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Original Article

A Critical Analysis of Early Childhood Education Curriculum Reforms in Uganda. A Case Study of Buloba Primary Teachers College, Uganda

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Keywords:

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This exploratory qualitative case study critically examined the impact, challenges, and effective implementation of Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum reforms, with a focus on Buloba Primary Teachers College in Uganda. Anchored in social constructivist theory, the study sought to: (1) analyze the impact of ECE curriculum reforms on teaching methodologies; (2) identify challenges faced by educators in implementing the reformed ECE curriculum; and (3) explore strategies to enhance the effectiveness of these reforms among students. These objectives were addressed through three guiding research questions: How have ECE curriculum reforms influenced teaching practices? What challenges do educators face in implementation? And to what extent are the reforms contextually relevant to Uganda's cultural and social landscape? To answer the research questions, a qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations involving 45 participants. The collected data were rigorously analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved systematically identifying, coding, and interpreting patterns and recurring themes across the data set. This method enabled the researcher to uncover both explicit and latent meanings within participant narratives, and to develop a nuanced understanding of how curriculum reforms are experienced and enacted in the college context. The findings revealed that the ECE curriculum reforms have significantly enhanced child-centred learning, interactive teaching strategies, and inquiry-based, experiential learning. These pedagogical shifts led to improved learner engagement and observable cognitive, emotional, and social development among student teachers. The study concludes that ECE curriculum reforms have successfully initiated a transformation from traditional, teacher-dominated instruction to more interactive and learner-driven pedagogies. Nonetheless, the sustainability and impact of these reforms depend on overcoming institutional

and resource-related barriers. The study recommends increased government funding to strengthen infrastructure and resource availability in Primary Teachers' Colleges. Additionally, the institutionalization of continuous, context-specific professional development programs for tutors is essential. Finally, integrating culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks and support systems will ensure that ECE reforms are locally relevant and sustainably implemented across Uganda's diverse education contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) lays the foundation for lifelong learning, cognitive development, and social adjustment (Fullan, 2007). Internationally, ECE has gained prominence as nations strive to meet Sustainable Development Goal 4.2, which emphasizes ensuring that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. Countries such as New Zealand, Kenya, and Finland have restructured their early childhood curricula to promote play-based, inclusive, and child-centred approaches—shifting away from rote learning towards more holistic, experiential learning models (UNESCO, 2021). These global shifts have also influenced reforms in ECE teacher training,

emphasizing competency-based education and context-sensitive pedagogies.

In Uganda, ECE reforms have been similarly informed by global developments, but are uniquely shaped by the country's socio-historical and policy landscape (Charles, M., Sarah, N., & Anthony, M. M. 2024). Historically, early childhood education in Uganda was informal and predominantly community-based, receiving little attention from formal education structures until the early 1990s (Kampala, 2012; UNESCO, 2010). During the colonial period, Uganda's education system prioritized basic literacy and numeracy with a focus on producing clerks and low-level civil servants for the colonial administration (Ssekamwa, 1997; Altinyelken, 2010). The curriculum emphasized

rote memorization over critical thinking or creativity, and early childhood education was largely neglected.

Following independence in 1962, Uganda began to make efforts to indigenize its education system and address local needs (Anthony et al., 2022). A significant shift occurred with the formulation of the National Early Childhood Development Policy (2007) and later the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2016), both aimed at improving the access, relevance, and quality of ECE. These were complemented by Uganda's National Teacher Policy (2019), which underscored the importance of teacher competence and continuous professional development in early learning settings.

Recent curriculum reforms in early childhood teacher education have emphasized learner-centred pedagogies, the use of locally available teaching materials, the integration of play and creativity, and inclusive practices (Namirembe, 2021; Oluoch, 2018). The shift aims to align Uganda's early childhood curriculum with international best practices while remaining culturally relevant and accessible (Stephen, A., et al., 2022). Consequently, institutions like Primary Teachers' Colleges (PTCs) have revised their training approaches to make learning more practical and experiential.

Despite these progressive steps, several challenges remain. These include inadequate resources, such as child-friendly learning materials and infrastructure; insufficient tutor retraining; and limited follow-up support for implementing new pedagogies. Many tutors were trained under traditional systems and struggled to shift to modern approaches. Furthermore, continuous professional development remains irregular or absent (Ejuu, 2012; Kirahora, 2022). This situation potentially undermines the effectiveness of the reforms in transforming teaching practices and improving learning outcomes for early childhood teacher trainees.

