

CHILDREN'S LENS IN REFLECTIVE TEACHING APPROACH: A PRE SCHOOL CHILDREN'S INTERVENTION FOR SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES IN MOLO SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The paper is derived from a study that examined use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach to enhance their learning of social emotional competences (SECs) in Molo Sub-County. The sample comprised of 73 children and 4 teachers where, 37 children and 2 teachers were in the intervention class and 36 children and 2 teachers were in the control class. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest posttest model with a training module for teachers, a semi-structured interview schedule and documentary analysis schedule for teachers and a Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) for the children. The two preschool teachers in the intervention class were trained and later guided on how to use children's lens in a reflective teaching approach. They provided explicit lessons that teach preschool children's SECs at the same time finding opportunities for them to strengthen their use throughout the school day. Teachers administered DESSA pretest and posttest to all the children in the sample between a time space of three months. The children's SECs scores were converted to Standard T-scores and analysed. A statistically significant difference in children's SECs scores was established using an ANCOVA test. Further, it was found that children's social emotional cognitive schema grew and developed. At the same time, preschool teachers also grew and developed professionally. It is recommended that teachers in preschools in the Sub-County need training and guidance on the use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach on children's SECs.

This would happen through workshops on the use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach, use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach seminars and use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach in-service training. In order to have a local resource for teachers in the Sub-County, use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach and children's SECs research findings and related scholarly literature should be availed in preschools libraries and resource centers.

Key Words: Children's lens, Reflective teaching approach, Children's social emotional competences

1. INTRODUCTION

Reflective Teaching approach is a means in which a teacher looks at what he/she does in the classroom, thinks about why it is done, and thinks about if it works. It is a process of self-observation and self-evaluation (Farrell, 2004; Tice, 2011). Preschool teachers looking at themselves through children's lens constitutes one of the most surprising elements in any teacher's practice.

It facilitates them to teach more responsively, for the reason that they have a sense of what is happening to children as they grapple with the difficult, threatening, and exhilarating process of learning which constitutes their primary information. Without this information, it is hard to teach well, and without an appreciation of how individuals are experiencing learning, any methodological choices teachers make, risk being ill informed, inappropriate, or harmful (Brookfield, 1998).

According to Brookfield (2006), children's formal evaluations, children's classroom assessments, children's focus groups, children's interviews and children's Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) should be used by preschool teachers in engaging with children's views to inform reflective teaching practice. In order get important feedback from learners while using CIQ, Brookfield (2002) argues teachers to regularly assess children by asking the following questions: Which incident did you feel most engaged and what was peculiar?

When did you feel most disconnected? What was done that you found most supporting or valuable? What action did the teacher or other children do that you felt most unanticipated? He urges that these methods are the most fundamental metacriterion for judging whether or not good educational practice is happening. It is an extension to which educators deliberately and systematically try to get inside learners' heads and see classrooms and learning from the learner's point of view. Evans and Harvey (2012) contend that the most effective learning is not contrived, nor is it left to chance but occurs when teachers utilize "naturalistic, moment-to-moment experiential opportunities for learning."

Children's social emotional competences encompasses aspects of learners using emotions in sending and receiving information that is central for social interactions and the ability to function successfully in social interactions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2008, OECD, 2015).

Shapiro (2007) breaks down children's social emotional competences into eight components that relate to one another: social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, goal directed behavior, self-awareness, optimistic thinking, decision making and personal responsibility. Shortfalls in these competences in preschool children, have been shown to forecast poor long-term academic achievement, dropping out of school, problems in mental health, risk use of substances and drugs, and emergence of antisocial/aggressive behavior and rejection by their peers and delinquency (Adi, Killoran, McMillan Killoran & Steward-Brown, 2007; Eisenberg, Valiente & Eggum, 2010; Webster-Stratton, 2011).

