

Enhancing Young Children's Access to Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study explored the current situation of limited access of young children to early childhood education and care settings in Tanzania. The aim was to explore the views of stakeholders regarding the basis for this anomaly and what needs to be done to assuage the situation. A total of 28 people participated in the study: six teachers, 12 children, and four parents in one rural and one urban pre-school (local level) and six national government education officials. Data was generated through interviews, classroom observation, focus group discussion, documentary review, and informal conversations. The findings showed that early childhood education and care in Tanzania is still unsatisfactory. Many children, the participants agreed, have no access to early childhood settings for various reasons including "lack of support from the government", "low socio-economic status of parents", "traditional norms and cultural values", "gender discrimination", and "lack of parents' awareness of the importance of early investment in education." To improve the situation, it is recommended that there is need for a forging of partnership between the government, parents, and the community. Government policy makers should set clear policies regarding how quality early childhood education and care can be equitably funded and conducted throughout the country.

Keywords: Tanzania; Access in Pre-School Centres; Early Childhood Education and Care; Parents and Community Involvement; Quality Education in Pre-School Centres; Young Children

Abbreviations: ECEC: Early childhood education and care

Introduction

Indeed, this study was inspired by the current situation of limited access of young children to early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings in Tanzania. Parents/guardians and community at large have negative attitude in regard to early investment, they perceive investing in ECEC like a waste of money [1]. In this regard, their complains include the notion that children who have access to the ECEC centre just go there to take porridge, sing and play and their parents pay for these. They argue that at that early age parents and the community should serve as the teachers of ECEC children, until the children grow to the primary school age.

It is imperative that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is recognised within education as the foundation for lifelong learning [2,3]. Numerous countries across the world recognise that education in the early years lays down the basis for all levels of education. In developing countries, such as Tanzania the situation of education for young children is not satisfactory [4-6]. There are large numbers of children who do not have access to ECEC settings for a number of reasons including lack of support from the government, low socio-economic status of parents, traditional norms and cultural values, gender discrimination, and lack of awareness of parents of the impor-

tance of early investment. It is recognised by the World Declaration on Education for All, and the Framework for Action, that education is a child's right [7,8], and it needs to be valued from early childhood. It is therefore of the highest priority that access to ECEC services is enabled for all young children. It is within these early years that young children present the greatest ability to learn and develop. All efforts to develop education from the early years onwards should pay consideration to access, relevance, and quality provision, to enable children to reach their full potential [4,6,9].

The situation of ECEC in Tanzania is alarming. A report by UNICEF [10] documented that children in Tanzania lack access to education provision, public health services, including vaccinations, clean water, and sanitation. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world [11]. One of the main focuses is to control infectious diseases, such as malaria, typhoid, and AIDS/HIV. These diseases result in a high number of orphaned children who are sometimes simply left on the side of the streets to care for themselves. According to the statistics from UNICEF [12], in Tanzania approximately 11 out of 16 people (68%) of the population live below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day, 21% of all children are forced into child labour, approximately two out of every eight children and one child out of approximately 28 children is HIV/AIDS positive (1.7 million total) [11,12]. The maternal mortality rate in Tanzania is among the highest in the world, being 1 in 38 births [12]. This situation leads to the high number of orphaned babies [13], who are rarely taken in by orphanages due to the high cost and effort required to raise a baby (in comparison to a young child or teen). Briefly, the situation in Tanzania is dire and unacceptable for the welfare of its people. Families live in poverty especially in rural areas and cannot manage to send their children to early childhood education and care centres [14], for which a large monetary contribution is required. Visible high youth unemployment and rising income disparities between the haves and the have-nots could upset further economic and social progress unless urgent action is taken to address them.

