



Teachers' Perception of Child-friendly School Environment in Public ECDE Centres in Uasin-Gishu County

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Abstract

Education is an important factor in improving children's social and economic development all around the world. Despite the number of developing nations providing universal primary education, the quality of such education remains a concern that must be addressed. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of teachers' perception of child-friendly school environment in public ECDE Centres in Uasin-Gishu County. The study was underpinned by the Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education. The study adopted a pragmatic paradigm utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study used simple random sampling to select ECDE teachers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select head-teachers and QASO officers. The tools that were used in this study were questionnaires and an interview guide. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. Data from questionnaires were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The findings showed teachers' perceptions were positively and significantly associated with a child-friendly learning environment ($r = .459, n = 271, p 0.00$), indicating that teachers' perceptions influenced the child-friendly school environment by 45.9%. The study concluded that teachers had a positive attitude towards teaching and pupils while some teachers had negative attitudes towards their learners. Teacher's attitude affects the learning environment of pre-school children. A teacher's classroom activities influence their children's learning, and a motivated teacher is one who feels satisfied with his or her job. The study recommends teachers be provided with resources to support their implementation of child-friendly practices. This could include materials such as books, games, and activities that are appropriate for young children. Also provide teachers with professional development opportunities such as workshops or seminars on cognitive-behavioral strategies to help them recognize and address negative perceptions among learners. The study suggests research analyzing the effect of teacher operational dynamics on service delivery in ECDE Centres to be pursued to determine options in all the counties in Kenya.

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Introduction

A child-friendly school aims to make the basic education experience engaging and stimulating for children (Loureiro, Grecu, de Moll & Hadjar, 2020). The goal also requires schooling to be of good quality and accessible to all children. These principles are the core of the United Nations Children's



Fund (UNICEF) child-friendly school education model because they ensure inclusive enrollment and equal treatment of all school-age children. The principles ensure safe, healthy, protective, and positive environments that promote learning and knowledge acquisition through relevant curriculum. The other core principle is making the school a harmonious learning community with strong leadership from school managers.

Perception is awareness, comprehension or an understanding of something (Erya & Pustika, 2021). Teacher perceptions are teachers' thoughts or mental images about their learners and are always shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences. However, perception, in accordance with Gulbahar (2018), exists as the process through which a person presents meaning to their occurrence. Fitriani and Qodariah (2020) argue that creating a child-friendly school environment involves engaging all stakeholders, including parents, to strengthen children's right to good education and address their needs as learners. Moreover, Fitriani et al. (2021) assert that the Child-Friendly School (CFS) model has become a dominant instrument advocated by UNICEF for promoting quality education. Taguma et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of creating child-friendly environments within schools and early childhood development education Centres globally.

Teacher's Perception and Child-Friendly School Environment

Teacher perceptions are the ideas or mental pictures instructors have about their pupils, which are influenced by their prior knowledge and life experiences (Bonner, Warren & Jiang, 2018). These encounters might be related to their family's history or traditions, as well as their education, employment, culture, or community. A group of academics has identified essential characteristics of a learning environment that make substantial changes in learners' deeper degrees of involvement in an exploratory manner (Al Mamun, Lawrie & Wright, 2022). The researchers based their findings on learners' assessments of teaching quality using course evaluation surveys that examine characteristics of instruction such as effective teaching, learning freedom, clear goals, suitable assessment and workload, and relevant material (Wang & Ji, 2021).

According to Guillen-Gómez and Mayorga-Fernandez (2020), a teacher who has a positive attitude towards teaching and his pupils was found to be more effective than a teacher who has developed a negative attitude towards the learners he has to deal with. Teachers as shapers of lives, must embody good character and virtues, be sincere in their words and actions, and ensure that their personal lives set a good example for their learners (Guillen-Gómez, & Mayorga-Fernandez, 2020). Unfortunately, many teachers do not realise how teaching and interacting with learners become more paramount than what they teach. This is to say that some teachers do not realise that their attitude could affect the learning environment of preschool children.

