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## **A critical analysis of child negligence by caregivers on the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

ECDE level of schooling being the basic foundation in a young one's education life, caregivers are called upon to be fully responsible, provide and care for the young ones for enhanced participation in learning programmes. It is in regard of this that this study purposely sought to critically analyse the impact of child negligence by caregivers on the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives: to investigate the effects of negligence of language development by caregivers on the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya, to establish how negligence of emotional development by caregivers contribute to participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya, to analyse the relationship between negligence of physical development by caregivers and participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya, to assess the extent to which negligence of moral development by caregivers impact on participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya. The researcher used qualitative research design in conducting the study targeting such caregivers as parents, teachers and the larger community. The researcher applied the theory of hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow (1943). The study established that most parents, teachers and the larger community have in one way or another neglected ECDE children as regards full provision of needs and care which in turn hinders learners' fuller participation rates and development. The researcher recommended that the caregivers be capacity built, enlightened and empowered on the need and value for full provision of needs and care for the ECDE children so as to enhance their participation rates. The study also called up on the government to devise and enforce viable policy guidelines in earnest to safeguard against child negligence by the concerned caregivers.

**Keywords:** Child, negligence, participation, ECDE, learners, caregivers

### **1. Introduction**

Child negligence by caregivers is a worrying worldwide concern as regards physical, spiritual, moral, emotional, linguistic and physical upbringing of children. According EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005) [2], UNESCO, it is a duty of all caregivers and institutions to uphold and enforce strategies of child protection, safety, provision and humane care. Kempe *et al.* (1962) [6]; Battered Child Syndrome; Journal of the American Medical Association pg 17-24 affirmed that the earliest neglect cases of such nature were first reported in Australia in the early 1960s and 1970s that were detrimental to the psychosocial development and schooling of ECDE children. This has with time spread out the world over e.g. USA, India and the other parts.

South Africa during the colonial Dutch administration era through their apartheid segregation policies mistreated, abducted and neglected young African ECDE children in learning centres thus continuously perpetuating child negligence. Kenyan ECDE children are not well cared for, safe guarded and provided for wholesomely despite the provisions of the National ECDE syllabus (2008). Conclusively, it is vital that safety, care, protection and provision for ECDE learners by caregivers be embraced for enhanced participation rates of the learners as it is asserted that "a young, safe and secure literate population is key to the overall development of any nation." Martin Luther King Junior (1984).

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow's instictoid theory (1943), human needs have to be satisfied in order of hierarchy. Children's basic needs require satisfaction before higher ones manifest themselves for effective learners' participation.

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It is against this backdrop that section 4(1) of the Children's Act 2001, provides that every child of the age 3-6 years should have access to quality and full care, nutrition and education provision both at home and school. Despite the numerous enactments both globally and locally that call on parents, teachers and the community to up their responsibilities in provision and care for children, little is yet to be realised. A number of school-going age ECDE children are still out of schools due to negligence by their parents, teachers and the community. It is in regard of this that the study sought to investigate the impact of child negligence by caregivers on participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.

### 3. Purpose of the Study

This study was geared towards critically analysing the impact of child negligence on participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.

### 4. Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by these objectives:

To investigate the effects of negligence of language development by caregivers on the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.

1. To establish how negligence of emotional development by caregivers contribute to participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.
2. To analyse the relationship between negligence of physical development by caregivers and participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.
3. To assess the extent to which negligence of moral development by caregivers impact on participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.
4. To find out how negligence of spiritual development by caregivers affect the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.

### 5. Research Questions

1. What are the effects of negligence of language development by caregivers on participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya?
2. How does negligence of emotional development by caregivers contribute to participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya?
3. What is the relationship between negligence of physical development by caregivers and the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya?
4. To what extent does negligence of moral development by caregivers impact on the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya?
5. How does negligence of spiritual development by caregivers affect the participation rates on ECDE learners in Kenya?

### 6. Research Methodology

The study used qualitative research design. This involved critiquing the related literature based on the study objectives in earnest to critically analyse the problem at hand.

