

Analysing the Impact of the Challenges Affecting Early Childhood Development Programs in Malawi

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Abstract

Early childhood development is promoted by high-quality ECD programs. The objective of this research study was to analyze the challenges that impact the challenges of early childhood development initiatives in Malawi. The research was conducted in the Lilongwe district, specifically in Area 36. The study used primary data that was collected from 60 randomly selected respondents in Area 36 in Lilongwe. To address the research objectives and research questions, descriptive statistics were used. This was achieved by analyzing the data using SPSS and STATA. With evidence from area 36, Lilongwe, it was discovered with worry that several issues affect the effectiveness, delivery, and implementation of ECD programs nationwide. As evidenced by the findings of the study, 73.08% of the sampled respondents did not know and were not members of ECDs in the community. Regarding the impact of the ECD programs on child development, it was noted with concern that only 14.29% of the respondents attributed the positive development of their children to ECDs. Importantly, a lack of coordination and management between stakeholders for ECD services, restricted access to ECD services, staff members with inadequate training and qualifications overseeing ECD centers, and unsuitable infrastructure for children are just a few of the issues affecting ECD programs identified in this study.

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1.0 Introduction

Early childhood development (ECD) is defined by the National Department of Education as the processes by which children grow and thrive in all domains; physical, mental, emotional, moral, and social, between the ages of one and nine (DoE, 2001a). It is well acknowledged that early childhood development lays the groundwork for future academic performance. Good early learning programs provide kids the chance to grow socially, cognitively, spiritually, physically, and emotionally while preparing them for adulthood. These courses foster a love of lifelong learning while helping to build the groundwork for holistic development (Biersteker and Dawes, 2017).

Malawi is among the countries in Africa with the largest network of ECD centers. These centers include daycare facilities, preschools, and community-based childcare centers (CBCCs) (Yallow *et al.*, 2012). To guarantee that Malawi's

children profit from such efforts, these ECD centers were set up. The research supporting the design and operation of CBCCs, as well as other ECD interventions, assures that children exposed to these programs develop lifelong basic skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values (Yallow *et al.*, 2012). The community's guardians, parents, caregivers, and other members oversee the three to five-year-old children who are served by the CBCCs (Soni *et al.*, 2020).

In Malawi, the concept of preschool childcare is not new; in fact, missionaries founded some primary schools in the 1950s that enrolled younger students for two years before Standard 1 enrollment. Only in 1966 did the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Blantyre, Southern Malawi, build the first early childhood development (ECD) facility. Subsequently, several other preschool groups started in Blantyre and other places (Kalyani, 2006). Preschools were opened in all 24 of the nation's districts by 1980 as a result of

the 1979 International Year of the Child (IYC) celebrations, which also facilitated the opening of more pre-schools at each district center. All of these preschools, however, were located in cities.

The ECDs are run by community members, including parents, guardians, caretakers, and others, and they serve children between the ages of three and five (Messner and Levy, 2022). Leading the charge in enabling the creation of Community-Based Child Care Centers (CBCCs) and providing training to community volunteer caregivers who look after the children enrolled in these centers is the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, with assistance from UNICEF. Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assist early childhood development (ECDs) in addition to the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Community Development. Some of these NGOs provide play equipment and cooking utensils, train the caregivers who oversee these ECDs, and build CBCC structures. Every ECD has a community-based care committee (CBCC) made up of community people who manage the center's day-to-day operations (Messner and Levy, 2012).

1.1 Problem Statement

Empirical studies have demonstrated the numerous advantages that high-quality early childhood development (ECD) programs offer to kids, families, and communities. As per UNESCO (2007), they aid in the social, emotional, nutritional, and overall health development of children. Families are also given the assurance that their kids are in a caring and secure atmosphere. Parents, women in particular are freed up from babysitting so they may work on projects that bring in money. Long-term advantages for communities include the reduction of child labor, improved social mobility across generations, a rise in the participation of women in the labor force, and gender equality.

Despite the many advantages of early childhood development programs, Malawi has not yet reached full capacity for the delivery of high-quality ECD services. Children from wealthier households benefit from these programs, which are primarily located in urban areas and are typically run on a private basis. As an illustration, in China, 95% of children in urban regions attend preschool, compared to 50% in rural areas. In Azerbaijan, 35 percent of 5- and 6-year-old children attend kindergarten in cities, while 12% attend in rural areas. Comparably, Education International (2010) stated that in Togo, access to early childhood services is only about 8% in rural areas and 60% in urban areas. However, Manji *et al.* (2015) emphasized that children who reside in urban rather than rural locations in Tajikistan, Iraq, and Yemen are four times more likely to attend ECCE programs.