Tanzania is blessed with a variety of natural resources that include areas of land, mountains, forests, national parks/wildlife, rivers, lakes, coastal zone, fisheries, minerals, coal and natural gas. Some of the natural resources, such as fisheries and minerals are being commercially exploited, and contribute significantly to the country's economic growth [15]. Despite the rich resources, Tanzania is still a poor country with unsustainable harvesting of natural resources. Yet, effective management and good mobilisation of natural resources could benefit the nation at large and would enable people to send their children to pre-schools and other levels of education. To bring about such change there is a need for an economic evaluation of key natural resources to be conducted, and for appropriate strong guidelines to promote the prioritization, and implementation of natural resources management regulations [15]. This would produce an effective framework for environmental fiscal reform as a tool to increase public finances through natural resources management and may enable young children to have access to early education centres.

In Tanzania, various reports indicate that the allocation of funds and resources by the government departments do not arrive at the people who need them, the education sector included, [10,11,15]. As a result, individual people/parents have to support education of their children using their pocket money which they may not manage to fulfil the needs and interests of children's learning and development. Again, the few previous studies conducted in Tanzania in the early years area observed dissatisfaction with ECEC provision and a lack of access of children to the pre-school centres. The studies recommended further studies to be conducted in this area in order to explore more about the situation and the access of children to pre-school centres. For example, a study by Kweka, Binagi, and Kainamula [16] about the situation of ECEC, a case of Temeke district in Tanzania, another study by Mwinuka [17] about the quality of pre-school education provision, and a study by Mtahabwa [18] who investigated pre-primary education policy and practices, where similar findings were obtained as those of the above-mentioned studies. With this in mind, this article intends to explore the enhancement of young children's access to early childhood education and care settings in Tanzania. What is the current situation of ECEC in Tanzania? What is happening in Tanzanian ECEC centres? The researcher of the current study is unclear if the situation of ECEC and accessibility has improved. Consequently, the principal objective of this study was to explore the views of stakeholders regarding the basis for this anomaly and what needs to be done to assuage the situation. The intention was to promote the optimal development of the resources and capabilities of each African child, particularly the Tanzanian child. For that matter, this paper was designed to explore the question about how optimal

enhancement of young children's access to early childhood education and care settings in Tanzania could be achieved. It is believed that one way of making progress in this regard is to assess the current situation of affairs in the Tanzanian ECEC centres.

The intention is to gain knowledge and understanding of the roles of the Tanzanian government in supporting ECEC provision and development at present, the degree of enrolment of children in ECEC settings, parents' awareness of the importance of early education for their children as well as to identify the expectations and aspirations of parents enrolling their children in ECEC settings. The paper concludes with suggestions for areas for future research in Tanzania in the field of ECEC.

Specifically, this study addresses the following three research questions:

1. What are the roles of the Tanzanian government in ECEC provision and development?
2. What is the degree of enrolment of children and parents' awareness of early year's education?
3. What are the expectations and aspirations of parents for enrolling their children in ECEC settings?

By answering these fundamental questions, the study hoped to describe the current situation of ECEC in Tanzania, availability of access and what should be done for better education provision, and to shed light more generally on the interplay of access and quality provision. It is the role of the government to prioritise access to ECEC for all children as it is important for healthy development, nutrition and hygiene, social-emotional and physical development and impacts on a sustainable future. This study uses the terms pre-school and early childhood education and care interchangeably.

Materials and Methods

This study as an interpretive study employs a case study design (Yin 2003), to explore the current situation of ECEC and access of children in the learning centres in Tanzania. An interpretivist methodology is used because of its potential to generate rich data (Sarantakos 2005) on how the participants viewed the situation of ECEC provision and children's access to the settings. This study is an outcome of the main thesis study conducted in Tanzania which investigated "Impediments to Effective Enactment of Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum and Pedagogy in Tanzania: Issues and Experiences of Teachers and Parents in Urban and Rural Pre-Schools". The main study elicited views based on three groups of participants: the teachers, ECEC children, and parents in one rural and one urban school (local level) and government education officials (national level). It had a total of 28 participants (13 were males and 15 were females), whereby six were teachers (three from each pre-school setting), four parents (two from each setting), and 12 ECE children (six from each setting) at the local level. The national level comprised six government education officials. Teachers in the sample were selected by the Head Teacher of the particular school, and the criteria were; teachers teaching a pre-school class and willing to participate in the study. For parents the criterion was any parent and/or guardian who, it was felt could work with the researcher in her study and they were selected by Head Teachers who sent out letters of invitation. Many parents were invited but on the day of the meeting only two parents in each school turned up. Indeed, working with only two parents in each school, it might have limited a wider overview in regard to children's limited access in ECEC as well as the validity of results. Parents are directly involved with the education of their children. They would be expected to have more experience concerning the challenges on accessibility and the learning of their children.

