



A cross-examination of the Teaching Environment on the Mentoring of Learners with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties in Public Primary Schools in Busia County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study took an inquisitive and interrogative approach to establish the possible environmental characteristics that could be the reason for the drop out of, especially, children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in public primary schools in Busia County. The study used the “Person-Centred” theory by Carl Rogers. The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship of teaching and learning environment with the learner with emotional and behavior difficulties (LEBD) for purposes of mentorship, intervention and handling of target behavior difficulties. The study engaged a mixed research design. Simple random sampling techniques were used on a sample of 44 public primary schools with 106 respondents (teachers, headteachers, and education experts). Data was generated by a structured questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions, observation and in-depth interviews. The validity and reliability of each tool was determined. The data collected was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive statistics. The study found out that the environment had both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can influence and mentor learners. The same environment has the responsibility to influence the construction of specific teaching resources and help impart values and impact target learners.

Keywords: Environmental reconstruction, Influence, Mentoring, Emotional Behaviour Difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Society and the people’s culture constitute a child’s background environment, knowledge and education (Kostelnik *et al.*, 2014). By the time a child goes to school he or she has already a collection of beliefs and values to build on. Student behavior is shaped by and exhibited and interpreted in a social context that involves multiple actors (teachers, students, support personnel, specialists), multiple settings (classrooms, hallways, lunchroom, playground), and multiple goals (enhancing academic performance, encouraging development of the whole child) (Epstein *et al.*, 2008). Homes and schools are, therefore, “social enterprises”. Parents take up the role of the first educational mentors (Weil, 2001). It is their initial assessment of the child that motivates them to take their child to school for the professional teachers to take over and proceed with the learner.

The main question that ran through this study was: “does the primary school teacher ever care to know whether his or her personal characteristics and learning environment contribute to the making or breaking of the young learners?” Sharma and Sharma, (2013) arguing from the point of view of a study carried out in Asia provide precise insight into this study: “A child’s behavioral problem represents a conflict between his developing personality and that of his parents, teachers and siblings and of other children with whom he comes into contact. Children who are secure and emotionally satisfied in their home relationships are not usually



affected by unstable teachers. Behavior problems in a student at school interfere with his lessons and may disturb other students. Behavior problems often overwhelm teachers. Children who exhibit behavioral problems invariably require extra attention, which places strain on teachers and slows the pace at which lessons are offered and completed.”

It is the concept of “...extra attention...” to the environment that this study sought to establish between teachers and learners with emotional behavior difficulties. The main variable in this study was: to find out and explain the extent to which the teaching and learning environment would be a resource and an opportunity for teaching and influencing LEBD. The other variable was to establish the teacher’s resourcefulness in manipulating target environment to address children’s emotional types and the related behavior-difficulties.

The researcher in this study as shown in Figure 1, to explain both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation involved in teaching and learning.

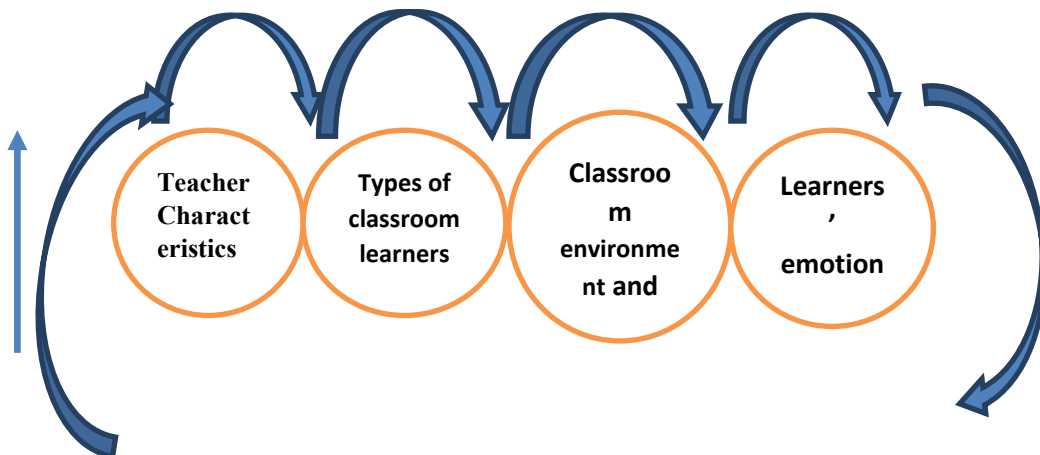


Figure 1: Spiral Process as a System in Teaching and Learning

----- **SOCIETY** -----

Source: Adapted from Mwaka, et al., (2014)

This spiral process demonstrates the centrality of the types of classrooms and environment in which curriculum implementation takes place.

