

Another informant argued that,

Lesson planning is meant to give the teachers a chance to get acquainted to the content and foresee any obstacle in its implementation and address it in advance. If a teacher takes a few minutes and makes sketchy schemes of work and lesson plan, then it simply means that the outcome may not be good. But by the virtue that, in thematic approach, normally the schemes of work and lesson plans are lengthy and detailed, then to me preschool teachers who regularly planning thematically, are even more and better equipped to have a successful lesson (INT10).

Data collected from Focused Group Discussion revealed that some respondents agreed to the point that, thematic integrated preparation improved mastery of content. Four out of six respondents in FGD1, Five out of six in FGD2 and five out of seven agreed that it promoted mastery of content. In FGD1 one informant confessed that,

Even though, thematic integrated scheming and lesson planning take a lot of time and it is very involving, when one prepares them well and regularly, it makes the teacher understand the teaching learning activities well and this promotes effective learning (FGD1).

During classroom observation, it was noted that many teachers taught without constantly checking the lesson plans. When the informant asked the respondent explained that,

I schemed and lesson planned personally, therefore I don't need to keep on referring to the lesson since I have mastered it well. From experience, the more you prepare before the lesson the more you understand the content and increased chances of making the lesson enjoyable and successful (OB7)

From in depth interview, focused group discussion and classroom observation one can deduce that, even though thematic integrated preparation is demanding in time and creativity, it is crystal clear that, regular and proper thematic integrated teacher preparation improves mastery of content hence quality teaching and learning outcomes. Gichuba, Opatsa and Nguchu (2010) support this by saying that, good planning takes into account the availability of learning resources, other events within the school calendar and the interrelation between various activity areas and this enhances good time management in relation to work load.

4.2 Results and discussion on Perspectives of Pre-school Teachers in Thematic Integrated Actual Teaching and Learning:

The second objective of this study was to establish perspectives of pre-school teachers in thematic integrated actual teaching and learning. To achieve this objective, the informants in focus group discussion (pre-school teachers) were asked to discuss whether thematic integrated teaching promoted effective learning. The administrators through in-depth interview with some probing questions were asked to disclose the instructional approach preschool teachers preferred whether single subject or the thematic integrated approach. Preschool lead teachers were observed on how they implemented thematic integrated lesson plans in the actual teaching. The following themes emerged; Motivation, retention and lack of consistency.

Many participants in in-depth interview declared that thematic integrated actual teaching motivated learners. For example, an administrator illustrated that,

It is only trained teachers who try to use thematic approach but the untrained obviously use single subject approach. I find children playing with materials, singing and even dancing both in and out of class with their teachers. They sound happy and they seem to be enjoying their lesson (INT3).

Another informant with excitement corroborated on motivation and disclosed that,

Whenever I go to their classes with or without their teachers, I usually find them busy learning numbers or letters on the colourful wall charts in class. I find some playing with the available materials in class although few because at times I find them struggling over a ball or rope. I think it is very effective for teaching young children ((INT8).

Many informants in Focused Group Discussion noted that thematic integrated actual teaching brings about motivation amongst learners by giving different examples. During the discussion an informant with vigour noted that,

Thematic teaching allows use of various activities and materials which helps in addressing various needs and interests of my learners. Natumia tu vitu mingi venye bright colours ndio wavutiwe tukisoma (I use various and bright coloured material to make them get interested during the lesson). (FGD1).

Another informant agreed that when children are given room to participate in both indoor and outdoor activities, they find learning funny. The informant substantiated by saying,

Some of my children are not active in class but when we go out for physical education you find them very active and enjoy every bit of it. They compete in racing with tires, running or kicking the ball as others cheer them up. During the lesson when i use songs accompanied with body movements I realise the whole class gets excited and actively participate in learning (FGD3).

The theme motivation also arose during classroom observation. In participant OB3's classroom, a science lesson on domestic animals was introduced by asking the learners to imitate the various sounds produced domestic animals. Children were happy and excited to do the same in turns.