Attitude of Teachers and Child-Friendly School Environment

Attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness organised through experience. It exerts a directive or dynamic influence upon an individual's response to all objects and situations it relates to. Furthermore, attitudes refer to the individuals' prevailing tendency to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, group of people, institution, or event (Morris & Evans, 2018). Therefore, no one is born with any attitudes. Attitudes, like interests, are learned through life experiences, shaping how an individual behaves toward people, professions, objects, issues, situations, etc. However, Attitudes are very personal and complex. Attitudes are uniquely organised in each person, and the organisation itself is the product of his reactions to his own experiences (Zimmerman & Pollner, 2017). Attitudes considerably influence one's behaviour. Consequently, an



individual's attitudes may be positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable) (Tormala & Rucker, 2018).

Teachers' attitudes are one of the factors that strongly influence the provision of a child-friendly school environment (Kaplan, 2018). According to Hutzler, Meier, Reuker and Zitomer (2019), teachers must have a positive attitude towards a new idea to create a new teaching mode. In addition, Andriani, Kesumawati and Kristiawan (2018) attributed that after training, the attitude of the teachers and experimental groups involved improved significantly. The fulfilment of this responsibility is only possible through the teacher's ability to develop healthy personality values and provide efficiency in their relationships with learners to allow them to develop their personality freely (Andriani et al., 2018).

Reggio Emilia Philosophy

The study used the Reggio Emilia concept of early childhood education. Reggio Emilia's socio-constructivist approach to education promotes the idea that education should be centred on the needs of each child as well as their family, other children, the environment, the school, and the larger community (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017). Because children learn by forming connections between diverse things, ideas, and experiences, the Reggio Emilia technique has been dubbed "pedagogy of relationships" (Kim, 2020).

The theoretical approach was chosen because it offers the constructs that describe Emilia's socio-constructivist approach to education that promotes the idea that education should be centred on the needs of each child, the environment, the school, and the larger community (Gbollie, 2017). This creates an appropriate atmosphere where learners may select from various alternatives and investigate a provocation or concept in collaboration with their instructor. Indications refer to this concept as "environment, spaces, and relations" to support the notion that child toddlers' and preschools' external and interior settings are planned and integrated to encourage learning and research. In the study, classroom components comprised instructional techniques, teacher perceptions of teaching, redesigning the learning environment, and modifying learning activities to create a child-friendly school environment in public ECDE Centres in Uasin-Gishu County.

Materials and methods

A multi-stage sampling design methodology was used in the study because it allowed the researcher to divide the population into several mutually exclusive subpopulations or strata, which aided in increasing sample statistical efficiency by providing adequate data for analysing subpopulations and allowed the researcher to use different research methods and procedures in different strata. The study target population was 2151 respondents comprising 1728 ECDE teachers, 422 school heads and one County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer. The total sample size for the study was 338 participants, comprising 1728 ECDE teachers, 66 head teachers and 1 QASO.

The tools used in this study were questionnaires and an interview guide. Questionnaires were the primary method utilised to obtain observable information from ECDE teachers, while structured interviews were conducted with the County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer and head teachers. After data collection, data cleaning and coding were done and computed to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V. 22) for analysis. Data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive statistics used were frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics used were Pearson Product Correlation coefficient. Analysed data was presented in form of frequency tables.



Results and discussion

The study evaluated the influence of teacher’s perception on child-friendly school environment in public ECDE Centres. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were utilised to describe the teachers’ perceptions of the answers.

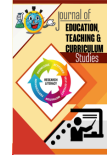
Table 1 Descriptive Statistics on Teachers Perception