Teaching, therefore, is the process of marshaling all curriculum resources aimed at mentoring learners with emotional difficulties into responsible adulthood. However, about two decades down the line, (Rumberger, 2004; SCI 2011; UNICEF 2012) revealed that 400,000 children who had been enrolled in schools under Free Primary Education did not complete standard eight. They were forced to drop out of school, or repeated classes. The result was only 59 per cent completed standard eight. Griffin, (1987), and Rumberger, (2004) argue that school dropouts have far-reaching consequences for the individuals and the country’s economy. This position is enhanced by Kisulu (1989), Iszat & Wasilewska,



(1997) and Kauffman et al., (2006) who share the general perspective that the ultimate goal should be to help schools create the most engaging environments to successfully prepare kids to graduate with clear pathways to rewarding post-secondary life.

There are millions of children who suffer from learning difficulties, lack interest and motivation in learning, and those who are only able to complete one or two years of primary education and are forced to repeat classes. Many children have, therefore, ended up victims of circumstances: there are those in forced labor, those living on streets and those suffering continuing physical, emotional and sexual abuse. There are children who are victims of war and armed conflict and those not attending school whatever may be the reason. All these children, according to Salvia & Yseldyke, (1985) and UNICEF, (2012) are being denied the opportunity to learn and gain the knowledge, understanding and skills to which they are entitled.

Theoretical Framework

The study sought to use Carl Roger's (1982). Person-Centered theory to explain how primary school learner's personal and psycho-social development should be nurtured through the current environment and interpersonal processes. This theory was complemented by the Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2005). This study endeavored to provide the crucial knowledge for successful teaching and learning in target educational environments. Abdi Elhamid et al (2009) confirm that epidemiological information about the prevalence of child behavior and emotional problems is essential to inform policy and public health practice.

It has been argued by Sheldon et al., (2001), Mayall, (2002) and Olorube, (2005) that there exist disagreements and disengagements between teachers and learners in the classroom. They cite learner – absenteeism, misbehavior and indiscipline problems as behaviors that indicate learners' disagreement and detachment from school. They also observe that teachers should initiate change in the classroom or modify the class learning environment to decrease problem behavior or remove the factors that trigger the behavior. Further, the teachers should be able to reinforce new skills in the class in order to increase appropriate behavior and preserve positive learning climate. IES (2008) points out: "When teachers understand the behavioral hot spots in their classroom in terms of timing, setting, and instructional activities, for example, they can proactively develop class-wide and individual student strategies (such as a change in instructional groupings, the seating plan, or the order or pace of reading and math instruction) to reduce the contribution of these classroom factors to students' problem behaviors".

METHODOLOGY

The study took a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative). It was situated in Western Kenya, specifically the expansive Busia County that is in the neighbourhood of Kakamega County, Bungoma County, Siaya County, and to the extreme west is Uganda. Busia County is composed of the following sub-counties: Nambale, Matayos, Butula, Samia, Budalangi, Amukura, and Amagoro. However, a convenient sample of the sub-counties was considered. One main reason for considering Busia County was to find an explanation whether it is its proximity to the border, nature of curriculum, teachers and teaching methodology, or other factors that cause some primary school children to feel neglected, frustrated, and hence fail to perform well leading to drop out.