According to Serem and Boit (2013)<sup>[11]</sup>, qualitative research design is suitably applicable to harnessing information from a population that is too large to be observed directly. The study targeted teachers, parents of ECDE learners and the larger community. The information so far harnessed from the study was purely descriptively analysed devoid of

numerical statistics. This is the more reason for using qualitative design by the researcher as advocated by Sr. Dr. Ateenyi Maria Goretti (2008).

### 7. Significance of the Study

The study sought to create awareness to parents in regard to embracing responsible parenthood, provision and care of their ECDE children. To the teachers, the study was hoped to capacity build those handling ECDE learners to be weary of the cons of child negligence. While to the community the research sought to create publicity and enlightenment, to the government, it would aid it to formulate and enforce viable policies against child negligence on ECDE learners in Kenya.

### 8. Literature Review

#### 8.1 Critique of Child Negligence by Caregivers

The independent variable for this study was; child negligence by the caregivers. Child negligence is both an omission and a commissioner misconduct (Bromfield 2005). Whether intentional or unintentional, child negligence by care givers has diverse effects on the overall growth and development and specifically the participation rates of ECDE learners.

According to the Child Welfare Information Welfare Gateway Report (2008), neglected ECDE learners develop negative school and home relationships and more risk factors which hinder their participation rates.

#### 8.2 Critique of Participation Rates on ECDE Learners.

From the study title, the dependent variable was; participation rates on ECDE learners. Participation rates of ECDE learners both at school and home rely on child care, provision and protection. Wolfe (1999) asserts that inefficient nurturance of children by caregivers overly inhibits kids' participation rates as regards speech, morals, emotions, physique and spirituality. It's in view of this that proper care and provision for the young scholars by the caregivers is vital in early developmental years as advocated by Robertson (2013).

#### 8.3 Critique of the Effects of Negligence of Language Development by Caregivers on the Participation Rates on ECDE learners in Kenya.

Language is the human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals like voice, sounds, gestures and or written symbols. It's a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Motherese is a system of language among the young kids. Language development is vital to ECDE children since through it they express their inner thoughts, needs, emotions, maintain their relationship, culture and the need for its full development and provision by caregivers.

Njagi (2009)<sup>[9]</sup> holds that most Kenyan caregivers neglect the enhancement of language development among ECDE learners by: not asking children thought-provoking questions, not encouraging kids to listen to other people talking, not providing print materials like story/comic books, not allowing storytelling sessions, riddling, tongue twisting among young ones, not correcting children's speech errors, not reinforcing the child's speech (motherese) by repeating after children and inhibiting interactions among children themselves and the adults.

Neglect of language development on ECDE children often delays their speech acquisition, hampers their articulation skills, affects their intonation abilities and impedes their vocabulary prowess. This consequently impacts on ECDE children's participation rates in life. In the writer's own opinion, caregivers therefore should enhance language development in ECDE children in Kenya so as to promote learners' participation rates both at schools and homes more so through motherese (child-directed speech/body talk). According to the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) language theory by Jerome Bruner (1983), caregivers' reinforcement, support and environment is vital in enhancing pre-scholars' language acquisition and development. This according to Bruner improves the young learners' (ECDE) participation rates.

#### **8.4 Critique of how Negligence of Emotional Development by Caregivers Contributes to Participation Rates on ECDE Learners.**

Whereas emotions are natural instinctive state of mind, emotional development implies how emotions emerge, grow and change over time and their impact on an individual. Samuel and Mathews (2001) highlights four elements of emotions key to child development and participation. These are the physiological arousal, subjective experiences or feelings, cognitive interpretations and behavioural expressions all of which they argue depend on the external reinforcement by caregivers.

Caregivers fail to cater properly for ECDE learners' emotional needs, deny children's emotional self-identity, fail to provide for the structure and regulations for kids to live by, deny them unconditional love, affection and nurturance as well as isolating them. Most of the contemporary caregivers in Kenya are absent ones hence these young pre-scholars don't exhibit such vital emotions, feelings and moods like happiness, contempt, sadness, disgust, surprise, fear, anger among others.

