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Analysis of the Caregivers' Quality Indicators from
a Community Perspective for Sustainable Early
Childhood Education Programmes

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study was to analyze the caregivers' quality indicators from a community perspective for sustainable ECE programmes.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative approach that used phenomenology research design. Twenty-five interviews and ten focus group discussions were used on the respondents for collecting data. The data collected from the caregivers/teachers, elders, parents and Early Childhood Education focal point officers revealed that the Ministry of Education and Sports caregiver quality indicators are not much emphasised in Karamoja.

Findings: While the ECE learning framework wants caregivers to promote holistic development of children, the karimojong community wants caregivers to focus more on their culture. A good ECE caregiver for Karamoja should be able to honour the histories, culture, language, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of the communities.

Unique contribution to theory practice and policy: The findings indicate that there is need for stakeholders to work together to identify the caregivers ECE quality indicators then support in the designing, implementation and supervision of the ECE programmes for sustainability. If researchers use the strengths of communities, enshrined in their funds of knowledge, we are more likely to tap into their reserve support for ECE interventions. The social capital theory therefore when correctly implemented helps the caregivers and the education sector in working collaboratively with the parents in the setting up systems that aim at sustainable ECE programmes in the communities.

Key words: *Early childhood Education, Sustainable Programming and Caregiver.*

1.0 Introduction

Early Childhood Education is the key to a full and productive life for a child and the progress of the nation (UNICEF, 2017). ECE is a critical stage of development that forms the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and that ECE interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality and social behavior. Integration of programs that target children in their very early years are therefore critical for their mental and psychosocial development. Failure to invest in ECE can result in development delay and disability as well as inhibit the optimal development performance of children throughout their lives (Geneva World Health Organization, 2012). In Karamoja region, data indicates that 63.4% children aged 6-9 years and 85.5% aged 10-19 years are enrolled at school. The data indicates that although more than 14 percent of children aged 3-5 years are enrolled in Early Childhood Education centers, (ECEC), about 100, 317 children in the same category are missing pre-primary education in the region (UNICEF,2018).

Many interventions have been implemented in Karamoja region like Universal Primary Education UPE (1997), Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK, 1999), Addressing Barriers to Enrolment and Retention in Karamoja (ABER-K, 2017), and Integrated Right to Education and Participation Programme (IREAPP, 2012). With these interventions and many more the children's rate of drop out is still high because the component of sustaining them is still a challenge. It's at this point that the ECE education systems in Africa must recognize and value patterns of intelligence that exist already in their culture if they want programmes to be sustained because their culture requires it. Nsamenang (2005) posits that culture is central to supporting African children's development and learning of norms. It should therefore be noted that culture is the heart of Africans which may not coincide with a large part of standards originally developed outside the region (Ejuu, 2012). This study w answers to the question 'what are the caregiver quality indicators that communities would like to see from caregivers who teach their children?

This study was guided by social capital theory advanced by Bourdieu (1984) which states that individuals are embedded in a network of social relations that influence decisions and action which can be traced to Karl Polanyi and later Granovetter (Coleman 2000; Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 1957). This theory relates to the current study in that, for any program to be sustained, the social systems should work together for example the family system, the community system and the education system to identify the ECE quality indicators for the caregivers then support in the designing, implementation and supervision of the ECE programmes for sustainability. If researchers use the strengths of communities, enshrined in their funds of knowledge, we are more likely to tap into their reserve support for ECE interventions. The social capital theory therefore when correctly implemented helps the caregivers and the education sector in working collaboratively with the parents in the setting up systems that aim at sustainable ECE programmes in the communities hence keeping the children in ECE sites.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sustainability of programmes and interventions has become critical. Many interventions have been implemented in Karamoja; (ABEK, 1999), (ABER-K, 2017), (IREAPP, 2012). However, commitment to ECE that forms a foundation education success has remained very low in Karamoja

