

Journal of

Education and Practice

(JEP)

An Evaluation of the Ghanaian Kindergarten's Standard-Based Curriculum



An Evaluation of the Ghanaian Kindergarten's Standard-Based Curriculum

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Accepted: 16th Dec, 2025, Received in Revised Form: 10th Jan, 2026, Published: 18th Jan, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This manuscript is an evaluation of the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum. It ascertains its ability to promote an integrated thematic approach to teaching and learning using Scriven's Goal-free model of evaluation.

Methodology: A rapid approach to systematic review was used to gather relevant information and critically appraise the programme. Out of a total 31, 15 manuscripts were selected for an in-depth analysis. Ninety-six (96) teachers' lessons were observed.

Findings: The evaluation reveals that thematic integrated curriculum is endorsed by many scholars as an efficient approach to teaching and learning in kindergarten education. The Ghanaian standard-based curriculum promotes intradisciplinary thematic integration demonstrated in Our-World-Our-People as a combination of multiple subject areas into one. Interdisciplinary thematic integration was not practiced by most teachers because the KG curriculum does not explicitly say how it is achieved in individual subjects.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommended that teachers should see the themes outlined under other subjects as subject-specific knowledge and skills that their lessons should s and develop sub-themes from the seven (7) broad themes for the other subjects.

Keywords: *Programme, Evaluation, Thematic Approach, Curriculum Kindergarten*

1. Introduction

In line with the government of Ghana's Educational Strategic Plan (ESP 2003-2015), the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2007 introduced a two-year compulsory Kindergarten (KG) education into the Ghanaian educational system. This educational policy reiterates the commitment of the government of Ghana towards its free and compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) policy introduced some decades ago and the importance it accords to the Early Childhood Education (ECE). The two-year compulsory KG education policy is expected to help the government to achieve its Strategic Development Goal 4.2 which is, providing all children aged 4-5 years access to quality Early Childhood Care & Education before the commencement of primary education (at age 6) by the year 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2018). Since then, the government has been investing immensely in the ECE sector and has embarked on several educational reforms aiming at improving the quality of KG education in Ghana; the most recent of which are the 2018 Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) led National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF) and the 2019 National Pre-Tertiary Curriculum reforms. Thus, the year 2019 marked the introduction of the new KG and Primary curriculum, popularly known as the "curriculum for change and sustainable development" or "standards-based curriculum" in all Ghanaian basic schools (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019, p. i).

Experts, including the Ghanaian Ministry of Education (2018) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2019), among others, have advocated an integrated thematic curriculum for kindergarten (KG) education. What then is an integrated thematic curriculum? And how does the new KG curriculum promote an integrated thematic approach to teaching and learning? This evaluation uses Scriven's Goal-Free Model of evaluation to evaluate the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum. According to Scriven (1991, as cited in Youker, 2024), Goal-Free evaluation is any evaluation in which the evaluator conducts the evaluation without particular knowledge of or reference to the programme's stated or predetermined goals and objectives. Youker and Ingraham (2014) explained that the goal-free evaluator observes and measures the programme's intended or unintended outcomes and impacts while ignoring the program's intentions.

2. Evaluative Framework

One of the two (2) conditions for evaluating a programme using the goal-free approach or model is that the evaluator must not be one of the key stakeholders of the programme being evaluated. The second condition is that a neutral person, known as a goal screener, who may be an administrative assistant or the evaluation client, is needed between the evaluator and the program to eliminate any form of interaction or exchange. This neutral person requires no training. They only need to be conversant with the model and the program being evaluated. (Youker, 2005b as cited in Youker & Ingraham, 2014).

The Evaluator: Per the first condition of this model, since we are not the programme developer or manager of the KG curriculum, which is the object of this evaluation, we are qualified to evaluate it. In this, the authors of the selected manuscripts in this study become the goal

screeners standing between the object of evaluation (the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum) and me, the evaluators.

The Evaluation Object: The Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum

Evaluation Variable: Integrated Thematic Instruction.