At the same time, science has established significant relationships between preschool children SECs, behavior and success. (OECD, 2015; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). SECs learning has been found to lead to continued subjective well-being, affirmative peers, children, teachers and the larger school

community healthy relationships and similar variables. In addition, there is increased participation and achievements in almost all areas of a learners' life (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Kluczniok et al., 2016; The Centre for Adolescent Health, 2018). In a recent meta-analysis on school-based, social emotional learning interventions found significant improvement in skills, dispositions, pro-social behavior, and academic performance at follow-up periods ranging from 56 –195 weeks (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Further, positive academic results have been found to be consistent across social-economic levels: urban, sub-urban and rural locations and in ethnically diverse settings (Durlak, Weissberg Taylor & Schellinger, 2011).

In a study done in Kenya by Gatumu, Muriithi and Thumbi (2014), they found out that preschool children whose teachers had received training in reflective teaching approach had statistically significant mean scores in academic performance compared to children whose teachers were been trained.

In their further studies, Thumbi, Gatumu and Muriithi (2019) found out that action research in reflective teaching approach and journaling in reflective teaching approach, to positively and significantly affect SECs scores in preschool children. On the same breath, Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich and Gullotta (2015) point out that one of the most prevalent approach to the learning of SECs involves training teachers to deliver explicit lessons that teach preschool children's SECs and then, finding opportunities for learners to reinforce their use during the course of the day.

Lower than average educational achievement and worse growth and developmental results are some of the hallmarks of children who experience social disruptions relative to children in stable families (OECD, 2006). In Molo Sub-county residents with and without children in preschools were socially disrupted during electioneering years of 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2008. Many residents were displaced from their homes because of political violence that followed these presidential elections (Koigi, 2009).

According to Molo Sub-County Commissioner (2018), some affected families relocated elsewhere in the country, but majority of them, prior living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) were resettled from the year 2010 through to 2017 by the government of Kenya in concert with non-governmental organizations. According to Molo Sub-County Education officer (2018), the Government of Kenya has not availed pedagogical interventions for preschool teachers in the Sub-County who work under difficult circumstances.

Social disruptions bring with it children lacking basic needs, security needs, self-esteem needs, emotional regulation and attention. Children attending preschools in this region therefore, require support in SECs because they attend preschools coming from difficult circumstances where their families adjust and/or cope with resettlements. This research study placed teachers on training on the use of children lens in a reflective teaching approach to facilitate them illuminate their own practice and hence be more effective in the delivery

of SECs in their preschool classes. Thus, the study's objective was to determine whether children's SECs pretest mean scores are significantly different from posttest mean scores in classes where preschool teachers use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach compared to classes where they do not.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental design with Pretest posttest model was used in the research study. A sample of 73 preschool children and 4 preschool teachers was selected through stratified simple random sampling and simple random sampling from the Sub-County preschools. The intervention class comprised 37 children and 2 teachers while the control class had 36 children and 2 teachers and was not intervened. Children's SECs level was measured at the beginning of the study in both classes and referred to as DESSA pretest. Preschool teacher's training on use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach was done in the intervention class and to provide explicit lessons that teach preschool children's SECs

and at the same time find opportunities to strengthen their use throughout the school day. Children SECs scores were measured after three months and referred to as posttest DESSA, in both classes. The effect of the treatment was obtained by comparing children's SECs mean score in the intervention class to the control mean score, controlled by subtracting children's SECs scores obtained at the start of the research study (Kothari, 2004).

Teachers' training module used Schön's (1983/87) ideas on reflective teaching approach; Kolbs (1984) reflection cycle, involving four stages: concrete experience, assessment, re-conceptualization, and testing in new situations; use of children's lens (Brookfield 1998/2006); SECs, and the importance SECs in preschool children (LeBuffe, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2014; Durlak et al. 2011). Preschool teachers were invited to attend a two days preschool teachers' training and thereafter follow ups were made on a monthly bases by the researchers.