The study used Purposive sampling technique to select the participants. The power of purposive sampling (Bryman & Cramer (2001) and Creswell (2009) lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied. The study sampled 44 public primary schools with 106 respondents (88 teachers, 11 headteachers, and 07 (out of 09) education officers) in Busia County. According to Neuman (2000), Denzin and Lincoln (2005) a population is a group or class of subjects, variables, concepts or phenomena to be investigated. A Population is a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken. Jwan and Ong'ondo, (2011) define population as an entire group of persons or elements that have at least one thing in common. It refers to the larger group from which the sample is taken. Dornyei, (2007) also suggests that "the multiple or collective case study is the type of a case study where a number of cases are studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon or general condition".

The study used four tools: Focus Group Discussion (FDG) for selected respondents; in-depth one-on-one interview with key respondents, observation schedule for classroom teacher-learner interactions, and a precise questionnaire for the sampled teachers. For credibility, the researcher involved the supervisors throughout all the stages of the study. Several scholars justify this design. To confirm the opinion of, especially Creswell, (2009) this design helped to explore causation in order to find underlying principles that define the form or behaviour of the subjects or focus, features or characteristics of the phenomenon under study. Indeed, as Jwan and Ong'ondo point out, in the case of considering every entity, the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and where boundaries between the phenomenon under study and its context are not clearly evident. For example, relationship between teachers and learners.

Mixed methods approach was applied in this study in view of the different reality of schools, individual teachers, and individual children; and the diverse perceptions related to the challenges posed by the effect of intra- and inter -social relationships. Bryman and Cramer, (2001) hold that mixed method inquiries integrate quantitative and qualitative research within a single project. Kerlinger, (2008), found that combining both methods reduced biases associated with each method. In this study, in-depth interviews were used to interrogate education experts especially Education Officers (at Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development and those in the field), Counselors, and Heads of Schools. Data from the observation schedule provided another dimension to explaining and understanding specifically, the human nature of individual teachers towards children with EBD.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were discussed by drawing on available evidence not only in the literature, but also triangulation of the contents of reference materials and data from the questionnaire, focused group discussions, indepth interviews, and observation. While it was not easy to establish the multiplicity of factors as well as the diverse ways in which teachers interacted with learners on a daily basis, a few factors could be explained based on the evidence gathered during the study.

The essence of the findings of this study was engraved in the meaning of the concepts of "Teacher Influence and Mentoring" in relation to learners with emotional and behavior difficulties. Crucial to the progress of this study was to first of all conceptualize the meaning



of “Influence” and “Mentoring” from the point of view of a primary school teacher in a classroom situation.

The FGD revealed that the teachers were aware of the fact that to “influence” a learner is a multifaceted process. It means both physical and psychological adjustment. Physical influence involves behavior change or adjustment from the undesired status to the desired status. For example, teachers and learners changing from dislike and fear of one another to liking and appreciating one another in the context of teaching and learning. This confirmed the position held by Bevington and Wishart, (2006) that “influence” and “mentoring” involve cognitive performance. Psychological influence on the other hand, means change of one’s attitude and behavior from negative thoughts and feelings to positive comments and articulation of ideas and thoughts in relation to teaching and learning in specific classroom situations.

“Mentoring” on the other hand was understood by respondents to mean the teachers’ effort to shape and encourage learners with emotional behavior difficulties (LEBD) into acceptable and responsible character and personality through the classroom process. During the indepth interview, one respondent who was incharge of Guiding and Counselling in Cluster A observed:

“Mentoring means shaping up a child into the practice of worthwhile values in a relevant organization”. This was enough evidence to confirm that some teachers knew both the meaning and value of mentoring but chose not to practice it in class. Ultimately, the study also analyzed the physical relationship between the teachers and their target learners, especially LEBD as part of the process of mentoring. The focus was on the extent to which individual teachers accessed specific learners with emotional behavior difficulties for purposes of direct influence. However, it emerged from the respondents’ uncertainty that they did not understand the range of “self-aware environment”, “social-aware environment”, “self-management environment”, and “relationship management environment” and behavior difficulties, and especially the standards in mentoring. This confirmed the argument by DFEE (1994): Emotional and behavioural difficulties range from social maladaptation to abnormal emotional stresses. ... They may be multiple and may manifest themselves in many different forms and severities. This study as shown in Figure 2, has unsoiled another level of understanding of the relationship between the teachers and their learners.

