



BOOSTER TRAINING OF THE RCT MENTORS WORKSHOP 16TH TO 19TH APRIL 2024

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Introduction

Kenyatta University in collaboration with Yale University, Tharaka Nithi County, Bangor University among other partners, are implementing a randomized control trial in Tharaka Nithi with funding support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The intervention examines the impact of allowing children to attend preschool from age three (3) and introduce children into an adapted curriculum from the preprimary-one (PP1) Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) curriculum designs. The child caregivers were inducted on how to handle three-year-old learners as well as receive regular coaching from mentors while implementing the curriculum. The intervention is hypothesized to improve child development and school readiness for children aged 3 and 4 at the start of preschool. It is also hypothesized that there will be an increase in employment and income among parents or caregivers of 3-year-olds whose children are attending the playgroup programme.

Intervention

The intervention targets 3-year-olds and uses the infrastructure of Pre-primary one (PP1) classroom. PP1 is the first part of the Pre-Primary program, which under the current school entry policy admits children who have reached four-years-old. Under the intervention children will attend PP1 starting when they are three years old. They will remain in PP1 for two years.

For the 3-year-olds the first year is known as play group and in the second year they will proceed to PP1. The intervention ensures to accommodate PP1 (4-year-olds) and playgroup (3 year-olds) in a way that is consistent with their ages.

Curriculum

PP1 already has a curriculum from the Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development (KICD) focused on the four-year olds. The PP1 curriculum was adapted to cater for the learning needs of the 3-year-olds. The adapted curriculum includes activities focusing on executive functions and addresses cognitive concepts such as size, shape, colour, position, difference/similarity, and quantity through various play activities, connected to children's daily experiences. Attention is paid on improving teacher-child interactions by encouraging two-way conversations, using

open-ended questions and positive feedback. Scaffolding and building from easy to difficult tasks helps to ensure that activities fall within each child's development.

The curriculum also promote socio-emotional development by encouraging sharing, taking turns, and helping others, and teaches empathy often through stories. Activity centres are set-up daily. For part of the day, children are given a selected activity they engage in with guidance from the caregiver to avoid interrupting the PP1 children in the same room. There is at least two structured group-learning sessions daily that will entail introduction of some pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities. The activity also includes daily singing and story time. This is meant to introduce dialogic reading methods emphasizing language skills. It also promotes meaningful conversations during breakfast and lunch among children and with adults keeping in mind the principles of activity-based learning.

Delivery of the Intervention

The intervention is delivered by the current teacher in PP1 (county teacher) and a caregiver (new teacher). The caregiver supports the learning needs of the three-year-olds. This is particularly important given the varying ages and abilities of the children in the current PP1 intervention class. The program has to take into account the needs of each individual child. The children are currently taught at the right level, without being pushed too fast, while at the same time being appropriately challenged.

The county teacher and the caregiver receive once a week coaching at their schools from the coaches (mentors) on the implementation of the adapted curriculum. For smooth implementation of the adapted curriculum, Kenyatta University in collaboration with Tharaka Nithi County hired the mentors and trained them at the beginning of the intervention. They spend 1 day every week in the preschool, guiding and coaching the teacher and the caregiver and solving any practical problems they may be encountering with implementation.

In view of this, the mentors were trained on curriculum delivery and the materials that would be used for curriculum delivery. The three weeks training happened from 4th to 22nd December 2023 at Chogoria Girls Boarding which also equipped the mentors with knowledge and skills on interpersonal relationships with the teachers so that they can be seen as supporting them, rather than monitoring/inspecting them. After actual implementation of the curriculum kicked off in January 2024, it was found necessary to conduct booster training, to mitigate the challenges experienced during the implementation.

Objectives of the Booster Training of Mentors Workshop

The objectives of the training of mentors included:

1. To explore and correct on the gaps experienced during term one implementation
2. Train teachers on how to overcome the challenges experienced during the implementation of the curriculum.