The value of early childhood development (ECD) is acknowledged by many nations worldwide, but in Malawi's rural areas, these programs still face numerous challenges. These obstacles make it difficult for child programs to be implemented successfully, which prevents many children from benefiting from these interventions and impairs the development of children in the community and the nation as a whole. Physical limitations, schedule conflicts, and an unwelcoming environment are just a few of the difficulties that Malawi faces. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to close the knowledge gap on the challenges to the successful implementation of child development programs by evaluating the challenges affecting the implementation of such programs in rural Malawi. This is supported by a report by Mwaipopo (2016), which found that little is unknown about the social,

developmental, and empowering impacts of these kinds of child development programs in the nation's rural areas. Therefore, a review of the issues affecting the effectiveness of Malawi's early childhood programs' overall impact on children's development is necessary.

1.2 Justification of the Study

There hasn't been any recent, thorough research conducted to examine the issues influencing Malawi's early childhood development programs' efficacy. Therefore, this study will close Malawi's knowledge vacuum. The data gathered from this research will serve as a crucial foundation for parents, child advocacy groups, and non-governmental organizations advocating for children's rights to design appropriate policies for the nation's early childhood development. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, caregivers, parents, guardians, and other international organizations that are vital to the rights and development of children are among the main players. As a result, the study was aimed at understanding the problems that prevent early childhood development programs from being implemented successfully and effectively and will provide potential policy recommendations to improve the situation in the nation.

The research also discovers and uncovers additional elements that contribute to the failure of numerous childhood development programs. This is consistent with the National Gender and Child Rights policy, which promotes each child's right to education and improved development nationwide (GoM, 2016). Children who participate in effective early childhood education programs may be able to explore and identify their interests, grow to love learning, and lay a strong basis for their future academic endeavors. Therefore, to guarantee that all children have access to these programs and support their cognitive development from an early age, it was imperative to identify and address early childhood education obstacles that are affecting the success of early childhood development program implementation.

1.3 General Objectives

The main objective of the study was to analyze the impact of the challenges affecting the effectiveness of early childhood development programs in Malawi.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study intended:

- To analyze the role of early childhood development programs in stimulating the cognitive development of a child.
- To evaluate the existing early childhood programs in Malawi and the challenges encountered.
- To determine characteristics of the effectiveness of early childhood development in Malawi
- To determine possible recommendations to inform the programming of early childhood interventions.

1.4 Research Questions

- What is the role of early childhood development programs in stimulating the cognitive development of a child?
- Are there any existing early childhood programs in Malawi and what challenges do they encounter?
- What are the characteristics of effectiveness of early childhood development in Malawi?
- Are there recommendations to inform the programming of early childhood development program interventions?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Main Literature Review

According to the 2003 National Strategy on Early Childhood Development (ECD), Lingolwe (2021) emphasized that Malawi's approach to policy and execution of childhood development stresses the holistic development of the child and, as a result, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. This is predicated on the numerous socioeconomic advantages that such an approach offers to adults, kids, communities, and society at large (Pence, 2004). Chalamanda (2018) states that local non-governmental organizations, government ministries, and development partners like UNICEF are among the stakeholders in Malawi's early childhood development.

Chalamanda (2018) emphasized that although childhood development programs in Malawi are still flourishing, coordinating the different implementing stakeholders to achieve a synergized implementation process for the holistic development of children remains a formidable challenge. Enhancing the availability of high-quality early learning and stimulation services for all Malawian children is the overarching objective of early childhood development (MoWCD, 2006). From a strategic standpoint, this includes concerns about access, getting ready for school and making the transition, connections, ECD advocacy, educating parents, monitoring, and assessment.

Research has demonstrated that many children are left out even within the CBCC context of ECD provision because only a small number of children can attend even these low-quality care centers (Munthali *et al.*, 2017). The low levels of education of caregivers raise concerns about how much they may intentionally engage the children in experiences that would enable them to develop adequate key skills in early literacy and numeracy. Since young children require more care at this point, caregivers may not effectively address all of the individual children's other needs, as the policy assumes.