Data Collection

The data generation on the main study occurred from April 2013 to September 2013. The month of April was mainly used for communication with study areas and for building rapport before interviews. Head Teachers were interviewed twice, the second time as a follow-up to fill gaps noticed after the analysis of the first interview. Each interview lasted for 40 - 55 minutes for each Head Teacher. On the other hand, classroom teachers were interviewed three times. The interviews, varied in duration from 45 to 60 minutes, and were conducted in

the pre-schools during work hours. Parents were interviewed once, for between 40 and 45 minutes, at their home with appointments or at school when they were collecting their children. All the study participants gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded with a voice recorder. To conceal the identity of the study participants, no names were recorded on the audio-tapes.

Data Analysis

The data of this study was qualitative in nature. After completing the data generation, the exercise of transcription started. The voice recorder that contained interview data was carefully listened to and transcriptions were made. Thereafter this qualitative data was read verbatim and analysed thematically by NVivo 10 software developed by QSR International, where themes related to the research questions were identified and coded. The researchers coded the materials using coding framework developed by Braun and Clarke [19]. Thematic analysis is a form of qualitative analysis. To ensure inter-rater reliability of the coding, the qualitative information was coded by two researchers using NVivo 10 software, thereafter using a coding comparison query in NVivo, the Kappa Coefficient and inter-rater agreement were established. The Kappa Coefficient was 0.76 while percentage agreement was 93.45. This indicates that there was substantial agreement between the two coders [20].

Results

Research question 1

The roles of the Tanzanian government in ECEC provision and development

The analysis of the results indicated that the government's commitment and funding for ECEC was inadequate. Both Head Teachers from rural and urban areas pointed out that the government, through the Ministry of Education, promised to support ECEC through the Quota Budget Code system. Quota Budget Code refers to the system of supplying grants to schools, teacher education, and higher institutions on a quarterly basis. However, it appears not to be the case. Pre-school education does not have its own budget. Pre-school education is therefore funded through parents and community donations organised by local committees. The following quote illustrates the efforts that the government is making to improve ECEC provision: For example, one of the government officials reported:

.....of course, the government is struggling to handle the childhood issues but it has a lot to do and a financial crisis. Look here!! Last year in 2012 the government through its officials saw the need to support pre-school education. The government showed its intention and there is a team dealing with this issue in order to allocate the pre-schools with their own budget, Quota Budget Code. In addition, the government is in the process of making arrangements for initiating more pre-school teacher education. We expect the teacher education programme will enroll trainees who have completed ordinary level of secondary education and with good qualifications. [Takio/ Government official-1/ Interview].

However, at the time that this study was conducted, the allocation of funds to pre-school education through Quota Budget Code had not been implemented.

Furthermore, Head Teachers reported that the Ministry of Education advised them to support pre-school education if there was any surplus from the amount they get for primary schools; however, the Head Teachers reported that even the amount they get for primary education was not sufficient to meet primary students' needs and was not coming in on time. The following quotes illustrate these points:

Yeah....! Actually, the pre-school class has no budget, the Ministry of Education advised to use the amount we get for primary education if any surplus to support pre-school education. However, in reality no surplus which remains from the primary school budget because even in primary school the amount is not enough. The amount of money is calculated based on the number of pupils in a particular school but I normally receive low amounts compared to the number of pupils. The government says each pupil in primary school should receive Tanzanian shillings 25,000/= per quota per pupil but the amount coming is less than what was said. When I need the clarification from the

Ministry of Education officials, the response is, the government is supplying according to the amount available. So, I suggest the pre-school education to have its own budget [Head Teacher, an urban area/ Interview].