N=271		SA	A	U	D	SD	M	StD
1.	A teacher has a positive attitude towards teaching	118(43.5)	142(52.4)	11(4.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4.39	0.57
2.	A teacher has a positive attitude towards pupils	87(32.1)	107(39.5)	77(28.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4.04	0.78
3.	Some teachers have negative attitudes towards their learners	54(19.9)	129(47.6)	33(12.2)	22(8.1)	33(12.2)	3.55	1.24
4.	Teacher’s attitude affects the learning environment of pre-school children	97(35.8)	108(39.9)	22(8.1)	33(12.2)	11(4.1)	3.91	1.14
5.	Teacher classroom activities influence children learning	76(28.0)	173(63.8)	22(8.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4.20	0.57
6.	A motivated teacher is one who not only feels satisfied with the job	87(32.1)	118(43.5)	44(16.2)	11(4.1)	11(4.1)	3.96	1.01
7.	Teachers are empowered to strive excellence and growth in instructional practice	98(36.2)	107(39.5)	55(20.3)	11(4.1)	0(0.0)	4.08	0.85
8.	Teachers need to have positive attitude towards a new idea to create a new mode of teaching	129(47.6)	65(24.0)	55(20.3)	22(8.1)	0(0.0)	4.11	1.00
9.	Large class sizes affect the implementation of child friendly school	43(15.9)	151(55.7)	66(24.4)	0(0.0)	11(4.1)	3.79	0.85
10.	The implementation of child friendly school is attributed to out-dated teaching methods.	43(15.9)	107(39.5)	55(20.3)	33(12.2)	33(12.2)	3.35	1.23
11.	Child friendly school approach will be successful if teacher are part of the team driving this process	65(24.0)	86(31.7)	76(28.0)	44(16.2)	0(0.0)	3.63	1.02
Teacher’s Perception							4.061	0.877

M = Mean, StD = Standard deviation, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree, All frequency percentages are reported in parentheses. Source: Survey Data (2024)

Sources: Research Data (2023)

According to the survey findings in Table 1, most instructors (n = 260, M = 4.61, 95.9 %) believed teachers had a favourable attitude towards teaching. However, (n = 11, 4.1%) of those polled disagreed. Furthermore, it was shown that most ECDE instructors (n = 194, or 71.6%) believed teachers had a favourable attitude toward learners. On the other hand, their perceptions of the children in the ECDE centres revealed that (n = 77, 28.4%) were unsure. This finding suggests that the teacher had a favourable attitude toward the ECDE learners. The study findings agreed with Kim and Connelly



(2019) that teacher attitudes can significantly impact student outcomes. A positive attitude towards teaching and a supportive teacher-pupil relationship can improve students' emotional and behavioural development. Additionally, teachers who adopt individualised instruction and have a positive attitude towards teacher aides may be better equipped to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Furthermore, most ECDE teachers (n = 205, 75.7 %) agreed that a teacher's attitude influences the learning environment of preschool children. However, 16.3 % of ECDE instructors disputed that a teacher's attitude influences preschool children's learning environments, while (n = 22, 8.1%) were uncertain. This research suggests that a teacher's attitude influences the learning environment of preschool children and is thus a crucial factor in establishing a child-friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, most ECDE teachers (n = 249, 91.9 %) believed that teacher classroom activities impact children's learning, whereas (n = 22, 8.1 %) were unsure. As a result, learning activities carried out by teachers during the learning process help to improve the child-friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, most ECDE instructors (n = 205, 75.6%) agreed that a motivated teacher is happy with his or her job. However, (n = 44, 16.2%) of the instructors were unsure, while (n = 22, 8.2%) disagreed. This shows that a motivated instructor was happy with his or her work. The study findings concurred with Karakose, Polat, and Papadakis (2021), who noted that motivating instructors is important for job satisfaction and performance. One of the most effective ways to motivate teachers is to praise them. Complimenting someone on their work makes them feel valued.

The data revealed that most respondents (n = 205, 79.7%) agreed that instructors are empowered to strive for excellence and improvement in instructional practice. In contrast, (n = 55, 20.3%) of teachers were unsure, and (n = 11, 4.1%) disagreed. This demonstrated that instructors were encouraged to strive for quality and improvement in their teaching. Finally, most ECDE teachers (n = 194, or 71.6 %) felt that instructors needed a positive attitude toward a new idea to build a new teaching model to increase a child-friendly atmosphere. However, (n = 55, 20.3%) of instructors were hesitant, and (n = 22, 8.1%) disagreed that innovative teaching approaches improve the child-friendly atmosphere. This research implies that teachers must have a favourable attitude toward new ideas while teaching with this method. Emmers, Baeyens and Petry (2020) indicated that it is important to consider the teacher's beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching method and provide professional development opportunities to help them develop positive attitudes towards new ideas and approaches. Teachers should also be encouraged to adopt innovative approaches that Favor a positive attitude towards research and scientific training.