The DESSA is a 72-item, standardized, norm-referenced behavior rating scale that assesses children's SECs that serve as protective factors. The assessment is strength-based, in that item in DESSA look for positive behaviours (for example, get along with other children) as opposed to maladaptive behavior (for example, annoy others children). It arranged into conceptually derived scales that give information about eight SECs domains. (LeBuffe, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2014). Items in DESSA are summed to raw scores which were then converted to *T*-scores.

In order to gain insights, comparisons and contrasts from both the intervention class and control class, a semi structured interview schedule was administered to the all the teachers in the sample in the last week of the study (Oppenheim, 1992). Questions and prompts elicited specific type of responses and enable respondents to broaden, elaborate, give details and qualify their answers. These data were also analysed in relation to the statistical differences obtained from pretest and post DESSA scores.

Documentary analysis was used as an indirect technique to facilitate more insights. A trained independent rater and the researchers scored the preschool teachers' documents independently. Records were tabulated based presence and absence of a given record of use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach by a preschool teacher in both the intervention and control classes. Average values for the researchers and the independent rater calculated were calculated. Results of the documentary analysis gave meaning to statistical difference obtained by ANCOVA test.

DESSA pretest and posttest SECs raw scores were first converted to *T*- scores before descriptive analysis and ANCOVA test, done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 for Windows (Field, 2009). The covariate (DESSA pretest children scores) increased power to detect differences between pretest and posttest DESSA scores in the test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pretest and posttest DESSA scores are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Control and use of children lens in reflective teaching approach classes pretest and post DESSA scores in T-scores

<p>Control class DESSA pretest T-scores 39,40,40,42,43,42,43,42,43,49,47,49,46,49,47,48,48,50,50,55,52,49,52,54,53,52,49,50,54,47,56,57,55,50,49,50</p> <p>Control class DESSA posttest T-scores 40,39,49,40,42,41,39,43,49,46,48,48,49,48,43,48,48,50,50,51,50,49,51,60,53,52,53,54,51,44,56,55,60,45,49,44</p> <p>Intervention class DESSA pretest T-scores 40,40,41,42,40,45,42,44,50,45,53,50,50,47,47,47,52,53,52,53,48,50,50,53,56,56,57,59,58,60,45,40 39,42,42,42,42</p> <p>Intervention class DESSA posttest T-scores 40,45,33,42,49,48,47,45,53,52,55,46,48,49,49,50,51,51,51,60,54,55,56,53,56,58,56,58,60,60,55,53 34,52,50,52,46</p>

Table 1 shows the pretest and post DESSA scores in T-scores from the control class (n-36) and intervention class (n-37).

In both classes, DESSA children pretest scores and posttest scores in T-scores were computed to find out whether they were different. The intervention class had 47.89 at pretest and 50.56 at posttest while control class had 48.25 at pretest and 48.36 at posttest.

There was a mean score difference of 2.71 in the intervention class and 0.11 in the control class. The intervention class had lower mean scores at pretest stage but had higher mean score at posttest stage. This greater score difference in the intervention class could be attributed use of children’s lens in reflective teaching approach.

The intervention and control classes SECs scores levels are shown in Table 2. The levels were measured before and after intervention. The numbers of children are indicated against each level in both classes. Children’s SECs levels are grouped as follows: Children with 40 T-scores and below were classified as in need for instructions, children with between 41 and 59 T-scores were classified as typical children while children with 60 and above T-scores were classified as strengths children (LeBuffe, Shapiro & Naglieri, 2009/2014).

Table 2: Levels of SECs in the Intervention class and Control class before and after 3 Months

Levels of children's SECs	Intervention class		Control class	
	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	No treatment
Children in need for instructions	4.0	1.0	3.0	3.0
Typical children	32.0	33.0	33.0	32.0
Strengths' children	1.0	3.0	0.0	1.0
Number of children in the class	37.0	37.0	36.0	36.0

Table 2 shows that 4 children in the intervention were classified as in need of instructions. These children scored below 40 *T*-scores in DESSA pretest and out of this, 3 transitioned to typical children level after intervention. There were 32 typical children where 2 moved to strengths children level after intervention in this class. Further, in the same class only one child was at strengths' children level, but on intervention there were 3 strengths children.

