

## **Reasons for Low Enrolments in Early Childhood Education in Kenya: The parental perspective.**

**Catherine Gakii Murungi**

Kenyatta University, School of Education, Department of Early Childhood Studies  
(Nairobi – Kenya)  
Catherine\_gakii@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

There is a continuous documented trend of low enrolments of children in the Early Childhood Education Centers in Kenya and these low enrolments continue to increase with the years. This study establishes the reasons for the low enrolments based on parental views and opinions. To document this, data is collected from 390 parents with children enrolled in pre-schools and parents with children not enrolled in pre-schools. A questionnaire with open-ended questions for parents is used. Data derived from the questionnaire is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study recommends that the government of Kenya needs to subsidize the Early Childhood Education costs so that more children can enroll in these centers.

KEY WORDS: Early Childhood Education, Enrolment, Early Childhood Years, Education, Kenya

### **Introduction**

The twentieth century perception and importance of education can be traced back to the universal declaration of human rights in 1948, which embraced education as a basic human right (Children Rights Commission, 1989 as cited in United Nations 1989). Article 28 of the Children's Right Commission as cited in United Nations 1989, in particular emphasizes that countries should recognize the right of the child to education. According to UN convention on the rights of the child (UNICEF, 1990), education is a sure means through which a nation's future can be developed and sustained. In the bid to meet this international declaration, the Government of the Republic of Kenya signed various global policy frameworks: the 1990 Jomtiem World Conference, the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) as well as enacting the 2001 Children's Act which is now a legal document that not only protects children but also advocates for their rights as cited in the Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines for Kenya, (2006) and MoEST, 2003 among other policies. These forums underscored the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE). Subsequently, education has been and continues to be of paramount importance and concern since it prepares people to socialize and become organized in life. Hence, the need for all children to have an education which includes Early Childhood Education cannot be overemphasized. However, parents are not enrolling their children in the Early Childhood Education and reasons for this have not been established systematically and explained. This paper explores and documents parental opinions on this issue.

## Objectives

The objectives of this study are to;

1. Document the resources that parents can utilize in supporting their children's Early Childhood Education.
2. Establish the reasons why children in the Early Childhood years are not enrolled in Early Childhood Education.
3. Find out the reasons why parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education enrolled their children.
4. Document views on what parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education can do, so that their children can be enrolled in these education centers.

## Methods

This study was conducted in Meru, Meru is a city in central Kenya. It is the headquarters of the Meru County in what was formerly known as Eastern Province, and the sixth largest City in the country. Meru forms a municipal council with a population of 240,900 residents.

The city is located at 0.047035 degrees north and 37.649803 degrees East, on the Northeast slopes of Mount Kenya. Meru is situated about five miles north of the equator, at an altitude of approximately 5,000 feet.

Meru City is well known as an educational center for the northeast of Kenya. There are Early Childhood Education Centers, primary and secondary schools, including the Nkubu High School and Nkuene Girls School, two leading Kenyan secondary educational institutions. Other notable schools include Meru School, Kanyakine high, and Kaaga girls, both of which are located in Meru city. There are also technical schools, the Meru Technical Institute and the Meru College of Technology being the major ones. There are also teacher training colleges, campuses of various universities including Egerton, Nairobi, among others. Kenya Methodist University has its main campus in Meru.

The sample of respondents was determined using the formula adopted from Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) and

$$\text{Thus: } n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where by  $n$  = the desired sample size,  $z$  = the standard normal deviation at the desired confidence level,  $p$  = the proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being measured,  $q = 1-p$ ,  $d$  = the level of statistical significance set.

This calculation yields a sample of 384.16, and since we are dealing with human beings and not figures, the study went to the nearest parent which makes the sample to be 385 parents with children

in their Early Childhood Years. To have an even number of parents who had children enrolled in Early Childhood Education as well as parents whose children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education, the distribution of parents in the division was 77 was further divided by two. This division gave a total of 39 parents in the two categories of parents. This change gave rise to the sample size from 385 to 390. However, since the mathematical formula adopted to calculate the sample size in this study applies to a large target population (a target population of 100,000 and above). Even if the sample size was to be increased again from 390 onwards, the results would not be any different.

### **Research Instruments**

The study utilized the questionnaire for parents in data collection. The questionnaire was constructed following the objectives of the study and administered to parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education and parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education. According to Claire, Craig & Asharaf, (2006), questionnaires are used to describe a situation. The parents' questionnaire had questions that derived information from parents regarding children's enrolment in the Early Childhood Education. In administering the questionnaires to parents who were not able to read and write, the researcher read for them the questions and keyed in their answers as per their responses.

