

ABSTRACT

One of the major features of quality education is a comprehensive curriculum in place and its effective implementation. Integrated curriculum provides learners with a chance to develop deeper understanding, transfer knowledge across subjects and have a greater appreciation of the relevance of education in their daily life. In Kenya, thematic integrated approach is mandated by the preschool curriculum and advocated by ECD policy framework. Despite preschool teacher's commitment to teaching using thematic integrated approach, studies done in Bondo Sub-County revealed that preschool education has been marked with poor classroom practise, use of teacher centred methodologies and falling education standards. This leaves one wondering how well pre-school teachers utilize thematic integrated approach in their teaching. The purpose of the study was to explore the pre-school teacher's perspectives on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning. Objectives of the study were to examine perspectives of preschool teachers on the use of thematic integrated approach and teacher preparation, actual teaching, and learning using content activity areas in classroom and assessment. This was a qualitative study with a phenomenological research design and was informed by progressivism theory as proposed by John Dewey. The units of analysis were 129 public pre-schools and 129 public primary schools. 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. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the study population which was made of primary school head teachers, preschool teachers and the ECDE sub county coordinator. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to sample 23 preschool teachers for focused group discussion, simple random sampling technique was used to sample 13 primary school head teachers for in-depth interview, 13 preschool lead teachers for classroom observation and saturated sampling technique for 1 ECDE Sub-County Coordinator for an in-depth interview making a sample study of 50. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 25 respondents for a pilot study. The study used in-depth interview guide, focused group discussion and participant observation checklist as tools of collecting data. Validity of instruments was ascertained by supervisors while reliability of instruments was determined by use of a pilot study. Trustworthiness and authenticity of research instruments were enhanced by use of member checking triangulation and multiple sources of information. Data was analyzed thematically as themes and sub themes emerged from the study. On the concern about the use of thematic integrated approach and teacher preparation the study found out that, preschool teachers had different perception on teacher preparation. On the issue about actual teaching, the study findings revealed that preschool teachers' actual teaching differed from one teacher to another. On learning using content activity areas in classroom, the findings showed that preschool teachers had different perceptions. On assessment, the study found out that preschool teachers assessed learning differently. Based on the findings, it was therefore concluded that pre-school teachers in Bondo Sub-County had different perceptions on the use of thematic integrated approach in teaching and learning. Therefore, the study recommended that, the Ministry of Education through the County Government should come up with unified criteria for using thematic integrated approach. A study on factors contributing to the preschool teachers varied perspectives towards the use of thematic integrated approach will expound the current study.