The variable of the evaluation was chosen independently while ignoring the programmed stated goal and objectives.

Procedure: The evaluator relied on secondary data from literature to appreciate the concept of integrated thematic curriculum and thematic instructional approaches. In light of what the literature says and based on impractical evidence (from the field), evaluate how the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum promotes integrated thematic teaching and learning. Zurqoni, et al. (2018) posit that the goal-free evaluator is prevented from knowing what the program is supposed to do (goals and objectives); therefore, the first task of the goal-free evaluator is to define and describe the program. This is accomplished by measuring, observing, and reviewing literature and documents regarding the program's actions and activities. Once the goal-free evaluator begins to understand what the program does and whom it serves, relevant outcome measures often reveal themselves, and the evaluator's anxiety begins to subside

3. Methods

3.1 Systematic Literature Review

A Rapid approach to systematic review was adopted to examine the concept of a thematic integrated curriculum and the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum model of an integrated thematic approach to teaching and learning. Rapid Review is “An assessment of what is already known about a policy or practice issue, which uses systematic review methods to search for and critically appraise existing research. Rapid reviews are still systematic reviews. Here, parts of the process may be simplified or omitted to increase rapidity” (Nunn & Chang, 2020, p.2).

3.1.1 Search Strategies

A search for relevant publications was undertaken using the Google.com search engine. The search focused on two key themes: (1) Integrated Thematic Curriculum (ITC); and (2) How does the Ghanaian new KG curriculum promote ITC? A total of twenty-one (21) published studies were located on Sage, Routledge, ERIC, IISTE, and Elsevier databases.

3.1.2 Criteria of Selection

Accessed studies were double-screened and read thoroughly to determine their inclusion. Out of the thirty-one (31) publications accessed, fifteen (15) were selected for an in-depth analysis. They were purposively selected based on their relevance in addressing the objectives of this paper. Selected studies were published in the English language between 2010 to 2019. They include online articles, books, and the government of Ghana's publications,

3.1.3 Analysis

Narrative synthesis of the selected published studies was done alongside the two (2) themes that guided the search and selection of published studies for this paper. This allowed the reviewer to find and summarise pieces of information using words or text to better explain the concept of thematic curriculum and its application in the Ghanaian standard-based curriculum in line with the objectives of this paper.

3.2 Unstructured Observation

Ninety-six (96) KG 1 and 2 teachers from five (5) kindergartens in the Sagnarigu District were randomly selected and observed in their classrooms. The unstructured observation lasted 30 to 45 minutes in each KG class. Available data at the Sagnarigu Municipal Directorate of Education indicates that there are 125 KGs in the Municipality. The number of teachers (96) corresponding to the number of KGs selected was determined using the second table of Glenn (1992), which suggests 96 as a suitable sample size for a population of 125 at a significance level of 95% (Singh & Masuku, 2014)

A multistage sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample. First, 9 out of 11 circuits in the Sagnarigu Municipality were randomly selected using the lottery method. Each circuit has a minimum of nine (9) and a maximum of fifteen (15) schools. Secondly and lastly, a proportionate sampling technique was used to select some schools in each circuit or stratum to make up the sampling size of 96 KGs. That is, 10 in Choggoo, 12 in Guman-Nyanshegu, 10 in Fuo, 10 in Kamina A, 10 in Kamina B, 10 in Mile Nine, 12 in Nyankpala road, 10 in Sagnarigu North, and 12 in Tishigu circuits.

The observation data were incorporated to evaluate the programme. This allows the evaluators to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in teachers' actual application of the thematic approach to teaching in relation to the prescriptions of the KG standard-based curriculum.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 What is an Integrated Thematic Curriculum?