Buloba Primary Teachers' College, one of Uganda's established PTCs, provides a useful case study for understanding how these curriculum reforms are unfolding in practice. Located within a peri-urban setting, Buloba PTC has undergone transitions reflective of broader national reforms but also faces local constraints. Understanding how tutors and student teachers at Buloba experience, interpret, and implement the new ECE curriculum provides important insights into the practical realities of curriculum reform (Thomas, W., & Charles, M. 2022). It is against this backdrop that the current study critically analyzes Early Childhood Education curriculum reforms in Uganda, with a particular focus on Buloba Primary Teachers College. The study aims to assess the impact of these reforms on teaching practices, investigate the challenges impeding successful implementation, and evaluate their effectiveness in influencing student learning and teacher preparedness.

General Objective

The study examined the impact, challenges, and effectiveness of Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum reforms on teaching practices and student learning outcomes at Buloba Primary Teachers College in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of my study were:

- To analyze the impact of ECE curriculum reforms on teaching methodologies at Buloba Primary Teachers College in Uganda.
- To identify challenges faced by educators in implementing the reformed ECE curriculum at Buloba Primary Teacher's College in Uganda.
- To explore strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of ECE curriculum reforms among students at Buloba Primary Teacher's College in Uganda.

Research Questions

- How have ECE curriculum reforms influenced teaching practices at Buloba Primary Teachers College?
- What challenges do educators face in implementing ECE curriculum reforms?
- To what extent are the ECE curriculum reforms contextually relevant to Uganda's diverse cultural and social landscape?

STUDY THEORY

The study was guided by social constructivism theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978) the theory highlights the importance of constructing knowledge through social interaction. The theory posits that learning is a collaborative journey that occurs as one interacts with others. Thus the cognitive functions according to this theory originate in social interactions hence perceiving learning to be a process of integrating learners into a community of knowledge. Lev posits that learners learn better in an environment free from destruction, thus teachers must support learners by encouraging collaborative learning in the classroom to enable practical learning outcomes among the learners. The main constructs of the theory are social interaction, practical learning, experiential learning, teachers' support in learning, a constraint-free environment and effective learning outcomes, therefore the theory informed the study. The study's purpose was to examine the impact, challenges and effectiveness as connected to the curriculum reforms. The curriculum reforms are emphasizing interactive learning as opposed to traditional learning, and social knowledge construction by the learners through interaction and collaboration for better learning outcomes. Thus the theory guides well how this should be done for the curriculum reforms to register an impact on the teaching and learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the literature review gave a foundational aspect of the point of interest in the study. It provided an in-depth examination of the existing discussion as related to Early childhood education curriculum reforms. This review problematized the ECE curriculum reforms by exploring the various dimensions of ECE, including theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and contemporary debates surrounding the impacts, challenges and effectiveness of implementing reformed curricula. By reviewing the literature, the key implications of the successful adoption of child-centred teaching practices, the barriers that educators face, and the resultant effectiveness on student learning outcomes are highlighted. However, the literature review not only shows the theoretical underpinnings of ECE curriculum reforms but also identifies gaps in the current research that this study seeks to address, ultimately informing the analysis of the situation at Buloba Primary Teachers College.

The review is done following the study objectives.

To Examine the Impact of Early Childhood Education Curriculum Reforms on Teaching Practices.

According to (Piaget, 1952) the influence of early childhood education (ECE) curriculum reforms on teaching practices can be understood using the constructivist theory, which supports learning environments that are active and child-centred. Piaget's theory of cognitive development contends that children learn best when they can interact directly with their environment. This trend influenced the shift towards child-centred approaches in ECE, which aim at promoting experiential and inquiry-based learning (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2010). Besides (Ejuu, 2012) contends that in Uganda, the ECE curriculum reforms advocate for curriculum reform practices to replace traditional rote learning with

more interactive and engaging methods (Kaahwa, Y. T., et al., 2023).

