

Role of Nature and Fate on Early Childhood Day Care Centres in Urban Cities: Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract

The study focused on nature and fate in relation to early childhood day-care centres in urban cities specifically in Nairobi, Kenya. In this regard, the study sought information on nature and fate in relation to type of environment day-care centres offered to children and situations that were out of children's control such as language diversity. Mixed methods approach was employed in this study. The data collection instruments included questionnaires and an observation checklist. Target population was twenty five (25) childhood day-care centres and twenty five (25) teachers. Systematic random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used to select eight (8) day-care centres and eight (8) teachers respectively. Data from questionnaire were presented in frequencies and percentages while data from observation checklist were analyzed through coding and categorizing of information to create patterns, themes and sub-themes. Findings regarding nature revealed that there were inadequate learning facilities while findings concerning fate showed language diversity in the day-care centres which in turn impacted negatively on the child growth and development.

Keywords: *Nature. Fate. Childhood Day-Care. Teachers. Day-care centres*

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I. Introduction

The focus of this study was on how nature and fate influence early childhood day care in urban cities in Nairobi, Kenya. The term "nature" as used in this study involves the type of learning environment provided to children such as classrooms and playgrounds while the term "fate" concerns the socioeconomic situations in which the children involved in the study were found and which would have made them victims of circumstances (McLeod, 2017). The term "early childhood day care" in this study refers to children's well-being in other words, the quality of children's lives that incorporates mental, health, communication, literacy, psychological, social, physical and emotional well-being (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014). The Government of Kenya has demonstrated commitment to the wellbeing of young children by signing various global policy frameworks. These frameworks include the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and also the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition, Kenya also participated and endorsed the deliberations of 1990 Jomtien World Conference on EFA and the 2000 World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal). The Jomtien and Dakar conferences underscored the importance of Early Childhood Development programs in improving the holistic development of children. The Government has further translated all of these international initiatives into national targets to be implemented at (Republic of Kenya 2004).

Despite the government intervention policies on childhood care there have been challenges facing the provision of early childhood day care services in Kenyan urban cities, in particularly Nairobi. The African tradition holds the view that, early childhood day care provision is the responsibility of the parents (Mbiti, 2012). There is no doubt that marginalized children in Kenya, in the case of this research, Nairobi, come from slum areas that are impoverished and therefore they may not, receive sufficient childhood care since most of the parents are not employed (Atmore, 2012). Nairobi, where the study was conducted, is home to people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures and who are mainly job seekers. In addition, previous studies have established that marginalized children in day care centres often operate in a climate of crisis due to inadequate learning resources and financial difficulties (Cummins and Hornberger, 2014). It is against this background, therefore, that this study sought to answer the question; "To what extent do nature and fate influence early childhood day-care centres in Nairobi Kenya?"

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Maslow's hierarchy of human needs theory. The theory guided the researchers to review various needs including the social, physiological, safety and affiliation needs of young children under two broad themes: nature and fate. According to this theory, the foundations for early childhood day-care lie in providing children with physiological needs such as food, shelter, sleep and toilets; safety needs, which would

include secure classrooms as well as secure play grounds and food; and love/belonging needs such as good relationships between the child care teacher and the children (Tay & Diener, 2011). In relation to this study, when children leave home in the morning to attend early childhood day care, the parents believe that their needs will be taken care of by the centres. If such needs are not satisfied, then the children's motivation will arise from the quest to satisfy them. Some researchers have suggested that children's needs may arise when they experience deprivation (Cherry, 2014). For example, the physiological needs must be fulfilled before children get motivated to desire the next need which, in Maslow's hierarchy is safety needs (Ray, 2012). A bored and hungry child will therefore find it difficult to participate in learning meaning that the hunger need must be satisfied before other needs, such as cognitive development need (Rand, 2010). Thus, teachers have a duty to motivate children to achieve their full potential.

II. Literature Review

Early childhood day-care centres are meant to provide a stable and responsive nurturing environment well able to satisfy the needs of children (Heckman, 2012). Teachers' pedagogical approaches when dealing with young children are of great importance when dealing with children. According to Khan (2017), children's social needs must be nurtured in the early years through activities such play and singing which provide them with opportunities for intelligence, motor development and language competence. Furthermore, playgrounds and play equipment promote children's creativity and talent discovery (Davies, 2013). In addition, play enhances collaboration, sharing of resources, oral communication and listening skills, all of which reinforce positive behaviour in children. However, playgrounds and play equipment must be safe and secure to avoid instances of injuries which are detrimental to early childhood development (Ashiabi, 2017). Further, various researchers have placed emphasis on promoting children's creativity through resources such as books, toys and visual media which assist children in meeting basic learning requirements such as visual, imaginary and concentration development (Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 2017).