(UNICEF, 2018). We live in an age where sustainability of programmes and interventions has become critical. In Uganda today, every product and service must offer quality in order to be sustained because every consumer wants to have it (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 2013). Early childhood education (ECE) is no exception. Cultural practices and beliefs that see quality of schools in a different perspective plays a role in keeping children out of school. Some elders here still view western education as a burden to their way of doing things. They prefer boys to look after the cattle, while girls get married as soon as they are ready (Ssekika, 2013). This has resulted into massive pull out by facilitators in the different projects, too many Non-government organizations implementing the same interventions and loss of money which is used in the projects.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the caregivers' quality indicators from a community perspective for sustainable ECE programmes.

1.4 Objective

Assess what communities see as a good quality Early Childhood Education caregiver.

1.5 Literature review

This chapter focuses on reviewing related literature on ECE caregiver quality indicators for sustainability ECE programmes in Karamoja region. The concept of indicators is explained, the variables are also discussed, and lastly the quality indicators and the variables will be considered according to the Ugandan-Karamoja context where the study was conducted.

ECE caregivers' quality indicators for sustainable programming

The concept "Quality indicators" is elusive (Myers, 2001) and the question of quality in early childhood education and care is no exception. There is no universally accepted definition of quality indicators (Mosha, 2000; Sims & Parry, 2006). Post modernism view quality indicators in early childhood services as a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). This perspective indicates that the meaning and perception of quality indicators can change depending on the individual and circumstances.

Although the notion of quality is subjective, a degree of consensus does exist (Ishimine, Tayler & Bennett 2010; Olaleye, Florence & Omotayo, 2009; Rivas & Sobrino, 2011). Many scholars agree on structural and process categories of quality (Burchinal, 2010; Ishimine, et al., 2009; Marshall, 2004). These quality variables are related, and influence the quality of the educational experiences for children.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is very important in our endeavor to meet the targets for Education For All (EFA) which are: quality early childhood education and care, free and compulsory primary education, life skills and training for youth, adult literacy, girls education and relevant basic education (NIEER, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). As reflected here, Early Childhood Development is a foundation on which the education for all and especially basic education should be founded. This section addresses quality issues, why qualification, education and professional development of ECD teachers matter. The quality of something is a judgment on the degree of overall excellence. Since it is a judgment; a person often uses his/ her own criteria to

make the judgment. This was not much of use if teachers wished to discuss "quality of learning environment" sensibly. Everyone needs to agree on the criteria. After such an agreement, then all are able to use the accepted criteria to evaluate learning situations. Research studies by Fives (2003) suggests three major areas one focusses to attain quality in ECD learning namely: pupil characteristics, content characteristics and to some extent, the teacher characteristics. These are the ideals. However, numerous questions arise. For instance, how many Early Childhood centers meet this criterion? Secondly, are people who run such institutions even aware of such requirements? These questions when addressed would fill the gap in related literature.

Teachers should be empathetic in order to win the children's minds. To be an effective contemporary early childhood teacher, one must be empathetic (Wesley, 1998; Wood, 2008). More specifically effective early childhood educators should be empathetic to the children in their care, the child's family and other co-workers. This reflects that the educator should be willing to listen, relate to others and therefore be integrated as a respected and trusted member of the school and wider community. As an effective early childhood educator, creating strong partnerships with children and their parents, as explained by Shonkoff et al. (2000; as cited in Wood 2008) has shown that to provide a productive learning environment a teacher must have a positive relationship with children and their families. The ability to accept new ideas and practices and a willingness to adjust the curriculum in accordance to specific cultural and social influences has been suggested to be another important factor for the effective early childhood caregivers.

