

The Challenges Facing the Implementation of Early Childhood Development and Education Policy in Bungoma County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper scrutinises the challenges facing the implementation of Early Childhood Development and Education policy in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study used a mixed research design and study population comprised of the QASOs, the Head teachers, ECDE teachers and the non-teaching staff in respective ECDCs. The sample size of the study comprised of 9 QUASOs, 27 head teachers, 81 teachers of ECDE and 27 non-teaching staff from selected public primary schools in the study region. The study utilised simple random sampling, stratified and purposive sampling. The tools for data collection comprised of the questionnaire, focussed group, interview schedule, observation and document analysis schedules. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data used content analysis procedures. The study identified a number of challenges including: inadequacy of teaching and learning resources, financial constraints, and lack of government good will, poor training of ECDE teachers, insecurity, high pupil-teacher ratio, poor teacher remunerations and the introduction of FPE. The study recommends that: the Counties and Central government should fund the ECDE, the central government should hire ECDE teachers on permanent and pensionable terms; QASOs should be facilitated to cover vast areas with ease and increase the number of visits to the ECDCs; the Education and lastly, the government should train non-teaching staff on safety operations and above all hire a qualified nurse for every ECDE centre.

Key words: *Challenges, Policy, Implementation.*

1.1 Introduction

Wangechi, (2012), states that the Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) make a positive contribution to a child's long-term development and learning. It facilitates an enabling and stimulating environment in foundation stages of lifelong learning. A shaky foundation subsequently affects the child's opportunity for holistic learning and growth. She asserts that Early Childhood Development (ECD) refers to the care, development, and learning of young children of ages 0 to 5 years and consists of the following major services: Nursery School, Pre-Unit Class, Kindergarten, Day Nursery, Playgroup, Madrassa, and Home-Based Care Centres. Elliot, (2006), in his article "pathways to the quality and equity for all children", states that the early years to children's life are essential without any question. A good beginning to Elliot is well recognised as the foundation for future development, health and well-being not only in early years but throughout life.

In East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda), governments have long recognized the importance of ECDE for later school success, although programs have largely been funded not by governments but by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and International charitable agencies. GoK, (2012), also brings out the essence of early years of the child. According to the world conference on Education for All (EFA) that took place in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990, early years are significant as a foundation for the life of an individual. The deliberation has been upheld by research on brain development especially (Shore, 2013; Mustard, 2013; O'Donnell, 2013; Stephen, 2014), which stresses that the six years of life are extremely important. This is because the environmental experiences during this period are significant in influencing one's life.

The government through session paper No. 1 of 2005, a policy Framework on "Education, Training and Research," recommended the development of a comprehensive ECDE policy framework and service standard guidelines. The policy provides a co-ordination mechanism and explicitly defines the roles of parents, communities, various government ministries and departments, development partners and other stakeholders in the provision of ECDE services. Development of this policy framework has taken into cognizance the critical role of investing in young children in order to achieve the MDGs, Poverty

eradication, child mortality rate and morbidity, universal school enrolment, maternal mortality and creation of gender equality.

The MOE in the GOK, (2006), said that implementation of this policy would ensure enhanced financing, access, quality, equity and efficient management of ECDE services. This would put development of infants and young children as an urgent priority in the development agenda of our country Kenya. Karanja, (2015), states that, the policy makes it clear that by 2010, the ECDE programme should be mainstreamed into primary education. It shall be two compulsory years at the school and the government shall take responsibility of employing teachers at this level, play a role of registering ECDE institutions, supervisions of ECDE services, training and employment of ECDE personnel among others.

In St Kitts and Nevis in the USA, the state has a strong tradition in the area of ECDE development , (UNESCO, 2014). According to UNESCO, (2014), despite the state's achievements in policy implementation, there are still obstacles that stand in the way. Challenges experienced include limited technical/ human resource capacity which has led to delays in meeting some targets such as completion of various building projects by public works department, the movement of key personnel through transfer, retirement or voluntary departure, lack of appropriate institutional framework which makes inter-sectorial collaboration difficult and funding by donors. Cuts in funding from major donors contributed to delays.