Research has also established that good nutrition plays a great role in the development of young children. Young children who are exposed to good nutrition and adequate psychological stimulation have better brain function, as well as better ability to learn during the later years in life, than those raised in a less stimulating environment (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011). Furthermore, children from poor environments may suffer from malnutrition which affects physical and cognitive development, as well as the ability to learn, particularly in early years (Marcus, Pereznioto, Collen & Carter, 2012). Findings of studies done in Australia on "neurosciences" have revealed that good nutrition and health are critical in children's communication development (Ministerial Council for Education, 2010).

Previous studies have explored how early childhood educators' beliefs should work with children and what type of environment they should offer in early childhood day-care centres (Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daugherty, Howes & Karoly, 2013). According to Gakuru & Koech (2015), early childhood day-care centres do not get full support from government. Existing evidence has shown that in Kenya, there is a great probability that physical facilities that enhance children's play such as play grounds are of poor conditions. The reasons being, that the facilities are rarely inspected by the county education officers or environmental health officers before approving their registration (National Development Agency, 2012). Childhood day-care provisioning in Kenya is characterized by various factors which include inadequate learning facilities, food and unavailability of appropriate physical structures such as classrooms and toilets. This has resulted to informal buildings and structures being utilized as early childhood day-care centres. Early childhood day-care outdoor facilities should be designed to allow children explore their environment through activities such as climbing, cycling and running which enhance their creativity, imagination and motor skills (Porteus, 2014). In addition, the facilities should provide an environment based on what children are ready for and interested in (Post and Hohmann, 2011). Furthermore, inadequate reading and writing materials may also influence children's holistic development (Melhuish, 2010).

Children's fate can be triggered by challenges such as social distortions, wars, language diversity and family or teacher's incompetence (Harrington, 2016). Children's home economic status plays a great role in early childhood day-care. The most common home aspects that have been studied include poverty and single parent families which can have detrimental effect on children's development (Iltus, 2017). Hence, children who experience long term poverty exhibit increased levels of developmental delay (David, 2014). According to Unicef (2011), early childhood day-care provision in Africa is a challenge for the marginalized. For example, a critical analysis of the nature, context and status of early childhood day-care provision in South Africa shows that various challenges that need to be addressed if early childhood day-care provision has to succeed. These challenges include uncoordinated service delivery, inequalities in existing early childhood day-care provisioning, lack of adequate human resource and financial resources. In addition, the results of the analysis showed that only 35% of children aged 0-4 attended early childhood day-care centres in 2015. Out of these 35% per-cent, only 29% attended where early childhood day-care activities were provided (Department of Education, 2010).

The level of education of teacher is also a critical issue that has influence on children development. A study conducted on early childhood development for children 0-8 years training in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions revealed that teachers needed to be equipped with relevant managerial, organizational and technical skills that enhance smooth running of young children programs (Dozva & Dyanda, 2012). According to Chen and Chang (2016), skills obtained in training enable the teacher to deal with young children in all areas of development. Moreover, early childhood day-care teachers who have received formal training can make a huge difference by designing appropriate learning approaches for young children (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2013).

Growing research has shed light on the effects of language diversity in early childhood development. Children from diverse language backgrounds may encounter difficulty in language proficiency in centres where the language of instruction is different from their home language (Johnston, 2010). Kenya's Constitution allows use of two official languages in urban areas (RoK, 2010). Therefore, children whose first language is not English may face challenges which may affect their development negatively (Child Friendly School Manual, 2012).

Environmental conditions such as noise pollution may determine children's holistic development. Research has indicated that noise may affect children's health because children are more vulnerable than adults to the negative effects of pollution (Strife & Downey, 2011). Environment that is free of loud noise helps children to thrive and succeed in their brain development (Fact Sheet, 2016). Children in large classes may drift off task because the teacher is over whelmed by the number of children. On the other hand, smaller classes may have positive effects on learning experiences (Blatchford, Bassett and Brown, 2015).