2.2 Status of ECD Across the Global

Numerous risk factors, such as infectious illnesses, malnutrition, and persistent poverty, prevent many children in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from reaching their full developmental potential (Walker *et al.*, 2007; Walker *et al.*, 2011). According to McCoy *et al.* (2016), the highest percentage of children in SSA do not meet their developmental potential. The goal of early childhood development (ECD) programs is to assist children's growth during their formative years so they can learn the skills needed to reach their full potential (Agbenyega, 2013). The advantages of top-notch ECD programs have enormous promise for SSA. Higher literacy rates, higher school enrollment and achievement, improved developmental outcomes, and better adult outcomes including increased productivity have all been linked to high-quality early childhood development programs (Melhuish *et al.*, 2008; Peisner-Feinberg *et al.*, 2001).

The recently agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include two specific ECD targets for children under five years old: meet developmental milestones and participate in organized learning before primary school (Black and Hurley, 2016). This is in recognition of the critical role that Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs play in improving childhood outcomes. Many SSA nations have made ECD a top priority in their reform agendas in recent years. Organizations like the Association for the Development of Education in Africa's (ADEA) Working Group on Early

Childhood Development (WGECD) assist in establishing policies that incorporate many methods of promoting the development of children (ADEA, 2017).

Particularly Kenya has gained recognition for its extensive national early childhood development program, which serves kids from a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious origins (Okenga, 2013). The Kenya ECD program has been successful in large part because of the community's ownership and commitment, the government's support and involvement, the decentralized training systems, and the strategic cooperation of several development partners. However, several issues continue to prevent ECD programs from being implemented effectively in the majority of SSA's countries.

Mvula and Silo (2014) claim that to close this gap, communities in numerous SSA nations have banded together to create and manage Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers, frequently with the assistance of community-based organizations (CBOs), to enhance the scholastic and developmental prospects for their kids. According to Munthali (2017), there is a lot of promise for early childhood development and learning to be facilitated by community-based ECD initiatives. But the standard of education and care that children in SSA can receive, whether via state-funded or community-based initiatives, continues to be a major obstacle. Research, for instance, has revealed significant obstacles to Malawi's ECD centers' quality and sustainability (Neuman *et al.*, 2014; Ozler *et al.*, 2016). According to Britto *et al.* (2011), low-quality ECD programs are unlikely to result in the intended results for children and families. To enhance quality and child outcomes, it is imperative to assess the level of care and education provided by ECD programs in Malawi and to think about the most effective ways to assist communities, CBOs, and governments.

A large number of Malawi's one million orphaned children reside in impoverished areas, according to Attenborough (2012). Malawi also suffers from frequent famines, which have caused food shortages and raised the country's childhood malnutrition rates. According to data from UNICEF, over 46% of children under five have stunted growth, 21% are underweight, and 4% are wasted (UNICEF, 2010). According to several indicator surveys, barely 60% of Malawian children between the ages of 35 and 69 months are developing normally (Bakilana *et al.*, 2016).

The UNICEF (2016) research states that significant variations in socioeconomic status indicate a higher likelihood of developmental delays in children living in rural impoverished communities. As a result of the enormous number of vulnerable children in Malawi, especially in rural and impoverished areas, Hasan (2018) stated that during the past few decades, numerous communities in Malawi have joined forces to create and manage community-based childcare centers (CBCCs). There are 5,665 CBCCs in Malawi, according to Munthali *et al.* (2014)'s national study. Of these, 45% were started by civil society organizations (CSOs) and 42% by the communities themselves.

2.3 Empirical Evidence

An increasing number of scholars worldwide agree that funding early childhood development (ECD) programs are worthwhile, as evidenced by decades of study on developmental, economic, and program assessment (Black *et al.*, 2017; Shon off and Phillips, 2000; Young, 2003). Richter *et al.* (2017) report that there are already around 70 countries with national ECD policies, and the number is continually growing. Quality early childhood development, care, and

education for all children has been included by the UN in the 2015–2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Vargas-Barón, 2015). With this growth, the global policy agenda in early childhood development (ECD) grew beyond measures of infant and maternal mortality to encompass indicators of child "health, learning, and psychosocial well-being" as well as universal access to preprimary education (United Nations, 2017). This is probably going to encourage more mobilization of resources at the national and international levels for ECD programs (Action Network, 2016).