### **Results**

The objective here was to find out the reasons for the low enrolment rates in Early Childhood Education from parents with children in the Early Childhood Years.

Descriptive results of this are presented below.

Among the parents with children in the Early Childhood years, 50% (195) that participated in the study had children either enrolled or not enrolled in the Early Childhood Education. Among the 390 parents who participated in the study, 195 of them had children enrolled in the Early Childhood Education. Some of the parents 183 (94%), had children enrolled and attended the Early Childhood Education regularly and only 12 (6%) had children enrolled but attended school irregularly. Parents with children enrolled in the Early Childhood Education were asked what resources they utilize in supporting their children's education. A large number of these parents 72 (37%) relied on their salary from professional jobs as stated in table 1-1.

**Table 1-1: Resources Parents Utilize in Supporting Their Children's Early Childhood Education.**

Resources utilized in educating children	Frequency	Percent
Support from parents	11	5.64
Farming	45	23.07
Business	41	21.04
Salary (professional job).	72	36.92
Informal labour	26	13.33
Total	195	100

According to table 1-1, a smaller number of parents 11 (6%) depended on their children's grandparents to support their education. The goal to make enrolment in Early Childhood Education compulsory may not be achieved if issues contributing to low enrolment in early childhood centres are not identified and described, to cover address this, the 195 parents with children not attending Early Childhood Education were asked to give reasons why their Early Childhood age going children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education centres. Some parents gave more than one reason as to why their Early Childhood children were not enrolled in the Early Childhood Education centres. Reasons given by parents as to why pre-school age going children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education are presented in table 1-2.

**Table 1-2: Reasons Given by Parents as to why children in the Early Childhood Years were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education**

Identified reasons as to why children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education	Frequency	Percentage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In ability to provide basic needs</li> </ul>	142	72.82
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility to the necessary services</li> </ul>	8	4.10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of awareness</li> </ul>	5	2.56
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of school</li> </ul>	190	97.44

fees		
• Security reasons	7	3.59
• Free primary education	6	3.08
• Early Childhood Education is not important	1	0.51
• My child is not interested	4	2.05

Table 1.2 shows that many parents reported inability to provide basic needs and lack of school fees to be the two main reasons why pre-school age going children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education centres. Among the 195 parents with children not enrolled in the Early Childhood Education, 73 % (142) said that they were not able to provide their Early Childhood age going children with basic needs while 97% (190) of them said they lacked school fees as well as money to meet school needs such as; books, uniform, pencils among other school needs. This finding agrees with a research conducted in Meru Central District by Ncabira (2005) who found that lack of school fees and relatively high cost of schooling was a crucial variable in the withdrawal of students from school. He argued that even where schools do not have high cost such as day schools, other school levies and expenses make schooling out of reach for a significant number of children.

One of the intentions of this study was to establish factors contributing to low enrolment of children in pre-school and as per the results in table 1.2; it seems that inability to provide required needs was the major reason for low enrolment in the Early Childhood Education Centres. This finding is close to that by Ncabira (2005) who found that lack of school fees and high cost of education led to low access in education. This is also in line with the views of 50% of the parents who participated in this study and had children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education. They claimed that they lacked money to meet their children's health needs, put a meal on the table as well as manage the schooling expenses for their Early Childhood age children together with the needs of the other children in primary and secondary schools.

It was interesting to note that even though it was not in the interest of this study, most parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education had children not attending other levels of schooling at home for the same reasons why their Early Childhood age children were not enrolled in Early Childhood Education. This finding is in line with that of World Bank (2007), which indicated that very low economic profiles for the majority of households, cannot overcome the hidden or direct costs of schooling. This finding further agrees with Ncabira (2005) who found that as the level of household poverty increased, child labour became crucial for family survival, whereby children of primary and secondary schools were employed to do domestic activities, agricultural and petty trades in rural and urban areas, hence low enrolments in schools.

The results of this study show that we cannot ignore the issue of low enrolments in Early Childhood Education Centres, especially now that parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education have identified lack of school fees to be the main reason that contributes to the current trend of low enrolments.

Parents who had their children attending Early Childhood Education were asked to state what makes them take their children to school. Their responses are reported in table 1.3.