The term curriculum has been defined differently by scholars to reflect certain ideologies and to satisfy a variety of purposes (Bhutta, Xiaoduan, Ullah, & Javed, 2019). Etymologically, the term curriculum means a 'course of study' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to Taba (1962), it is a "plan for learning" (p.231). Popham & Baker (1970) see it as "all the planned learning outcomes for which the school is responsible" (p.48). For the Scottish Government (2009), it is "the totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated" (p.11). "It is not an end in itself but rather a means to fostering quality learning" (Stabback, 2011, p.18). It encompasses all the learning and skills acquisition activities including classroom learning, in/outdoor play, arts, sports, support services, and other extracurricular activities approved by the school (National Middle School Association, 2010 as cited in Wall & Leckie, 2017).

The curriculum is a document that outlines a set of skills, knowledge, and values that learners are expected to master from one grade level to another while in school. It prescribes all the

learning experiences that learners are expected to acquire under the supervision of the school at a particular point in time. These learning experiences are embedded in the various subjects taught in school or elements of a subject or topics taught within a subject (Encarta Encyclopedia Dictionary, 2012).

The term “integrate means to render something whole or at least to provide some sort of unity”. That is, using a variety of teaching strategies to harmoniously connect all the various subjects or components of the school curriculum for learning to occur in an all-inclusive and assimilated manner (Bacon, 2018, p.1). Integrating the curriculum is an all-inclusive approach to instruction which consists in combining two or more subject areas and disciplines to help children learn concepts more comprehensively and interestingly and appreciate the connections that exist among the various subjects and disciplines that make up the school curriculum. It enhances individual subjects and discipline, arouses and sustains children's interest in the learning activities, and promotes inquisitiveness, academic excellence, and an efficient approach to problem-solving. It also helps children to relate concepts taught in school to their daily life experiences and appreciate their relevance in real life. Thus, it enables them to look at concepts from varied perspectives and see learning as a gradual and wholesome process rather than a series of discontinued events (Alghamdi, 2017).

The curriculum can be integrated using a thematic approach which is an efficient instructional approach that makes teaching and learning comprehensible, real, and responsive rather than the disjointed way they used to be (Okoro & Okoro, 2016). “The child's brain is not compartmentalised; therefore, subject teaching should not be used at the kindergarten level”. This can only be achieved through an integrated thematic curriculum approach to teaching and learning which allows the teacher to “integrate learning experiences from the various learning areas” or subjects in a single lesson (The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019, p.xi).

An integrated thematic curriculum is a multidisciplinary approach to teaching where various subject-teachers team up or work together to plan and handle lessons in their individual subjects around a “common concept, issue, problem, topic, or experience in a career-themed context”. This approach to teaching and learning allows teachers to explore topics or issues beyond the usual boundaries of their individual subject areas and helps the learner to see how the various subjects relate. It also allows them to see the connection between home and school; that is the practical use or application of the concepts taught at school in solving real-life problems (Clayton, Hagan, Ho, & Hudis, 2010, p.2).

4.2 How Does the Ghanaian New KG Curriculum Promote an Integrated Thematic Approach to Teaching and Learning?

A critical look at the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum document shows, in its preliminary pages (xv – xxxvii), an explanation of the concepts of an integrated thematic curriculum and the reasons for adopting a thematic approach to teaching in kindergartens 1 and 2 (KG1&2). It suggests Inter-disciplinary integration and Intra-disciplinary integration. Interdisciplinary integration is the combination of two or more subject areas to create a single

subject. Our World and Our People is an example of an interdisciplinary integration with five different subjects combined, namely Religious and Moral Education, Civics, Geography, Agriculture Science, and Computing. Intra-disciplinary integration is the integration of different skills that are taught in one subject. For instance, listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the Language and Literacy. In the KG standard-based curriculum, the major themes (strands or topics) are derived from the four focal content areas (Language and Literacy, Our World and Our People, Numeracy, Creative Arts). These themes must be integrated and interwoven during teaching and learning, and their core component skills taught across subjects (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NaCCA], 2019, p.xix). Contrary to the subject-based approach to teaching, where curriculum contents are taught in an isolated way, in an integrated thematic approach to teaching, curriculum contents are organised around “big and broad real-life themes instead of subject topics”. A theme is a focal idea around which all subject teachers plan their daily or weekly lessons. This makes it possible for the various curriculum contents to connect and interweave within a selected theme. In this approach, isolated individual subjects teaching is discouraged (Asante et al., 2024).