The 2003 introduction of free primary education (FPE) negatively affected the ECDE programs in Kenya. Parents and other stakeholders have a feeling that ECDE is not a government priority and hence many parents have pulled out their children to stay at home, until they are of age to join FPE. Other parents have failed to pay fees for the pre-school administrators. This has affected the feeding programme and ECDE salaries. The prior enthusiasms that had been instilled in parents, teachers and other stakeholders on ECDE have declined, (Karanja, 2015). Xinxhua, (2013), in an article posted on the internet said that the Kenyan government had plans for ECDE to be mainstreamed into the primary cycle by the year 2010. Mainstreaming would make it easy to monitor the centres, where children will be joining from the age of four, and hence a comfortable transition from the centres to Standard 1. Over 20,000 teachers would be employed for nursery schools. It said that the proposal to have funds for mainstreaming early childhood development centres (ECDCs) was already on the table.

However, this was contradicted by the ministry, which said the programme to be mainstreamed, was hampered by lack of resources, but noted that its proposals had been presented before the Treasury, to have it incorporated in the next fiscal budget. On the contrary, efforts by the Ministry of Education to make Early Childhood Development Education part of the primary school system flopped in 2010. It is therefore for this reason that the paper seeks to establish the challenges affecting the implementation of the early childhood development and education policy in Kenya.

1.2 Problem Formulation

In spite of the great importance associated with the early childhood Development and Education, very little effort is being made to uphold this. UNESCO, (2006) asserts that, the government's interest in pre-school programs has dwindled. Many pre-school programs located previously in primary schools have been closed thus making mainstreaming impossible. On the other hand, Garcia *et al*, (2008), says that the idea of registering ECDCs by the government has suffered a big blow. This has been occasioned by the mushrooming of ECDCs in different parts of the country at rates never seen before. The government of Kenya is involved minimally in the establishment of ECDCs. This is evident by the number of ECDCs compared to those of the primary Schools in any given County. For instance, Bungoma County has 1,655 ECDCs compared to 990 Primary schools. Similarly, Mombasa County has more ECDCs compared to primary schools; 770 and 550 ECDCs and Primary schools respectively. Parents and other non-professionals are responsible for planning, developing and managing different early childhood programs.

On the other hand, in spite of the great importance and available literature studies have accorded ECDE, not much has been since done to enhance this programme of ECDE policy in Kenya. The question is why is it so? What could be the cause of this insensitivity? What could be hindering the investment in this field? What should be done? Nyakwara, (2014), asserts that areas of research in ECDE that have elicited concern for research include child rearing practices (Ray, 2011), transition from pre-school to primary, community involvement in the early childhood programmes (Atmore, 2011), challenges and solutions of ECDE programs in Kenya (Karanja and Githinji, 2011), current issues in ECDE in Kenya, (Felicity & Kanga, 2011), progress and prospects of Early Education in Ethiopia and Bridging Culture, Research and Practice in Education (Hoot,

Szente, & Mebratu, 2011). Mwaura and Marfo, (2013), looked at what child rearing practices are and the indulgence of parents in these practices. Similarly, (Ray, 2011) echo similar ideas by discussing the effects of parent's indulgence in child rearing practices.

From the above examples, there is a clear indication that little research has been carried out on challenges especially at regional and even national levels. Most literature review in this study has been derived from outside Kenya. It is hence clear that more research needs to be carried out on challenges facing ECDE policy implementation in Kenya with reference to challenges in Bungoma County which forms the thrust of discussion in this research paper.

2.1 Challenges facing ECDE.

According to Chalamanda, (2013), National Coordinator for ECD based in the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare and Community Services entered the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) program at a time when the government of Malawi was considering enacting a National Policy on Early Childhood Development. That policy, and a policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children, were approved by Cabinet in February 2003 and officially launched March 1, 2004, (UNESCO, 2004). Chalamanda's work focused on an essential key to forward movement in ECD in African countries: He further stated that not only must policies be developed, but action plans must be developed, coordinated, monitored and updated as needed in order for the intent of the policies to be realized.