It is now apparent that most, if not all teachers in Busia County’s primary schools lack the knowledge and skills of identifying and handling LEBD. It follows therefore, that the teachers do not both to know or track records of behavior and performance of their LEBD beyond primary school education.



SELF

OTHER

Awareness

Self –awareness

What are you feeling?

How did these feelings arise?

What information do they carry?

Social-awareness

What are they feeling?

How did those feelings arise?

Self Management

How do you want to feel?

What do you need to do in order to
feel that way?

Relationship Management

How do you want them to feel?

What do you need to do in order
for them to feel that way?

Actions

Teacher-Self-Conscious as a basis for interacting with learners

Source: Adapted from Myers 1998.

Ted and Simpson (in Myers) have established that such children avoid tasks. By the time they are identified as challenged, most children have experienced failure. It is because of these reasons that it becomes important to identify such children early in their growth. If parents and teachers react with negativism, blame and discrimination, the problem is compounded. The children may avoid assigned tasks in various passive or aggressive ways. Daydreaming, giving attention to other children's activities, doodling and drawing, active resistance, misbehavior, and in some cases truancy and absenteeism may be practiced by such children. This was the situation that led to the loud question: "Are our children learning?" It is in this respect important to recognize that this study has put a premium on the need to be aware of the teachers' power and responsibility upon the LEBD. The teacher should take logical measures not only for the learner's character formation, but also striking a balance between classroom content and his/her future life. Similarly, the results suggest the need for timely action by turning primary schools in Busia County into "Child Growth Centre" (CGC). For example, every learner, therefore, should be assisted by a teacher in order to realize one's own character efficiency and accountability. Every respondent wondered why "Mentoring" was not a key concept in the process of teaching and learning. The key question here was "does the primary school teacher ever cares to know whether his or her personal characteristics and learning environment contribute to the making or breaking of the young learners?"

The study sought to recognize whether the respondents' bio data and demographic characteristics had specific relationship with the expected biophysical explanations, psychodynamic explanations, behavioural explanations, cognitive-behavioural explanations, sociological explanations and ecological explanations. All these together, related to the perspectives of Aronson and Patnoe, (1997), had a bearing on the study. The study's subjects included two broad categories of respondents: (i) the teachers in the public primary schools majorly providing information on the key perspectives regarding the influence of



their own personality, teaching methodology, their teaching resources and environment on target learners; and (ii) Education management experts as key respondents. These were Education officers and headteachers. In relation to the teachers' perspectives, the major characteristics of these respondents that determined the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this group were length of time in the teaching profession, especially in public primary schools; experience in assessing learners, their position in school management as well as gender and age characteristics. The lower primary and upper primary clusters of teachers, who also included guiding and counseling teachers, provided their viewpoints on perspectives such as gender of learners, types of behavior; challenges teachers faced handling them; choices, advantages, challenges and quality issues regarding the environment and related resources in context. The views of these respondents raised the bio-physical data that was corroborated with those of the education management experts. In view of the theory used in this study that sought specificity and uniqueness of entities in-depth interview method of data collection was used to access more qualitative data that strengthened the study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The over-riding conclusion from this study was that a classroom is a community of learners with teachers who together, should have a good impression of one another and increase the well-being of every one. The gap between teachers and the Learners with Emotional Behaviour Difficulties (LEBD) was clearly highlighted through strong opinions by respondents. It emerged that the teachers lacked the psychological ingredients for harmonizing the classroom community. It was, therefore, concluded that teachers should create time to work with target LEBD by identifying their specific behavior problem. The behaviour's antecedents and consequences should be used to design effective and efficient intervention strategies that respond to the needs of individual LEBD in the classroom situation. The study revealed that LEBD were not afforded meaningful schooling experience which consisted of limited learning opportunities in over-crowded classrooms with insufficient teaching-learning materials, inappropriate environment and poorly motivated or supported teachers. For that matter, teachers should work with timely information related to specific behavior problems that emerge from known school environments. Practical personal teacher and LEBD relationshiping is both intrinsic and extrinsic that would require empirical evidence guided by behavior problem classification and rating scales applicable in specific environments.

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