Parents and teachers complained to the government for not supporting education of their young children from the early stages. They mentioned that the government is responsible for educating its citizens but all activities in relation to pre-school education was left to parents and community. The lack of government commitment to supporting pre-school education has given rise to much concern for parents and community and a loss of faith in their government. The following three quotes illustrate the views of teachers and parents:

The government gives no support to pre-school education, our living condition is poor, so we depend on agricultural activities and weather condition is not stable. My husband is doing volunteer security services and being paid a small honorarium and we have other two children in secondary school, where we are also paying tuition fees. So, we would like one day our kid to become a big official in this country but due to lack of money we do not think if we could fulfill his dreams [Parent, an urban area/Interview].

In my view the government has a lot of money but too much corruption; few people in government offices are responsive for fair distribution of money to the needy areas. And they are not providing good advice to the government during the annual budget, government officials are politicians so they just favour their interests and the Ministry of Education professionals seem not to be reminding the government to provide funds for pre-school education [Classroom teacher, rural area/ Interview].

The government is placing the burden on parents for a lot of contributions to run pre-school education. It sounds like the government was forced to initiate the pre-school education because everything was left to the hands of community and parents with children at the particular school; the government seems had no preparation to this education, parents are paying money from their pocket to run pre-school education. As a result, many children are not attending the pre-school education and as a result they cannot meet their dreams for their future life. The government should highly support ECEC [Classroom teacher, an urban area/Interview].

The description from the quotes implies that the government is not locating priority in pre-school education, just parents and community support pre-school education and they seem not to be managing. This may cause children to miss the basic foundations of learning.

Research question 2

The degree of enrolment of children, and parents' awareness of pre-school education

One of the intentions of this study was to explore the degree of enrolment of children, and parents' awareness of pre-school education. The analysis of the results showed that many parents and/or guardians in Tanzania were not enrolling their children in pre-school settings especially in the rural areas. They said that some parents hide their children until the age of primary school when education is free. Amongst the reasons given were low economic status and their lives depending on low level agricultural activities, informal labour, and enterprise. Furthermore, parents raised a concern about the need for the government to pay teachers' salaries. For example, the following quote illustrates the views of parents:

Yeah! Here in rural areas the situation is so bad, our economic status is low and we mainly depend on farming activities and always our community leaders and teachers talk about school contributions. Every parent with a child in a pre-school class pays teachers' salaries amounting to 1500/= Tanzania shillings per month as an honorarium. So, why the government does not pay salaries to ECEC teachers? Apart from this, we buy school uniforms, notebooks, pencils and the like. So, you find that many parents have no money and as a result they are not sending their children to the settings, they hide their children until the age of primary school where the education is free. [Parent, rural area/Interview].

On the other hand, parents from the urban areas described the motivation they get when they see the well-off families enrolling their children. They had the view that in urban areas there is a mixture of various people from different tribes with a diversity of knowledge. So, for such challenges they had to engage with various entrepreneur activities to get money for school and for family households. For example, a parent from an urban area commented:

I live in town because I can find informal labour, such as helping shopkeepers in arranging their goods in the shop, selling milk to the Kiosk and planting seedlings and selling them. It is difficult to get a good job because I am not qualified. I just ended with primary education. But I want my children to attend a pre-school education, the problem discouraging me is the contribution of money for school development, it is about 5000/= Tanzanian shillings per month here in the urban areas, where is our government support? [Parent, an urban area/Interview].

Regarding the school costs, parents complained that it was difficult for them to get money as they were not employed in a formal job, and they had to fulfil household requirements. As a result, it became difficult to enroll their children in ECEC centres.