Other scholars indicate that sometimes the reforms are limited by the challenges for example (Altinyelken, 2010; Chowdhiuri, 2022) indicates that the adoption of child-centered approaches in Uganda presents unique challenges like low-resource settings. With such a challenge implementing the new reforms becomes a problem. Challenges may include though not limited to lack of appropriate materials, inadequate teacher training, and larger class sizes that hinder individualized attention. This is supported by Tusiime and Bakkabulindi (2018) who highlight that teachers in Ugandan public schools often struggle with limited access to age-appropriate teaching aids, which are crucial for delivering activity-based learning effectively. Similarly, Oketch and Ngware, (2012) contend that teacher resistance to new methodologies can also be a barrier, as many educators have not been sufficiently prepared to implement these changes in terms of professional development. Besides other studies emphasize that training is essential for teachers to adopt and sustain child-centred practices. For example, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), contend that professional development programs should focus on building teachers' understanding of child development theories and interactive teaching strategies. Yet, Ugandan teachers often have limited access to continuous training opportunities due to financial constraints and logistical challenges (Mukasa, 2019). This gap in professional development not only affects the quality of instruction but also limits teachers' ability to adapt to the new curriculum reforms.

Not only that but Kagoda and Katamba, (2013). Say that cultural considerations also play a role in shaping how these reforms are received and implemented. They contend that In Uganda, traditional pedagogical practices are teacher-centred, with a strong emphasis on discipline and

authority thus, shifting to a child-centred approach may face resistance not only from teachers but also from parents and the wider community (Charles, M., et al., 2025), who may perceive these methods as less rigorous or effective. Ejuu (2012) also notes that without addressing these cultural perceptions, the full benefits of curriculum reforms may not be realized in the Ugandan context.

In the same context, Schweinhart et al. (2005) contend that evidence from other countries with similar reforms provides insights into the potential outcomes of these changes. They say that child-centred approaches in early education positively impact cognitive and social development. Pianta et al. (2008) posit that the successful implementation of curriculum reforms requires robust support systems, including regular teacher training, adequate classroom resources, and policies that promote consistent monitoring and evaluation of teaching practices. They contend that such support is crucial for Ugandan educators as they navigate the challenges associated with curriculum reform (Mugenyi, D. K., 2024).

To Assess the Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing ECE Curriculum Reforms.

Several literature have been put up elucidating how challenges in implementing early childhood curriculum reforms are so much related to resource inadequacy which directly impacts teacher performance and the quality of education. It is indicated that in Uganda, early childhood education classrooms are constrained by a lack of enough basic resources necessary for child-centred learning, such as age-appropriate learning materials, child-sized furniture, and safe outdoor play areas (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Woodhead & Moss, 2007). Similarly, Mwaura et al. (2008) posit that resource gaps can significantly limit the ability of teachers to engage students in interactive and exploratory learning activities.

Other literature indicates that teacher training and professional development are also significant

obstacles to the successful implementation of curriculum reforms. They indicate that without adequate training, teachers are likely to get stuck to traditional, lecture-based approaches that emphasize rote memorization rather than active learning (Fullan, 2007; Perry & Dockett, 2011). In the Uganda context, many teachers report that they have not received enough training to adopt child-centred methodologies, which impacts their confidence and willingness to engage with the reformed curriculum (Mukasa, 2019; Ejuu, 2012). Oketch and Ngware (2012) found that while some training programs are available, they are often not aligned with the specific needs of ECE teachers, particularly in rural areas.

Additionally, still, large class sizes present a logistical challenge in adopting the child-centred approaches promoted by the reforms. According to UNESCO (2015), Uganda is blessed with high numbers of learners. This creates a challenge of high student-teacher ratios in many early childhood settings, which many times makes it difficult for teachers to provide one-on-one attention. This is especially problematic in activity-based learning environments, where teachers are expected to facilitate small group activities and monitor student interactions closely. Such demands are difficult to meet in crowded classrooms, where managing behaviour and ensuring safety often take precedence over pedagogical goals (Kirahora, 2022).

Other literature indicates that the socio-cultural context within which these reforms are implemented also affects teachers' ability to adopt new practices. In Uganda specifically, the prevailing educational culture has traditionally been more authoritarian and hierarchical, which can clash with the child-centred approach promoted by the curriculum reforms (Kagoda & Katamba, 2013). Teachers who have been trained in these traditional pedagogical methods may find it hard to adjust to practices that emphasize child autonomy and experiential learning. Ejuu (2012) emphasizes that for reforms to be successful, there must be a broader

cultural amalgamation in how education is perceived by the stakeholders say, teachers, parents, and the community in a given cultural setting.