Secondly patience is a very important indicator that caregivers need to demonstrate to the children. Because young children don't always exhibit self-control and have short attention spans, an early childhood development caregiver needs patience. Children don't always follow instructions or learn new tasks quickly, so a teacher must patiently repeat and reinforce directions and behavioral guidelines. Teachers must effectively address each child's needs and developmental progress, while maintaining open communication with parents and support staff. According to Laura Colker's essay (2012), "Twelve Characteristics of Effective Early Childhood Teachers," "Good teachers have a long fuse for exasperation, frustration and anger. High-quality teachers are patient with children's progress and work effectively with parents and staff to encourage growth and development. Patience is said to get along with stability. It has been found to be strongly and consistently positively related to child outcomes (Loeb *et al.*, 2004). High staff turnover is also pronounced across studies of child care in various countries, somewhere between 30% and 50% annually (Huntsman, 2008; Moon and Burbank, 2004).

Thirdly, the literature cites numerous examples of positive teacher dispositions (Ebro 1977; Smith 1980; Glenn 2001; Usher 2003; Adams & Pierce 2004). These examples often include characteristics such as enthusiasm, passion and a good attitude should be considered as other teacher quality indicators that helps to sustain the children at school. According to Laura Colker's (2012), early childhood teachers reported that a passion for teaching is one of the most important indicators of a good teacher. Passion includes heart-felt enthusiasm that encourages development and often results in job satisfaction, knowing the work makes a difference. Even in a challenging classroom environment, watching a child grasp a new concept, effectively resolve a conflict or demonstrate responsible behavior provides a sense of accomplishment. Without a passion for the

development of young lives, a teacher might wear out or burn out. Similarly, a caregiver should be dedicated to his or her work, research has proved that young children respond to teachers who are dedicated and striving to provide a safe and secure learning environment.

Another indicator is having trusted relationships between teachers and children often result in positive educational experiences. According to Jacqueline Zeller's article for the Harvard Graduate School of Education (2003), "Early Childhood Education and Beyond Teacher Child Relationships and Learning," "High-quality child care experiences support the development of social and academic skills that facilitate children's later success in school." The article also states that there is supportive evidence that close relationships between teachers and children are an important part of creating a high-quality educational environment. Good teachers are dedicated teachers. For example, teacher belief systems have been shown to be a major determinant of teacher classroom decision making (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Vartuli, 1999) and are responsible for classroom climate and socialization processes (Vartuli, 1999).

On addition to the above, teachers should be able to promote child independence and self-esteem. Stipek and Byler (1997) found that early childhood teachers who held stronger beliefs in basic-skill practices, such as highly structured, teacher-directed instruction, were also less likely to endorse child-centered practices, whereas early childhood teachers who had stronger beliefs in a child-centered curriculum also valued child independence and self-esteem (Stipek & Byler, 1997). McCarty and colleagues (2001) found that Head Start educators in lower-quality classrooms are more likely to respond favourably to statements about developmentally inappropriate classroom practices than teachers in higher-quality classrooms. Other studies that have found discrepancies between beliefs and practices argue that experience in the care setting becomes important because teachers, particularly those with low efficacy, find it difficult to maintain discipline using the child-centred practices they attest to believe in (McMullen, 1997)

The teachers should consider Active, standards-based participation methods. Education that supports and empowers both teachers and learners through democratic processes increasingly defines quality in the 21st century. An example of how schools might organize learning activities around these principles comes from Uganda. With help from USAID's Improving Educational Quality project, researchers collaborated with teachers in primary schools in Uganda to develop action research opportunities for learners that would exemplify empowering learner-centred education. In one school, for example, learners identified the problem area of learner tardiness and selected it for study. They collected and analysed data tracking attendance and mapping the homes and routes tardy children took to school. Based on these data, more punctual learners teamed up with their slower classmates who lived nearby, and devised systems to encourage them along (Kanyike, L., Namanya, P., & Clair, N., 1999). Among other things, this type of learning activity promotes critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and community involvement. Such activities can build the attitudes and values in children that contribute to democratic societies.

