

The Boundlessness Effect of Hidden Curriculum in Teaching and Learning among Secondary School Students in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The boundlessness of hidden curriculum includes all the unrecognized and sometimes unintended knowledge, skills, experiences, values and beliefs that are part of the learning process yet still not fully considered in curriculum designs. Therefore, awareness guides key education actors to maximize on learners' potential. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of hidden curriculum influencing teaching and learning process. The study adopted a descriptive design. The target population was 142 form four secondary school students in Kiambu County in Kenya. From the three class streams, one stream was purposefully selected thus a sample of 45 students participated. Questionnaire was utilized to collect data. Data collected was analyzed using frequencies and percentages and findings presented in tables and graphs. The findings revealed that majority of students were not aware of the hidden curriculum and the teaching methods that promote hidden curriculum such as cooperative learning and problem solving were rarely used. The study recommends continuous awareness of hidden curriculum to curb its negative effects and promote learning.

Keywords: Curriculum, Hidden Curriculum, Quality Education, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

The teaching and learning process is influenced by several factors, one of which is the hidden curriculum. Despite its significant impact on student learning, the hidden curriculum is often overlooked in curriculum design. This omission is concerning, as the hidden curriculum shapes the formal curriculum by influencing non-academic aspects of the learning environment and the social relationships of power within it. Learning extends beyond formal instruction to encompass these implicit elements, which play a critical role in shaping students' educational experiences.

Efforts aimed at improving educational quality through curriculum development are diverse and context dependent. However, the complex effects of the hidden curriculum necessitate a deeper understanding of its role within the school or classroom environment, particularly in the 21st century where there is increased emphasis on inclusive education, digital literacy, and social-emotional learning, all of which are subtly influenced by the hidden curriculum. Cornbleth (1984) highlighted how various aspects of the hidden curriculum impact teachers, students, and society at large. Thus, understanding its role is essential to ensure that evolving educational goals are fully realized. Many scholars describe the hidden curriculum as the unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, procedures, attitudes, experiences, knowledge, skills, and norms that are practiced within educational settings (Jerald, 2006, cited in Alsubaie, 2015). Recognizing and addressing the hidden curriculum can enable education stakeholders to foster more

Literature Review

This section presents diverse perspectives from scholars who have studied the hidden curriculum's influence on teaching, learning, and broader societal implications.

Awareness of Hidden Curriculum

Despite various scholars heated debate on the nature of hidden curriculum according to Jerald (2006) in Alsubaie (2015) hidden curriculum are implicit curriculum expresses through attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, which are conveyed or communicated without deliberate intent; it is conveyed indirectly by words and actions that are parts of the life of everyone in a society including the teaching learning environment (Semper & Blasco, 2018). Since the ultimate goal of curriculum implementation is desired learning outcome for each learner, it is paramount for teachers who are key curriculum implementers to have deep understanding and awareness of the hidden curriculum to combat any aspect that may derail efforts of attaining the instructional learning outcomes. According to Myles there is need to continuously update teachers on unfolding aspects of hidden curriculum in order to support their learners adequately in applying the hidden curriculum positively. This is because, as Myles (2011) points out, learners, who are the receivers of curriculum, may not comprehend in totality aspects of hidden curriculum, thus having undue disadvantage. As this occurs, the ultimate learning outcome of curriculum will be impeded, hence the quality of education affected.

Crucial to teachers is the Vygotsky's pedagogy and child development contribution of the hidden curriculum. First, Vygotsky's has pointed on psychological processes of children that direct teachers to contribute in helping and encouraging children to socially communicate with other people building on relationships; secondly, he points out the pedagogy preparations that incorporate value of care, concern,

and responsiveness such as modeling, and imitation (Vygotsky, 1978). The elusive question therefore is, how updated are teachers in children development issues and preparation of a responsive pedagogy to promote teaching and learning? The Dewey progressivism approach to teaching emphasizes on learner center in order to ensure teachers meet learners needs, interest and experiences during implementation. This concurs with Schiro (2008) who pointed out the importance of learner centered because its characteristic supports and enhances schools through the hidden curriculum thus teachers need to put into considerations their students' needs and interests to impact positively teaching and learning.

The Influence of Hidden Curriculum

Research shows that elements of hidden curriculum are conveyed through the words, actions, and interactions of individuals, becoming a pervasive part of societal life (Park et al. 2023). This phenomenon is not confined to any single environment; it permeates all aspects of daily living, including the educational setting. In the context of classroom teaching and learning, the hidden curriculum has a significant role. Teachers, often unknowingly, impart values, expectations, and social norms through their demeanor, language, and interactions with students (Vlah et al., 2015; Langhout & Mitchell, 2008). For example, a teacher's emphasis on punctuality, respect for authority, or collaborative work may subtly instill these values in students. Similarly, the physical arrangement of the classroom, the allocation of time for different activities, and the implicit prioritization of certain subjects over others can all communicate unspoken messages about what is considered important or valuable. Students, in turn, internalize these cues, which shape their understanding of societal expectations and norms. This implicit learning can significantly impact their behavior, attitudes, and future interactions within the broader society (Gaufberg et al. 2010).