3. Refine on how to coach the teachers better and the follow-up required

Training Methodology

The venue of the training was at Lexington Square Hotel, Chogoria in Tharaka Nithi County. Fifteen mentors, three of whom had acted as relieving teachers of those teachers who proceed for maternity leave, participated in the training. The training was preceded by a debrief in the afternoon of 16th April on how implementation happened in the first term of the year from 8th January 2024 – 4th April 2024, highlighting on what worked well, what did not work and what needs to be done differently.

The debrief involved individual feedback from each of the mentors and from the project leadership that were present.



Mentors debriefing meeting at Lexington Hotel

Findings from the Debriefing Meeting

What worked

From the debrief it was apparent that the following worked during the implementation of the project:

- The one week training given to the teachers before the intervention started on 8th January 2024 gave the teachers the knowledge and skills on content delivery and the use of teaching learning materials.
- Teachers expressed passion and embraced the new methods of teaching exercising the skills they acquired during the training.
- Splitting of big classes and hiring and training BOM teachers enhanced smooth implementation of the project in the overpopulated classrooms at least in the 4 affected school.



Reliever teachers undergoing training at Munugu Primary school before their release to schools

- 3 teacher relievers and 4 new BOM teachers from the 4 split were recruited and trained to enhance their capacity to take up the teaching roles and smooth implementation of the project in the affected schools
- Facilitation to mentors to travel to schools to conduct coaching activity greatly enhanced their mobility during the term thus enabling them attend to the assigned duties.
- The use of mother tongue for instruction and teaching the learners proved to be working well for all children apart from schools in the cosmopolitan parts of the county where this was mixed with Kiswahili and sometimes English
- Introduction of use of learning and play materials enhanced learning and immediate difference in the development of the children which in return has already attracted more learners from adjacent private schools leading to increased admission already in the first school term to some schools.
- Using rich language in correcting learners has become a norm in the intervention schools and in return has lead to the children to like coming to school and even releasing their mothers or caregivers to at the school gate.
- Parents have appreciated the project and are very supportive and over the term a number of schools have received support from the parents on their feeding programme where some parents of the three-year-olds are paying for food for their children
- The model of delivery of the curriculum and the diversity of materials has made learning interesting and a majority of the children enjoy coming to school daily.
- It also emerged that support from KU to facilitate mentors and intervention officer's movement to schools as well as provision of the track to transport materials to schools was timely
- The second round of delivery of remaining materials to schools happened in the week of 11th – 15th March 2024 and was conducted efficiently by a team of KU staff that also involved checking the completion of painting and/or modification of backboards to the standard required for the curriculum intervention. The team also left behind the signing-in and signing out register for daily reporting to work by the teachers. The register is signed also by the mentors and the intervention supervisor when they visit the schools and stamped and signed by the headteacher of the school at the close of the week. This is then scanned and sent to the Hub for record of work attendance.
- Mentors visited schools regularly with each school receiving a mentor assigned to it once a week.
- Three mentors played the role of relief teachers which was also timely since from February the first teacher with a pregnancy proceeded on leave and the mentor stepped. The county and intervention teachers are doing a commendable job in supporting each other on the implementation of the project.

What did not work

Mentors also outlined the following that did not work:

- Misunderstanding on payment of school fees for the intervention children who had letters of admission from the project. The project had indicated that the children are sponsored and their schools fees will be paid without elaborating on the form of the payment. Parents and teachers interpreted this to mean that the project was to pay fees for the children with letters possibly assuming that physical monetary resources will be transferred to school. It has now been clarified that the sponsorship was by way of equipping the schools with the required learning and play materials, recruitment, training and paying the salary of the teachers and supporting the mentors who are continuously coaching the teachers by visiting the schools once a week.
- The curriculum intervention is a new approach that both the new caregiver teacher and the county teacher are not used to despite the training they have received, as such the teachers are taking time to persist on the new methods of teachers and covering the content and concepts as per the design and in following the instruction manual and covering the content within the allocated time for each of the activities.