The proposed integrated thematic approach in the KG standard-based curriculum focuses on the following seven (7) meaningful and relevant themes or strands which are woven and connected to learners’ everyday life: “(1) All about me, (2) My family, (3) Values and beliefs, (4) My local community, (5) My Nation Ghana, (6) All around us, and (7) My global community” which can be further broken down into sub-theme or sub-strands. These themes are expected to run through the four (4) disciplines or subjects in KG, namely “Language and Literacy, Numeracy/Mathematics, Creative Arts, and Our World and our People” (NaCCA, 2019, p.xix). See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Focal Themes

Term	Strand or Theme	KG1	KG2
1	All about me	√	√
	My family	√	√
	Values and beliefs	√	√
2	My local community	√	√
	My Nation Ghana	√	√
	All around us	√	√
3	My global community	√	√

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

The themes or strands can also be broken down into sub-themes or sub-strands (see Tables below)

Table 2: Our World, Our People

Theme or Strand 1: All About Me
Term1

KG1 Sub-theme or sub-strand	KG2 Sub-theme or sub-strand
K1.1.1 I am a wonderful and unique creation	K2.1. I am a wonderful and unique creation
K1.1.2 The parts of the human body and their functions	K2.1.2 Parts of the body that we cannot see (internal) and parts of the body that we can see (external) and their functions.
K1.1.3 Caring for the parts of my body.	K2.1.3 Personal hygiene and caring for the parts of the body
K1.1.4 Keeping my body healthy by eating good food and taking my vaccination	K2.1.4 Eating good food and taking my vaccinations to keep my body healthy
K1.1.5 My environment and my Health	K2.1.5 My environment and my Health
K1.1.6 Protecting ourselves from home and road accidents	K2.1.6 Protecting ourselves from road accidents and harmful strangers

Theme or Strand 2: My Family

K1.2.1 Type and members of my family	K2.2.1 Types and members of my family
K1.2.2 Origin and History of my Family	K2.2.2 My family: Our origin and history
K1.2.3 Family Celebrations and Festivals	K2.2.3 Family Celebrations and festivals
K1.2.4 My school family rules and regulations	K2.2.4 My school family
	Rules and Regulations for Learners and Teachers at school

Term2
Theme or Strand 3: Values and Beliefs

KG1 Sub-theme or sub-strand	KG2 Sub-theme or sub-strand
K1.3.1 Our Family Values	K2.3.1 Our personal values
K1.3.2 Our cultural and family values	K2.3.2 Our cultural values
K1.3.3 Our religious values	K2.3.3 Our national and civic values
K1.3.4 Our beliefs	K2.3.4 Our Beliefs
	Relating well with people with different beliefs

Theme or Strand 4: My Local Community

K1.4.1 Knowing the special places in our local community	K2.4.1 Knowing the special places in every community
K1.4.2 Knowing (who) the important people/occupation in our community	K2.4.2 Knowing (who) the important people/occupation in our community
K1.4.3 Knowing the special leaders in our community and country	K2.4.3 Knowing the special leaders in our community and country

K.5.1 History and celebration of Ghana's Independence.	K2.5.1 History and celebrations of Ghana
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**Term
3**
Theme or Strand 6: All Around Us

KG1 Sub-theme or sub-strand	KG2 Sub-theme or sub-strand
K1.6.1 Living and non-living things	K2.6.1 Living and non-living things
K1.6.2 Living things: Animals (Domestic and wild)	K2.6.2 Living things - Domestic and wild animals
K1.6.3 Water	K2.6.3 Water
K1.6.4 Air	K1.6.4 Air
K1.6.5 Plants -1	K1.6.5 Plants -1
K1.6.6 Plants - 2	K1.6.6 Plants - 2
K1.6.7 Gardening	K2.6.7 Types of soil and gardening; Making soil fertile for gardening
K1.6.8 Light - Day and Night	K2.6.8 Natural and Man -made sources of light.
K1.6.9 Changing weather conditions	K2.6.9 Changing weather conditions; Positive and negative effects of Weather conditions