Some issues surrounding the hidden curriculum have been identified in the literature, particularly in the context of medical education, but these issues are also relevant across various educational settings. For example, Gaufberg et al. (2010) highlight that medical students often internalize the implicit messages conveyed by their educators and peers, which can lead to the adoption of unprofessional behaviors. This internalization occurs as students navigate the complex social dynamics of their learning environments, where they may observe discrepancies between the formal teachings of professionalism and the behaviors exhibited by faculty and peers. Such conflicts can create a professional identity crisis for students, as they struggle to reconcile the ideals taught in the classroom with the realities they observe in practice (Lawrence et al., 2018; Mackin et al., 2019). Further, the hidden curriculum is seen to have the potential of causing a disconnect between the formal curriculum and the actual learning experiences of students. As noted by Mackin et al. (2019), the messages conveyed through the hidden curriculum can counter the goals of the formal curriculum leading to confusion and conflict for learners. This dissonance can in return undermine the effectiveness of educational programs and hinder the development of essential skills and competencies. Another notable concern is the lack of awareness and recognition of the hidden curriculum among educators in two ways: they may either not fully understand the implications of the hidden curriculum or underestimate its impact on student learning and development. This lack of awareness can hinder efforts to address the negative aspects of the hidden curriculum and to promote a more inclusive and equitable educational environment (Doja et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2023).

Despite the issues surrounding hidden curriculum in education, Jerald (2006), as cited in Alsubaie (2015), observed that when teachers are aware of the effects of the hidden curriculum, they can evaluate both their

teaching methods and student responses to mitigate aspects of the hidden curriculum that might hinder learning outcomes. With this understanding, teachers can strategically utilize the hidden curriculum by incorporating cooperative learning as a teaching strategy to promote specific behaviors, values, and experiences. By using diverse teaching methods like simulations, role-playing, problem-solving, and cooperative learning, educators can create a supportive environment that respects students' unique backgrounds and personal experiences. This approach helps foster positive self-belief and a sense of belonging within their societies. Consequently, students are better placed to adapt to new classroom environments, which can lead to improved academic achievement and skills for future success in society.

A study investigating the basic components of Hidden Curriculum in Medical Education (HCME) and their interrelationships found key components, including structural, educational, cultural, and social factors (Arikhani, Shojaei, & Rafiee, 2020). It revealed that organizational rules and structures, the dominant culture within the educational environment, teaching and assessment approaches, and the clinical and educational physical setting were essential in shaping the hidden curriculum. These factors collectively influenced the implicit lessons learned by medical students. Additionally, social components, such as peer interactions and professional socialization, were found to be significantly shaped by these foundational elements (Arikhani, Shojaei, & Rafiee, 2020). This scenario underscores the extensive nature of the hidden curriculum's impact, revealing how deeply it permeates various aspects of medical education. It suggests that beyond the formal curriculum, the hidden curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping the professional attitudes, behaviors, and values of future healthcare providers, thereby affecting their future practice and patient care.

The influence of hidden curriculum in other learning contexts would involve similar structural, educational, cultural, and social components influencing students' experiences and learning outcomes. For example, structural factors in secondary schools, such as rules and regulations, significantly influence students' experiences. Research indicates that the hidden curriculum often manifests through implicit expectations regarding attendance, punctuality, and behavior in classrooms, which can shape students' attitudes toward education and their overall development (Varga, 2023). This structural aspect of the hidden curriculum emphasizes that what students learn informally can be as impactful as the formal curriculum itself, often guiding their behavior and attitudes more profoundly than the prescribed educational content (Varga, 2023). Additionally, the values and norms established by any school culture can significantly affect students' socialization and identity formation. For example, a study done by Ahvan highlighted that the hidden curriculum fosters implicit learning of values and attitudes, which can enhance students' creativity and social climate within the school (Ahvan, 2021). This cultural dynamic is crucial, as it can either promote a positive learning environment or contribute to negative experiences, depending on how inclusive and supportive the school culture is (Ahvan, 2021).

Many scholars argue that hidden curriculum is more significant than formal curriculum, because much of the learning occurs through non-academic aspects of the meta-learning environment and social dynamics of power. It encourages individuals to learn implicitly through the nature of organizational structures and the behaviors and attitudes of teachers and administrators within the school environment. The values and behavior patterns are often randomly acquired in hidden curriculum (Leli, Mohamed & Armin, 2015). This suggests that the influence of the hidden curriculum is unique, pervasive, and occurs unintentionally across various settings.