Research has also indicated that, teaching methods that facilitate active child learning rather than promote passivity and rote memorization represent a new and difficult paradigm for many teachers, but one that needs to be understood and put into practice if learner outcomes are to improve. Life skills is a term which UNICEF uses in two main ways, (i) to refer to a broad group

of psychosocial and interpersonal skills, and (ii) to refer to the process of teaching and learning about these skills. As such, it is important to discuss life skills in terms of essential content and processes related to life skill-based education. Teaching and learning about life skills requires interactive, student-centred methods. Since skills are by definition active, competency is unlikely to be developed without active practice.

Equally Teachers should have a belief that all learners can learn. The way time is used is related to school priorities and expectations. Quality education puts learner at the center of the process, learners' achievement must be the school's first priority. Since schools exist because of students, this would seem self-evident. Perhaps because of the complexity of educational systems, however, teachers may not always believe in the school's ability to help all learners. For example, teachers interviewed in Guinea and Mexico had little awareness of the school's role in pupil failure and dropout. Instead, they tended to blame the pupils and their family environment (Carron & Chau, 1996). Research around the world has shown that low expectations for student achievement permeate educational systems. Rather than setting high standards and believing that students can meet them, teachers and administrators in many developing countries expect that up to half the students will drop out or fail, especially in primary grades. Schools committed to student learning communicate expectations clearly, give frequent and challenging assignments, monitor performance regularly, and give students the chance to participate in and take responsibility for diverse school activities (Craig, Kraft, & du Plessis, 1998).

Teachers should be flexible and Creative. (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Grainger, Barnes and Scoffham, 2004, 2006; Cremin, Burnard, and Craft, 2006). The research work of Woods and Jeffrey has been particularly influential in this area in documenting the creative response of primary professionals to the changing face of education (Woods, 1995; Woods and Jeffrey, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Jeffrey, 2006) and in identifying features of creative teaching, namely relevance, ownership, control and innovation. Without flexibility and creativity, an early childhood teacher/caregiver loses her ability to adapt to change and inspire young lives. Due to the changeable nature of young children, a teacher must learn to work with new challenges. Whether peanut butter crackers spill all over the floor or an outdoor play area turns into a rainy mud pit, a teacher must react positively to unpredictable situations, coming up with flexible schedules and new ideas to entertain and educate children.

Creativity helps a teacher incorporate different learning styles into the classroom environment. For example, a teacher might use puppets, music or art supplies to discuss literature or create an inspirational science room by allowing learners to explore magnets and magnifying glasses. This essay examines the components that contribute to being an effective early childhood educator. Effective early childhood education has been shown to be an evolving and complex process, and is influenced by many factors. These factors include a deep understanding of the theories and philosophies of many pioneering and contemporary pedagogues, such as Piaget, Montessori and Vygotsky and studies emerging from Reggio Emilia in Italy. Researchers have found, that unless the educator is working in a specific theory based environment, for example, a Montessori school, or a school where Piagetian practice is implemented, the contemporary pedagogy will base lesson plans on a selection of these theorists ideas and concepts rather than the entire philosophy (Edwards & Hammer, 2006).

1.6 Methodology

The study followed a qualitative research approach and phenomenology research design that directly investigated description of phenomena as consciously experienced by people living those experiences (Creswell 2007; Moustakas, 1994. van Manen, 1990). The design formed a basis for collecting exploratory information from participants on the community's perception on the caregivers they want to teach their children so as to have children in the sites. The research was conducted in the five districts of Karamoja. The researcher collected data using interviews which involved face to face interaction between the informants and the researcher. The interviews were carried on the 10 (ten) parents, 10 (ten) elders and five (05) ECE focal point officers giving a total of twenty-five (25) participants in the five districts. There were two focus group discussions of five caregivers in two centers in every district bringing a total of fifty participants. The total number of all participants who participated in this research were seventy-five.

