
Influence of Instructional Strategies on Pre-School Children Transition to Lower Primary school. A case of Kikuyu Sub-Urban, Kenya

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Abstract: *Transitions are preordained phenomena in the lives of children in the process of growth and development. Various attempts to enhance transition from pre-school to lower primary school have led to various effects on the way pre-school teachers have designed approaches and strategies to accomplish the desired effective transitioning. Nevertheless, the efforts made have not always led to expected results in transitioning. Therefore this study seeks to assess the preparedness of primary school teachers in transitioning preschool children to lower primary education in Kikuyu sub-county. This study sought to find out the influence of available instructional strategies used by lower primary teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool learners to lower primary. To achieve this purpose, a sample of 48 respondents was randomly selected for the study. Questionnaires for teachers and interview guides for head teachers were the major instruments used to collect data. Reliability of the instrument was established through split-half method. The result of the analysis revealed that singing, reading and numbering as the mostly used strategies by teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool children to lower children.*

Key Words:Instructional strategies, transitioning, pre-school, lower primary school

Research Area: Social Science

Paper Type:Research Paper

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the introduction of free universal education, access to primary education has dramatically increased across the world. Nevertheless, completion rate remains wanting due to high dropout and repetition in the lower primary level. This is determined by children's readiness and school readiness for the children in pre-school prior to transition (Arnold, Barlett, Gowani & Meralli, 2006; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Various studies have been conducted to ascertain the situation of transitioning into lower primary schools. In the United States of America use of appropriate instructional strategies and interventions in early elementary school by teachers is instrumental in ensuring smooth transitioning of children from pre-school to elementary school and that teacher training was found to be critical to this end (Corey & Deborah, 2013). In Norway, smooth transitioning was enhanced by pre-schools, lower primary schools and schools offering different content and instruction strategies that were sensitive to the diverse educational needs of children at these levels (Haug, 2012).

In Kenya, the major issues of the entire education spectrum range from management of teachers, level of teacher-child ratio and adequacy in the provision of educational infrastructure (Ministry of Education, 2012). The introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 strengthened and expanded the access to education for children. However, various studies revealed that FPE has great negative impact on the enrollment of the children in the

Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers (Rotumoi, 2012). According to UNESCO (2007), there has been a gap in transition and retention for those children who had gone through the ECD service and those whose parents took the straight to class one.

Children joining lower primary school have been found to be very stressed due to lack of continuity as they moved from preschool to primary school. Most children have been reported through research to dislike the primary school routine due to the many restrictions placed on them by teachers and use of teaching approaches which makes lower primary school unpleasant (Arnold et al., 2006). Various attempts to improve on preschool to lower primary school transitioning have resulted in various effects in the desired end. Preschool being special schools, preschool teachers have designed unique approaches and strategies to achieve the desired effective transition. Despite all this, no special considerations have been put in place to ensure that preschool learners meet all-round transitioning from preschool to lower primary. It is against this ground that the researcher finds it viable to find out the influence of available instructional strategies used by lower primary teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool learners to lower primary.

Readiness to the next level is significant for the success of the child in the next level of education. Thus, for a smooth transition, children must be ready for school. School must be ready for child in terms of methods of teaching. The idea of school readiness and transition is more than just children's abilities and early learning, it has more to do with school readiness for the children, however schools are often not ready for children, they fail to provide an enabling environment for children to learn effectively and since teachers are the main stakeholders in the readiness for learners' transition from preschool to primary school there is a major concern of the reason why children tend to disconnect when they move from preschool to primary school. Preschool being special schools, preschool teachers have designed unique approaches and strategies to achieve the desired effective transition. Despite all this, no special considerations have been put in place to ensure that preschool learners meet all-round transitioning from preschool to lower primary. The efforts made have not always led to expected results in transitioning. Therefore this study sought to assess the preparedness of primary school teachers in transitioning preschool children to lower primary education in Kikuyu sub county, Kenya.