Similarly, other literature discusses these challenges. For example, they indicate the systemic issues within the education sector that further hinder the successful implementation of these reforms. Take an example of funding limitations which many Ugandan schools cannot manage through the necessity of implementing child-centered practices fully. Research by Tusiime (2020) suggests that without increased investment in the ECE sector, efforts to reform the curriculum may be undermined by a lack of practical support. This reinforces the need for government and policymakers to address structural challenges that go beyond the classroom and affect the entire educational infrastructure.

To Explore the Effectiveness of ECE Curriculum Reforms on Child Learning

Schweinhart et al., 2005; Heckman, (2006) posit that early childhood education (ECE) curriculum reforms aim at enhancing students' learning outcomes by creating a developmentally appropriate and engaging learning environment. On the other hand, it is said that by incorporating interactive and play-based learning, these reforms seek to foster critical thinking, creativity, and social skills in young children. On the other hand, (Sylvia et al., 2004; Pianta et al., 2008), indicate that child-centred curricula contribute to improved language, literacy, and numeracy skills, as well as positive social-emotional development (Sylvia et al., 2004; Pianta et al., 2008). Similarly, studies in Uganda suggest that children who experience such learning environments demonstrate greater cognitive and behavioural gains compared to those in traditional classrooms (Nambalirwa, 2015). Whereas Tusiime, (2020) found that while urban schools with better resources saw improvements in student learning outcomes, rural schools with fewer resources did not experience the same level of success. Thus indicating the role of contextual factors, such as resource availability and teacher training, in shaping

the overall impact of ECE reforms on student learning (Mwaura et al., 2008; Tusiime & Bakkabulindi, 2018). Similarly, studies underscore the importance of the classroom environment in facilitating these outcomes. Child-centred curricula rely on well-equipped classrooms that allow for free movement, exploration, and access to diverse learning materials.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which is ideal for exploring complex educational phenomena, such as curriculum reforms, in-depth. The qualitative approach enabled a comprehensive

understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by teachers implementing ECE curriculum reforms at Buloba Primary Teachers College. The qualitative approach was used alongside the case study design which is well-suited for investigating contemporary issues within real-life contexts. Given the study approach and design, the study employed interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations for data collection. Data was collected from 45 participants (refer to the table in the above sections) and data collected was analyzed thematically.

STUDY FINDINGS

Table 1: A Table Indicating Study Participants

Participant category	Number of participants	%	Role in the study	Data collection method
ECE teachers	10 female	22	Provide insights on teaching practices and challenges	Interview
	05 male	11		
School administrators	02 male	4.5	Offer perspectives on resource allocation and training support	Interview
	02 female	4.5		
Teacher trainers at Buloba PTC	03 female	07	Share experience on teacher training and professional development	Focus group discussion
	03 male	07		
Students	10 year ones	22	Provide feedback on their learning experience and engagement	Observation
	10-year twos	22		
Total	45	100		

Source: Primary source.

Table 1 above shows the breakdown of the participants. They were 45 in number, 15 of whom were ECE teachers of the 15, 10 were females and 5 were male. Four (4) school administrators, 2 males and 2 females. Six (6) teacher trainers at Buloba PTC, 3 females and 3 males and then lastly 20 students; of which 10 were in their first year and 10 in their second year.

Having seen the study participants in the table above, the proceeding paragraphs thereafter discuss the study findings following study objectives one by one as guided by the items in the interview guide for each objective.

Objective one was examining the influence of early childhood education curriculum reforms on teaching practices. Using interviews, focus group discussion and observation, the study observed that there is a positive influence of ECE curriculum reforms on teaching practices among the educators at Buloba PTC. For example, when asked how the ECE reforms have impacted their teaching practice, many of them reported an improvement and a shift towards a child-centred curriculum and interactive teaching methods which normally encourage experiential and inquiry-based learning. Many of them indicated how important this shift was in enhancing learner participation and engagement. For example, when asked how have ECE

curriculum reforms influenced teaching practices at Buloba Primary Teachers College? One of the teachers said;

The ECE reforms concerning child-centred learning have encouraged me to adopt engaging classes with my students. It is so strong in attracting learners to actively participate in class activities during the teaching and learning sessions. The child-centred teaching and learning positively affect their active participation. However, she said this comes with challenges and limitations for example in terms of big class sizes that may not favour activities like storytelling.