Even with these recent increases in funding for early childhood development, it is still very difficult to provide high-quality ECD services at scale and to guarantee that all children have access to services that are appropriate for their needs. According to Black *et al.* (2017), there is a conservative estimate that about 250 million children globally, or one in three, are in danger of not reaching their full developmental potential because of severe poverty or stunting. While there are evidence-based therapies accessible to enhance children's development, Lu *et al.* (2016) emphasized that the challenge this offers is mostly characterized by the question of scale. The creation of robust mechanisms to enable the efficient application of laws and procedures at the international, national, local, and subnational levels is crucial to achieving high-quality ECD.

ECD has recently been given top priority in the reform agendas of many SSA nations. Organizations like the Association for the Development of Education in Africa's (ADEA) Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) assist in establishing policies that incorporate many methods of promoting the development of children (ADEA, 2017). At least 23 of the 47 SSA nations currently have national inter-sectoral ECD policies in place, and 13 more have drafts (Vargas-Baron & Schipper, 2012). Particularly Kenya has gained recognition for its extensive national early childhood development program, which serves kids from a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious origins (Okenga, 2013).

Research has revealed significant obstacles to the sustainability and quality of early childhood development centers in Malawi, for instance (Neuman, McConnell, & Kholowa, 2014; Ozler *et al.*, 2016). Low-quality ECD programs are unlikely to result in the outcomes that families and children want (Britto, Yoshikawa, & Boller, 2011). To improve quality and child outcomes, it is vital to assess the level of instruction and care provided by ECD programs across the SSA and to think about the most effective ways to assist communities, CBOs, and governments.

2.4 Research Gap

Theoretical research on the challenges impacting childhood development programs' efficacy, which this study examined, has identified a wide range of challenges that the programs still face and which have an effect on the caliber of services provided for childhood development. Nevertheless, empirical research examining the challenges that early development programs face in helping children grow cognitively has not kept up with theoretical research, creating a policy vacuum on the subject. Aside from the academic curiosity that underpins this work, there is currently no evidence to indicate whether child development centers and early childhood education (ECD) have an impact on Malawian children's cognitive development or whether these programs can be implemented in highly cohesive rural environments where the only challenges that residents face could jeopardize the nation's

children's better cognitive development. This demonstrates unequivocally that there is still a dearth of empirical research on the issues influencing Malawi's early childhood development programs' efficacy, highlighting the necessity for further investigation into the subject.

3. Research Methodology

Early childhood education has become increasingly important in recent years. A child's general growth and future success are greatly influenced by their early years of existence. Even so, there are a lot of challenges that prevent early childhood education from being as accessible and effective as it may be. This study explores potential barriers that can jeopardize the effectiveness of Malawi's early childhood development programs. Therefore, the methodology chapter of the paper provides the framework that enabled the study to be effectively conducted to meet and address the study objective. This section covered several additional topics, including the population under study, study area, sample size, and research strategy.

3.1 Research Design

To collect data for the study, a household survey of selected respondents was used. Accordingly, the sample of respondents consisted of families and individuals who were parents, guardians, or caregivers of children aged 3 to 5 as well as certain institutions that provide programs related to early development across the country. Purposeful sampling, which focuses on those who directly provide child care to young children from 3 to 5 years old, was used to sample a total of 4 care groups and community child centers. Simple random sampling was also employed to select 60 study participants at random from the designated ECD centers, child centers, and care groups in the area.

3.2 Population of Study

The total population of Area 36 where this study was carried out is 92,733 people according to the NSO (2018) census report. However, children in the age range of 0-14 years account for 36,212 of the total population of the area representing 39.05 of the population. Individuals in the age range of 15-65 account for a large part of the entire population of the study area. Hence the focus of this study was on children in the age range of 3-5 years who were based at home with parents or in different care groups or child centers within the area (Area 36, Lilongwe).

3.3 Data Collection Tools

To collect data for the study, personal interviews with selected individuals were used. These respondents were randomly selected from the study area using a simple random sampling method. Again, focus group discussions with caregivers and key informant interviews were also among the means to collect data. To elicit data from the respondents, semi-structured questionnaires were used and administered to the selected individuals by well-trained research assistants. The questionnaire had different questions on the subject that were in English language but during the interview, the research assistants were required to translate them into the local language (Chichewa), depending on the language the respondent was comfortable with.

3.4 Tools for Data Analysis

Statistical software packages, particularly SPSS, EXCEL, and STATA, were used to analyze the data to meet the objectives

of this qualitative study. To analyze the impact of the challenges affecting Malawi's early childhood development programs' efficacy, descriptive statistics were run. The study's findings were presented using percentages and frequencies. The results were presented using tables, figures, and charts.