Theme or Strand 7: My Global Community

K1.7.1 Connecting and communicating with the global community	K2.7.1 Connecting and communicating with the global community; K2.7.1 Financial literacy: Buying and Selling
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(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

Table 3: Numeracy or Mathematics

STRANDS	SUB-STRANDS	KG1	KG2
1. NUMBER	Whole Numbers: Counting and Representation and Cardinality	√	√
	Whole Numbers Operations	√	√
	Relationship between numbers		
2. Algebra	Non-numerical Patterns and Relationships	√	√
3. Geometry & Measurement	Lines and Shapes	√	√
	Telling positions of objects in space		
	Measurements-length, mass, capacity	√	√
4. Handling Data	Data (Collection, Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation)	√	√

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

Table 4: Creative Arts

STRANDS	Content standard	KG1	KG2
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1. MEDIA, METHODS, TECHNIQUES, AND TECHNOLOGY	Explore, understand and experiment creatively with a variety of tools and materials	√	√
2. CREATIVE EXPRESSION THROUGH PRODUCTION AND MAKING	Design, make, exhibit, and respond to own or others artworks (2-dimensional and 3-dimensional) freely	√	√
3. AESTHETIC PERCEPTION	Derive meaning and make judgments about artworks using the senses according to its beauty	√	√
4. ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN	Create and organize the elements of design according to the principles to create art forms	√	√
5. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT	Demonstrate knowledge and skills of the visual and performing arts in relation to history, culture, environment, and modern society	√	√

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

**Table 5: Language and Literacy
Theme Or Strand 1: Oral Language Development
Learners' Learning Indicators**

KG1	KG2
Listen to and participate in songs and rhymes	Initiate and engage in conversation for more than one exchange
Listen to and carry out simple instructions and commands	Ask questions and seek help when something is not understood
Give simple instructions and commands	Answer questions and confirm understanding of information presented orally
Participate in conversations with peers and adults in small and large groups	Adequately express oneself verbally and nonverbally
Follow common rules during a conversation	Begin to understand and speak with correct grammar
My environment and my Health	Begin to understand and use learned vocabulary correctly when speaking
Protecting ourselves from home and road accidents	Begin to understand, discriminate, and correctly when speaking
	Produce sentences and phrases of increasing length and complexity

**Theme or Strand 2: Print Concepts
Learners' Learning Indicators**

KG1	KG2
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Understand that spoken words are represented in written language

Understand that words are separated in print

Point to individual words to track reading (illustrations)

Handle a book correctly and follow the basic concepts of print: hold the book upright, turn pages front to back, read left to right and top to bottom

Use visual information when reading (illustrations)

Identify basic components of a book (cover, back, title, author)

Theme or Strand 3: Phonological Awareness
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1

KG2

Identify the position of individual sounds in one-syllable words (beginning or end)

Recognize and create rhyming words

Recognize and create (say/make/form) words with the same initial sound

Recognize, separate and count syllables in simple spoken words

Blend syllables to make simple words

Count words in a spoken sentence

Theme or Strand 4: Phonics
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1

KG2

Repeat the letters of the alphabet in order

Begin to connect sounds with their corresponding letters

Recognize and identify letters in own local language name

Know some sight words, such as own name

Recognize and identify most letter names (at least 75% of alphabet)

Theme or Strand 5: Vocabulary
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1

KG2

Connect words orally with their usage in real life

Read level-appropriate sight words

Use context clues (i.e. pictures, situations) to infer the meanings of new words orally

Sort objects into categories orally

Use names of items common to familiar environments (classroom, home, community)

Understand and articulate the opposites of commonly occurring words

Theme or Strand: Fluency
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1**KG2**

Engage in oral storytelling based on books Identify and read your own name and “picture walks” to practice reading text.