The narrative highlights the transformative influence of ECE curriculum reforms on teaching practices, particularly through the adoption of child-centred approaches. The shift toward learner engagement and active participation reflects a pedagogical paradigm that empowers students to construct knowledge through interaction and exploration. As observed, such methods not only enhance classroom participation but also contribute to the holistic development of learners. This suggests that when effectively implemented, child-centred learning strategies can significantly enrich the quality of teacher education by modeling best practices for future educators

To the same question on the other hand, one of the administrators said;

While the curriculum reforms have brought positive changes in theory, the practical implementation is being seriously hampered by the lack of adequate resources. In many of our classrooms, we still lack enough child-friendly furniture that allows children to sit comfortably and interact freely with learning materials. The few available play items and learning aids are often outdated, worn out, or insufficient to meet the needs of all learners. This limits our ability to fully implement the interactive and exploratory learning methods encouraged by

the reformed curriculum. At times, tutors are forced to improvise or abandon planned activities altogether because the materials required simply aren't there.

The narrative underscores a critical implementation gap in the realization of Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum reforms. While the curriculum promotes interactive, exploratory, and child-centred learning approaches, the persistent shortage of essential teaching and learning resources significantly undermines these pedagogical ideals. The lack of adequate child-friendly furniture, up-to-date play items, and instructional materials directly compromises the effectiveness of learner engagement and experiential learning, which are central tenets of the reformed curriculum.

In the same line, another teacher said;

Sometimes even when I want so much to implement the reforms, I find myself limited due lack of resources. I am forced to go back to the old fashions of traditional ways of teaching which is teacher-centered leaving my learners not helped.

This reflection reveals the tension between professional commitment to educational reform and the practical constraints imposed by inadequate resources. Despite a strong personal motivation to adopt child-centred, interactive teaching methods encouraged by the reformed ECE curriculum, the lack of basic instructional materials and infrastructure often forces tutors to revert to traditional, teacher-centred pedagogies. This regression undermines the very goals of the reform, which aim to foster learner autonomy, creativity, and active participation.

Whereas a student trainee declared that;

We are now learning how to create engaging learning environments for young children using locally available and low-cost materials. This includes making teaching aids like counting stones, bottle-top letters, and story charts from

manila paper or old newspapers. The emphasis on creativity and resourcefulness has helped us understand that effective teaching does not depend on expensive materials. The new methods encourage us to think more practically and adapt our lessons to suit the learners' context. It has also made our training more hands-on because we don't just learn about these theory methods — we practice them during micro-teaching and school practice. This has built our confidence and prepared us better for real classroom situations, especially in rural and under-resourced settings.

This has several implications for curriculum implementation. First, it validates the effectiveness of experiential and practice-based training models like micro-teaching and school practice in bridging the gap between theory and classroom application. Second, it affirms that meaningful learning experiences for young children do not necessarily rely on expensive, commercially-produced teaching aids but can emerge from a teacher's ability to creatively leverage their local environment. Third, the focus on low-cost, hands-on strategies enhances teacher confidence and pedagogical readiness, especially for deployment in rural or underserved areas.

Generically, the above narratives collectively reveal that while Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum reforms in Uganda have introduced progressive, child-centred pedagogies aimed at enhancing learner engagement and holistic development, their practical implementation remains uneven. Tutors and student teachers demonstrate a strong willingness to embrace interactive and experiential methods; however, this pedagogical shift is frequently constrained by systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, and insufficient infrastructure. A key implication is the urgent need to align curriculum policy with classroom realities. The reforms are effective in principle—promoting creativity, contextual

learning, and active learner participation—but without adequate material and institutional support, educators are often compelled to revert to traditional, teacher-centred methods. This undermines reform objectives and reinforces outdated teaching practices, particularly in rural and under-resourced settings.