Emotionally neglected ECDE children, become stressful, withdrawn, frustrated, traumatised and stigmatised. Lober and Egeland (2011) add that such children consequently would be lethargic, apathetic thus depicting learned helplessness and cognitive problems like poor problem-solving skills and impulse control skills. Caregivers' input as regards emotional upbringing in ECDE learners is vital by psychologically arousing the learners to stimulate their cognitive abilities thereby tapping their participation rates. This is as held by the Schachter and Singer Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotions (1962). In the researcher's own view, motivation, appraisals, instillation of esteem, role modelling, interactive support groups, enhancing clubs and societies would be viable for developing emotions in ECDE learners which would imply higher participation rates both at school and homes in Kenya.

#### **8.5 Critique of the Relationship between Negligence of Physical Development by Caregivers and Participation Rates on ECDE Learners in Kenya.**

Physical neglect is the commonest of all forms of child neglect as perpetrated by caregivers to ECDE children. Absence of feeding or underfeeding, clothing, sheltering, supervision, safety, security, protection from harm or injury as well as abandoning children for prolonged durations or even caregivers' death constitute forms of physical neglect. According to Abraham Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of

Needs (1943), physical and basic needs as there above outlined are the vital foundation for any meaningful growth, development and participation of an individual and specifically children; the ECDE learners inclusive. Maslow argues that satisfaction of such basic (lower) needs give room to emergence of higher needs.

Physically neglected ECDE learners exhibit low self esteem, stunted growth and development, starvation due to hunger hence body emaciation, proneness to actual bodily harm or injuries, delinquency and to higher extent death.

According to Bernard Van Leer Foundation Report- A Pre-school Education Project (1971), caregivers should provide the ECDE learners with physical play toys, bean bags, swings, rollers, balls among others so as to enhance the pre-scholars' participation rates at schools. Cases of child physical neglect in Kenya have been reportedly on the rise in the recent past majorly due to caregivers' ignorance, weak legislations, inadequate facilities/resources and the government's lack of goodwill despite legal provisions on child safety, security and protection contained in numerous enactments among them The Constitution of Kenya (2010), The Child line Kenya (2007), The Penal Code, The Children's Act (2001) <sup>[3]</sup> to name but a few. It's in the author's own perspective therefore that caregivers in Kenya should rise to the occasion and shun physical neglect by ensuring safety, security and protection of the ECDE learners so as to promote their (kids') participation rates at school or home.

#### **8.6 Critique of the Extent to which Negligence of Moral Development by Caregivers Impact on Participation Rates on ECDE Learners in Kenya.**

Moral development implies the acquisition of beliefs, norms, values and understanding of the culture of the society. Lawrence Kohlberg in his Moral Reasoning Theory (1969) asserts that young children acquire morality in three stages namely; pre-conventional, conventional and post conventional depending on the approval of adults and caregivers. Young ECDE kids in the pre-conventional stages strive to do the right in order to avoid punishment.

Morality aids ECDE children in gauging right and wrong behaviour, enhances honesty and truthfulness to each other, helps in problem solving through creativity and critical thinking, improves respect for others and adherence to rules and regulations. Urging kids to indulge in illegal activities like theft, use of drugs or alcohol and caregivers' over expectations of the learners amount to moral neglect.

According to a survey by Tanner and Turney (2003) the role of farther and other family members in child rearing as regards moral development is not well recognised save for the mothers' both globally and Kenya in particular. Absence of mentorship, guidance, counselling, role modelling, supervision, intervention, autonomy and rules by caregivers hinder effective moral upbringing in ECDE children in Kenya.

Morally neglected children tend to be rude, rowdy, bully, dishonest, untruthful, cruel, deceitful and disrespectful which adversely impacts on their participation rates at school and home. Conclusively in the researcher's own proposition, caregivers need to impart desirable moral values and standards in ECDE kids both at home and schools in Kenya so as to raise their (kids) levels of participation.