III. Research Methodology

Mixed method approach was used in the study. Data was collected and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative forms of research paradigms. The researcher used this approach to avoid biasness that could arise due to use of single method. In addition, in studies that use mixed method approach, one method helps to develop the other method (Gorard, 2013). In this sense, the researcher used questionnaire to collect data from participants. The questionnaire was used to get the views and perceptions of the practitioners regarding the major themes that were being investigated, that is, nature and fate. The researcher found questionnaire to be useful in this study because it collects large amount of data and takes a shorter time (Bulmer, 2014). Further, an observation checklist was used by the researcher to gather detailed information and develop a holistic understanding of early childhood day-care centres as regards nature and fate (Hopkins, 2006).

Target population was twenty five (25) early childhood day-care centres and twenty five (25) teachers in Nairobi city. Systematic random sampling method was used to select eight (8) centres that participated in the study following Gay (2006) who suggests that studies with larger population should sample ten per-cent of the population while studies with smaller target population should have a sample representative of twenty percent (20%). Purposive sampling design was used to sample eight (8) teachers in the sampled centres. Before data collection process, the researchers obtained ethical clearance letters of authorization from the relevant authorities. The researcher also visited the sampled centres to introduce herself to the participants and establish a rapport. A mutually convenient time for data was identified and agreed on by the researcher and the respondents. To ensure confidentiality, the researchers did not use any element that might indicate the centres' identities such as, names or taking any photograph. Data from the questionnaire was analyzed and presented in frequencies and percentages while data analysis from observation checklist began in the field during data collection process whereby the researcher recorded detailed information on themes and sub-themes. The sub-themes included nature: learning facilities such as classrooms toilet, playgrounds, kitchen and reading and writing materials; fate: noise, teachers' level of education, language diversity and large classes.

IV. Data presentation

Data collected using questionnaire was presented first followed by data gathered using observation checklist. Data were presented as follows:

4.1 Data from questionnaire

4.1.1 Nature

The study sought information from respondents on the number of meals the children had per day. Four (50%) indicated that children had three meals per day, two (25%) indicated that children had four meals per day while one (12.5%) said that children had two meals per day. Further, the study established that children performed the following activities: cycling, jumping, kicking, swinging, painting, drawing and drama/ play. Five (62.5%) respondents said that children in their class did not perform the activities while three (37.5%) reported the children performed the activities. Reasons given for not performing the activities were that three (37.5%) said that centres had inadequate learning facilities for the activities and three (37.5%) indicated that children were young to perform the activities.

Data gathered using observation checklist concerning nature included type of learning facilities such as classrooms, play grounds, kitchen and toilets. It was observed that some centres were housed in flats where children had to climb stairs to reach their classroom. Further, it was observed that some classrooms were also bedrooms for the owners of centres while other centres had kitchens within the classrooms. It was observed that some centres had only one toilet that was shared between the teachers and the children. Observation made showed that some classrooms had insufficient spaces for learning. It was also observed that in some centres, children had only one meal and a snack in the afternoon per day.

4.1.2 Fate

Data on fate concerned situations that were out of children's control. This includes demographic information which showed that five (62.5%) teachers were secondary school graduates, two (25%) were primary graduates while one (12.5%) had college education meaning that majority of teachers had no training to handle small children. Further, the findings showed that seven (87.5%) of the teachers were females and one (12.5%) was a male indicating inadequate or lack of father figure. Another situation was that children and teachers were linguistically diversified. This indicates that communication between teachers and the children was insufficient. For example, data collected on what language teachers used when communicating to children indicated that majority, seven (87.5%) used only English while one (12.5%) showed that the teachers used English and Kiswahili. When respondents were asked what other languages the children used when communicating among themselves, four (50%) indicated languages such as Kikuyu, Luo, Swahili, and English. This was also reflected in the data regarding what problems teachers had when communicating with children. Three (37.5%) had problems communicating with children, two (25%) had problems in controlling the class and three (37.5%) had difficulties in interacting with the children. The findings on number of children per class indicated that three (37.5%) of the classes had more than 21 children, three (37.5%) classes had between 11-20 children, one (12.5%) had between 11-15 children while one (12.5%) had number of children between 5-10.

Data on fate from observation checklist showed situations that were out of children's control. It was observed that children in the institutions came from different linguistic backgrounds. This was deduced from different languages and accents used by children during free play, when talking amongst themselves and when they communicated with teachers. The communication involved code-switching and code-mixing. Other instances observed included children's inability to express their feelings sufficiently. In other instances, children showed shyness such as looking down when teachers talked to them. Another area of concern observed was that there were large classes of more than ten children handled by one teacher.

