

Early Childhood Education for the Pre-School Age Going Children: The Issue of Low Enrolments in Kenya

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Abstract

There is a continuous trend of low enrolments of children in Early Childhood Education Centers in Kenya. Failure to adequately meet pre-school children's basic needs such as food, water and health care has resulted to low enrolment of children in the pre-school centers. As a consequence we have swelling numbers of children not enrolled in the Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Enrolment, pre-school children, pre-school, Kenya

Introduction

Achieving education for all is among the goals set by the government of Kenya and particularly making enrolment in Early Childhood Development programs compulsory for all school age going children (Millennium Development Goal's, 2005). It is viewed that education is the best single development investment a country can make. Education contributes to better health, higher incomes and increased enrolment in the community life (KIE, 2002). One of the important national policies for the Kenya government is the provision of basic needs for her citizens. Currently, this might not be the case since a large percentage (65 %) of the pre-school children in Kenya is not attending the early childhood education. Pre-school enrolment in Kenya is even much lower when compared to other countries, (in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, the Central Asia and South and West Asia), (MDG's, 2005). The goal to make enrolment in early childhood education compulsory has not been achieved.

In this article I shall provide an overview of Early Childhood Education in Kenya and the issue of low enrolment among the pre-school age going children in Early Childhood Education centers.

Enrolment of Children in Early Childhood Education in Kenya

Pre-school enrolment is especially low in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa; Arab States, Central Asia and South and West Asia, while those in Latin America, Caribbean region, North America and Western Europe regions have generally higher levels of enrolment (Weikart, Montie & Xiang, 2004). Kenya in contrast to other countries of the world such as; North America, Western Europe, Latin America, Caribbean, East Asia, Central Asia and South and West Asia, the Pacific, central and Eastern Europe, and the sub-Saharan Africa, has a low enrolment (35%) of pre-school age children. In Kenya, 20% of the population is children aged between 0-5 years and only 35% of these pre-school age going children attend pre-school. Similarly, a large percentage of children who enroll for class one in primary school do not pass through ECD programs (MoEST, 2003). This fact in itself undermines the importance of pre-school education which clearly stipulates the need for providing pre-schoolers with a firm foundation for primary education, future learning and personality development through pre-school education cannot be over emphasized. Especially the large percentage of children in Kenya who are not attending pre-school education; 65% of them in the whole country (MDG's, 2005).

General Objectives for Pre-school Education in Kenya

The Ministry of Education (1989), states and describes pre-school education objectives as:

- i) To provide an informal education geared towards developing the child's mental capabilities and physical growth
- ii) To enable the child to build good habits for effective living as an individual and a member of a group.
- iii) To develop a child's imagination, self reliance and thinking skills
- iv) To enrich the child's experience so as to enable him to cope better with primary school life.

These objectives bring about the benefits of pre-school education. Many children miss out on the stated benefits since they do not attend pre-schools. This paper contends that, the issue of low enrolments in Early Childhood Education needs to be systematically established and explained so as to reduce the high numbers of children not enrolled in pre-schools.

Educational Needs for Pre-school Children

The National Policy of Kenya is that every child has a right to education and it is the responsibility of both the government and parents to ensure that this right is met. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) embraced education as a basic human right (CRC, 1989) as cited in the (World Conference on Education for All, 1990). The Children's Act passed by the Kenya government in 2001 as cited in KIE, 2002 considers provision of basic education as a basic human right that every Kenyan child should enjoy. In this view, children's education has been and continues to be of paramount concern. Despite this understanding the numbers of children not attending the pre-school education is on the increase in Kenya.

Pre-school education is an important aspect of basic education that provides a sound foundation for primary education and personality development which can make all the difference in the child's future (MoEST, 2006), & Wilson (2004). The government was making intervention anchored on both policy and legal framework to ensure that free education covers the ECD sector since pre-school education was not free until the announcement in January, 2007. This should have increased the pre-school enrolment and retention rates since it was initially a parents responsibility to pay pre-school children's fees which was anticipated to be free after the government through the former Vice President Honorable Moody Awori announced that Pre-school Education in Kenya was to be free (Bosire 2007) However, This announcement was not implemented. This means that parents of pre-schooler's are still faced with difficulties in providing not only children's educational needs but; learning materials which include books, pencils, crayons, plasticine, colors, uniform, paying for the school feeding program, paying the teacher's salary among others, as well as providing them with their basic needs. Currently the Kenyan shilling has declined against the dollar and this has led to a more costly lifestyle making it impossible for the parent who is already experiencing financial constraints or hardships to meet the educational needs of the pre-school child.

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