Chalamanda saw NAP as central to the future of ECD in Malawi and chose it as the focus of his major project in order to: Identify strategies that facilitate implementation of the ECD policies and other sectoral strategic plans, outline mechanisms, processes and strategies for coordinating the development and implementation of the NAP and outline operational linkages and networks between the two policies and other existing child care policies, sectoral strategic plans and institutions.

Towards the completion of his major project work, Chalamanda flagged the following as some of the significant challenges he faced in his coordination work: limited number of committed partners taking part in the development of the NAP, limited capacity of some partners to follow systematically the agreed-upon framework, achieving synergy across the 12 thematic areas of the NAP is challenging, some partners were challenged by the role of children and caregivers in the process of developing the NAP and Inadequate resources in terms of funds, transport, books, stationary and computers to be used by the partners in their work.

The challenges noted in Malawi have a familiar ring: a small nucleus of concerned, committed and informed individuals; bureaucratic challenges to working across sectors; inadequate resources of various types; inadequate knowledge in the public domain regarding the importance of ECD; marginalized importance of ECD within government.

According to Manoj, (2011), in spite of the great importance ECDE has on the child, there have been challenges that to some extent have crippled this kind of education. This could be negatively affecting the child. The major challenges that were identified in this study are human resource capacity, resource support monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and other challenges of the policy's implementation. This paper, in the next section, will therefore discuss the factors that have influenced the implementation of the ECDE policy in Kenya. It will also look at some other States and assess how they have overcome these challenges to make the ECDE policies work for them.

2.1.1 Early Childhood Development and Educational Funding

Financial support is central for any programme to assume shape. ECD investments should be increased to expand service coverage, improve services, and ensure they are sustainable, high in quality and cost-effective. Indicators measuring investments as inputs and their outputs and outcomes should be included, (Vargas-Baron, 2013). Early Childhood Education receives very little funding in Kenya. Manoj, (2011), has observed that funding in Kenya is only through payment of ECDE teachers' trainers. The parents who have been the main sponsors of the programme run many ECDCs.

Parents are supposed to pay fees for their children. It is out of these funds that the teachers of ECDE are paid, facilities acquired and any other necessary resources be availed to the teachers. Because of poverty and even negativity of attitude towards the programme, many parents do not pay these services and hence making it difficult for the learners to access quality education, (Manoj, 2011). He also associates high costs of ECDE and

Primary education provided by Private ECDCs and primary schools to have posed a big challenge to learners in public ECDCs and public primary schools. They cannot afford the amount and hence still get poor quality education from institutions that are not well funded. According to white paper on Education and Training (1995), inadequate funding of ECDE for Black communities has resulted in ECDE in these communities to be characterized by lack of financial resources for salaries for practitioners, equipment and food for children. It has also lead to de-motivation of ECDE staff and high turnover of non-formally trained ECDE practitioners.

Leslie, (2014), in his article “Early Childhood for all; the Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education”, says that in the time of scarce resources, the care and education of young children will continue to fall to the bottom of the priority list until there is a shift in the public about the economics of raising the next generation. He asserts that quality of education for early childhood is too vital to be brushed aside as a social service, too expensive to consider in tight budgetary times. Investments in quality childcare and early childhood education do more than pay significant returns to our future citizens and they benefit taxpayer and enhance economic vitality.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), made a declaration on Education for All (EFA) by 2015. Early Childhood Development Education is the first formal agent of socialization. Kibera and Kamotte, (2013), call the attention of all stakeholders to critically address the challenges related to issues of access, equity, quality and relevance of ECDE programmes. However, the private sector seems to have monopolized most of the ECDE centres compared to the government. Thus, the public education sector opportunities for ECDE are lacking, yet available data shows that at later formal education primary schools, public education caters for well over 90% of Kenya’s school going age. This paper therefore questions why the public education sector is missing out in this very important domain of education in its children at this tender age. Efforts by the Ministry of Education to make Early Childhood Development Education part of the primary school system flopped in 2010 due to financial constraints.