The above findings reveal that the implementation of early childhood curriculum reforms in Uganda is hindered by several interconnected challenges, including inadequate teaching and learning resources, limited teacher training, large class sizes, socio-cultural barriers, and systemic underfunding. These findings are in agreement with existing literature that underscores the critical role resource availability plays in determining the success of curriculum reforms. For instance, Neuman and Celano (2001) and Woodhead and Moss (2007) highlight that the absence of age-appropriate learning materials, child-sized furniture, and safe play spaces directly impedes child-centred learning. Similarly, Mwaura et al. (2008) affirm that such resource inadequacies greatly limit teachers' ability to facilitate interactive and exploratory learning—an issue mirrored in the current study's findings.

With objective two assessing the challenges faced by teachers in implementing ECE curriculum reforms, during the interviews with the participants and focus group discussion basically, it was revealed that though ECE reforms are of great importance; their implementation is hindered by several challenges. The most disturbing challenge mentioned about is the lack of resources. Many teachers reported lacking enough and adequate learning materials, others mentioned child-size furniture and safe outdoor play areas. Other participants talked about limited professional development among teachers to be in a position to adopt and adapt to the ECE reforms. Some participants talked about cultural resistance to new pedagogical approaches and limited funding from the government. This was evident when one of the teachers was asked to talk about challenges

hindering them from implementing curriculum reforms, she said;

While the need to adopt and adapt reforms is in blue and white colours for anyone to see, implementation is many times a challenge. If I like so much to have the reforms of the ECE curriculum for example teacher-centred learning implemented I may be limited. First of all, I lack knowledge because I have not been taught how to implement and other times I may fail just because I lack the needed resources for implementation.

The student-teacher trainee in her response said that;

Before the introduction of the curriculum reforms, our learning was mostly theoretical. We spent much of our time writing notes, listening to lectures, and memorizing content for exams. It was more about cramming than understanding. But now, with the reforms in place, our training sessions have become more interactive. We are actively involved in role-plays, group discussions, and classroom simulations that mimic real-life teaching scenarios. These activities have made the learning process more engaging and meaningful. They help us apply what we've learned in practice, collaborate with peers, and critically reflect on different teaching strategies. This shift from passive to active learning has significantly improved our understanding and retention of content

The narrative reflects a transformative shift in pedagogical practice brought about by the implementation of ECE curriculum reforms. It highlights the movement from passive, teacher-dominated instruction to active, participatory learning environments. This evolution aligns directly with the study's objective of analyzing the impact of the reforms on teaching methodologies and student learning outcomes. The incorporation of interactive methods such as role-plays, group

discussions, and classroom simulations indicates a deeper engagement with content, enabling student teachers to internalize and apply theoretical knowledge in practical, real-world teaching scenarios.

One of the administrators with a lot of dismay told me that;

In our area, and not just at Buloba PTC, many schools lack the necessary materials and trained teachers to effectively implement these reforms. A significant number of teachers are not adequately trained, and even those who have received training did not undergo enough preparation to truly understand or embrace the reforms.

This narrative reveals a critical gap between curriculum reform policy and its practical execution across many education institutions, including but not limited to Buloba Primary Teachers' College. While the reforms emphasize modern, learner-centred pedagogies, their success hinges significantly on the capacity of teachers to internalize and implement these approaches effectively. The narrative suggests that many educators either lack training altogether or have received insufficient professional preparation, which undermines their ability to adopt the reformed curriculum in meaningful ways.

Another administrators said ;

The reforms are undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but many of our tutors were trained during a time when the education system emphasized teacher-centred methods like lectures and note dictation. Because of this, some struggle to embrace the child-centred and activity-based methodologies required by the new curriculum. Even with training sessions held during the roll-out phase, the transition has not been easy. It's not uncommon to find tutors reverting to traditional lecture methods, especially when under pressure to complete the

syllabus or when handling larger class sizes. This shows a disconnect between policy and practice that still needs to be addressed.

The above narrative therefore implies that curriculum reforms must be accompanied by sustained professional development and mentorship tailored to address the deep-rooted pedagogical orientations of teacher educators. In addition, reforms must take into account contextual constraints such as class size, time allocation, and resource availability. Without addressing these underlying issues, the shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred methodologies will remain superficial, and the potential benefits of the reformed curriculum may not be fully realized in practice.