From the foregoing, hidden curriculum encompasses valuable concepts that significantly influence thinking and behavior. It highlights that many aspects of the hidden curriculum are beyond the direct control or prediction of teachers and other facilitators of learning, manifesting subtly through the educational environment and interactions (Leili et al., 2015). This unpredictability stems from the complex interplay of various factors, including institutional policies, classroom dynamics, and societal norms. Moreover, the teacher's role in shaping the hidden curriculum is profound and wide in scope. Teacher empowerment, which includes their ability to make autonomous decisions and implement innovative practices, directly impacts the hidden curriculum. Similarly, interpersonal relationships—how teachers interact with students and colleagues—contribute to the implicit lessons students absorb. A teacher's personality and ethical standards, such as fairness, empathy, and integrity, also play crucial roles in modeling behaviors that students may emulate. Educational practices, including teaching and assessment methods, further influence the hidden curriculum by conveying what is valued in the learning process (Leili et al., 2015).

Given its implicit and explicit influence, continuous awareness and intentional reflection on the hidden curriculum are key for educators. By understanding its influence, teachers can strive to create a more positive and equitable learning environment that supports both academic and personal growth of students. This proactive approach ensures that the hidden curriculum reinforces beneficial values and behaviors, enhancing the overall teaching and learning experience.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To determine awareness of the hidden curriculum during the teaching and learning process among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.
- To assess the impact of the hidden curriculum on the attitudes, behaviors, and academic performance of secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya.
- To explore the awareness and role of education stakeholders in influencing hidden curriculum practices during teaching and learning process in secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya.

Method

The study adopted descriptive design to find out the boundlessness effect of hidden curriculum in teaching and learning among secondary school students in Kiambu County, Kenya. The target population was 142 form four secondary school students in Kiambu County in Kenya. From the three class streams, one stream was purposefully selected thus a sample of 45 students participated. Questionnaire was utilized to collect data. Data collected was analyzed using frequencies and percentages and findings presented in tables and graphs.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Information

In this study the demographic information entailed age and gender of the students as presented in figure 1 and 2

