

## **What's Life got to do with it? Assessing the Implementation of Life Skills programme in Secondary Schools in Buuri Sub-County, Kenya**

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**Abstract:** *This study was conducted among the Deputy head teachers in Buuri sub-county, Meru County and descriptive survey research design was used. A Questionnaire was used to collect data from the Deputy head teachers with a view to answer research questions. The sample comprised 23 deputy principals drawn from public secondary schools in Buuri sub-county. Deputy head teachers play a major role in the implementation of the curriculum in their respective schools. They are well versed with their schools programme as they supervise the implementation of the curriculum. Findings reveal that teachers were not inducted in implementation of the curriculum neither did learners have access to instructional materials in life skills education. The study concludes that life skills education be integrated in professional preparation of teachers in Kenya so that adequate content and pedagogical skills are acquired before commencement of implementation. The study recommends infusion of life skills in the existing secondary school curriculum.*

**Keywords:** *Life Skills Education, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Teaching life skills to youth and vulnerable groups is recognized internationally as an empowerment strategy that changes their perception of the world. This in turn ensures that the youth are able to respond to the challenges that they encounter in the immediate environment. Social reality reveals that there are myriad issues affecting the youth such as unplanned pregnancies, negative peer influence, inadequate communication skills and dependence on parents, teachers and family. Contemporary education has placed so much emphasis on academic subjects, examinations and academic progression leaving the learner ill prepared to effectively manage themselves in a dynamic society. More so, a lot of emphasis is placed on the acquisition of ICT at the expense of effective peer interaction. Kenya's ministry of education through efforts by the Institute of Curriculum Development has established a curriculum aimed at equipping students with the vital skills and attitudes that make them active and relevant navigating the dynamic digital society. The curriculum includes several activities designed to develop independence and self-reliance as observed by Harris and Franklin (2008). Life skills education is an important way of equipping the young people to go through tough times and overcome the challenges and risks in their lives and also to enable them be more productive and participate effectively in the society (UNICEF 2012).

Teachers play a critical role in implementing the lifeskills curriculum by preparing instructional materials teaching resources in addition to providing hands-on learning experiences. At the world conference on Education for All held in Jomtien 1990, the international society raised concerns about the relevance of education, particularly, on the need to focus on appropriate life skills for all learners from all parts of the world. Jomtien underscored the importance of teaching skills that are relevant to life. Life Skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitudes, and values into actual abilities in reference to what to do and how to do it. Life skills are both psycho and social. Psycho refers to those skills that deal with mental functions and processes, while social are skills that deal with a person's interaction with the environment and culture (UNESCO, 2003).

Implementation stage is critical for a curriculum to succeed. Hord (1998) conceptualized success in the implementation of new curriculum to be characterized by: Planning to adapt change to the local setting, teacher training that was concrete, specific and ongoing, necessary administrative arrangements for the innovation, close contact with the change agent, through training and support using interpersonal forms of communication, helping identify needs and solve problems, classroom consultation and advice from resource personnel, modeling by more experienced teachers, active support of the principle and providing a conducive learning atmosphere

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study sought to assess how effectively the life skills curriculum was implemented in Buirisub-county, a typical rural context in Kenya. Social reality in the sub-county revealed that most of the implementation procedures might not have been adhered to. Additionally the study sought to establish the extent to which monitoring and evaluation were done as a strategy to ensure maximum benefits of the learning experience in life skills education were achieved. The administrators in schools do not monitor the implementation of the syllabus as per the findings. Also the quality assurance office does not monitor how this subject is taught in schools when they visit schools for assessment.

## **3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Contemporary education practices are examination-oriented which contradicts John Dewey's school of thought in which the learner should be the starting point, center and end of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation. Thus, the needs of the learner and not the subject are pivotal in determination of the quality of learning. In Kenya, most education reforms hardly achieve the planned goals and objectives due to a plethora of issues some which include ineffective and inefficient supervision as pointed out in official government documents (ROK, 1988, 1999). This has made it necessary to strengthen the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards by increasing the personnel and providing requisite resources to oversee effective implementation the life skills curriculum in schools.

