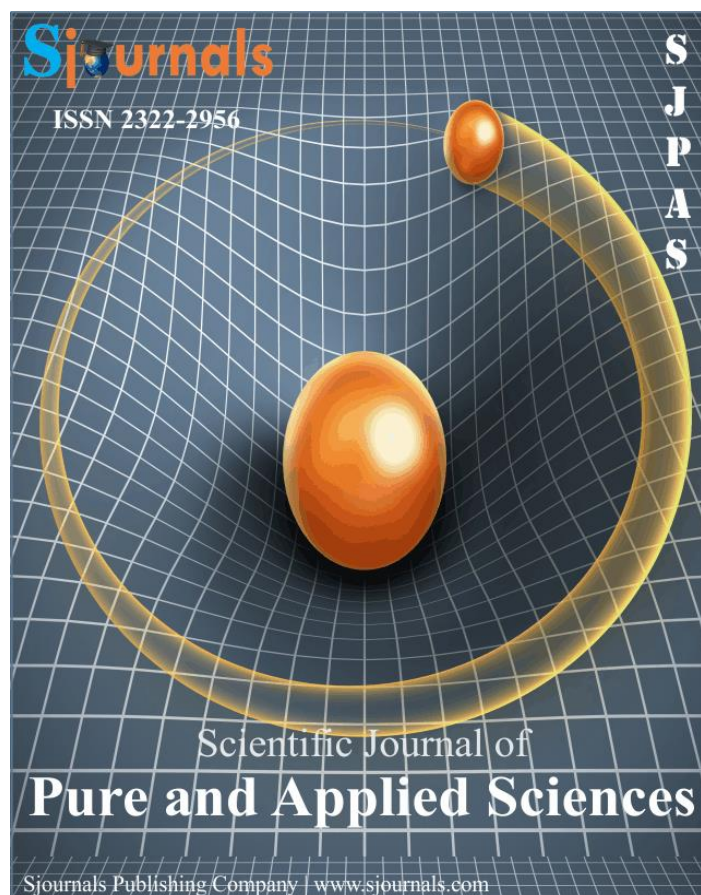


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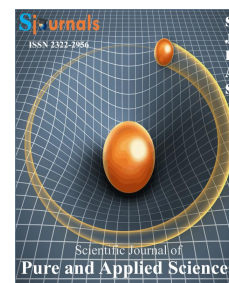
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Review article

Investment in early childhood development: Strong foundations for higher education in Tanzania and Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we argue why higher education should be concerned with early childhood development (ECD) and demonstrate how investment in ECD can form a strong foundation for more children pursuing higher education. On the other hand, we substantiate how higher education can be inferred to create, plan and design relevant curricula and programs that support early childhood development policy and practice in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. It is undeniable that planned well ECD and higher education influence one another. Implying that while early ECD forms a strong basis for higher education, higher education can influence the planning and designing of relevant curricula and learning activities that suit early childhood education. In other words, we see higher education as an important ECD partner in designing and delivering contextually relevant early childhood education services and programs in Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

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1. Situating ECD in Tanzania and Zimbabwe

The evidence of benefits for children of holistic Early Childhood Development interventions of different kinds, which include education, health, nutrition and stimulation components, is indisputable-provided that they are of

sufficient quality (Woodhead, 2008). International evidence attests to the life-long benefits of appropriate early childhood interventions (Lancet, 2008).

The authors argue that early childhood development is not a western construct or import to Africa. In fact, ECD has been part and parcel of raising children in African societies since time immemorial. Prior to colonization by western countries and their hegemonic influence on education and society, there existed traditional methods of child development. Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) argued that traditional African education was highly specialized and that educational practices were utilitarian in that they equipped children to fulfil a wide range of occupations in society. Nsameng (1992) noted that the foundation of all aspects of development of the child in the African context lay in the family even before the child was born and they were concretized after the child was born as he/she continued to interact with the family and interconnect with the wider community as illustrated by African philosophy of education (APE), a guiding lens in this paper.

The African Philosophy of Education is a discourse that cultivates in a child a sense of humanity along the lines of communal and relationality. In that sense, growth and development are acquired through interactions and interconnections between a child (individual) and the community (Waghid et al., 2018). APE sees boys and girls growing through adulthood by learning from oral traditional methods that included proverbs, artefacts and histories of their culture and communities that emphasized on values of sharing, togetherness and feeling of familyhood. This has implied concerns to precolonial ECD as it prepared children to contribute to the welfare of the community and maintain co-existence. Thus, with this rich history of child development embedded in culture and tradition, Africa has had pathways to support the raising of well-rounded children able to adapt and function in the social and economic affairs of their communities.