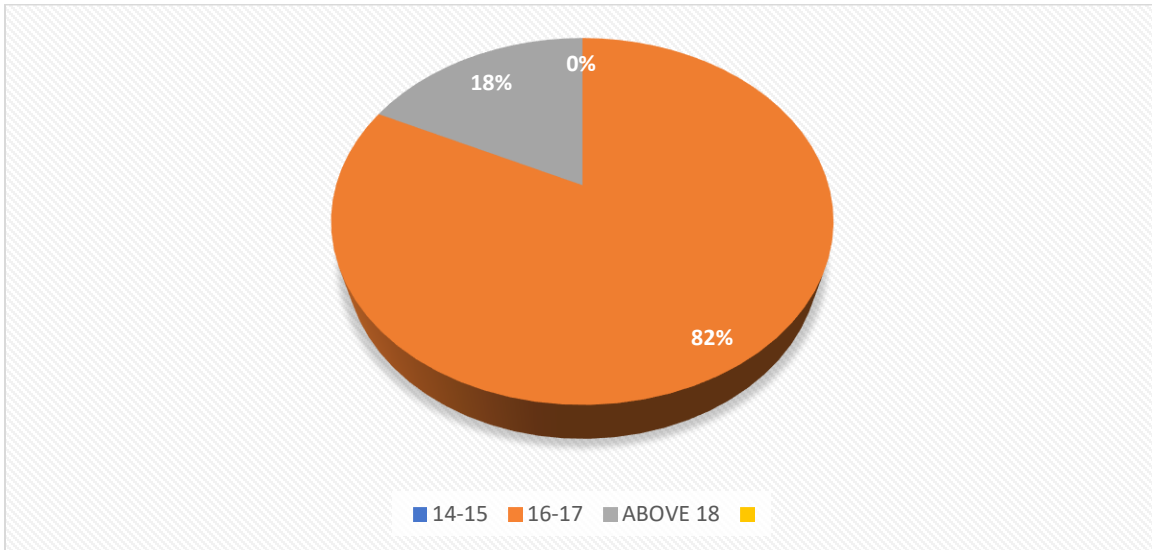


Figure 1: Students Age

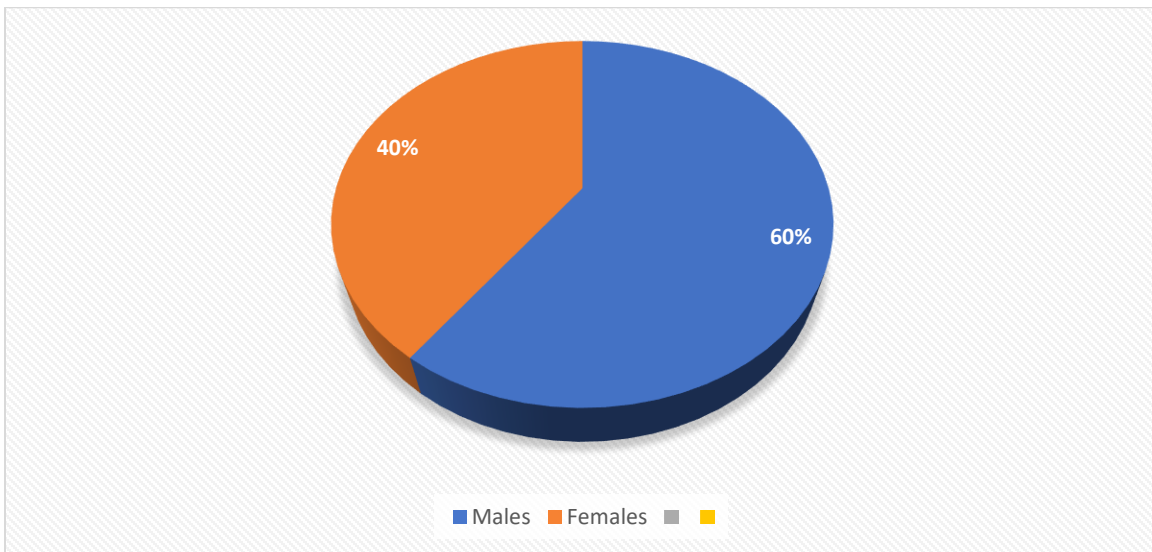


Figure 2: Gender of the students

In figure 1 it shows that most students are within (16-17years) age brackets appropriate to the level of education. The few students above 18 years is an indication of supporting all learners to pursue their education as a right in the basic education. Most of the respondents were males as shown in figure 2.

The Awareness of Hidden Curriculum among the Students

To achieve the objective of this study, it was paramount to determine the awareness of the hidden curriculum among the students. The findings are presented in Figure 3.

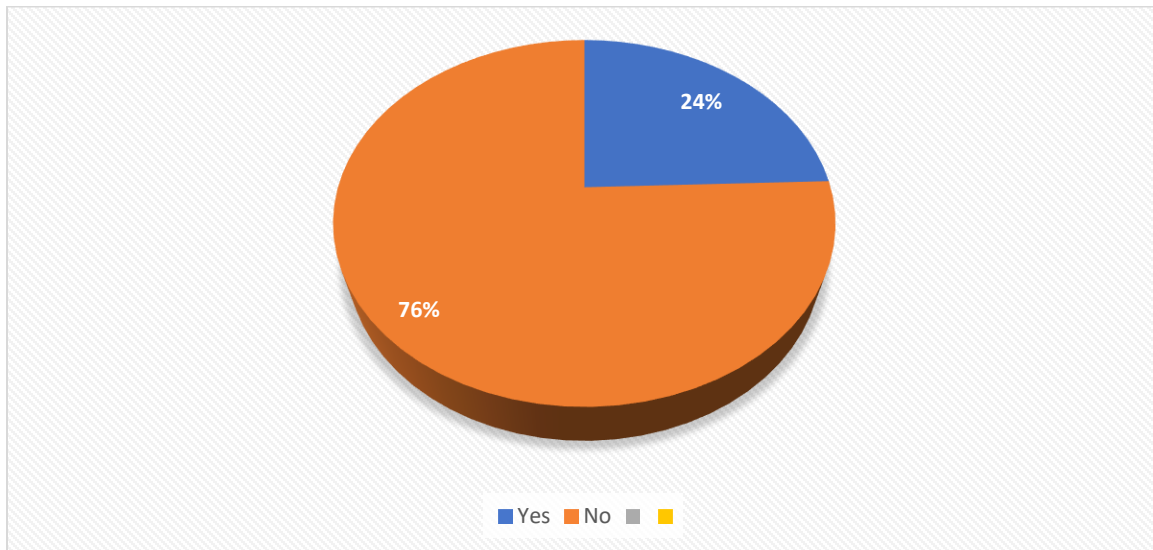


Figure 3: Awareness of hidden curriculum among the students

From figure 3, majority of the students 76 % pointed out that they were not aware about hidden curriculum. The non-awareness by the students revealed may impede efforts made in both formal and non-formal curriculum offered in all education institutions since hidden curriculum play a major role in the curriculum implemented. Equally all students 100% pointed out that their teachers have not explained to them the concept of HC. In regard to the student-student relationship most (36) students pointed as having positive relationship at 80% among each other, while only (5) students, 11% indicated as very positive and (4) students, 9% said it was fair. The positive relationship among students portrays a conducive learning environment that enhances teaching and learning. However it is important to note that though few students indicate their relationship as fair, there may be other factors such as unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, procedures, attitudes as pointed out by Jerald (2006) in Alsubaie (2015) contributing that needs to be addressed to promote curriculum in smooth environment to avoid thriving, being escalated thus interfering with desired interactions. Therefore, hidden curriculum awareness needs to be emphasized.

The Teacher Behaviour in the School

The behaviour that teachers display within the school environment has impact to all the learners. Students rated the behaviour of their teachers as presented in Figure 4.