According to Karanja and Githinji, (2011), ECDE is currently facing challenges related to the funding, policy formulation, low participation rates of target age groups including special learners, lack of curriculum content informed by research based data, inadequate qualified educators, lack of schemes of service for educators, rising number of orphans, conflict in medium of instruction among others. Further, of importance to note is that lack of the Ministry’s funding and implementation initiatives complicates the provision of ECDE. Lack of support for Early Childhood Education (ECD) has led to the transfer of early childhood lessons to the primary section because many parents are not willing to pay any money for ECD while FPE is free, (Kariuki, 2014). He has observed that despite the great essence that ECDE carries, the government has always concentrated to offering FPE. Despite FPE, lack of support for ECDE has led to the transfer of Early Childhood lessons to the Primary section because many parents are not willing to pay any money for ECD while there is FPE.

Odundo,(2013), in his paper “Determinants of Effective policy Implementation in Early childhood Development and Education in Nakuru municipality”, asserts that limited institutional capacity is a hindrance to proper implementation of Early Childhood Development and Education policy. The quality of instructional material is unreliable, inadequate, and therefore poses as a significant challenge affecting the implementation of ECDE program

2.1.2 Policy, Training, and Pedagogy

According to Gardener, many schools in Nigeria lack ICTs laboratories and collective equipment. They also lack libraries which are critical to student success especially given the fact that a majority of the student population does not have access to reading materials at home. The school library is, therefore, the only space where they can access reading materials besides the required textbooks. Obviously, students, who cannot read or write effectively, cannot be successful in examinations or in school more generally just as teachers cannot teach students with low literacy and numeracy levels, Gharam, (2010). This is also a case that prevails in Kenya. Teachers in Kenya go through the same. They have no ability to handle the large classes especially in public ECDCs which is an alternative to poor parents who can not afford high ECDE costs in Private ECDCs.

2.1.3 Teacher Welfare and Empowerment

In every education system, low morale and motivation often leads to poor teacher performance Udofot, (2013) in (Egbo, 2013). This sentiment has been echoed by Egbo, (2013). He asserts that in Nigerian education system, teachers are the most distressed and the most de-motivated in the world from pre- primary to the tertiary level. He alludes this happens right from the time they are recruited into the profession through their training to the period of deployment. Even when they retire from the service they are not paid their retirement entitlement. This

phenomenon does not only affect their job performance as the Nigerian teacher but also their psyche, (Udofot, 2013).

2.1.4 Capacity of ECDE Teachers in Kenya

Several things have affected the teachers' capacity building in Kenya. Firstly, there is lack of Schemes of Service of ECDE teachers. There has been low and irregular remuneration of pre-school teachers thus adversely affecting the morale of the teachers. Several studies have been carried out and it has been discovered that teachers' motivation is hampered by low pay and benefits as well as lack of professional development avenues. This is according to (Makoti, 2013), (Gumo, 2013), in (Karanja and Githinji, 2011). Secondly, inadequacy of ECDE qualified teachers in Kenya is also to blame for lack of teacher Capacity. The number of untrained teachers in ECDCs is still high at 56% in Public ECDE centres. Due to high rate of attrition because of poor pay packages, many pre-school teachers are untrained and hence lack skills to enhance the holistic development and learning of children, Karanja and Githinji, (2011).

According to UNESCO (2004), teachers' remuneration is poor for majority of the teachers. The salary ranges between KES 500 and 18,000 per month based on urban- rural divide and who pays salaries. The private owners of ECDCs in major towns like Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu and Nakuru pay trained teachers with certificate or diploma an average of 10,000 per month. The municipal council teachers are paid salaries ranging from 13,000-18000 per month. The teachers who teach in rural and slum-based, public and community get salaries that range from 500 to 3500 per month.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods design. This approach combines both qualitative and quantitative forms, (Sekaran, 2013). The study adapted pragmatic philosophical paradigm thus lending itself to mixed method where data was collected through a set of questionnaire, interview schedules, document analysis schedule, and observation schedule.