**Table 1.3: Reasons for Taking Children to Early Childhood Education Centres**

What makes the parent take the child to school	Frequency	Percentage
Early Childhood Education is important	178	91.28
Ability to meet the required needs	111	56.92
The child falls sick less often	11	5.64
The child is interested	3	1.54
Ability to provide nutritious food	2	1.03

Table 1.3 shows that many parents take their children to Early Childhood Education since Early Childhood Education is important and are able to meet the required needs. Among the 195 parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education, 91% (178) of them said that Early Childhood Education was important and 57% (111) said that they were able to meet the required needs. Among the 390 parents who participated in the study, 2% of them reported that their Early Childhood age going children were not interested in Early Childhood Education. This finding is similar to that of Ncabira (2005) who found that primary and secondary school children did not like continuing with education because they lacked motivation and aspirations. This means that since it is now evident that children can lack interest and motivation to attend school, parental motivation is critical to these children's school enrolments, performance and chances of their children completing schooling. The value that these families attach to education determines the motivation with which its children pursue such education.

Parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education were asked to give their views on what parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education can do so that their children can also enrol in Early Childhood Education. Their responses are indicated in table 1.4.

**Table 1-4: Parents with Children not Enrolled in Early Childhood Education can do the Following so that their Children also can enrol in Early Childhood Education**

what parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education can do so that their children can enrol	Frequency	Percentage
• Pray	5	2.56
• Small scale business	44	22.56
• Farming	29	14.88
• Proper planning and budgeting	12	6.15
• Informal labor and enterprise	61	31.28
• Prostitution	3	1.54
• Seek financial support	41	21.03
• Total	195	100

Table 1.4 shows that many parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education suggested that their fellow parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education to get involved in jobs like; working in someone's house, farm, shop/ supermarket as well as washing clothes for those who can pay for the service. Some of the parents with children enrolled in Early Childhood Education 23% (44) advised parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education to engage in small scale business like run a shop, sell second-hand clothes, buy and sell milk in urban areas, selling vegetables in the kiosk, buying and selling of firewood, planting seedlings and selling them, among other small scale-businesses. Few parents 21% (41) advised parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education to seek financial support from well wishers, church and faith based organizations and community based organizations like Lewa conservancy (Lewa is a Maasai word meaning men, at the conservancy there is a river that passes through and it used to be in the middle of the forest, so only men would meet there and the river was named river Lewa, when the conservancy started the name Lewa was adopted ).

Three parents (2%) from the municipality location gave an interesting proposal that their fellow parents should do anything including prostitution to have their children enrol in Early Childhood Education. This drew my interest in knowing what they do to support their own children and it

turned out that they depended on children's grandparents for support since they were not independent. This finding is close to the views of Ncabira (2005) who reported that prostitution is another option open to school girls in Kenya, Meru included. Sugar daddies usually rich and "respectable" members of a society exploited the economically deprived situation of majority of school girls to gain sexual favours.

Further, findings closely related to this study established other needs that contribute to low enrolment in education to be:

1. The availability of places as well as enrolment and attendance procedures (Wedgwood, 2005). This means that when strict measures are in use at the time parents are enrolling and when children miss out on school days, they may opt not to take their children to such schools, which in turn will affect enrolment.
2. The accessibility of schools was found to be good because of zoning and the provision of transport where necessary (Vavrus and Larsen, 2003). This implies that when schools are conveniently located in all the regions, then they can be accessed easily and where transportation is made available enrolment improves.
3. The low costs for parents: education was free (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005b). This calls for Early Childhood Education to be made free or affordable to parents since it has been established that low costs will influence enrolment in school.
4. Pre-school provision is good: crèches in all districts mean that girls are not kept off school to look after younger siblings (World Bank, 2005a and World Bank, 2007).

## **Recommendations of the Study**

### **To the Government, Republic of Kenya**

1. It was established in this study that many parents (190) attributed low pre-school enrolment to lack of school fees. Based on this, there is a need for Early Childhood Education to be subsidized so that parents not taking children to Early Childhood Education can afford to educate their pre-school age children, since it is not only about the school fees but the uniforms as well as other added costs to the Early Childhood parent who is also burdened with other needs at home.
- 2.

### **To the Parents of children in the Early Childhood Years**

3. It is documented in this study that parents with children not enrolled in Early Childhood Education attributed this to inability to provide them with basic needs. Based on this there is need for parents to recognise that they have the power, skills and knowledge to support one another through self-help groups and parent networks instead of waiting for donor support, whereby they can form committees and mobilise parents and the

community to avail resources for children from families that are identified as not being able to meet their children's basic needs.

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