Generally, all above narratives imply that while ECE curriculum reforms have introduced promising learner-centred and interactive teaching approaches, their effective implementation is significantly hindered by inadequate resources, limited tutor retraining, and deeply ingrained traditional pedagogies. Many educators remain constrained by large class sizes, outdated teaching materials, and insufficient professional development, leading them to occasionally revert to teacher-centred methods. However, the emerging creativity among tutors and student teachers in using locally available materials signals potential for positive change if adequately supported. Overall, the success of the reforms depends on closing the gap between policy and practice through sustained investment in training, infrastructure, and institutional support.

The above findings agree with (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Mwaura et al., 2008) who contend that resource gaps in terms of learning materials and safe play areas hinder the ability of teachers to engage their learners in interactive learning as recommended by the ECE curriculum reform. Not only that but still the study findings agree with (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Mukasa 2019) who posit that for proper implementation of ECD reforms, the ECE teachers need to be taken for

ongoing professional development. On the other hand, however, some literature disagrees with the study findings, for example (Kagoda & Katamba, 2013) refute the idea that cultural beliefs may impede ECE curriculum reform implementation. They instead suggest further exploration of community perspectives in the context of ECE reforms.

Then with objective 3 exploring the effectiveness of ECE curriculum reforms, the study findings reveal that despite the challenges in place, there was effective implementation observed towards curriculum reforms. For example, many participants reported improvement in children's development perspectives; that is to say the social cognitive and emotional development as a result of adopting the interactive and play-based learning approaches. Participants noted enhancement in literacy and numeracy skills among students who were part of the reformed curriculum. However, participants reported variations in the outcomes of the curriculum with the learners. The variations according to the participants were based on contextual factors such as resource availability basically between the rural and urban areas. They continuously emphasized the importance of a supportive classroom environment and teacher engagement in facilitating positive learning outcomes. They emphasized despite all efforts; effectiveness is upon addressing the existing challenges. In their own words when asked about the student's response to the reformed curriculum, one of the participants said;

Students are more excited during classes more so when they are engaged in the hands-on activities. The participant said that learners seem to be more curious and willing to participate when we do group work or story-based activities.

This narrative implies that the hands-on, participatory strategies promoted by the ECE curriculum reforms are positively impacting learner engagement, curiosity, and willingness to participate in class. When student teachers

implement interactive methods such as group work and storytelling, learners become more actively involved in the learning process, suggesting that child-centred approaches foster deeper interest and motivation. This highlights the importance of maintaining and expanding such practical, engaging strategies as core components of early childhood instruction to enhance learning outcomes.

When asked, one of the administrators said;

“When the curriculum reforms were first introduced, we received some orientation and initial training. However, since then, there has been very little in terms of follow-up or ongoing professional development. Yet the reforms demand a significant shift in mindset and pedagogical approach—something that cannot be achieved through one-off workshops. Tutors need continuous training, mentoring, and reflective opportunities to adapt effectively. The absence of structured and consistent professional development has left many feeling unsupported. As a result, there is a visible inconsistency in how different tutors interpret and implement the curriculum, which ultimately affects the quality of training student teachers receive.”

The implications of this situation are both immediate and long-term, with potential negative effects on the overall effectiveness of the curriculum reform. The lack of continuous professional development means that tutors are not adequately equipped to internalize and apply the new pedagogical approaches required by the reforms. This leads to inconsistent interpretation and implementation across institutions, creating disparities in the training that student teachers receive. Consequently, the quality and uniformity of teacher preparation suffer, undermining the intended outcomes of the curriculum reform. Moreover, the feeling of being unsupported can lower tutor morale and reduce their commitment to innovation and change, further jeopardizing the success of the reforms. To address these challenges,

a structured, ongoing professional development framework is essential—one that includes regular training sessions, mentorship programs, peer collaboration, and reflective practice opportunities.

When asked, one of the teachers said that;

Some students who struggle with self-direction most times call for extra teacher engagement. Many students need teachers' support. With the reformed curriculum it is crucial to observe a learner needing my support on an individual basis.

The implication of this observation is that the reformed curriculum, which emphasizes learner-centered and self-directed learning, may unintentionally disadvantage students who struggle with autonomy. While the curriculum encourages independence, not all learners are equally prepared for such a shift. As a result, teachers are required to play a more active and responsive role in identifying and supporting individual learners who need extra guidance. This places additional demands on teachers' time and skills, highlighting the need for smaller class sizes, better teacher-learner ratios, and professional development in differentiated instruction. Without adequate support mechanisms, there is a risk that some learners may be left behind, ultimately compromising the inclusiveness and equity that the reformed curriculum aims to promote.