Another parent from the rural area also had a similar view to other parents. She reported the difficulties rural people face in raising their income as they depend much more on farm activities at the local level and the weather is not predictable for sustaining their crops, drought and floods occur:

Look here.....! I have four children and John aged 6 year olds is my last-born studying in pre-school class. Our life is very difficult because we depend only on farm activities to get money for our daily use and other expenses for our children at school. Actually, the contribution in terms of money frustrates me but I am okay with manual school-based activities (volunteer work), getting money in the village is very difficult because of drought or floods and depending on the weather. The weather condition here is not predictable due to it being a semi-arid zone. *"In reality here in the village there is famine, the sun rises and crops get dry. So where can I get money for donations to school? Government is obliged to provide school services"* [Parent, rural area/ Interview]. (The italic phrase above was narrated two times with great feelings.

Lack of awareness of parents of the importance of pre-school education was observed as another reason for parents not to sending their children to pre-school settings. Based on the lack of awareness and poverty, children do not attend schools and look for child labour. In addition, teachers thought the government is not raising public awareness about the value of pre-school education. It was also argued that traditional childrearing systems contributed to many parents not enrolling their children in pre-school settings. Young brothers and sisters who are also small were used to take care of their children when parents attended individual farms or community activities. The Head Teacher from a rural area school described the low rates of enrolment in pre-school education. Comments included:

There are so many children in this ward location, but approximately, it is about 42% of children attends pre-school class, 33% of children go direct to primary school and 25% are not in schooling. In rural areas parents and guardians are not motivated to send their children to pre-school, their poverty lead them to send their children to do small business in order to raise their family income. So, I think the government needs to raise awareness to the community [Head Teacher, rural area/ Interview].

.....As you know our culture, a tradition of childrearing systems, parents leave small children with children who are also small or pre-adolescents when going to the school-based manual activities, individual farms, and community activities for aim of taking care of their young brothers and sisters when parents are away. If in the household no other small or older children or families, mothers hold their children, they had no trust with anybody stranger [A classroom teacher, rural area/Interview].

The researcher is very familiar with the tradition of childrearing described in the quote as she (the researcher) did not attend a pre-school class because she was left to take care of her brothers and sisters while her parents were far away from home working on a farm. It needs education to raise awareness of parents and community.

Having seen the situation in rural areas regarding the awareness of parents in enrolling their children in pre-school education, the researcher had an interview with the Head Teacher of the pre-school which was located in the urban area. The data indicated that the rate of awareness of parents and guardians in sending their children to pre-school class in an urban area was a bit higher than in the rural area and these families seemed better able to afford contributions. The following responses illustrate this view:

Here in urban area a large number of parents and guardians send their children to pre-school class but few parents are problematic. They claim that, sending children in the pre-school class is wastage of money because children stay in classrooms without learning instead they take just play, singing, and take porridge, which is true for sometimes because the same teacher teaches a pre-school class and Grade one pupils in primary school [Head Teacher, an urban area/ Interview].

The quotes from this Head Teacher indicate that parents are not aware of the non-cognitive skills necessary for children’s development. They seem to complain when their children are engaging in play and singing and defined it as a waste of time. The view indicates that parents perceive learning as just reading, writing, and arithmetic and not for gaining other skills including motor skills, socio-emotional skills, persistence skills, motivational skills, and self-regulation skills. Indications are that the degree of enrolment of children in ECEC settings country-wide is low compared to the total number of children. For instance, while the statistics from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) [21] indicated the total population of children aged 5 and 6 years old expected to be in enrolled in Tanzania by 2012 was 2,472,530, the actual number of enrolled children was only 985,060 (39.8%). Enrolment in the areas of the current study in the same year 2012 was as follows: In Mbeya region where the urban school was selected the expected enrolment for children aged 5 and 6 years old was 145,673 and the actual enrolment was 61,634 (42.3%) while in the Dodoma region where the rural school was selected the expected enrolment was 126,264 and the actual enrolment was 57,509 (45.5%). Table 1 below clarifies the situation.

