

Forum: Education Committee

Agenda: On measures to increase access to early childhood care and education in sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

The continuous yearning for exploration of new knowledge and acquiring information has long been the driving force behind expansion of human development throughout time, and early childhood education sets the basis for this lifelong education goal. Since being acknowledged its significance as far back as in the 16th century, early childhood development encouraged by childhood education has consistently been the topic of advocacy by many scholars, educators, and policy makers. Despite increasing efforts to further promote the rights and assurance of basic education of children, barriers including the lack of support by the governments and tacit pressure fostered within the society are crucial obstacles in pursuing early childhood care and education, especially in the sub-Saharan African region.

The purpose in stressing the education and childhood care of the early stages lies in the potential benefit it brings to the children in aspects of socializing skills, cognitive development, and a foundation for future learning opportunities. The age group covering from birth to 8 years old holds the critical phase for brain development and thus possesses the essentiality in investments towards early childhood care and education (ECCE). Not only does it function as the preparation step for bridging primary education, but ECCE also allows the children to actively establish their emotional well-being. Through learning to interchange emotions and associating with peers, it stimulates emotional growth, setting the basic skills of expressing oneself from an early age. The advantage in ECCE also contains the merits it brings not confined to the individual children, but to a wider range of the entire society, both as a nation and as the whole world.

Despite the innumerable benefits that come from promoting ECCE, the implementation of childhood education is being underestimated; more specifically, the barriers blocking the active approach towards ECCE have not yet fully been resolved. With the global trend of increasing tendency of enrollment in early childhood care, the disparity in the enrollment has been observed as in the significant differences between the family of varying socioeconomic status, indicated by different income levels.

In the 21st century, the attention towards establishing a sustainable goal targeting the equity across the world has ever so been highlighted, though the most fundamental foundation of providing the equal opportunity for education and care is still lacking effort in the process of its achievement. Among the developing world regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest education exclusion rate.

Approximately 20% of primary-age children are not attending schools and 60% of the youth of ages 15-

17 are not supported by education. Moreover, it is estimated that over 1.1 million children of age 3-4 years are not receiving any education programs. To improve this region-wide low education rate, the first step in the reform ought to be the guarantee of increased accessibility to early childhood education and caring system.

Key Terms

Early childhood care and education - Early childhood care and education (ECCE), or nursery education, is the teaching of children in the early ages of pre-primary stages. Children at this age require delicate care and not only in the injection of knowledge as in the aspects of education. As SDG 4 indicates, inclusive and equitable quality education must be ensured for all. Directly calling out for a lifelong learning opportunity, the assurance of this goal should start from the early childhood stage, which is the goal of ECCE.

Equity – Equity refers to the achievement of equal treatment towards every individual, regardless of their status. It is the idea that even though everyone has different circumstances, an effort should be made to reduce the gap between the differences and produce an equal outcome. Specifically, equity in education pursues the ideology that every child must receive an equal amount of education, in minimum, disregarding one's gender, ethnicity, family income level, and/or physical disabilities. A confounding term could be equality, which is to provide the same amount of support for each subject, regardless of individual circumstance; therefore, equity and equality may seem similar in terms, but the stark difference must be noted.

Children's right – Just as the human rights and civil rights stated explicitly in official documents, the children's rights are the basic rights that must be assured to all children under the age of 18. According to UN convention on the rights of the child, there are 54 articles that support the rights of children. Among the many children's rights listed, the children have the right to be educated, and it must be guaranteed by protection.

Well-being – Well-being is the quality of life often linked with physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects. It is a relatively subjective measurement reliant on individual's happiness and satisfaction in life. In this topic of increasing the access of early childhood care and education, the well-being of children is the point of issue, but the well-being of parents, especially the mothers, may also be the topic of interest.

Teacher shortage – Teacher shortage is the situation in which there is a relatively small number of instructors compared to the number of students requiring education. Particularly, for early childhood stage, the duty of teachers is beyond simple education, but also involves basic caring and interaction with individual students to manage emotional communication. Teacher shortage may result in a secondary problem of unintended child neglect in school.

Overcrowded classroom – When a classroom is overcrowded, there is an exceeding number of students placed in one classroom, which is above the adequate and recommended level. Related to the problem of teacher shortage, a lack of professional educators may lead to overcrowded classrooms. However, the lack of infrastructure, meaning there is an insufficient number of schools to accommodate the students, is the main cause of overcrowded classrooms. Recent research has shown that small class sizes are beneficial and efficient in care and education since the number of students per teacher is reduced.

Women empowerment – Women, as the mother of children, are often in charge of taking care of the children at home. Due to the daytime spent on caring after the pre-primary child, women are discouraged from active participation in economic and social activity. By increasing accessibility to care and education of children, women may be offered more freedom and encouragement to participate in the economy and labor market. This is referred to women empowerment, or encouragement of their voice and role in households and in the society.

General Overview

The average enrollment rate of early childhood care and education in the sub-Saharan African region is notably lower than that of the most developed countries, but there still exists disparity in investments towards ECCE among the African nations.