1.1 Purpose of the Study:

This main purpose of the study was to find out the influence of available instructional strategies used by lower primary teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of pre-school learners to lower primary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers have a role in establishing suitable curriculum and pedagogy as they are emerging essential factors effective towards pre-school to primary school transition (Einarsdottir, 2010). Briggs and Potter (1999, cited in Mureithi, 2013) acclaimed the employment of early childhood special educators in the lower primary level as well as in pre-school in order to provide continuity of pedagogy. Whatever young children learn, when and how they do it, should have to be addressed collectively in order to develop an appropriate pedagogical approach. According to Lee and Goh (2012) the significance of matching teaching methods with educational vision grounded in a more clear value structure (Arnold *et al.*, 2006).

Studies done in Denmark by Brostrom (2012) highlighted the need for teachers in primary schools to have a close working relationship with preschool teachers especially in developing curriculum continuity to meet the learners' needs. The study observed that through special meetings between preschool and primary school teachers, teachers can gain more insight into the interests of individual children and can therefore jointly plan transitioning activities accordingly (Brostrom, 2012). During such meetings, preschool teachers can provide photographs, drawings and favourite stories which can be taken up by primary school teachers. This study was conducted in Denmark, a country which has a unique educational system in addition to having different socio-economic status. It was necessary to carry out a similar study in Kenya so as to compare and contrast the findings from these two diverse locations.

Research studies further highlights various instructional strategies that can be employed in enhancing smooth transitioning of preschool learners to lower primary. According to a multicultural study carried out by UNICEF (2010), the impact of transitioning was effective with effective use of various teaching approaches. The study examined teachers under a special controlled programme with special provisions while the current study was carried out in a normal school setting. This study was also carried out across different countries with different educational conditions and as a result the findings were extensively generalized in order to draw conclusions. The current study focused on one country to fill this gap.

A study by Thomas and Collier (2012) revealed that linguistic continuity for children in instruction plays a major role enhancing transitioning from pre-school to primary school. The study noted that children who learn in their mother tongue in pre-school and lower primary were found to record better test scores and had relatively higher academic self-concept and self-efficacy which results to smooth transitioning as compared to those who received instruction exclusively in the official language in lower primary (Thomas & Collier, 2012). Classroom observations across 12 countries in Africa, found that the use of unfamiliar languages forced primary teachers to use ineffective and teacher-centered methods which undermine children's learning thus making transitioning from one class to another more challenging (Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh & Wolff, 2005).

Studies carried out in Africa gives similar findings. In Malawi for instance, a study by Lewin (2007) children in Grades 1 to 4 who were taught in three or four languages namely: Chichewa (Malawi's national language), English (the language of instructional). It was established that those learners who shared the same mother tongue with their teachers performed significantly better in primary school in transitioning from one grade to another. These studies relied more on classroom observation as data collection method which meant that there was a likelihood of teachers and learners acting differently influenced by the presence of the researcher. This could have led to reduced objectivity of the findings. Use of questionnaires in the current study sought to reduce such effects hence ensuring accuracy of data collected.

Simple strategies can help foster social relationships between children. For example, using names will help children learn who is in their class and who the key adults in the school are (Moska, 2010). Paired activities can help children meet each other (Einarsdottir, 2010), but can also cause anxiety. For example, asking children to organize themselves into pairs can result in some children consistently not having a partner which can heighten their feeling of isolation (Peters, 2010). This study sought to find out the influence of available

instructional strategies used by lower primary teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool learners to lower primary.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design:

This study adopted exploratory approach using descriptive research design to investigate the preparedness of primary school teachers to transit pre-school children to lower primary in terms of instructional strategies.

3.2 Target Population and Sample:

The target population for this study was all head teachers, standard teachers and pre-school teachers in 57 public primary schools in Kikuyu Sub-County. Simple random sampling method was used to select a total of 24 schools (12 public primary schools and 12 pre-school centers). Simple random sampling was used to select 2 teachers from each school. All 24 head teachers were purposively sampled leading to a total sample of 48 respondents.