5 and 6 year olds in 2012	Gross enrolment	Net enrolment	(%)
Country wise	2472530	985060	39.8
Dodoma Region	126264	57509	45.5
Mbeya Region	145673	61634	42.3

Table 1: Children’s Enrolment Country Wise and in the Study Regions in Year 2012.

Source: Ministry of Education (2012, p.7)

Research question 3

Expectations and aspirations of parents for enrolling their children in pre-school settings for learning and development

Parents’ expectations and aspirations for enrolling their children in pre-school settings for learning and development was another intention of this study. The analysis of the results indicated that parents have higher expectations and aspirations for their children’s learning and development. Parents seemed to love their children if they fulfil their dreams in education. Representative quotes have been given to clarify the points under discussion. The following two quotes illustrate the views of parents:

Of course.....! My expectations and aspirations of sending my child to pre-school education are to see that my kid knows how to write, read, and count. We parents are getting older now, so our kids will be helping us with reading and writing letters to our older children who are living in town [A rural, Parent/ Interview].

Of course I want my child to learn and understand what is going on within the community and national wise and to help me in the future. My parents managed to send me up to the junior secondary education; they were not able to send me for further studies due to poverty. So, I am trying to do casual jobs and farm activities, I sell crops for my child to learn more and go up to the higher levels. Education is everything [An urban, Parent/Interview].

Furthermore, the findings indicated some discriminatory aspects among parents who favour boys going to school more than a girl child. Teacher and parent participants reported that such customs interrupt the dreams of children; contrary to the call for the rights of education for all children regardless of their gender. The following quotes illustrate how parents and teachers expressed this:

Here in the village some parents had bad plans for their children, especially girls. Due to poverty, some parents find a well-off man to support the family with the promise of marrying their girl child. So, you find parents are taking bride price while the child is still very young and she never attends school. They say education is for boys, girls are for marriage [Teacher, rural area/ Interview].

My intention is to see my child progressing well with studies and succeed in his future life. My parents did not send me to school because I am a woman but my brothers went to school. My father said that girls are not supposed to go to schools. Schools are for boys. Girls at maturity should get married and the family will increase their income with a bride price. And it was a tendency of some parents to receive bride price when the child is still small, so she grows knowing that she will be married to somebody. So, for me I am against such customs, my aspiration is to see my children fulfil their dreams. I suggest the government to raise awareness to its people, so that the community can understand the importance of education to all children, regardless of their gender [Parent, rural area/Interview].

The above two quotes imply that the provision of education at all levels, ECEC included, should take gender into consideration. Gender discrimination seems to be the ongoing challenge of all girls in education especially in the rural areas. Girls' education is a special global priority across countries as they are currently greatly under-represented in terms of educational enrolment and access. Better education for girls would provide sustainable benefits to societies in future in terms of family income, reduced birth rates, reduced infant and maternal mortality and better care of their children.

Discussion

This article aimed to investigate the enhancement of young children's access to early childhood education and care settings in Tanzania. Drawing on the data from two Tanzanian pre-schools (one in the rural area and another one in the urban area), it is obvious that the situation of children in Tanzania is still not satisfactory; the quality and accessibility of early childhood education is currently below world standards [1,14]. Young children are disadvantaged due to the inadequacy of social services, and lack of access to pre-school education settings, health facilities, and environmental services [22-24]. Children have rights and adults have shared responsibilities for achieving a sustainable future. Investments in high quality early childhood education and care, combined with education for sustainable development, represent a necessary component in promoting children's rights within Tanzania's schools and worldwide.

The findings have shown that a large number of children do not have access to ECEC settings for various reasons including lack of support from the Government, low socio-economic status of parents/guardians, traditional norms and cultural values, gender discrimination, and lack of awareness by parents and community of the importance of early investment. Yet it is recognised by the World Declaration on Education for All, and the Framework for Action, that education starting from childhood is a child's right [7,8].