According to the report of UNICEF, the proportion of qualified and trained teachers in Cape Verde, Ghana, and Tanzania are less than one-quarter of the total educators. On the contrary, more than 90% of the teachers are trained educators in countries such as Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritius, Niger, and Senegal. As such, different countries within the sub-Saharan African region are each positioned in different status of ECCE, and thus requires unique resolutions tailored to each country's circumstance.

Mauritius

Mauritius is one of the nations that have put the most in effort in the development of early childhood care and education process. Among the sub-Saharan countries with low ECCE support, Mauritius has a gross enrollment rate in the pre-primary education nearly approaching 100%, up until 2021. Following the SDG 4.1 which states all boys and girls should be guaranteed access to early childhood care by 2030, Mauritius is at the lead of all African countries. This percentage is considerably distinguishable from the majority of other countries which have rate below 10% (Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.) or rates below 25% (Benin, Burundi, Senegal, etc.). By promoting collaboration of Mauritius with other countries and the encouragement of sharing the education methods will be an effective way in boosting the ECCE enrollment rate across the continent.

Chad

Chad has recorded one of the lowest enrollment rates in early childhood education among the sub-Saharan African region and among the nations considered as low-income countries in Africa (36 in total). The ECCE attendance rate reported in 2023 of Chad was barely 1%, with some outstanding threats to early childhood development marked as child poverty (48%) and violent discipline (79%). Although Chad has already taken part in multiple conventions including Convention on the Rights of the Child, the extremely low engagement in ECCE promotion within the nation is an indicator of the necessity of the need for international organizations and the developed countries to intervene and offer help through collaboration. This goal could also be achieved by the help from other sub-Saharan African countries that are in a more advanced position in the promotion of ECCE such as Mauritius.

Major parties involved

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF, run by the General Assembly, advocates for the protection of children's rights to allow them to reach their full potential. The children's rights promoted by UNICEF resonates with the guarantee of basic healthcare and education, which are the essential factors in childhood development. Previous attempts by UNICEF in resolving the lack of ECCE in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically to marginalized groups, includes upgrading ECCE infrastructures, training of educators, and educating parents. The role of UNICEF in ECCE was especially highlighted when coronavirus spread worldwide. The initiative run by UNICEF not only helped the hygiene by providing face masks and sanitizers but also increased the chance of education for children in rural environments by allowing schools to reopen. Numerous children from sub-Saharan African nations including Ghana and Nigeria were helped by this program in 2021.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is the organization under the UN that mainly contributes to building peace, eradicating poverty, and maintaining sustainability through encouraging education, science, culture, communication, and information. UNESCO centers around five pillars for education which includes learning to know and learning to live together. From its listed goals, it can be seen that one of UNESCO's main purposes is to set the learning environment for children to prepare the learning opportunities throughout life, which is eventually the early childhood care and education.

World Bank

The World Bank is an international development organization owned by 187 countries together which has the main function of lending money to countries in need. Their goal is

to reduce poverty and to enhance the standard of living of people around the world. In doing so, the World Bank lends capital to fields such as human development involving education and health. Between 2019 and 2024, the World Bank remained the largest donor in supporting the education of African countries by funding \$1 billion annually on average. Recognizing the importance for ECD in sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank has also facilitated Debt-for-Education Swap with Cote d'Ivoire in 2024; it was a mechanism to offer a loan with reduced interest rate, having committed the usage of funds toward education.

African Development Bank Group (AfDB)

The African Development Bank Group is the multinational finance institution established in 1964 to encourage both economic and social growth across Africa. AfDB has played a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for Africans by investing in healthcare, education, and various fields. *Banking on Nutrition* Program launched by AfDB in 2016 aimed to combat the issue of child malnutrition, which is a serious problem across the continent. Further, by collaborating with Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) through financial support, the institution has contributed to advancing African-led research initiatives targeted towards ECCE. AfDB maintains close partnership with the World Bank in the purpose of controlling and assisting the finance of African countries.

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) was established in 1988 and is a network of African Ministries of Education, Development Agencies, and key educational stakeholders both in private and public sectors. The association provides spaces for collaboration of different agencies to eradicate shortage in childhood education. ADEA has arranged multiple conferences inviting African and international experts, policymakers, and development partners to come together and has provided opportunities to discuss early childhood policies and programs.

Timeline of Events

Various attempts throughout history have engaged in the improvement of early childhood care and education across the globe. While the first interest regarding ECCE evolved from the European nations in the 16th century, the ideology reached the sub-Saharan regions only at the beginning of the mid-20th century. This is because most of the African nations gained independence from colonial powers around the 1960s. Although the initiatives were based on primary and secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, more attention was brought to pre-primary education as we enter the 21st century.