3.5 Summary

To analyze the impact of the challenges affecting Malawi's early childhood development programs, in particular Area 36 in Lilongwe, the study used an exploratory research approach. The primary data, which came from parents, guardians, caregivers, and key informants in Area 36, was used to meet the study's objectives. The researcher purposefully picked the study location, and simple random sampling was used to select study participants. To collect data for the study, interviews with 60 respondents were conducted. Statistical software, specifically STATA, EXCEL, and SPSS, was used to analyze the data and produce results in the form of frequencies and percentages. Tables, charts, and figures were used to display the analysis findings.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the key findings of the study on the impact of the challenges affecting ECD programs in Malawi. In this section, descriptive statistics were performed where frequencies and percentages were calculated with an emphasis on the institutional, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics of sampled household heads, caregivers, and key informants. Importantly, key findings on the different factors hampering the growth and performance of ECD programs are also discussed. The last sections of the chapter provide the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

Demographic Data

The study presents the key findings from the 60 participants on the behavior, economic, and social patterns of the study about the demographic characteristics of the caregiver, parents, or guardian and the impact of the challenges impacting ECD programs in Malawi. In the study, where the household size of 5–6 individuals and education level of more than 9 years of formal education were of concern, the distribution of household size and education level highlights the significance of focused interventions. The study suggests further intervention to promote inclusivity in social program participation about marital status differences. Several factors, including age, marital status, and primary occupation, were identified as contributing to the variations in the ways that the challenges affecting ECD programs in the area affected the parents' and caregivers' demographics.

Knowledge and Challenges Affecting Early Childhood Development Programs

This section provides the key findings on the knowledge and challenges that impact the ECD programs in the study area. The results of the study revealed that 82.54% of the local sampled respondents were aware of ECD while just 17.46% were unaware of ECD. ECD program efficacy can be assessed by knowing what respondents know about the discipline. ECD membership assessment aids in figuring out who is using the service and how extensively. It offers information about the program's accessibility and reach within the specified target demographic. 73.08% of study participants emphasized that they did not belong to ECD. Merely 26.92%

of the participants were affiliated with the ECD in the area. Membership is a measure of respondents' commitment and level of participation in social and community programs, particularly the ECD program. Stronger participation is often associated with better results for children, and higher membership levels can indicate just that. 33.33% of the study participants and caregivers said that one important service provided by the child centers is education. Some respondents emphasized that (32.26%) their children receive additional benefits from ECDs. According to 31.18% of respondents, the ECD center's newborn and young feeding services are beneficial to their children. Merely 3.23% of respondents said that dietary programs are beneficial for their kids.

Improvement in the Child after Joining ECD

Researchers can determine how effective Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs are by assessing the improvements made in children who take part in these programs. It aids in assessing the achievement of the desired results, including the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical abilities. Of the research area's total sampled respondents, 85.71% emphasized that their children's enrollment in ECD programs had not improved. When asked if their children had improved since they were enrolled in ECD programs in their community, only 14.29% of respondents said that their children had. This is in line with the argument made by Michael *et al.* (2022) that program administrators, educators, and legislators can make sound decisions based on evidence of child improvement. It is in favor of providing funds, resources, and assistance to ECD initiatives that show promising results. Designing focused treatments to address areas where kids might still require extra support can be made easier by having a clear understanding of the specific areas of improvement (such as language development, motor abilities, and social interaction). Parents' and caregivers' engagement and satisfaction with the ECD program might rise when children show observable progress. It supports attempts to give early childhood education and care a priority at the policy level by offering verifiable proof of its advantages. Comprehending particular enhancements enables the tailoring of assistance and materials to fulfill the distinct requirements of every youngster.

Government-explicitly-stated Multi-sectorial ECD Policy

Determining the degree of awareness and comprehension within the target community can be accomplished by evaluating the respondents' knowledge of the policy. This was essential for assessing how effectively the policy has been disseminated and put into practice among various industries. Respondents' awareness of the policy may be a sign of how well ECD initiatives are working. Respondents may be successfully distributing information and adhering to policy rules if they are well informed about the policy. According to the results of the study, 69% of the respondents emphasized that they were aware of the government's clearly stated multi-sectorial ECD policy. Merely 31% of the participants emphasized that they were unaware of the government's clearly defined multi-sectorial early childhood development agenda. Understanding governmental policies can affect the distribution and application of resources. Finding out how well respondents understand the policy can aid in locating inadequacies in the allocation of resources and guarantee that funds are being used efficiently to support ECD activities. Early childhood development-related behaviors and attitudes can be influenced by knowledge of ECD regulations.