Theme Or Strand 6: Comprehension
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1	KG2
Read” pictures stories (stories with no text)	Answer factual, inferential, and vocabulary questions about the level-appropriate text
Use pictures and other text features to aid understanding of a text	Retell level-appropriate text in your own words
Connect stories to own experiences	Use pictures and other text features to make predictions
Use background knowledge to understand a text	Actively engage in teacher-led reading activities with purpose and understanding

Theme Or Strand 8: Writing
Learners' Learning Indicators

KG1: Writing Conventions	KG2: Writing Expression
Follow basic concepts of writing: write from left to right and top to bottom	Adequately communicate visually through pictures, symbols letters, and words
Write individual letters legibly and with appropriate spacing	Write or copy familiar words including your own name
Demonstrate appropriate use of writing tools	Work with peers to generate ideas and draw pictures to show ideas
Make given patterns, trace and draw various objects	Draw objects and accurately label drawings

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019).

4.3 Discussion

Available literature reveals that an integrated thematic approach to curriculum promotes child-centered teaching and learning by providing meaningful opportunities for the teacher to engage learners in a variety of practically oriented activities that develop their potential and promote independent learning. For instance, Clayton, Hagan, Ho, and Hudis (2010) opined that an integrated thematic curriculum approach helps learners to “explore a set of topics in several standards-based academic disciplines connected by a unifying concept that reinforces learning and brings the curriculum to life. The concept that is being explored brings together various aspects of the curriculum in a meaningful way” (p.2). This implies that, in an integrated approach to teaching and learning, themes are the best tools to meaningfully integrate the curriculum content and help children to see how knowledge and skills acquired from the various subjects or disciplines can be used skilfully to solve their daily life problems wherever they find themselves. Thus, themes that best relate to learners' environment and real-life

experiences are selected, and learning contents or concepts from the various subjects or disciplines are integrated through these themes using participatory and hands-on learning activities that promote collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, and lifelong learning.

The Ghanaian standard-based is expected to provide children aged 4 and 5 memorable learning experiences through the use of an integrated thematic approach and other developmentally appropriate instructional strategies such as play and differentiated learning. It is expected to promote the holistic development of the young child, and as such, it focuses on helping children develop Ghanaian values, good social attitudes, language, and 21st-century literacy skills through integrated thematic instruction.

An integrated thematic approach to teaching and learning is endorsed by this new curriculum because the child's brain is not divided into compartments, and so, learning should not be segregated into subjects or disciplines but should rather be integrated through themes (NaCCA, 2019). This suggests that integrated thematic instruction allows learners to construct connected knowledge and understanding of themes or learning concepts across different disciplines or subjects and use that to adapt to the real world outside the classroom. This approach makes learning real and meaningful, improves retention, and skills acquisition as well as promotes the use of child-friendly assessment techniques in KG.

A critical assessment of the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum indicates that its seven (7) proposed themes (All about me, my family, Values and beliefs, my local community, my Nation Ghana, all around us, and my global community) are indeed connected to learners' everyday life. These themes provide many stimulating learning opportunities that arouse and sustain children's interest in the discipline, subject, or concepts of the day and provide them with more practice opportunities. It was observed in most schools that children were actively involved in the learning activities because the concepts they were learning relate to their individual life experiences, and are relevant to their social settings. As such, they allow them to see the relationships among content areas as well as the connection between home and school.

Within this curricular framework, under each strand, theme or learning concepts, teachers are systematically and efficiently guided. The content standard clearly defines in behavioural terms the knowledge, skill and/or attitude that learners are expected to attain in a given lesson. The performance indicator shows clearly what learners should be able to do to demonstrate that they have indeed attained the stated content standard's expectation. Also, exemplars are given to guide teachers to design learning activities that help learners to achieve the expected outcomes of a performance indicator. Thus, teachers are guided to provide children with more relevant knowledge and practical understanding of learning concepts in terms of their usefulness and application in various aspects of their lives.