In the control class, only one child transitioned from typical level to strengths. More transitions were observed in the intervention class compared to the control class. The transitions could be attributed to use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach.

In order to determine if the mean score of intervention class and control class were statistically equal, an ANCOVA test was done. First, the underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for ANCOVA was tested using the Levene's test of equality of error variance. This was based on the null hypothesis that the error variance of DESSA pretest is equal across classes. Results indicated that the error variances are not significantly different, $F(1, 69) = 0.154, p > 0.05$.

In order to test whether there was interaction between children pretest and posttest scores in the classes, a test of assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was done. Accordingly, there was no significant interaction of regression slopes in the classes, $F(1, 69) = 0.668, p > 0.05$.

In order to test effectiveness of use of children’s lens in a reflective teaching approach SECs in preschool learners while convarying for their SECs before treatment an ANCOVA test was done as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: ANCOVA Analysis for Use of children’s Lens in a Reflective Teaching Approach on Learners SECs Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1518.595 ^a	2	759.298	49.983	.000	.588
Intercept	104.901	1	104.901	6.905	.011	.090
Dessapretest	1418.292	1	1418.292	93.363	.000	.572
Group	135.035	1	135.035	8.889	.004	.113
Error	1063.377	70	15.191			
Total	181005.000	73				
Corrected Total	2581.973	72				

a. R Squared = .588 (Adjusted R Squared = .576)

In Table 3 the group source (labeled group on the SPSS output), evaluates the H₀ that the means scores of the intervention class and the control class are equal.

The results indicates that there was a significant effect of use of children’s lens in a reflective teaching approach on children scores in SECs, after controlling the effect of teaching SECs without use of children’s lens in a reflective teaching approach, $F(1, 70) = 8.889, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .113$. The effect size $\eta^2 = .113$ show that 11.3% of variation at posttest DESSA scores was associated with use of children’s lens in reflective teaching approach on children’s social emotional competences. This effect according to Howell (2007) is medium.

Teachers’ records were analysed both in the intervention and control classes. Average values of the researchers and a trained independent rater were obtained as shown in Table 4. The researchers and the independent rater obtained scores from documents on use of children’s lens in a reflective teaching approach on children’s SECs kept by a teacher in both classes. A score of 11.00 was the maximum, indicating intense use of children’s lens in a reflective teaching approach. In the first entry, a score of 1 was

required while in the other two entries, a maximum score of 5.0 was required.

Table 4: Records kept by Use Children's Lens in a Reflective Teaching Approach Class and Control Class for Children's SECs

Use of children teachers' records	Use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach class score	Control class Score
Notebook for on use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach	1.00	0.00
Notes on children's feedback on SECs	3.00	0.00
Remarks on challenges of teaching SECS using children's lens in a reflective teaching approach	3.00	0.00
Score	7.00	0.00
Maximum Score	11.00	11.00

Table 4 shows that the intervention class was rated higher than the control class on the entries outlined. Preschool teachers in this class had documented how they got learners feedback on the teaching of children's SECs.

These methods included, class assessments,

class evaluations, children's interviews, children focus groups' interviews on SECs and Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ).

In class assessments and evaluations, a preschool teacher noted:

There are deeper collaboration among learners, learners are moving faster from one activity to the other and there is a reduction of challenging behaviour. The teacher also made the following observations in her class: Children have become more open discussing about themselves, friends and their classmates; they are more self-confident and are more approachable by their classmates and better at making friends.

Use of children lens in a reflective teaching approach had mean of 7.0 (63.63%) to a score of 11.0. The control class had no records on use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach with a score of 0.0 (0.0%) to a score 11.0. There was evidence on the use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach in the intervention class compared to none, or minimal, or non-structured use of children's in a reflective teaching approach in the control class.