During a classroom observation, in participant OB7's lesson, mathematics activity was introduced with a poem on numbers and all learners were up reciting the poem about numbers accompanying it with gestures.

Varying of activities and having a variety of materials caters for learners varied need and allows manipulation enhancing learning through senses. This makes learning real and enjoyable. Kabiru and Njenga (2007) admitted that, outdoor activities make learning enjoyable. They also added that play enhances the child's world and promotes holistic development. Also the Ministry of Education (2010) echoes the same sentiment that children will learn best when they are motivated and given opportunities to manipulate concrete objects as this makes the topic meaningful and relevant.

The findings unveiled that; children who have undergone preschool with the use of thematic integrated as an instructional approach recall the learnt concept with easy. One of the informants gave an illustration to confirm that thematic integrated teaching enhanced memory as expressed in the next representative statement;

Trained teachers in most cases use thematic integrated approach. When I was teaching mathematics standard eight last term I asked a pupil to draw a triangle but the pupil could not draw it correctly. I called a preschool child in PP2 who was playing outside and asked the boy to draw a triangle and he drew it well. I was completely amazed and it was enough prove that it promotes effective learning and improves memory since learners can remember the concepts and skill learnt. Concerning using of the approach i can say that preschool teachers use both single subject and thematic integrated approach equally since some are not trained preschool teachers (INT9).

During Focus Group Discussions participants explicitly said that learners seemed to remember more concepts from a lesson when using thematic integrated approach because learnt concepts are repeated across content activity areas. By using songs, rhymes and poems learners' ability to recall learnt concepts is greatly improved. Informants had the following to share,

Through thematic teaching am able to address various needs of learners because themes are arranged from known to unknown and given that learning cuts across activity areas the knowledge and skill are repeated. Through repetition children easily understand and master whatever they are learning (FGD2).

Another informant agreed by saying that,

I agree though thematic teaching I can reach learners with different abilities and interests in class. Thematic allows me to reach children in different ways in class, through songs, rhymes, and poems. When I use different methods they will remember what we have learnt through songs. For example they easily recall days of the week through songs (FGD3).

During classroom observation OB2's class, by just hinting a song, the children easily named seven days of the week as they sang and clapped. Participant OB7 asked a few learners to identify alphabetical letter in their order and the volunteers were able to do so with a lot of easy. The teachers also asked what they had learnt the previous day, a group of learners exploded with a poem about family. This response shows that the children easily recall the learnt concepts with a lot of easy.

One can infer that thematic teaching promotes effective learning as learner's ability to recall learnt concepts is enhanced. Use of hands of activities, learning through senses by manipulating objects, and varying teaching learning activities aids memory. The findings tally with an early childhood philosopher Pestalozzi (1746-1827) who believed that children learn best through activity, hands on activity and by interacting with physical and human environment through their senses. Also, Sacks (2008) supported the idea by noting that using variety of teaching activities and varying teaching methods has transformative abilities to change and trigger mental abilities and that it aids memory.

Although informants agreed to the fact that thematic integrated teaching motivates and enhances memory of learners, some argued that there is inconsistency. Inconsistency manifested in teachers teaching both lower primary and preschool compelling them to use two different approaches compromising their consistency in using thematic approach in teaching. One informant had the following to share,

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I have two teachers one is trained and the other has just joined college. Both teachers are not employed by the government but are paid by the parents. The trained teacher finds it difficult to use thematic approach because he is handling both preschool and lower classes. In primary the teacher is expected to use single subject approach unlike preschool. One teacher planning differently both thematic and single approach is quite challenging. Consequently, the teacher uses single subject in teaching even the preschoolers (INT1)

Another informant concurred that there is lack of consistency in teaching thematically in the aspect of teacher preparation and seconded by making the following observation,

Thematic promotes effective learning because it covers many areas of growth and development in children. Teachers do not use it regularly, even planning is not regular. My opinion is that thematic method should be used in teaching lower classes too for it to impact well in learners because i feel two years is a very short period to judge its effectiveness (INT8).