The body charged with the responsibility of improving the standards of education in Kenya is the Directorate of Quality Assurance and Standards (DQAS) which was formerly Inspectorate (Waweru, 2005). For Farrant (1980) the roles of directorate (DQAS) are dual; the first of these entails acting as administrative inspectors with the purpose of ensuring that the educational systems work efficiently and the standards are maintained. The second role is to improve the performance of teachers by offering professional encouragement, guidance and counseling and by seeing to it that they get whatever In-service training they need to do their jobs effectively. Further stressed that it was to the advantage of the teachers to make the fullest possible use of QASOs, for such people not only provided a link between teachers and administration but through contacts, they are also able to offer the teachers access to in-service training, various teachers support services and such educational resources as the teachers might find it difficult to obtain on their own.

The QASO is there to observe children learning and teachers teaching. When necessary, the QASO advises the head teachers on how to do their jobs better. Quality Assurance and Standards Officers monitor schools. They find out whether activities are being implemented as planned and whether they are producing desired results. All activities in a school should be monitored to ensure they are properly implemented. Performance should also be monitored. It should measure against the standards set during planning process so that necessary actions can be taken (Nyakwara, 2009). As per the TSC Code of Regulations for Teachers – revised edition (2014), the roles of heads of institutions include: management and implementation of the intuitional curriculum, providing direction for effective teaching and a conducive learning environment, paying regular visits to the classrooms to evaluate delivery of curriculum, among other roles. This is in relation to free and compulsory education act (2013). Heads of the institutions should be in front line offering internal monitoring of the curriculum in all their institutions.

According to Melrose (1996) Curriculum evaluation refers to the process by which the judgment is made about the merit of a curriculum or its appropriateness for the individual, the group, the organization offering it or the society within which it operates. On the other hand, Doo (1974) defines curriculum evaluation as a broad and continuous effort to inquire into effects utilizing

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educational content and process according to clearly defined objectives. Curriculum evaluation is a process which affects all the stages of curriculum development. The first stage of curriculum development which is situation analysis is in itself real evaluation. To avoid the confusion which might arise in understanding the process of curriculum evaluation, Scriven (1967) coined two time-oriented concepts used to describe curriculum evaluation, namely formative and summative evaluation.

Shiundu(2004) points out that,the Kenya National Examination Council plays a major role in curriculum evaluation. End of the year examinations have been used over years as a yardstick to measure the achievement of the curriculum objectives. The data collect from the evaluation done by the Kenya National Examination Councils gives crucial information on the curriculum that is being implemented.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focused on specific implementation processes such as the induction of school teachers in handling the life skills curriculum, inclusion of life skills education in the school timetable, availability of instructional materials, and lesson preparation with respect to life skills education. For any curriculum implementation to be successful teachers have to be inducted appropriately and sometimes this is also referred to as in-servicing teachers. Deputy head teachers are pivotal in effective curriculum implementation since they perform a coordinating function in the school. The study established that, no deputy head teacher had been inducted in life skills education programme implementation and perhaps not able to deliver it effectively as summarized in Table 1.

**Table1.** *Distribution of participants' responses on induction of deputy head teachers in implementation of life skills curriculum*

Response	Frequency	%
Undergone induction	0	0.0
No Induction	23	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The findings differ with an observation by Marsh (2009) who posited that for a new curriculum to be effectively implemented, “teachers must be thoroughly trained ... so that they are able to teach it with a high level of technical proficiency” p. 93. The study also sought to establish whether the life skills education was included in the classroom timetables in secondary schools in Buuri sub-county. Table Two summarizes the findings.

**Table 2.** *Distribution of participants' responses on status of inclusion of life skills lessons in the school time table*

Response	Frequency	%
Time tabled	14	60.9
Not in time table	9	39.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In establishing whether life skills as a subject appeared on the time table as per the ministry's directive the deputy head teachers were asked whether the subject was slotted in the time table. 60.9% of the administrators indicated that it is time tabled while 39.1 % showed that it did not appear on the timetable. This implies that implementation of life skills curriculum was yet to commence in Buuri sub- county. In the same vein, the study sought to determine the particular ways in which deputy principals were actively involved in implementing the curriculum besides allocating it in the timetable. The question was posed on whether the deputy principals were allocated lessons to teach life skills. 21.7% of the administrators indicated that they were timetabled to teach while 78.3 % did not teach life skills. Table 3 summarizes participants' responses in relation to lesson allocation in life skills education.