Contrary to what one would have expected, further assessment of the new KG curriculum document shows that the seven (7) proposed themes (which should have flown through all 4 KG subjects) are listed only under 'Our World and our People'. All the remaining three (3)

subjects have a completely different set of themes or strands which are do not relate in any. For instance, themes expected to be treated in Numeracy are Numbers, Algebra, Geometry, and measurement and Handling data. Under Creative Arts, we have strands or themes like Media, Methods, Techniques, and Technology, Creative Expression through producing and Making, Aesthetic Perception, Elements, and principles of Design and historical Cultural Context. Oral Language Development, Print Concept, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing are the themes or strands under Language and Literacy as a subject in KG.

Furthermore, the breakdown of the curriculum content indicates that there is an attempt to integrate the curriculum around the seven (7) proposed themes or strands. For instance, under theme or strand 1: 'All about me', the first exemplar says:

"With learners seated in a big circle outside the classroom, and using "pass a ball" game, (in which learners pass a ball to their friends), learners take turns to use positive language to describe and appreciate themselves. Have them talk about themselves focusing on the uniqueness of their names, the homes they are from, their physical bodies, and how tall or short, big or small. Use the following questions to guide the learners who cannot talk fluently. E.g. What is your name? age? Gender? height? What are your likes and dislikes? etc. The teacher must model the description and scaffold the learners to do so" (NCCA, 2019, p.2).

Here the focus is on language and literacy development.

Exemplar 6 says:

"Learners are asked to draw themselves, colour it nicely, after which they scribble freely underneath. Let them talk about what they have written with friends sitting next to them in the classroom. Ask learners what they have drawn and write them on the board. e.g. What did you draw? and write it on the board or under their drawing" (NCCA, 2019, p.4). Here, Creative Arts, as well as Language and Literacy skills, are taught.

Under the 2nd sub-strands: 'The part of the human body and their function', the 4th exemplar says:

"Learners sing three different songs, clap to the rhythm and count the number of parts they hear in the songs. E.g. My head, my shoulder, my knee. (3 names). Help them understand that the last number names are the number of objects or items counted" (NCCA, 2019, p.7). Here the development of Numeracy skills is the focus.

Again, under the third sub-strand: 'Caring for the part of my body' the 2nd exemplar:

"Guide learners to count the materials used to clean the body (e.g. soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, sponge, etc.) seen in the video clip and/or those listed on the board. Classify the cleaning materials according to their colours" (NCCA, 2019, p.10), Numeracy and Creative Arts skills are taught here.

All these are examples of intradisciplinary integration occurring within Our World and Our People as skills from the other three (3) subject areas or disciplines (Numeracy, Creative Arts, Language, and literacy) are taught within a single subject, Our-World-Our-People (OWOP).

This means that two types of thematic integrations mentioned in the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum (intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary) are all occurring within a single subject, Our-World-Our-People. This is because, the focus of this new KG curriculum seems to be on only one content area, subject, or discipline (Our World our People) with no explicit lessons on how subject-specific skills embedded in the various themes or strands, sub-strands, and content standards in the other three (3) subjects (Numeracy, Creative Arts, and Language and literacy) could be taught or developed through the proposed seven (7) themes and used to enrich other lessons, content areas, subjects or disciplines.

Again, with the proposed intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary thematic integrations, a variety of subject-specific skills are expected to develop within a single lesson, content area, subject, or discipline and integrated into other lessons, content areas, subjects, or disciplines to broaden children's knowledge and understanding of concepts taught in the classroom and help them appreciate the relevance and applicability in real-life situations. However, it was observed that many teachers teach only subject-specific skills within a lesson. There is little or no effort made to intentionally teach other subjects' skills or learning concepts within a different subject area. For instance, teaching numeracy skills in Language and Literacy or numeracy or literacy skills in OWOP or Creative Art, and vis versa. With the exception of Creative Art skills that are featured in all other subject areas or disciplines (usually in the form of homework where learners are asked to draw and colour), most teachers were observed teaching concepts or skills within their subject areas or disciplines where they are expected to be taught or develop. That is, literacy skills in Language and Literacy, numeracy skills in Numeracy, and OWOP concepts related are also taught in OWOP.