1.7 Findings

The word quality attached to caregivers may vary depending on one's perspective. Countries like the USA have tended to focus more closely around the nature of caregiver preparation and the need for advanced degrees (Darling-Hammond, 2005; 2006; Grossman & Loeb, 2008; Finn & Madigan, 2001; Goldhaber & Hannaway, 2009; Zeichner, 2014). In Uganda a quality caregiver is that one who is able to demonstrate professionalism by providing emotional, social, intellectual, physical and moral foundation for nurturing the development of unique talents of children (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016). For this study, the researcher went to Karamoja to find out whether they hold the same view on the quality of caregivers who are teaching in the community early childhood education sites. One of the key quality indicators of a good caregiver identified was his/her use of Ngakarimojong language as explained:

For me a good caregiver is that one who speaks my local language and teaches children using my Ngakarimojong local language and when I know that the caregiver is teaching using my language then I know that is a good caregiver (Male elder, Napak)

Another female elder from Amudat had the same view and said:

To me e a good caregiver should speak the local language of the area in order to make the children feel at home. The truth is that if a teacher teaches using a different language, the children will hate going to school, you people of Kampala are lost, your children in schools learn different languages and now your children are confused and they cannot even speak the parents' language, haaaaa that is not allowed in Karamoja.

Besides that, during the caregivers' focus group discussion from Nakapiripirit, there was a consensus that:

You cannot teach the Karimojong children when you cannot speak the Ngakarimojong local language, we teach the children using their local language because they can understand well and it helps to lay the foundation for other languages. Madam not only that, it also helps to maintain the Karamojong culture

On the same view, majority of the caregivers from Kotido said;

karamojong people are very particular with caregivers who teach their children, they want caregivers who speak the local language, they do not want anybody to come and dilute their way of living. They want someone who has a good command of the local language

From the above statements, the Karimojong people believe that a quality caregiver is one who understands the Ngakarimojong local language.

Culturally competent teachers, was another quality indicator needed from caregivers. The respondents want teachers who can respond to children's needs, cultural traditions, and ways of knowing. A female elder from Nakapiripirit community indicated the kind of cultural competence she wants from caregivers, when she said that:

Owa, madam, for sure I want a caregiver who knows the karimojong culture. He/she should be able to teach my child how to cook Karaimojong food like cucumber, sour milk and green vegetables. By doing that, caregivers will motivate and engage children in learning what will benefit them in their lives.

Another male parent from Nakapiripirit said:

Haaa for me I want a caregiver to know my culture so that he/she teaches girls how to make necklaces, decorate the clothes with tree seeds, collecting firewood, and cooking, gardening, making fences, plaiting hair, grinding sorghum, building houses, making local beer called (agwe) and sour milk. Those things help them to earn a living and more importantly to be recognized in the community as a skilled karimojong child.

Another male elder from Kotido said;

I want a caregiver who should teach the boy child to make stools, yolks, construct the huts, make water troughs for animals, teach them to look after the animals and providing security to the home. These boys should be taught how to treat the animals using herbs from the bush. Otherwise coming to school to sing and jump around renders education useless madam.

Meanwhile the ECE focal point officer from Amudat said;

You see madam, you cannot separate Karimojongs from their culture. ECE caregivers for Karamoja region should be mindful about the Karamojong culture because they want their children to learn things that can help them in their communities. For them they want caregivers to teach children about their way of life that is all here madam. Anything beyond what they don't want is abandoned. That is why you see those ABEK schools and constructed ECE centres abandoned.

From the above statements, it is very clear that Karamojongs want caregivers who know and are very passionate about preserving their cultural heritage and traditions. While the Ministry of Education and Sports (2016) want caregivers to focus on the holistic development of children, the Karamojongs want caregivers who would respect cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living in Karamoja. Caregivers should take the children's' culture as central to their children's success in Life-long learning so, a quality caregiver in Karamoja should be that one, who is able to promote children's cultural competence.