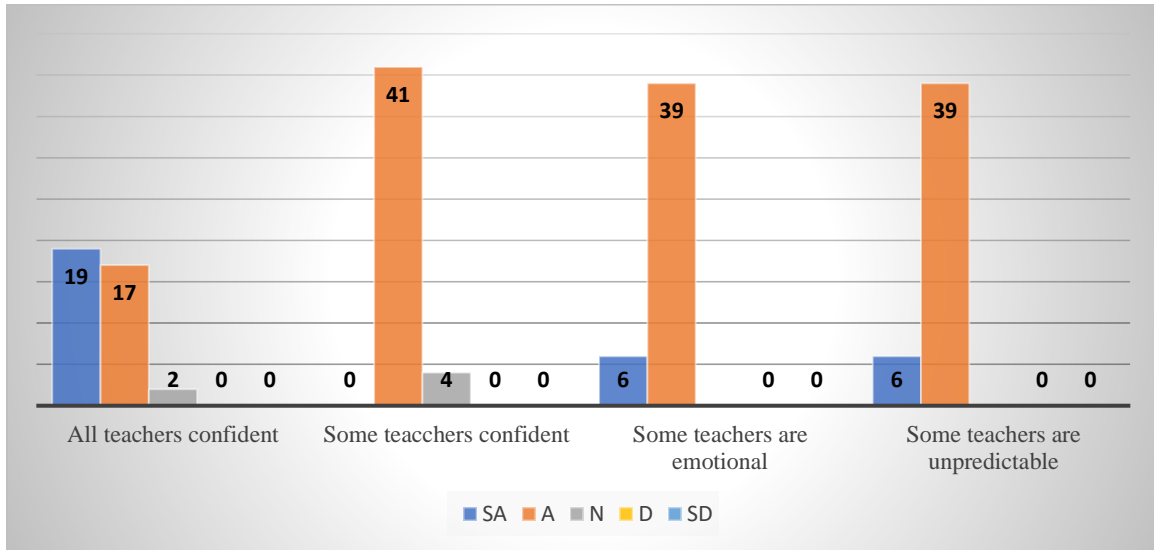


Figure 4: Teacher's behavior

Of concern in figure 4 are majority of students who agree that some teachers are confident, moody and unpredictable as indicated by 41 and 39 students respectively may impact on student's self-fulfillment. This is supported by the findings on teacher-student relationships that no student pointed out that they had a very positive relationship with their teachers, with the majority pointing that their relationship with teachers was positive at 86% and a few 14% said their relationship was fair. Though few students have fair relationships with their teachers it is a point of concern that may affect their desired interaction which impacts on attainment of curriculum outcome and eventually their achievement. Further, the teachers pointed out to be moody and unpredictable undermines the extent to which compliance with the code of ethics is adhered since Jerald (2006) in Alsubaie (2015) has pointed out that the hidden curriculum are either unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, attitudes practiced in teaching and learning environment. Similarly, students rated how teachers act as their role model. The results are presented in Figure 5.

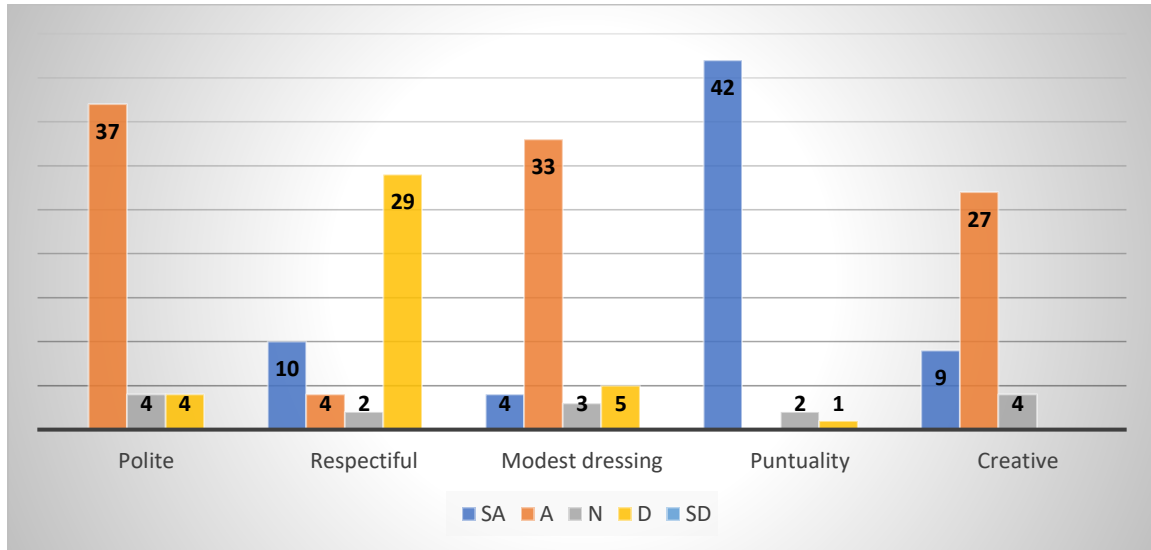


Figure 5: Teachers as role models

The teachers result on punctuality, majority of students strongly agree is commendable in efforts directed to curriculum implementation. It is an indication that teachers are diligent and committed to their call of duty. However, the findings that most students disagree that teachers are not respectful are worrying, since as a virtue students may replicate thriving and may escalate impacting negatively on curriculum in all aspects. The implication also calls for teachers’ personal focus on how they treat all students without bias and their role of mentorship.