Date	Description of event
1500s	<p>Martin Luther first brought up the official idea of the importance of education for young children. By his fervent advocacy in teaching children to read, the establishment of public schools were promoted.</p>
1837	<p>The first kindergarten opened in Germany and was founded by Friedrich Froebel, a German educator. His belief that children should learn through play led to the establishment of kindergarten. During the 1830s and 1840s, Froebel developed his vision for kindergarten based on the pre-existing ideologies explored by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.</p>
1907	<p>“Children’s House” was founded by the first Italian female doctor Dr. Maria Montessori to provide education to low-income household’s children. This gave the start of the Montessori method of education, which is still embedded in the modern education system, with 7 major principles, including following the child, prepared environment, and independence. Attention towards child education started to rapidly grow not only pertained to the European nations but worldwide.</p>
2000s	<p>With the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) set in the 2000s, the global attention noting the importance in ECCE began to rapidly grow in the Sub-Saharan African region. Up until 2001, only Mauritius and Namibia had adopted ECD policies among the 46 countries in the sub-Saharan Africa. However, with sharply growing concern, UNESCO presented the statistic showing that 23 countries are now promoting ECD policies nationwide in 2012.</p>
2020s	<p>The impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 revealed the remarkable deficiencies in the sustainability in Africa’s early childhood educational system. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (AEDA) held a conference in 2022 in Mauritius to reflect upon the status. Continuous efforts in sub-Saharan Africa are being made to complement the changing circumstances in education.</p>

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UN has intervened in promoting childhood education and care directly and indirectly by multiple means such as but not limited to launching multiple programs on a local and global scale, declaring the SDGs regarding the assurance of ECCE, and adopting new measurements of early childhood development for efficient monitoring purposes.

- In the mission of providing a quality education to the children in Africa, in 2004, UNICEF launched the “Schools for Africa” program in cooperation with the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Considering Nelson Mandela’s belief that education will provide a wider range of opportunities for African children, the goal of the program is to ensure that every child in Africa has an opportunity for education, in the hope of offering a safer and healthier environment. This event was an exemplar of UN involvement which collaborated efficiently with the local organization to maximize the effectiveness. Up until 2023, from 27 countries around the world, UNICEF has collected over USD 300 million to support the program. In 2008, the Croatian government incorporated the “Schools for Africa” program within their nation and has collected funds with the support of various educational organizations and citizens’ supports. A total of 1.1 million EUR has been collected for the education of children in Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso. This attempt not only raised funds but also spread awareness of the lack of early childhood education in Africa.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations in 2015 cover the importance of early childhood care and education. Specifically, SDG 4, which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes life-long learning opportunities for all, recognizes the need for support from around the world. By stating the urgency in promoting education, it takes a role as putting pressure on encouraging national awareness and governmental support in individual countries especially in the regions with low education rate. Article 4.2 reads to “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. The sentence is shown to emphasize the goal of UN to encourage ECCE by 2030.
- The Early Childhood Development Index 2030 (ECDI2030) was suggested by the UN in 2015 to form an efficient method in monitoring the development of early childhood worldwide. Efforts by direct programs and fundings are also valuable, but the continuous monitoring of the events are more of a priority since recording and reflection will work as the indicator of showing the effectiveness of certain approaches or revealing the blind spots. This method provides the measurements of childhood development, regarding kids of 24-59 months, through the answering

of 18 items of yes/no questions and 2 items of ratings on behaviors. The index is seen as the key determinant in the further implementation and pursuit of SDG 4.2.

Possible Solutions

Since resolving the problem of deficiency in access to early childhood care and education in sub-Saharan Africa is a complex issue, it should be viewed from multiple perspectives and different approaches that complement each other and can collaborate to reach the ultimate goal – successful education in Africa.

Parental education

The importance of early childhood care and education must be noted by parents who are the guardians of the children at the pre-primary age. Similar to how poverty is inherited, the lack of education, especially the awareness of appropriate education, is likely to be passed on through generations. Thus, educating the parental generation is of the utmost importance to guarantee the childhood education of the children. This could be achieved through government campaigns or direct education opportunities to parents.

Development of professional educators

Teachers should also be educated to increase the quality of education. Providing a low-quality education to children in the early childhood stage would not be able to achieve a desirable outcome. Therefore, active investments should be made in fostering professional educators. Increased number and qualification of staffs will contribute to increasing the efficiency and quality of education.

Foundation of infrastructures

The lack of basic infrastructures for education acts as obstacles preventing further ECCE development. Children should be guaranteed the facilities to gather and to be educated. This would mean infrastructures such as kindergartens, nurseries, or schools. Basic facilities of teaching aids for kids should also be managed with consideration of hygiene and age-appropriateness. Moreover, infrastructures for the education of teachers should also be actively established.

Engendering family-friendly policies

To some families, early childhood care and education may not be an affordable practice due to the high costs despite the situation of being in lower income levels. In order to resolve the financial barrier constraining the education and care of children, the government could provide subsidies to certain families, such as the lower income groups. Furthermore, to decrease the cost burden that the family will intake by supporting the

children's education, the government could directly fund educational institutions and promote educational programs that will decrease the costs.

Reduction on external dependency

Receiving funds and support from international organizations or institutions may be beneficial in a short run for the development in ECCE of sub-Saharan African region. However, glancing at the situation from a long-term view, increasing the dependency of foreign affairs will bring negative consequences to the nations. The sub-Saharan African nations must devise methods to gradually gain independence in policy making and funds, as well as in strengthening the domestically based solutions.

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