To the same question, the student-teacher trainee with a smiling face said that;

Through the reformed curriculum, I have come to appreciate that young children learn best through play, interaction and exploration rather than through rigid instruction. Previously, I thought teaching meant standing in front of the class and talking while children listened. But now, I understand that involving children in playful, hands-on activities

allows them to express themselves, ask questions, and build their thinking skills. The emphasis on learning through play has changed my perspective — I now see myself more as a facilitator of learning rather than just an instructor. This shift has inspired me to be more creative and intentional about how I'll organize my future classroom, ensuring it's child-friendly, inclusive, and full of opportunities for social and cognitive growth.

The above narratives therefore imply that the reformed ECE curriculum has posited a positive effect on the teaching and learning of early childhood. However, there is a need to monitor these reforms and find out to what extent these reforms might be effective. This is because the participants highlighted that however much the reforms might be effective at one time they are affected by the existing contextual challenges. The findings revealed by the participants, agree with the existing literature for example, (Sylvia et al., 2004; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Tusiime, 2020; Mwaura et al., 2008) posit that ECE curriculum reform forces children to exhibit improvements in cognitive, social, and emotional development hence ascertaining the importance of child-centred learning environment in enhancing several developmental outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Following the study findings, the study came out with conclusions as per the objectives.

For example, for objective one the study concludes that the early childhood curriculum reform has greatly impacted changes from traditional teaching and learning pedagogies to new pedagogies like interactive teaching methods, and experiential and inquiry-based learning that have prioritized learners' engagement and participation in classroom activities. By adopting these changes teachers and learners will be empowered in fostering critical thinking, creativity and collaborative skills among the young ones.

With objective two the study concludes that despite the observed positives, the ECE curriculum reforms face several challenges that may hinder its effective implementation. The study underscored challenges like lack of sufficient resources like learning materials, insufficient child-sized furniture and limited safe outdoor play areas. Thus with such challenges the mentioned reforms like enhancement of child-centered, interactive and experiential learning as well as inquiry-based learning may remain on paper and their implementation faces a natural death.

With the third objective, the study concludes that despite all the challenges in place there was a positive observation of effective implementation. This was indicated by the many participants' reports from the teachers who reported vibrant improvement of learners' outcomes in terms of social, cognitive and emotional development. There was recommendable improvement and enhancement in literacy and numeracy due to interactive and child-centred learning but of course with support from the teachers. Thus the study exhibited that ECE curriculum reforms at Buloba PTC are effectively implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the above conclusions, the study suggested the following recommendations as per the objectives: -

- With the first objective, the study recommends that for ECE curriculum reforms to effectively and appropriately impact both teachers and learners during the teaching and learning sessions, there must be continuous professional development programs for the educators to feel part and partial of the reforms curriculum. This could be done through workshops, benchmarking and sometimes through peer observations. On the other hand, the heads of institutions must enhance these reforms by providing resources and support to facilitate the feasibility of these reforms in institutions of

learning. With the observation of these recommendations, Buloba PTC specifically may begin building sustainable and positive learner outcomes and further enhancing the quality of early childhood education.

- With objective two, the study recommends that following the observable challenges basically towards curriculum implementation, both local and national educational authorities should be invoked to prioritize funding and resource allocation to Early Child Hood education since it is the foundation and backbone of a bright future of the education sector. Similarly, the study recommends that there should be platforms for international funding that may enable the availability of resources and empower continuous professional development to enable teachers to fully understand the reforms and be in a position to fully implement them when the need arises.
- With objective three the study recommends that for consistent effectiveness basically in the implementation of ECE curriculum reforms, there should be targeted support for resources-constrained places or institutions. There should be enhancement in teacher engagement as well as establishing partnerships between schools, communities and government agencies as key stakeholders. These have the potential to create a more supportive environment favourable to the effectiveness of the reforms. Not forgetting still the need to develop a continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanism to enable tracking of variations in curriculum effectiveness as well as to enable the timely adjustment to strategies and resources.

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