The Teaching Methods Used During Teaching and Learning

The use of varied teaching methods is encouraged when implementing the curriculum for its known benefits. In this study the teaching methods used during teaching and learning and its effectiveness was sought. The findings are presented in Figure 6 and 7.

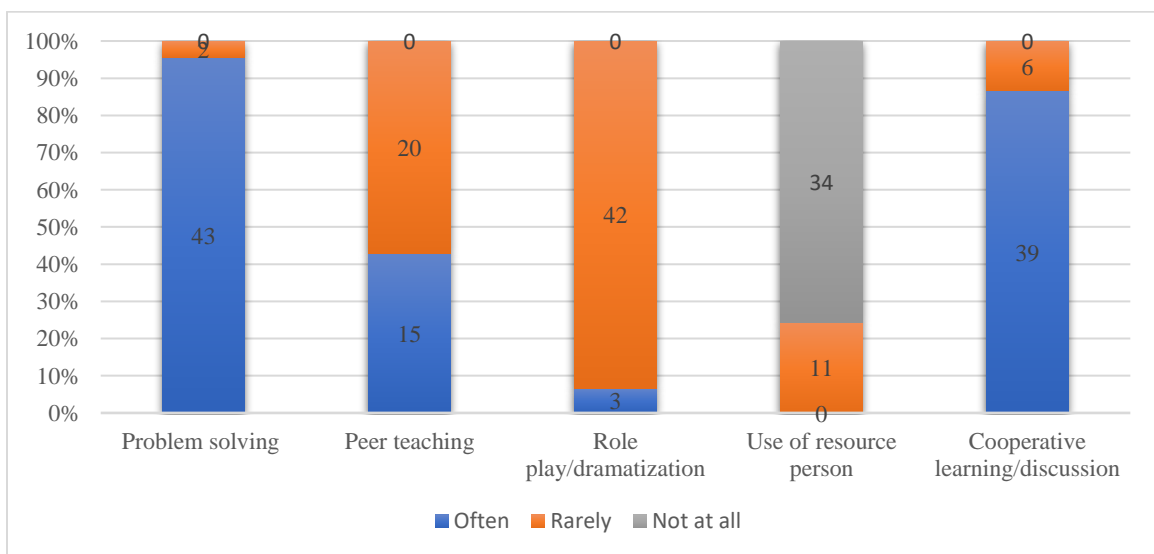


Figure 6: Teaching methods used during teaching learning

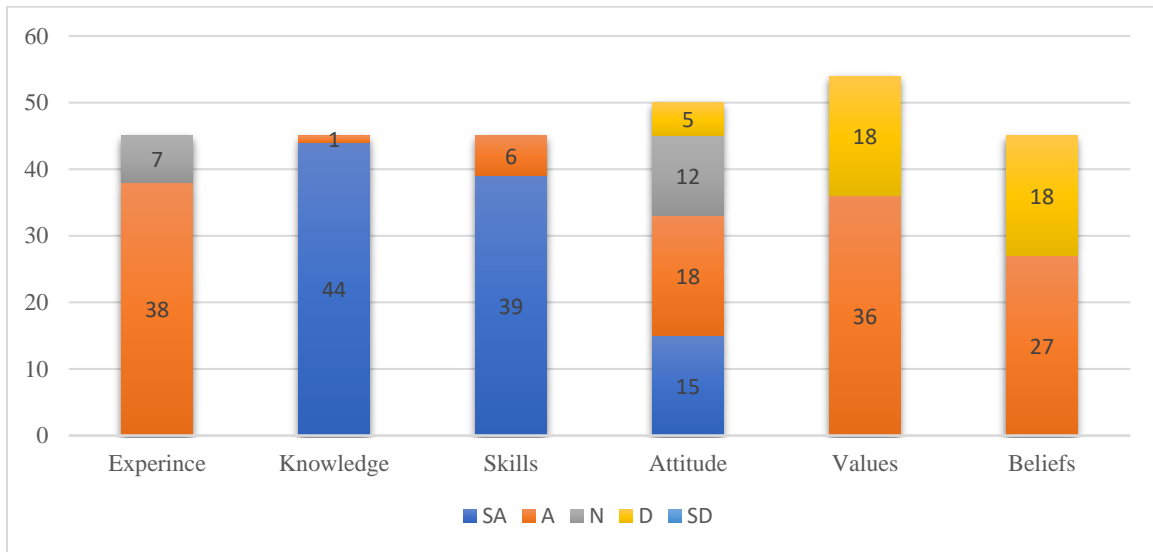


Figure 7: Influence of the teaching methods

In order to comprehend the utilization of teaching, methods students rated effectiveness of communication. Most (34) students, 75% pointed out that use of written communication was very positive, while (8),17%, and (3),6% respectfully pointed out that it was positive and fair. The use of oral communication was rated by 95% as very positive and 5% as fair.