Determining the level of awareness among respondents can aid in evaluating the effect of the policy in modifying attitudes and actions in support of better child development practices.

Contribution from Parents to ECDs

The study also investigated whether parental involvement is mandatory at any particular early childhood development center to have a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Malawi's early childhood development programs. According to the study's results, 30.82% of respondents emphasized that parents must help pay for their children's school uniforms. Of those who responded, 29.56% underlined that they must pay for the children's meals at the ECD centers, and 25.16% said they must pay for the tuition. Merely 0.63% of the participants concur that their contributions aid in the process of matriculation.

Financial Incentive Support

Additionally, an analysis was done to determine who in the research area was offering financial incentives to caregivers. According to the results, community members themselves provide the majority of funding for community caregivers (64.58%). The government is the one offering financial incentives in their neighborhood, according to 20.83% of the respondents. 6.25% of the respondents then said that they were unaware of any financial incentives offered to caregivers in their community. Caregivers often work unpaid and without official recognition, thus financial incentives and support are essential in encouraging them.

Challenges Affecting ECD Programs

The study was further compelled to rigorously examine the reasons behind the nation's ECD programs' failure. The country's 31% funding gap for ECD initiatives is a significant cause for worry. Poor facilities supporting a large number of ECD centers in the research area came next (22%). According to 17% of the respondents, the poor performance of early childhood development programs is caused by a lack of coordination and management of these programs. Merely 6% of the participants brought up the issue of unqualified individuals running and operating many ECD centers. This specifically highlights a few of the key challenges affecting ECD programs in Malawi and guides policymakers on where to work in policy interventions to improve the Program's impact in the country.

Conclusion

Based on the study results and findings, the researcher made the following conclusions.

- The research has found that the coordination and management structure of the ECD business is woefully inadequate. This prompted scaling up the ECD program both by the government and the private sector.
- The study also emphasizes how difficult it is for Malawians to receive ECD services. Early childhood development (ECD) services are believed to be unavailable to 68% of children between the ages of 0 and 8 hence a call for inclusiveness in ECD programs.
- As previously mentioned, the survey revealed that staff members with inadequate training and qualifications now oversee the majority of ECD centers. Because most of the teachers at government elementary schools lack proper qualifications for their courses, this affects even those schools. Hence a need for caregivers to enroll in training

courses offered by the Malawian Association for Early Children, which is situated in Blantyre.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

- To create distinct support networks, the government should think about integrating ECD centers especially, CBCCs into the regional frameworks of the Ministry of Education. As this is going on, the government ought to make sure that communities are still playing a major part in running the centers.
- Strong coordination between the various sectors is necessary at both the policy and practice levels, even if it is acknowledged that planning, managing, and carrying out ECD activities necessitates a multi-sectoral approach. This will guarantee the nation's ECD programs' efficacy and efficiency.
- The country's ECD program requires ongoing, higher investment. As a result, the government and other interested parties ought to intensify their lobbying efforts to secure increased financing for the ECD program.
- Crucially, the Ministry of Education must devise novel approaches to improve the country's oversight, synchronization, and tracking of early childhood development initiatives. In addition to its current working mechanisms on ECD, one approach would be to collaborate with all important national and local stakeholders.
- The Ministry of Education must put more effort into recording how each stakeholder contributes to ECD services. For example, as this report illustrates, it was extremely difficult to determine overall support for ECD from non-government parties. All parties with an interest in the documentation should also have access to it.
- Increasing efforts to develop the skills of educators and caregivers in ECD centers is also crucial. Training on all important aspects of ECD, including management and real service delivery, should be part of the capacity-building activity. All federal employees who are involved in the development, administration, and execution of ECD should also receive this instruction.
- The national government ought to think about instituting a reliable accreditation system for ECD training for educators and caregivers. Furthermore, assistance ought to be offered to the ongoing endeavors of the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, which provides ECD training.
- The infrastructure supporting ECD services needs to be improved, and this is something the government should think about. This should include creating new structures as well as enhancing the ones that already exist, especially in rural areas. ECD stakeholders ought to think about pushing for more funding to be allocated in this direction.

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