2. Tanzania

The Tanzanian ECD policy (2012) identifies ECD as upholding the rights and needs of every young child from conception to 8 years of age especially the most vulnerable so that they realize their optimal development: physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally & spiritually. Tanzania has witnessed significant improvement in maintaining ECD as one of the national development agenda items with increased interest in promoting partnership and coordination amongst players within the sector.

Tanzania's poverty reduction strategy MKUKUTA (URT, 2005) incorporated ECD as a way of addressing issues of child rights and welfare in the main development agenda. In 2006 through a number of consultations, the government of Tanzania through its ECD key ministries attempted to address the coordination challenges which affected the realisation and full implementation of ECD programs at community, regional and national level. Through deliberations led by the designated ECD coordinating Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children (MCDGC) the integrated ECD initiative was developed to guide the implementation of ECD programs in Tanzania (MCDGC, 2006).

Tanzania has therefore developed policies, plans, guidelines, legal frameworks and public financing systems to ensure young children's diverse care and education environment are supportive and well linked. Tanzania's ECD policy, the Intersectoral Early Childhood Development Policy (IECDP), was drafted in 2010 after a multi-year consultative process. It is a holistic policy which includes the sectors of education, health, nutrition and social and child protection (Neuman and Devercelli, 2012).

3. Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean education system recognizes early childhood development as young children 0-8 years and their parents and caregivers catering for a child's growth and development starting from conception through the child's entry to primary school. The National Constitution (GoZ, 2013) encapsulates a national vision for the education sector. The Education Act, revised in 2006 and currently under review (2019) to be consistent with the provisions of the new Constitution provides guidance and direction on matters related to education. The education system provides for 4 years of Infant education that is comprised of 2 years of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the first 2 years of formal primary education, followed by 5 years of junior education after which all students sit for the national grade 7 examinations.

Following an inquiry into the status of education and training in Zimbabwe (Nziramanga, 1999), a policy pronouncement was issued in 2004 requiring the attachment of an ECD classes in 2005 that would graduate into

Grade One in 2006. The Secretary's Circular 14 of 2004 was developed which required the ECD classes to be manned by appropriately qualified teachers (Chikwiri, 2017). The Director's Circulars 12 of 2005, 48 of 2007 and the Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005 were developed which gave guidelines on the implementation of the ECD programme. At the time of writing this paper, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is carrying out consultations on a comprehensive early learning policy that will inform implementation of ECD based activities in Zimbabwe.

4. The premise of higher education

Higher learning contexts are centres of knowledge production and professionals training (Schon, 1987). They are contexts where men and women are educated with high levels of intellectual development in different fields (Waghid, 2019). In regard of that, they are vital pedagogical communities where teachers and students are engaged in study and research. It is worth noting that, investing in ECD is fundamentally important because it sets strong professional and academic foundations of any society or nation. With this understanding we argue that the bright future of Tanzanian and Zimbabwean higher education, indeed the prospects of these countries depend largely on the education and care of the children who are not only the guarantors of a future they are the future themselves. This is to say, their ability to learn and function as contributing members of society rests heavily on their development of social competency and emotional health (Ngwaru, 2014).

In order to set children's positive attitude towards social relationship and schooling as well as to enable them to climb the ladder to higher education, orientation to learning and care should begin in earlier years (Burger, 2009; UNESCO, 2007). To make this happen, it requires early childhood practitioners with relevant knowledge and skills that seek to foster the development of a child as a whole person (holistic learning) socially and academically through literacy and caring programs based at higher education and other related institutions.

Holistic approach is an emerging discourse in early childhood development (Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010). This approach is based on the premise of wholeness of a child whose physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs ought to be addressed in unison. However, the emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills evidenced in Africa, in this case, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, deny children quality early childhood education and care as advocated by ECD guides of these countries (Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010; Mbise, 1996; Ngwaru, 2014) and the African philosophy of education (Waghid et al., 2018).

According to Waghid et al. (2018), the African philosophy of African of education emphasizes on reflective imagination to harmonize the interests of an individual and that of the community. This implies that early childhood development ought to be harmonized and taken into context within the community in which the child lives. In other words, ECD should be contextually situated in order to enable the child see the relevance of what she learns in schools and apply the knowledge acquired at home. We argue that there should be reconciliation between school and home experiences through carefully designed home-school relationships that ensure that parents and caregivers are an integral part of the learning environment.