During Focused Group Discussion, lack of consistency manifested in having a section of preschool teacher who are not trained and therefore cannot teach thematically. The informants confessed that,

I don't use thematic integrated approach in fact I don't even understand it. Two of us are not trained but only the lead teacher is. So yeye pekee ndiye anaielwa na at times anaitumia (it is only the lead teacher who understands it and at times uses it to teach), (FGDI).

In classroom observations lack of consistency was evident when some trained preschool teachers did not have current schemes of work and lesson plans. In OB4, the researcher noticed that the lesson plans availed in class were old and enquired from the informant why and the informant had this to say,

I find it difficult to regularly prepare a lesson plan because I have a big work load as i also teach lower classes due to understaffing in primary section. You know at primary they don't use thematic integrated approach so am forced to use two different approaches daily making my work difficult (OB4).

From the above sentiments it is clear that there are gaps existing on how thematic integrated actual teaching is being carried out. The gaps exist on how it is being used due to the untrained teachers, irregular preparation by the preschool teachers and some teachers who teach both preschool and lower classes due to understaffing in primary school increasing the teachers work load. Some administrators argued that, thematic integrated approach should be used in teaching lower primary classes too to allow it have a strong positive impact on learners citing that two years is too short. This concurs with the TAYARI Baseline Report (2016) in Kenya which revealed that, more often public pre-schools are characterized by inadequate learning materials, shortage of trained teachers making teachers use the traditional teacher-centred methodology.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the findings of the study:

5.1.1 Summary on Perspectives of Preschool Teacher in Thematic Integrated Teacher Preparation:

According to the study findings, informants who were ECDE conversant understood the meaning of thematic integrated teaching approach. Preschool teachers perceived thematic integrated teacher's preparation as hectic and tiresome. Data revealed that, even though preschool teachers were convinced that the approach was developmentally appropriate, they argued it was demanding in time and creativity. During observation only 4 out of 11 observed lessons had current schemes of work and lesson plans an indication that majority of the teachers do not regularly prepare. More data revealed that untrained preschool teachers do not prepare since they lack knowledge and skill. On the other hand, some informants argued that the extra time required preparing enhanced mastery of content.

5.1.2 Summary of findings on Perspectives of Preschool Teachers in Thematic Integrated Actual Teaching:

The study findings established that, thematic integrated teaching and learning made the lesson interesting by using various teaching learning activities and materials. By integrating both indoor and outdoor activities, learners got excited and felt motivated to learn. The analyzed data, further disclosed that, by teaching one concept across activity areas the element of repetition improves content mastery as it aids memory. Additional findings showed that, even though preschool teachers

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had positive attitude about the approach, there was lack of consistency in the manner in which the method was used due to irregular teacher preparation, the untrained teachers and conflict of interest by preschool teachers handling both preschoolers and lower primary classes which embraces single subject approach. Some administrators debated that, it could have been better if thematic integrated approach could be used to teach lower classes too so that its effectiveness can be clearly seen and its impact on learning outcome citing that two years is too little to judge its effectiveness.

5.2 Conclusion of the findings:

Based on these findings, the study concluded that, gaps exist in the manner which preschool teachers in Bondo Sub-County prepare thematically. Teacher preparation is irregular creating a gap on its implementation.

The study concluded that preschool teachers in Bondo Sub-County use thematic integrated approach differently in actual teaching and learning. The variations on its implementation is attributed to untrained teachers in school, inequality distribution of resources across preschools in Bondo bringing lack of uniformity on its implementation across the public preschools in the Sub-County.

5.3 Recommendations of the study:

Carrying out regular supervision on teachers' preparedness to teach with the main focus on thematic schemes of work and lesson plans.

The ministry of education through county government should put in place strong policy statements on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching lower primary classes to ensure consistency in its implementation.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

The following areas were suggested for further research

- i) A study on factors contributing to the preschool teacher's varied perspectives towards the use of thematic integrated approach will expound the current study.
- ii) A study on lower primary school teachers' perspectives on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning in lower primary classes.

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