3.3 Research Instruments:

The researcher made use of questionnaires for teachers and interview guides for head teachers as the main tools for collecting primary data.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Tools:

Both the questionnaires and interview guides were pre-tested before the final study. Basing on content validity, the researcher sought expert advice from the supervisor to ensure relevance of items on the instruments against the set objectives. Split half reliability index was conducted to measure internal consistency in determining the reliability of items.

3.5 Methods of Data Analysis and Presentation:

Data collected using the questionnaires were coded, assigned labels according to variables and discussed using descriptive statistics frequency and percentages. The data were presented using tables and were used to present the information. Qualitative data generated from the interview schedules were organized as per relevant objective and presented using texts.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

This study is aimed to find out the influence of available instructional strategies used by lower primary teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool learners to lower primary. Killen (2004) states that teaching methods provide a framework for orderly organization and presentation of instructional activities. A comprehensive understanding of these approaches and some of the factors related to their selection is a pre-requisite for good teaching. Teachers' methodology is a sufficient actor in facilitating of the implementation of the intended aims and expressed objectives. In order to establish which strategies had been put in place to enhance smooth transitioning specifically during instruction, various strategies were listed. Teachers were asked to select among the listed strategies the ones that they were using at a frequency. The findings are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Instructional strategies used to enhance smooth transitioning:

Instructional strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Rote learning	9	75.0
Using drawings	8	66.7
Numbering	10	83.3
Reading	11	91.7
Using diagrams	7	58.3
Singing	11	91.7
Recall	8	66.7
Others	4	33.3
Total	12	100

Table 1 shows that majority (91.7%) of preschool teachers used singing and reading as instructional strategies to enhance smooth transitioning. This was followed by numbering (83.3%) and then rote learning as the fourth strategy (75.0%) in frequency of use. Using drawings and recall was the fifth and sixth (66.7%) strategies in order of frequency followed by diagrams (58.3%). There were other (33.3%) strategies that teachers were using to facilitate smooth transitioning which were not among those ones listed by the researcher.

These findings imply that the major strategies used by teachers to enhance smooth transitioning of preschool children to lower children were singing, reading and numbering as the mostly used. Others included recall, diagrams and drawings. All these were the same strategies that preschool teachers use in instruction. These findings concur with Brostrom (2012) who highlighted the need for teachers in primary schools to have a close working relationship with preschool teachers especially in developing curriculum continuity to meet the learners' needs. When similar teaching approaches are employed by lower primary school children, then preschool children may find it a friendly learning environment since there is no bigger change from their familiar preschool environment. In so doing, smooth transitioning of preschool children is enhanced.

These findings also agree with findings in a multicultural study carried out by UNICEF (2010) based on the impact of transitioning was effective with effective use of various teaching approaches. The findings advocated that proper transition of children to lower primary school was enhanced by equipping the teachers to impart academic skills such as colour naming, pattern recognition, numeral identification, counting, applied addition and subtraction, letter identification and reading, perceptual motor skills such as attention, mastery motivation and the ability to follow directions.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study the study concludes that teaching methods form part of the major factors influencing learner's transition from pre-school to lower primary. Teachers suggested that ECD centers to be established either in the same compound as primary schools or let them be as close as possible, that teachers and parents to encourage preschool children to interact freely with other children in the school especially those in primary schools for those schools that are built together and that there should be an encouraged move by primary school teachers to visit preschool children frequently and encourage them to work hard and later join them in lower primary schools. In addition, it was also suggested that lower primary school teachers to be providing all the necessary learning

materials to the 'new' learners as well as encouraging learner centered teaching approaches. The study thus concludes that teachers should be well prepared and equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills so as to select appropriate instructional methods while preparing children for the next level of education.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussions, the following recommendations have been made:

- A preschool guiding document ought to be crafted by the Ministry of Education that will describe the appropriate standard procedures and methods of effectively transitioning children from preschool to lower primary as well as management of pupils in their early years of lower primary.
- The researcher recommends that strategies should be enhanced for lower primary classes to be smaller this will ensure clear and consistent classroom activities that are intensive and interactive in practice.
- Teachers to attend short course training to improve their knowledge and skills in the use of teaching methods appropriate for young learners that is methods that ensure an orderly approach to learning new tasks.

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