However, we are cognisant of the fact that harmonizing home-school relationships to achieve effective learning and caring in early childhood is not an overnight project. It requires relevant professional training and orientations. This is a call to higher learning institutions and other organisations involved in training early childhood experts and practitioners. Focusing on higher education and by adopting the African Philosophy of Education as the lens of discussion in this paper, we argue that early investment in education and care of children is a pathway to break the cycle of poverty in Africa and gateway to positive social relationship in later life (Makokoro, 2019a; Mligo, 2018; Ngwaru, 2014). Equally important, early childhood development is the foundation of all formal education (Dachyshyn, 2016; Mligo, 2018). Nevertheless, investment in ECD should be seen as a catalyst for eradicating poverty and act as a base for formal education and lifelong learning (Makokoro, 2018).

In order for this to happen it requires thoughtful considerations of various elements which are key to successful early childhood development. Firstly, curricula and pedagogical practices involved in preparing early childhood practitioners, secondly, creating awareness of parents or guardians to be involved in pre-school learning and care of their children and lastly advocacy and sensitization of government policies that recognize early childhood education and care as an important component towards the realisation of sustainable development.

5. Making early childhood education and care accessible in Tanzania and Zimbabwe

The majority of the population in both Tanzania and Zimbabwe can be argued to be located in predominantly rural areas. In this case many children have limited access to early childhood education and care mainly due to poverty and parents or guardians' uncertainty of how they can productively engage in their children's early learning and care (Dachyshyn, 2016; Mligo, 2018; Ngwaru, 2014). Given this drawback, the question thus arises to how can quality early childhood education and care be made more accessible in Tanzania and Zimbabwe?

There is empirical evidence that proposes several approaches and strategies to enable children to have increased access to quality early learning and care in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The proposed approaches include; partnerships between schools and communities to create community based early childhood development programs (Mligo, 2018; Ngwaru, 2014), advocacy for governmental intersectoral coordination (Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010; Pence and Benner, 2015) and professionalization of the early childhood development sector so that ECD teacher qualifications, teacher/student ratio, early childhood curricula are standardized (Dachyshyn, 2016; Krog and Nel, 2015; Mtahabwa and Rao, 2010).

We note however, that in both countries these propositions and other related strategies may be difficult to realize because of policy disconnect between various ministries (Makokoro, 2015). In order to bridge this gap, we see higher education needing to step up to the plate and play the agential role due to its nature of knowledge production and dissemination. We argue that higher education ought to shoulder a number of responsibilities. Firstly, act as agent of creating awareness among parents on the importance of participating in early childhood development as a foundational phase for achieving future higher outcomes for their children (GPE, 2019). Bloch (2002) highlights the fact that when children are young, the adults around them (parents, other adult caregivers, and preschool teachers) are the most important influences on their social and emotional development. Importantly too, the realization that knowledge is co-constructed by the child and others within the family and the school (McNaughton, 2001) means that there has to be deeper engagement with parents and caregivers.

Secondly, design ECD curricula that is affordable to many families given their low socio-economic status. The curricula should speak to local contexts and address the development agenda of each country. Durojaiye cited in Nsameng (1992) opined that "the consensus of opinion in many African countries is that the curriculum of schools is inadequate for the purpose envisaged for education in Africa.... Schools, it is desired, should make pupils more of job makers and less of job seekers" (Durojaiye, 1983). Higher education should therefore be involved in projecting manpower development issues, future growth and direction of the economy and in doing so support the crafting of a curricula that aims to address these.

6. Concluding perspectives

We observe that the challenge for African countries is that of strengthening the ECD field by pursuing universal provision for all age groups and unified objectives in a context of social, economic and cultural diversity. Another challenge is to achieve a unified view of ECD and full co-operation between employment, family support, health, welfare and educational sectors. It is important to have continuity of support given throughout the period beginning before birth and continuing after entry into primary school and then into higher education. Critically too, are the conversations that are needed to ensure that there are pathways linked to manpower development and economic development specific to each country. A one size fits all approach will not work.

With these perspectives therefore, there needs to be a system which presents a diversity of services within the context of unified objectives, resulting in a wide range of choice for children, parents, service providers and governments. Besides the recognized and acknowledged long-term value for children's learning and development, early childhood development should be a space for children where childhood culture can be visible and validated and where adults can learn about children and exchange ideas on their discoveries.

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