**Table 3.** *Distribution of participants' responses on life skills lesson allocation*

Responses	Frequency	%
Allocated lessons	5	21.7
Not allocated lessons	18	78.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Ariav (1988) cited in Marsh (2009) suggested that many teachers lacked curriculum literacy in spite of their professional preparation and were unskilled on how to teach it. This may perhaps explain why lessons had not been included in some of the school timetables. Effective implementation of life skills curriculum calls for instructional materials to be available to learners. The study sought to establish whether text books on life skills education were provided to the learners and responses on this item are tabulated in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Distribution of participants' responses on availability of life skills instructional materials for learners*

Response	Frequency	%
Available	2	8.7
Not available	21	91.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Findings revealed that 91.3% of the respondents indicated that learners in their schools did not have any access to instructional materials while 8.7% of the respondents indicated that the students were provided with basic instructional materials. It clearly indicates that the students did not take notes related to the content of life skills education and probably did not revise whatever they were taught. Table 5 indicates the participants' responses on the adequacy of text books on life skills education.

**Table 5.** *Distribution of participants' responses on adequacy of text books on life skills education*

Response	Frequency	%
Adequate	3	13.0
Inadequate	20	87.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to Table 5, the study found that 13% of respondents indicated that the learners had adequate texts in life skills education while 87% of the respondents indicated that the life skills education texts were inadequate.

Deputy Principals are involved in day to day monitoring of the process of implementation of any curriculum in schools. In the questionnaire the deputy principals were asked whether they monitor the implementation of life skills in their schools. 30.4% of the respondents indicated that they monitor how teachers teach while 69.6% indicated that they do not supervise the implementation of the subject. The table presents the findings.

**Table 6.** *Distribution of participants' responses on monitoring teaching of life skills education*

Response	Frequency	%
Monitoring Activities	7	30.4
Not Monitored	16	69.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The quality assurance officers are expected to visit schools to check on the process of curriculum implementation. The deputy principals were asked whether the officer assessed how life skills education was implemented in their schools. Findings revealed 69.6% of the respondents were not interested on how it was done in their schools while 30.4% of the respondents indicated that the

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officers assessed how the subject was implemented but did not even make follow up to ensure effective implementation. This is consistent with Loveless (2011) who found that teachers may have the necessary knowledge of content and pedagogy but may be inadequate in implementing change

**Table 7.** *Distribution of participants' responses on assessment of quality in life skills education*

Responses	Frequency	%
Quality Assessed	7	30.4
Not assessed	16	69.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Professional documents are a vital component in the implementation of any curriculum; these are the schemes of work, lesson notes and the records of work. A question was asked on whether these documents especially in life skills are prepared and presented to the deputy principal's for monitoring purposes and record keeping. All the respondents indicated that the documents were never prepared.

An item seeking how the deputy principals rated the benefit of life skills to the students was included in the study. Findings revealed that 43.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that the subject was very beneficial while another 45.3% of the respondents agreed that the subject was beneficial while 13 % of the respondents felt that it was not beneficial. Table 8 presents the distribution of the responses.

**Table 8.** *Distribution of participants responses on the perceived benefits of life skills education to learners*

Response	Frequency	%
Great extent	10	43.5
Somewhat	10	43.5
Less extent	3	13.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study sought to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of life skills education curriculum in public secondary schools in Buuri sub-county. Findings reveal that teachers were not inducted in implementation of the curriculum neither did learners have access to instructional materials. The study concludes that life skills education be integrated in professional preparation of teachers in Kenya so that adequate content and pedagogical skills are acquired. This will go a long way in perhaps helping teachers change their attitude to life skills education. The study further recommends that life skills education be infused into the existing curriculum for public secondary schools in Kenya.

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