4.1.3 Connecting Datasets Regarding Nature and Fate

Data collected using both questionnaire and observation schedule in each theme were compared in relation to their similarities and differences as follows:

4.1.3.1 Nature

In both cases data concurred that in some day-care centres children had only one meal per day. In addition, the data agreed that there were inadequate learning facilities in the institutions. However, there were data from observation schedule that did not feature in questionnaire. These data included risky conditions such as day-care centres being housed in flats, teachers and children sharing one toilet and kitchen put within classroom premises

4.1.3.2 Fate

Data that was related included linguistic diversity in the day-care centres and more female teachers than male teachers. Another similar data from both questionnaire and observation schedule indicated that number of children per class was large. However, questionnaire had data on teacher's level of education.

V. Discussion of the Findings

The findings were discussed in relation to themes nature and fate. In the discussion, the findings from both questionnaire and observation checklist were incorporated in each theme as follows:

5.1 Nature

The findings revealed that some of the day-care centres lacked essential learning resources such as books, crayons, playgrounds and play equipment such as swings and tyres which implied that children development in the areas such as cognitive and motor development was not taken care of in these day-care centres. Playground provides children with opportunity to play. When playground and play equipment are inadequate, children's creativity, language, social skills and talents may fail to develop. Play helps children to solve their problems, make decisions and ask questions through experiencing their environment. Therefore, these findings showed that children's holistic development in the day-care centres could not be achieved.

It was observed that some facilities were in risky conditions and could affect children's safety and development. For example, day-care centres that were housed in flats exposed children to dangers such as falling from stairs. Other risky facilities were kitchens that were placed within classrooms which could cause dangers such as children getting burnt. The area of nutrition was not sufficient. It was observed that in some day-care centres children had only one meal and a snack in the afternoon per day. Good nutrition develops children's cognitive and psychomotor skills. When children are insufficiently fed, they may suffer malnutrition which affects their wellbeing. The finding on nutrition may imply that teachers did not have basic information about the dietary needs of young children. Secondly, it may mean that these institutions were not in a position to give the right diet due to financial constraints. In addition, observation made showed that some classrooms had insufficient spaces for learning. This means children were squeezed in small classrooms that could have made it difficult for them to learn adequately. Therefore, individual attention and possible health issues among children could arise because of congestion.

5.2 Fate

The findings showed that most of the institutions had more female teachers than male practitioners which implied lack of father-figure in the institutions that participated in the study. The finding can be related to African culture whereby females were preferred in taking care of young children. However, the father figure is very important in a developing child. Researchers have established that children who are involved with male figures are more secure, confident, have better social connections with their peers and better educational outcomes. The findings indicated that children in the institutions came from different linguistic background. Children and their teachers communicated through code-switching and code-mixing. This affected children ability to express their feelings sufficiently. Children's inability to express themselves led to shyness such as looking down when teachers talked to them. Language diversity plays a big role in early childhood development. Success of young children in early childhood day-care is determined by the language which provides children with competence to follow instruction and interact with others as they engage in learning activities.

Class size is an important factor in dealing with young children. The findings showed that in all the day-care centres that participated in the study, the classes had more than ten children. Children in large classes may drift of task. The low achievers may also be affected because the teacher is over whelmed by the number of children in class. Smaller classes have positive effects on learning experiences if introduced with young children in school because they help the children benefit from their learning experiences. Further, children's individual attention is taken care of in smaller classes.

VI. Conclusions

Conclusions made were based on the data gathered on the two major themes; nature and fate. The findings on nature revealed the day-care centres had inadequate facilities such as playgrounds and reading and writing materials which are essential for children holistic development. Findings also indicated that children day-care centres were exposed to risky conditions such as fire, falling and disease infection. Kitchens in some centres were put within the classroom. Some centres were housed in flats which was dangerous because they could fall on stairs. There was also sharing of a single toilet between the teachers and the children which exposed them to infections.

Findings concerning fate showed that children in early childhood day-care institutions lacked father-figure. Data gathered showed that female teachers were the majority in the institutions. Language diversity was evident in most of the day-care centres. Children used different languages and dialects. Therefore, it can be concluded that children in these centres did not interact sufficiently. The findings showed teachers were under qualified in dealing with small children. The findings indicated that the number of children per class was large which minimized children individual attention by teachers.

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