From the findings on figure 6, it is clear that teachers use varied teaching methods mainly problem solving and cooperative learning as pointed by 43 and 39 students. The scenario of adopting varied teaching methods supports what Schiro (2008) and (Vygotsky (1978) deemed vital in addressing learners' needs appropriately.

In spite of the effort's teachers put, majority of students indicated that role play is rarely used, and resource person not used at all may deny students positive development that enhances curriculum implementation. It is worth noting from Figure 7 that majority of students, 44 and 39 strongly agreed that teachers' use of varied teaching methods influenced their acquisition of knowledge and development of skills. This agrees with what Alsubaie (2015) observed that use of varied methods enhances students' achievement. Similarly, 38, 36 and 27 students agreed that varied teaching methods influence their experience, values and beliefs an indication that teachers need to be supported to make use of varied teaching methods.

In regard to the effectiveness of teaching methods used most learners rated cooperative learning and peer teaching as very effective while role play and problem solving as effective. A few rated uses of resource person as not effective. Similarly, students (45) 88% indicated that teacher's personal attitude during teaching and learning affected their behavior, attitude and skills development.

Evaluation and Achievement

The study also sought to find out how examination procedures, rules and regulations in school affect them and how various factors within the school affect their achievement. The findings are presented in Figure 8 and 9.



Figure 8: Influence of evaluation

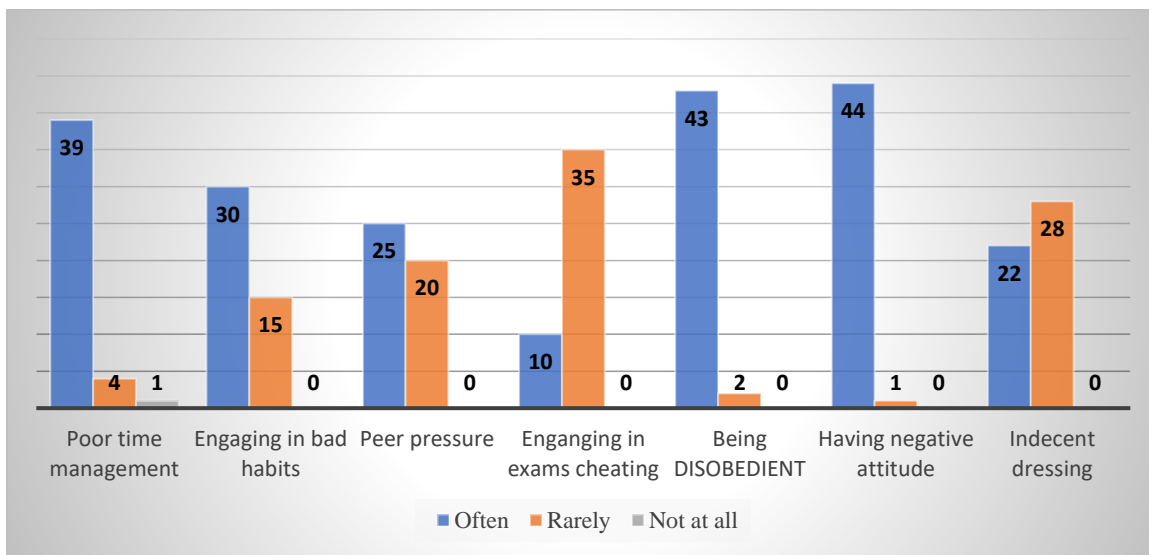


Figure 9: Factors affecting students' achievement

From figure 8, it is evident that examination rules and procedures affect the students mainly their experience, behavior and attitude as revealed by 38, 36 and 29 students respectively. Of concern is that the same examination rules do not influence their beliefs and rarely influence skills and knowledge. Their adherence to rules and regulations about 32% indicated that it was very positive, about half 48% said it was positive and 20% revealed that it was fair.

In figure 9, majority of students have pointed out having negative attitude, being disobedient, poor time management, engaging in bad habits and peer pressure often affect their achievement. Worth pointing out are students that reveal that engaging in exams cheating rarely affect their achievement. This calls for strict implementation of examination rules and awareness made to students on consequences of cheating to curb the vice. This concurs with Myles (2011) who points out that students who are the receivers of curriculum may not comprehend some aspects of curriculum and thus they should be empowered. Further, schools need to have modalities on how to deal with negative attitudes and disobedience. The majority, 92% agreed that HC determined their future practice such as skills, competence, creativity, talents and performance.