It is therefore of the highest priority that access to ECEC services is enabled for all young children. It is within these early years that young children present the greatest ability to learn and develop. The building blocks of personalities and identities of children are formed within the early years of life.

Furthermore, the results have shown that pre-school education in Tanzania does not have its own government budget. It is mainly funded by the parents and community through various donations and school-based activities, such as helping with building schools, maintenance, renovation, and participating in school and parent's committees. Parents seemed unable to manage the provision of quality teaching and learning resources, let alone donations in monetary form. It is probable the situation of ECEC services is not improving due to government's lack of commitment to this type of education.

The findings from the current study suggest that there is a need for capacity building of awareness in civil society through training, advocacy, and formulation of appropriate policy statements, plans, strategies, and programs in selected sectors and at sub-national levels. This could result in the enhanced capacity of government and non-government actors to influence national policies on natural resources management. Improving the socio-economic circumstances of the Tanzanian's large group of citizens must remain a top priority for policy makers. There is a need for equal distribution of the national resources from which currently few people benefit [1,15].

The government needs to support investment in early childhood education rather than just supporting primary, secondary, and higher levels. The findings have revealed that there is a lack of public awareness of the value of ECEC for children's learning and development and a lack of trust of strangers taking care of their children in ECEC settings [1,16,25]. Large number of research indicates that the early years investment is the most important in the life of a person [26-28]. These findings inform us of the benefits of early childhood education investment as it yields extraordinary returns that far exceed the returns on most investments in private or public sectors [29]. In the same way, investment in early education is investment in human capital [29], which raises overall economic success for families, communities, and the nation at large [30]. A substantial body of research evidence shows the very significant benefits for young children of participating in high quality ECEC, not only at the time that they attend, but later through schooling and into adulthood [3,14,31]. It is theorised in the literature that children's participation into low-quality ECEC is associated with higher levels of antisocial or worrying behaviour at the time and at other levels of education [3].

In addition, the low socio-economic status of parents especially in rural areas contributes to parents and/or guardians not sending their children to school [23,32,33]. In rural areas incomes are lower compared with urban areas. People increase their incomes through farming, fishing, and keeping livestock but all these activities are done at low levels due to lack of extension agricultural officers [32] and weather changes. As a result, parents/guardians do not enroll their children in ECEC settings. Although the parent participants showed great expectations and aspirations for their children through education, they may not meet their dreams due to lack of funds, and the fact that the government seemed not to prioritise ECEC matters.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that not only financial investment in ECEC would change the situation, but there are a number of other related issues, such as governance and financial management, cultural issues, gender discrimination, socio-economic status, awareness of parents and community of the importance of early education investment, and others that need to receive adequate attention as they tend to reinforce each other in a complementary way. Therefore, to improve the situation, it is recommended that there is need for a forging of partnership between the government, parents, and the community in such a venture; and that Government policy makers should set clear policies regarding how quality early childhood education and care can be equitably funded and conducted throughout the country.

The findings from the current study suggest further research could be conducted using a larger sample of pre-schools to include both public and private pre-schools, since this study was conducted with only public pre-school education and with a small sample. This could provide more comprehensive insights into the status of pre-school education and learning needs of children from wider area of the country. This would inform policy makers in collaboration with ECEC practitioners in their planning based on the needs and interest of children, pedagogies, teachers, and resources. Another limitation of the current study is: the study did not select teachers based on their working experience. Indeed, the experienced teachers could have a better understanding of the current situation of ECEC, and would have

provided valuable insights into the probable developmental effects of the classroom experience. Hence, it might have affected the validity of results. Therefore, further research could be conducted using teachers based on their working experience.

Overall, this article has explored the main reasons for the need to invest in quality ECEC and access based on experiences worldwide. Importantly, education is a child's right, so every child needs to get access to it without any obstacles.

Conflict of Interest

No financial interest or any conflict of interest exists.

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