Conclusion

At the end of this evaluation, we arrive at the conclusion that on one hand, the intradisciplinary thematic integration is a reality in theory and practice within the curricular framework of the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum, occurring in Our World and Our People, as a fusion of multiple subject areas into one. On the other hand, the interdisciplinary thematic integration is demonstrated only through the use of Creative Art activities given to learners as homework in all four (4) subject areas in KG. Interdisciplinary thematic integration hardly occurs intentionally with the remaining three (3) subjects. This is because the Ghanaian KG curriculum does not explicitly say how subject-specific skills embedded in the themes or strands, sub-strands, and content standards from other subjects are supposed to be integrated, taught, and developed in each subject area or discipline.

Recommendations

1. Contribution to Practice

To achieve an effective integrated thematic curriculum instruction using the current Ghanaian new KG curriculum document, teachers should maintain the seven (7) proposed themes under ‘Our World our People’ as the broad issues or themes and cave subject-specific strands and sub-strands from them to cover other aspects of the broad themes. This will help them to focus on specific knowledge and skills acquisition which could be integrated into the various content areas, subjects, or disciplines through well-designed learning activities, instructional approaches, and developmentally appropriate teaching aids that promote purposive play, practical, collaborative, and lifelong learning.

Also, the proposed themes in the other three (3) subjects (Numeracy, Creative Arts, and Language and Literacy) should be seen as subject-specific knowledge and skills that teachers need to inculcate in children. As such, teachers should develop sub-themes under the proposed seven (7) broad themes (under ‘Our World our People’) and set lesson objectives that can achieve these subject-specific knowledge and skills. For instance, let's look at teaching ‘Numbers’ (which is the first theme under Numeracy) under the first broad theme ‘All about me’, which first two (2) sub-themes in KG1 are (K1.1.1) ‘I am a wonderful and unique creation’ and (K1.1.2) ‘The parts of the human body and their functions’. The teacher can have ‘Counting things around me’ as a sub-strand with daily lesson objectives such as: (1) Identify and count members of my family; (2) Identify and count things in my bedroom; (3) Identify and count things in our living room, kitchen, compound, etc.; (4) identify and count the parts of my body; (5) Identify and count my fingers and toes, etc.

In Creative Arts, the teacher can look at (1) Identify my first best colours; (2) Identify the colours of the things in my bedroom; (3) Trace and colour my favourite toy; (4) Trace and colour the parts of the human body, etc.

In Language and Literacy, the teacher can develop a nice text or story on ‘I am a wonderful and unique creation’ and use that to teach all the components of language and literacy (Oral Language Development, Print Concept, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing).

Again, teachers need to rewrite the KG curriculum to suit learners’ social context and meet the learning needs of their individual KG classes. This suggests that every KG teacher must break down the curriculum content into his/her personal scheme of work by developing themes or strands and sub-themes or sub-strands around the seven (7) proposed broad themes which reflect the learning objectives of the various subjects. This scheme of work should be developed for each of the four (4) KG subjects or disciplines to explore all aspects of the broad themes as they apply to the children's daily life. This will serve as a reference document and a guide that will keep the teacher focused on specific knowledge and skills development while demonstrating the connections among subjects or disciplines and between the school and the home.

2. Contribution to Policy

The curriculum developers' idea of integrated thematic curriculum instruction was great, but was not effectively demonstrated in the Ghanaian KG standard-based curriculum document. There is therefore the need for the Ghana Education Service to organise training sessions for KG teachers to equip them with the practical knowledge and understanding of this wonderful instructional strategy.

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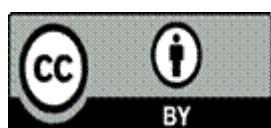
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