

# **Factors Contributing to the Expansion of Early Childhood Education in Kenya**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Education acquired in the early stages of childhood refers to as Early Childhood Education (ECE). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), ECE spans the human life from birth to age eight. Although ECE does not have to occur in absence of the parent or primary caregiver, this term is often used to describe preschool or childcare programs (NAEYC, 2007).

Much of the first two years of human life are spent in the creation of a child's first "sense of self" or the building of a first identity. This is a crucial part of children's makeup, how they first see themselves, how they think they should function and how they expect others to function in relation to them. For this reason, early childhood care must ensure that in addition to employing a carefully selected and trained caretaker program, policy must emphasize links with family, home culture and home language.

In Kenya, the first preschools were started in the 1940s by and for the exclusive use of the European and Asian communities. It is later that preschools were developed in African locations in urban areas and on coffee, tea and sugar plantations (Kipkorir and Njenga, 1993).

After independence, preschool education expanded throughout the country. In their paper, Kipkorir and Njenga wrote that prior to the 1970s Kenya lacked an organized curriculum. Also, there were other support materials for use in the preschools. In addition, many of those teachers teaching in these schools were untrained. Because they lacked training, many of the

teachers used formal teaching methods equivalent to those used in the primary schools with older children.

In 1991, in an effort to address the situation presented by the ever-increasing numbers of preschools and the lack of appropriate support for them, the Kenya government, with assistance from the Bernard van Leer Foundation created the Preschool Education Project, based at the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) Nairobi. The main objective of this project was to improve the quality of preschool education through the development of viable training systems and the creation of curriculum and other support materials for use by trainers, teachers and children

## **2.0 Factors That Have Contributed To the Expansion of Early Childhood Education in Kenya**

There are various factors that have necessitated to the expansion of early childhood education in Kenya. Some of these factors include government policies, changing roles of men and women in the growing economy and lastly but not least the provision of learning environment. This paper tends to find out in detail how these factors have necessitated the expansion of ECD.

### **2.1 Government Policies**

In Kenya, ECD is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST). Of concern here is that the current Education Act does not even include ECD in its legal provisions. The existing situation in Kenya is that the Partnership Policy provides the only policy framework that directs the MOEST's provision for the development of ECD. This policy is the, first on ECD and was stipulated in the Sectional Paper No. 6 of 1988 and the National Development Plan of 1989/1993. The Children's Act of 2001 safeguards the rights and welfare of children from early childhood to adolescence (UNESCO, 2005).

In a letter submitted to International Development Association (IDA) by the Government of Kenya in 1996 on Sub-Sector Policy outlining policies that will be implemented as a result of a proposed Early Childhood Development Project, it proposed that budgetary allocation for ECD

in the Ministry of Education budget would be increased to at least 1% of the recurrent MOE budget at the expiry of the IDA Credit ([Http://Siteresources.Worldbank.Org](http://Siteresources.Worldbank.Org)).

One of the important events was the move in 1983 to decentralize government under the District Focus Strategy for Rural Development. The focus of development was shifted to the district level. The result of this shift is that district and local governments have taken on the main responsibility for ongoing support of preschool education. The MOE is currently involved in the formulation of policy guidelines for early childhood programmes, registration of preschools, coordination of government grants and funds from external donors and the provision of early childhood personnel at all levels.

When the Preschool Education Project was evaluated in 1982, it was recommended that the activities of the project be continued. This was done through the creation of a National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE), established in 1984 to harmonize the growth, evaluation and oversight of early childhood education. It was later followed by implementation of District Centers for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) in 1985, to facilitate decentralization of ECCE support (*Ibid*).

The administrative and organizational structure of early childhood care and education is recognized in the Gachathi and Kamunge educational commissions from 1976 and 1988 respectively. These commissions played key roles in creating greater recognition of preschool activities within the MOE.

Thus the government through its policies has done a lot to expand Early Childhood Education. From the point where ECD was not included in the country's budget to the point where some funds are set aside for the expansion of this education.

## **2.2 Changing Roles of Men and Women in the Society**

As the world keeps revolving so do people and their cultures keep changing. In the world that we are living in at the moment many things have changed from the dressing code, gender equalities, job specification and many more. All these have led also to the emerging issues of women employment. This employment affects the children because in the African community women are taken to hold the main responsibility of taking care of the children when the husband is out to work..

It has been reported (Kola, 2001) that regional disparities have significant role in facilitating access to early childhood care and education, where enrollment levels in rural areas are low in comparison to those in the urban areas. This is due to the development of the roles of women in urban areas. Most of the women in urban areas go to work so that they can be able to provide more for their families and at the same time keep up with own needs. This leaves no option but just to take the young ones to these ECD programmes so that they can have a humble time at work without having worries about the well-being of their children.

### **2.3 Conducive Environment**

Kenya's early childhood programme has grown because it is rooted in the community. Through workshops and seminars organized by the DICECE. Parents and community members have been encouraged and empowered to increase their participation beyond provision of physical facilities. They provide the feeding programme and take part in collecting, telling and demonstrating stories, songs and dances in the mother tongue. The incorporation of tradition and folklore into the curriculum make the community feel proud of their contribution to the learning process and development of their children. The lesson from Kenya is that the community is a very important resource for the development of the ECCE programme and must continue to be tapped and appreciated. A larger portion of the costs of the preschools development are borne by the communities and external donors. For example in 1992, the expenditure on ECCE activities was extremely low. Myers argues that if it were increased to even 1% of the budget, this allocation could provide more comprehensive and higher quality services (Myers, 1992:23).

The ECD center provides a conducive learning environment for the young children age 3-5 years. According to a research carried out by the World Bank in 1989 gives evidence that the Child's fastest growth in physical, mental and social emotional characteristics takes place during the age of 0-5 years.

In these centers the children are looked after by well qualified personnel. The teachers who look after these children have undergone lessons of psychology and sociology of the early childhood. They are able to identify some of the behavior the children may tend to have thus knowing the good way of handling them without interfering with their attitude. This kind of training held by these teachers motivates most parents to take their kids there, thus increasing the number of young children enrollment in these centers. This is for the reason that most parents would like their children to get the best of foundational classes to help them their future life (UNESCO, 2000).

### **3.0 Conclusion**

In conclusion, all the members in the society have a big role in the early childhood education. Starting from the parent back at home to the law making body all need to work hand in hand together in bringing up this young children in a good moral and organized manner. More policies should be created in favor of ECD and also funds to be allocated to these centers providing ECD so as to improve the facilities that are available with the modern technology and requirements.

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