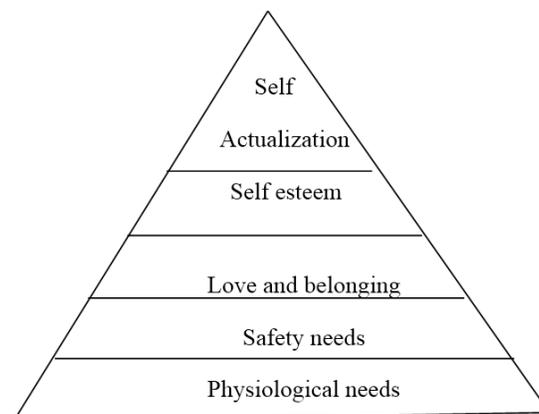
### 8.7 Critique of how Negligence of Spiritual Development by Caregivers Affects the Participation Rates on ECDE Learners in Kenya.

Spiritual development means the acquisition of personality towards a religiously desired better personality (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia). It's the understanding of the relationship of the self to a higher supernatural being and search for meaning in life. Spirituality moulds ECDE children's conduct, bonds and attaches them close to God, taps their faith and belief in God, aids them to discern good and evil, promotes feelings and emotions to enhance creativity, unearths their individual identities and curiosity. According to the National Curriculum Council Study Report on Spiritual and Moral Development (1993), most Kenyan caregivers propel neglect on spiritual development on ECDE children. They do not take children to worship places e.g. churches and mosques, do not fellowship with them, do not expose kids to holy books e.g. Bible, Quran, do not organise for religious fanfare competitions for kids and have failed to role model the young ones spiritually more so the ECDE learners at school/ centres. Children who are neglected spiritually tend to develop deviance, disrespect to elders, irresponsibility, paganism and low esteem at very early ages; a situation that kills their bond, faith and growth in religion. This obviously impacts on the learners' participation rates both at school and home.

Peck (1987) in his research publication 'The Different Drum; Community Making and Peace' suggests a five-stage theory of spiritual development in young pre-scholars through which such kids require caregivers' assistance, provision and care to enhance their religious beliefs, values and faith in a supernatural being so as to up their participation rates. In the author's own assessment, caregivers should therefore care, uphold, nurture and provide for spirituality development to ECDE children so as to facilitate the participation rates of such learners in Kenya.

### 9. Theoretical Framework.

The study was anchored on the Abraham Maslow's Instinctoid Theory of Hierarchy of Needs (1943). The theory proponents that human needs are satisfied based on priority levels. The most basic i.e. physical/physiological needs e.g. food, shelter, clothing should be satisfied first, followed by care, safety, security and protection needs, after which emotional needs like love and affection follows. Self esteem and finally self-actualisation follows at higher levels. Summarily therefore, ECDE children's physical, emotional, moral, speech and spiritual needs have to be prioritised for effective care, provision and protection against neglect by caregivers so as to promote the learners' participation rates in school.



Source: Maslow (1943)

### 10. Conclusions

The study reveals that many ECDE learners are neglected by caregivers and hence the need for model shifts in providing for, safeguarding, securing and protecting such learners. The caregivers should give priority to full provision, care and nurture of ECDE learners' basic physical, speech, language, emotional, moral and spiritual needs in order to enhance their participation rates in schools. The government, Non-Governmental organisations, religious bodies, civil society, child-based protective agencies among other stakeholders should have goodwill, extended charity and enforce enactments ensuring effective care, provision and protection of ECDE children against neglect so as to promote the learners' participation rates.

### 11. Recommendations

The research recommends the following;

The caregivers should develop and embrace effective use of relevant speech models such as motherese by the ECDE learners so as to improve the kids' participation rates.

The caregivers should encourage free expression of both positive and negative emotions such as happiness and sadness respectively by ECDE learners in order to promote the learners' participation rates.

Adequate and relevant physical and physiological needs like food, shelter, clothing, medical care, play toys, balls, and rollers among others should be availed to the ECDE learners by the caregivers in order to positively tap learners' participation rates.

Effective and viable mentorship, modelling, autonomy and supervision of ECDE learners by caregivers should be enhanced for the acquisition of good moral behaviour that promotes learners' participation rates. Proper spiritual nurturance and nourishment of ECDE learners by caregivers should be upheld in order to improve the learners' participation rates as regards faith-based/Godly matters.

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