Some teachers had a favourable attitude toward their learners, while others had a negative attitude toward their learners. The teacher's attitude influences the learning environment of pre-school children. The teacher's classroom activities affect their children's learning, and a motivated teacher is one who is not only content with his or her profession but also enjoys it.

During the interview of the head teachers, it was noted that:

I understand that positive perception makes learning enjoyable and negative perception makes learning boring (Head Teacher [HT1], personal communication, February 16, 2024).

It is a positive perception that makes the teacher motivate the learners to love the school (Head Teacher [HT2], personal communication, February 19, 2024).

The interview with the head teacher determined that positive perception makes learning fun, and negative perception makes learning monotonous. Furthermore, the favourable view motivates the



teachers to urge the learners to enjoy school by establishing a child-friendly environment. A welcoming school encourages high enrollment and creates a favourable learning atmosphere, making learners eager to be in or out of school. Children should study in child-friendly settings where learning becomes engaging.

During the interview with the quality assurance and standards officers concerning the teacher's perceptions, we noted that:

Teachers' perceptions of child-friendly school environments among the ECDE Centres varied. (Quality Assurance and Standards Officer [QASO1], personal communication, February 23, 2024)

The interviews with the Quality Assurance and Standards Officers found that teachers' impressions of the child-friendly school environment in ECDE differed. Some teachers have welcomed learner-friendly situations, while others have reacted adversely. Some teachers were just engaged in teaching and left the atmosphere to management. Some ECDE centres are welcoming from the outside to the inside of the classroom since it is advised that the classroom be attractive to attract learners. The findings were consistent with Cornejo-Araya and Kronborg (2021), who state that teachers' personalities contribute to creating and maintaining a classroom or learning environment where learners feel at ease and motivated to study.

Correlation Analysis

The objective of the study was to determine the perceptions of teachers towards child-friendly school environments in ECDE Centres in Uasin-Gishu County. The correlation findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation on Perception of Teachers on Child Friendly School Environment

N=271	Child Friendly Learning Environment	Perception of Teachers
Child-friendly school environment	1	.459**
Perception of Teachers	.459**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0. 01 level (2-tailed).

Source: *Survey Data (2019)*

The findings revealed that teachers' perceptions were positively and significantly associated with a child-friendly learning environment ($r = .459, n = 271, p < 0.00$), indicating that teachers' perceptions influenced the child-friendly school environment by 45.9%. Based on the coefficient of determination, teachers' perceptions are expected to influence child-friendly learning environments by 45.9%; hence, it is suitable for predicting child-friendly learning environments.

Increased teacher perceptions lead to a better child-friendly school environment. This agrees with Browne-Ferrigno (2016) that the nature of interaction and influence in schools is important in determining learners' perceptions of the school and themselves. Attitudes toward people and school-related activities. This factor involves the interaction between the teacher and student personality. According to the Interpersonal Perception Theory by Stevenson and Kritsonis (2009), learners' attitudes towards teachers will affect their attitudes towards the subjects taught by the teacher. Against school Furthermore, it can be postulated that learners' attitudes toward teachers are a function of the teacher's personality. The study also agrees with Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse and



Wright (2016) that teachers must embody good character and virtue, be sincere in word and deed, and have a personal life that sets a good example for their learners.

Conclusions

In conclusion, a positive relationship existed between teachers' perceptions of a child-friendly environment and the data collected. This indicates an increase in the perception of teachers, which leads to an improved child-friendly school environment. The nature of interactions and influences in the school is an important factor in determining the learner's perceptions of the school and his/her attitudes towards school-related people and activities. This factor involves the interplay between the teacher's and learner's personality. The learner's attitude toward a teacher is a function of the teacher's personality. Since the school environment is significantly related to children's learning, everything possible must be done to make the school child-friendly. Therefore, this calls for a collaborative effort among all education stakeholders to not relentlessly provide the necessary infrastructure and personnel to make the ECDE Centre learner-friendly.

The study recommended that all teachers who work in public ECDE Centres should meet all the academic qualifications. This could be done by requiring all teachers to have a Diploma in early childhood education. Also, it provides teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities. This professional development should keep teachers informed of the latest research in early childhood education and provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and strategies. Further, a system of rewards and recognition for teachers who are effective in creating child-friendly school environments should be created. This system should be designed to motivate teachers to continue to improve their practice.

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