- For the schools in the lower and middle zones of the county and where children are carrying food to school the food goes stale due to heat from the higher temperatures and possibly poorly managed food carrying containers or generally poor hygiene leading to cases of food poisoning requiring medical attention or leading to absenteeism by the children.
- A number of schools do not have regular feeding programmes forcing children to bring food from home or also requiring the parents to contribute funds for meals a circumstance that initially was protested by the parents in the assumption that the project children had their fees paid for. This has affected some schools with parents threatening to withdraw their children.
- Absenteeism was widely reported by almost all mentors and in almost all schools attributed to conflicting requirements with the school calendar.
- The design of the curriculum intervention requires the participation and daily engagement of the county PP1 teacher supporting one another with new caregiver teachers but without monetary incentive or motivation to the county teacher because of the project. The intervention had proposed to put the teachers at the same salary scale and assumed that with more materials and their capacity building that will be motivation enough. Currently the PP1 teachers feel demotivated and are supporting the project less enthusiastically as they are not given any incentives and especially since, project teachers' pay is perceived to be slightly higher than theirs. However, data from the field indicate that the gross pay of the county teachers is KShs. 31,760/- per month while that of the new caregiver teachers is KShs 32,000/-, a difference of only KShs. 240/-.
- Material delivery to schools happened between 11th January – 26th January 2024 and therefore led to delay of two weeks for the last school to receive materials and that led to delay in the start of the intervention activities in the last schools to receive the materials. In addition some schools did not receive all the required materials. This is still the case even after the additional materials were delivered in the week of 11th – 15th March 2024
- A number of schools do not have secured rooms for storage of materials. These are currently being secured in the schools' offices or secured school stores. The teachers are forced to pick and drop them daily a task that does not give the children free access to play materials as they arrive in school, this may also lead to loss of some items and/or increase their possibility of damage during poor handling between the two locations.
- Some schools have partitioned classroom spaces leading to smaller spaces and challenge in communication as the two Divisions of the class are not sound proof. The spaces are also small to facilitate mat-based activities in the classroom for larger classes of enrolled children.
- Equally, there are no adequate furniture for young children in some schools. A school like Mikame had no furniture at all and the mentor had to request that parents be informed through a meeting with them to support the school now that the learning materials were available, some tables and chairs have now been facilitated
- In a number of schools either the toilets for PP1 are too far from the classroom and/or they are being jointly used by children from the upper classes. The problem is being addressed through consultation with the headteacher of the affected school to provide an independent latrine for the PP1 and PP2 children to afford them some level of hygiene.
- The playgrounds in some schools are not suitable as play ground for a number of reasons among them the rocky nature of the field, the field is bare and too dusty and some schools have no playground

Training of Mentors

The booster training focused on thematic areas that mentors felt teachers were having challenges handling them. They include:

1. Number of the week
2. Letter of the week
3. Teaching shapes

4. Teaching vocabulary
5. Teaching patterns.

The Intervention Officer modeled those concepts and allowed mentors also to demonstrate how to teach in large and small group activities as shown in the pictures below:



Top Intervention Officer demonstrating bottom mentor demonstrating as Intervention Office guides

Appendix 1: List of Participants

1. Prof. Nelson Wawire
2. Prof. Simon Onywere
3. Dr. Teresa Mwoma
4. Dr. Esther Gachara
5. Ms. Mary Wawira
6. Mr. Joseph Mutegi
7. Mr. Brian Muriithi
8. Mercy Kanyiru
9. Benson Munene
10. Comfort Nyakio
11. Ann Chabari
12. Priscila Makena
13. Fridah Mutegi
14. Lydia Muthoni
15. Bonface Nkari
16. Mary Joseph
17. Rose Karimi
18. Juliah Nyaga
19. Phyllis Kendi
20. Dorothy Naivasha