Association between Child Care Quality and Children’s Socio-Emotional Development and Learning Achievements in Early Childhood Education Centers: Comparing Urban and Rural Early Child Education Centers in Uganda

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INTRODUCTION

- The quality of child care in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is of key importance to children’s developmental outcomes and learning achievements (Pianta et al., 2002; Barandiaran et al., 2015).
- Quality of care refers to classroom variables (e.g., group sizes, quality or teacher-child interaction, classroom size, free play space and materials for learners, teacher-child ratios) and center environment variables (e.g., sufficient space for several play activities, appropriate sanitary facilities, rich play area, safety consciousness observed at the center) that relate to children’s development and learning.
- Competent cognitive abilities are achieved through children’s explorative behavior of a rich varied environment (Bowlby, 1978) with warm sensitive caregivers who support learning and act as a secure base (Ainsworth 1978).
- ECE in Uganda faces several challenges, like insufficiently trained teachers, overcrowded classrooms, low levels of cognitive stimulation and consequently deteriorating the educational achievements of children, a high level of dropouts, and low funding of ECE programs (UNICEF Report 2015).
- Human capital is today the main contribution towards poverty alleviation (Melhuish et al., 2008). In Uganda support to ECE is the way through to improve educational equity and quality, combat poverty and health promotion.
- 56% of Uganda’s population are children under 18 years of age and 18% of these are between 0 - 4 years. Many of these due to poverty are not attending school which calls for the action of the government to support and implement free universal pre-primary education.

GOAL

- To examine the association between quality of child-care standards in ECE centers in Uganda and children’s socio-emotional development and academic achievements in their early years. The study findings will address the gap in scientific evidence needed to support ECD policy reviews, and government decisions for funding towards ECE programming in Uganda.

HYPOTHESIS

- It is hypothesized that quality of child care standards that children are exposed to in ECE centers would correlate with their overall development of socio-emotional competence and learning achievements.

PARTICIPANTS

- 15 randomly selected ECE Centers from Mukono District of different socio-economic status; 10 Urban and 5 Rural centers
- 15 ECE teachers / caregivers; one randomly selected from each center
- 30 ECE children aged 5 years from these centers; 2 per center

1. Funding
   - Look for a funding source for conducting the study (approx. 5000USD)

2. Participants
   - Identification and selection of participants

3. Consent of
   - Participants & agree on dates for center visits

4. Materials
   - Preparations and Production

5. Center Visits
   - Professional Child observers will visit each center and spend 2-3 hours observing quality factors in the learning environment (in classrooms, play area and around the centers).
   - Classroom interactions between teachers and children will also be observed and scored.
   - Teachers to fill several questionnaires (e.g., Child Behavior and Teacher Child Relationship)

6. Data Analysis
   - All data collected will be scored using the tools on this study.
   - Analysis will be done using SPSS and results computed

7. Reporting
   - A final report will be written and results widely disseminated

MEASURES

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R; Harms et al 2005) adapted to measure quality matters at the centers with 35 items and scores range from 1 – 7; 1 as inadequate care, 3 as minimal care, 5 as good care and 7 as excellent care
- Child Behavior Direct observation tool (Achenbach, 2000) with a scale of score of 5 items like Acts too young for age, Disrupts group Discussions, Shows difficulty in waiting for turn in activities or tasks
- Teacher Child Relationship Scale; (Pianta, 1990) for assessing child social competence; a 15 item questionnaire with a 5 scale described as ; Definitely Does not apply for 1 and Definitely applies for 5
- Learning achievements of learners: a checklist developed from the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) will be used to assess the learners’ academic competencies based on the ECD curriculum approved by Ministry of Education in Uganda

CLOSING REMARKS

- Policy reviews and shift of strong focus towards improving standards of child care in ECE is much needed at this time, efforts from all sectors to inform and push all children to the front of programming is all that Uganda needs to achieve its developmental prospects by 2040.

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