The school community impact

The study further investigated how the school community influences students. The results are presented on Figure 10.

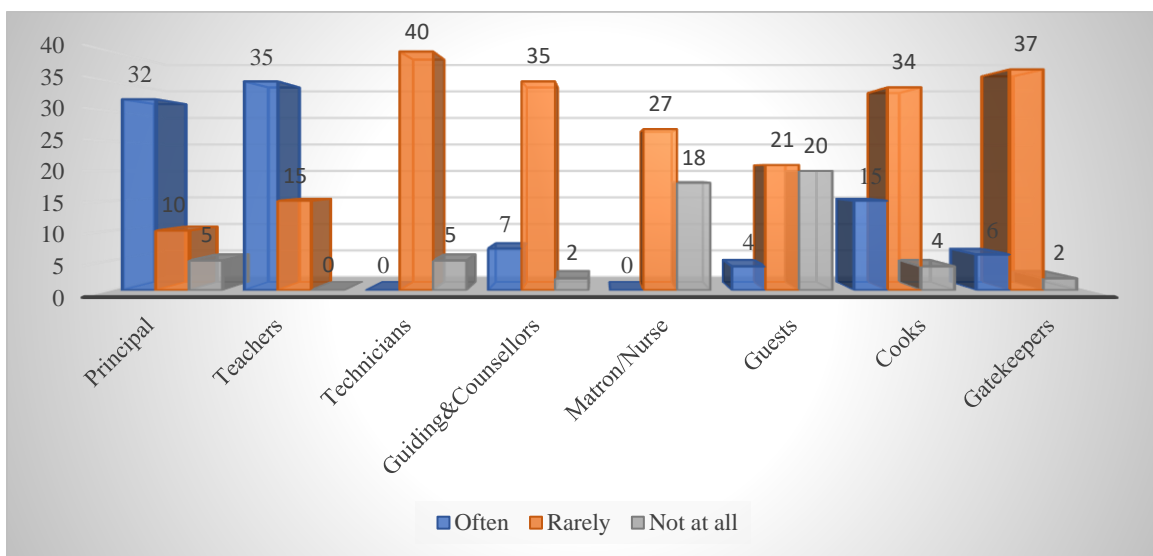


Figure 10: Impact of school community

The hidden curriculum influence from the school community is varied. Most students have pointed out mainly that often teachers and principal influence them. It is also important to note that the cooks in the school have a higher influence than the rest of the community members apart from the teachers and principal. However, the students pointing out that the principal not at all influence them is a concern yet he/she is the leader in the school. Similarly, teachers noted to rarely influence students is worrying since they are key implementers and may have negative impact on students' holistic growth. The scenario concurs with Leili et al, (2015) observation that the entire school community needs to be empowered on the impact of hidden curriculum to curb negative unintended aspects. The students also pointed out that their interactions with the personnel in school was positive and few revealed that it was fair.

Conclusion

For effective curriculum implementation, there is a crucial need for continuous and consistent awareness of the hidden curriculum among all education stakeholders. The hidden curriculum, though indirect,

significantly shapes students' attitudes, behaviors, and values, with profound impacts that extend across both formal and non-formal educational settings. By fostering an understanding of these implicit elements, stakeholders including educators, administrators, parents, and policymakers can collaborate to create learning environments that reinforce positive values and align with the goals of holistic education. Furthermore, it is essential to establish clear mechanisms for identifying and addressing any unintended effects of the hidden curriculum. This requires ongoing assessment and open channels of communication among stakeholders to allow any emerging issues to be addressed proactively.

Recommendations

Due to the less emphasis of hidden curriculum among all the key education stakeholders, this study recommends continuous awareness to all stakeholders involved in education matters to curb its negative effect during curriculum implementation to realize desired curriculum learning outcome.

Specifically, in regard to teachers' behavior and being role models, they should be on the forefront making known effects of hidden curriculum in the same wavelength aspects of formal and non-formal curriculum emphasized. This includes making known hidden curriculum, encouraging positive relationships and cherishing good behavior as provided in the profession ethics. Similarly, on teaching methods, all teachers need to embrace diverse teaching methods for optimal learning outcome.

The evaluation procedures adopted in school should involve learners to increase their receptiveness of the same thus promoting positive inculcation of ideals. Involving learners in evaluation procedures can foster a participatory approach that enhances their receptivity to the feedback and insights that the evaluations provide. When learners actively engage in the assessment process, it nurtures a sense of responsibility and ownership over their learning.

The school community needs to re-align HC deliberate efforts that promote friendly school environment to enhance successful implementation of curriculum thus improving quality of education.

Finally, the learners who are key curriculum consumers need to be equally made aware not only on formal and non-formal curriculum, but also on all aspects of hidden curriculum that need to be embraced.

Conflict of Interest. “The authors declare no conflict of interest”

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