4.0 Findings and discussion

Based on the data from the focussed group discussion, questionnaires, document analysis and observation schedules, the following findings were established on the challenges influencing the implementation of early Childhood Development and education policy in Kenya. Respondents were required to respond to set questions related to challenges and give their opinions.

Table 4.1 Challenges Facing the Implementation of ECDE Policy in Bungoma County.

	Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The school has qualified and experienced ECDE teachers	102	4.06	.854
There is high pupil-teacher ratio	102	3.94	1.249
The school has sufficient learning resources	102	3.26	1.185
The school has sufficient classrooms	102	2.97	1.837
The school is well funded by the government	102	2.22	1.513
Families are a source of funding to the ECDCs	102	3.96	.964
ECDCs are funded by social organizations and NGOs	102	3.69	.954
There are enough furniture for children at the ECDE Centre	102	3.32	1.321
The school has enough ECDE teachers	102	3.54	1.264
The ECDE Centre has enough playground for the pupils	102	3.41	1.120
The school has sufficient play materials	102	2.90	.990
The teachers of ECDE are paid in relation to their qualification	102	4.02	.689
Valid N (list wise)	102		

On challenges, the study results revealed that there is inadequate teaching and learning resources, financial constraints leading to ineffective implementation of the policy, and high pupil-teacher ratio with poor remunerations. There is also lack of government good will as far as funding of the ECDE programmes and poor training of teachers of ECDE. Inadequate essential facilities like classrooms, desks, chairs, and the tables are also a big challenge some children learnt from the floor. Finally, the play facilities like playgrounds, swings, slides, among others are also a major challenge to most ECDCs, since they are either missing or do not meet the standards required. They included poor remuneration, insufficient teaching/learning resources, inadequate teaching/learning facilities, diverse culture, and job insecurity since they are hired by the individual schools. The teachers of ECDE alluded that the government had no plan for them. They stated that each individual ECDE centre had their own plans of employing the teachers. This had seen the teachers of ECDE to be very poorly remunerated. It was upon the individual centres to decide how much they had to be paid. In line with this, the teachers also lamented over insufficient teaching /learning resources. They indicated that the centres hardly provide them with reference materials making their instructional process very difficult.

These challenges are not new. Many studies carried out by researchers in their areas of study faced the same challenges. Manoj, (2011), states that funding was one of the major challenges of implementation of any programme. Vargas-Baron (2013) echoed this. Leslie, (2014), mentions resources as one of the hindrances to ECDE stagnation. According to the Social Journal Policy of New Zealand, (2015 issue 32), funding is a very big obstacle to policy implementation. Otieno and Colclough, (2014), affirm the same. On the other hand, Kariuki, (2014), associates failure of the ECDE policy implementation in Kenya with lack of support by the government. Xinhua, (2013), in one of the dailies, states that ECDE curriculum is not taking effect because of the financial constraints. On the contrary, Kibera and Kamotte (2013), insinuate that the policy implementation is very much affected by access, equity, quality and relevance of the ECDE programme. Finally, Karanja and Githinji, (2011), associate non-implementation of the ECDE programme with insufficient funding, poor policy formulation, low participation rates by the target groups, lack of curriculum content, inadequate qualified educators, lack of scheme of service, rising number of orphans and conflict in medium of instruction. From these references therefore, it is true to say that, these challenges are related.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study results revealed that there is inadequate teaching and learning resources financial constraints leading to ineffective implementation of the policy, and high pupil-teacher ratio with poor remunerations. There is also lack of government good will as far as funding of the ECDE programmes. Inadequate essential facilities like classrooms, desks, chairs, and the tables are also a big challenge some children learnt from the floor. Finally, the play facilities like playgrounds, swings, slides, among others are also a major challenge to most ECDCs, since they are either missing or do not meet the standards required.

The study recommends that the Counties and Central government should fund the ECDE, the central government should hire ECDE teachers on permanent and pensionable terms; QASOs should be facilitated to cover vast areas with ease and increase the number of visits to the ECDCs; the Education and lastly, the government should train non-teaching staff on safety operations and above all hire a qualified nurse for every ECDE centre.

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