Posttest DESSA scores in the intervention class, indicated that significant mean difference was caused by the intervention, compared to the control class as shown in Table 3. The eight domains mean strength in the social emotional competences composite for each domain means scores are tabulated in Table 5 from this class.

Table 5: Means Score of the Eight SECs Domains at DESSA posttest in the treatment class.

	Pretest DESSA	Posttest DESSA	Mean Difference
Social awareness	49.35	52.32	2.97
Self management	48.72	51.81	3.09
Relationship skills	48.00	50.78	2.78
Goal directed behavior	48.41	50.86	2.45
Self awareness	47.76	50.49	2.73
Optimistic thinking	47.43	49.90	2.47
Decision making	47.35	49.79	2.44
Personal responsibility	46.10	48.81	2.71
Total	47.89	50.59	2.71

From the Table 5, mean score of each of the eight domains at DESSA posttest are ranked.

Social awareness had the highest mean T score of 52.32 followed by self management with a mean of 52.10 T scores while personal responsibly tailed with a mean of 49.78 T scores. In terms of mean score differences between DESSA pretest and DESSA posttest, the domain self management, had the greatest mean score difference of 3.09 followed by social awareness, and relationship skills at 2.97 and 2.78 T scores respectively, while decision making had the least mean difference of 2.44 T scores. Children's lens in reflective teaching approach from these results appears to make learners better in managing themselves in relation to the other seven domains. Teachers' interviews were carried in the intervention class and the control class. In the intervention class, teachers stated that they used of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach enable them grow, develop and shape children's SECs. They said that by discerning learners through asking them questions using Critical Incident Questionnaire while observing and paying attention to what the children said, having

one on one talk with them they found important feedbacks in regards to teaching SECs and how SECs evolved in children.

According to these teachers, this knowledge facilitated them to become more accurate in reading the learning of SECs as stated by Brookfield (2006).

A preschool teacher in the intervention class stated the following:

I am better in reading out my children SECs. And I am assisting them to develop the competences by asking questions, keenly observing them, listening to them and talking to them in one on one, in groups or the whole class bases. It is only after training that I acquired this skill. When they mention to me: (I have many friends now; let me lead this song, this dance, this play; let me be the doctor, the boss in a play) they have learned, especially those who could not do or say so earlier. Most of my children are better socially and emotionally and every other day I am moving in tandem with them.

Further, children's feedbacks according to them, helped to establish a basic pedagogical information base from the children

themselves and this made them to be critically reflective as pointed out by Farrell (2004).

Preschool Teachers in the control class were evidently distant relative to use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach in illuminating their practice, and a child's learning of SECs. They did not know that use the children's lens in a reflective teaching approach facilitates them to grow and develop as teachers and may not have used it at all. They stated that the information they collected via children's feedbacks was basically on academic. And did not find out that in this these were occasions to grow and develop children's SECs as well as themselves. One teacher stated that although she taught children's SECs, she was not aware of use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach and how it could shed light on how children learnt SECS. This could explain the mean score obtained by this class which was significantly lower than the intervention class.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results show that use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach positively and significantly improve children's SECs.

This occurs through the growth and development of social emotional cognitive schema where the competences are seated.

There is growth and development of teachers professionally as reflective practitioners through training and use naturalistic, moment-to-moment experiential

opportunities to teach children SECs.

Further, where teachers employ explicit lessons and opportunities sought for learners to reinforce their use during the school day.

It is recommended that teachers in preschools in the Molo Sub-County needed

to be further trained and guided on the use of children's lens in a reflective teaching approach on children's SECs. This would

happen through workshops on the use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach, use of children's lens in reflective

teaching approach seminars and use of

children's lens in reflective teaching approach in-service training. In order to have

a local resource for teachers in the Sub-County, use of children's lens in reflective teaching approach and children's SECs research findings and related scholarly literature should be availed in preschools libraries and resource centers.

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