The Karimojongs want caregivers who are natives and specifically those who come from their communities. A female elder from Nakapiripirit said;

I want a caregiver who comes from my place here so that I can monitor his/her way of behaviour. Madam you know caregivers have a lot of influence in our children's life so I need to know the behaviour of the caregiver before I entrust my child to him/her that is why you see some of the elders seated around the sites. They want to know what she is teaching our children. It is not a joking matter my dear hoooo.

Another parent from Napak who happens to be a chairperson local council said;

I want a caregiver who comes from my locality because that one can be monitored compared to the one who comes from another place. I want to tell you madam, the world is spoiled I have heard about teachers who are teaching children uncultured things like sodomy and lesbianism which I don't want to hear. And am telling you, should such a caregiver be got, the karimojongs kill him/her in a painful way. We sharpen a stick which has a hook and we push it through the stomach and pull out the intestines and leave you to die. You are then thrown to the bush for animals to eat you. I do not want our culture to be diluted, even I don't want my children to mix up with those who return from towns like kampala because they can teach my children to put on mini-skirts and pull-down trousers. Actually, the entire community looks at them as a misfit because they cannot interact with anybody and so they end up going back to the towns and that is why karamojongs will never go away from the streets.

One of the male caregivers from Kotido said:

I need our own Karimojongs to teach our children and am telling you that it is only the karamojongs who can manage life here. What I know is that life in this place is not easy. Our children need to be trained to manage the life we live here. Am from this place and I know all things that take place here. I am not someone bringing other things here that is why parents trust me.

This means that the Karimojongs believe that when a caregiver is from another culture, he or she is most likely to teach their children another culture since they believe that teachers are agents of change. Acceptability, therefore, becomes critical if parents are to entrust their children to the care of a particular caregivers. On top of that, coming from the community does not make you become the preferred teacher, one has to earn it through dedicated work to your own family and the community. You must show total discipline when dealing with community members so that with time, they get to know that you are a good person who cannot misguide their children.

Another quality for a good caregiver identified by the respondents is that the caregiver should be a role model which is supreme for one to be a good caregiver in their ECE community site. This is what the community selected caregiver from Amudat had to say;

You see me madam, am a role model in this community am a disciplined person. The people see me as a good person and want their children to

behave like me. I did not go to school, but am better than those other teachers who went to school. I behave well among the people, so they want me to teach their children how to behave well too.

The teachers from Napak said that:

We role model by demonstrating to the children. We greet them with respect and we also ask them to reply with respect. Respect, according to this community is a key quality indicator that must be treasured in the life of all people.

While the ECE focal point officer from Kotido had this to say:

If caregivers' model good morals then definitely the children will imitate and demonstrate good behavior. Caregivers should role model by the way they dress, speak, walk, eat and they should be careful how they conduct themselves in the community, this is very important madam.

The respondents want a caregiver who have not only professional qualities but one with the qualities possessed and admired by the community. Being a caregiver in this context requires one to have good knowledge of the cultural values and skills of the area and also be able to develop them in the children. The elders and parents wanted these attributes to be reflected in their children.

Besides the above quality indicators, the respondents emphasized that caregivers must show that they are knowledgeable and can impart skills to learners who are brought to them. Knowledge and other personal skills that teachers possess will only be useful if those skills are translated into daily problem-solving episodes. This is because parents keep interacting with children on a daily basis to evaluate whether the teacher's pedagogy is appropriate. Majority of the caregivers from Kotido described the pedagogy that has worked for them as follows;

We demonstrate mastery of the content by showing children how to do things. We take them out in the environment and teach them about different plants that are useful to them as food or medicine. We show them how to get them and if they have any injury, we show them which herb to use and how they can administer first aid.

An ECE focal point officer from Moroto district supported this view when she said that:

Teachers should demonstrate being knowledgeable by being able to make curriculum decisions that uphold all children's rights to have their cultures, identities, abilities and strengths and this can be achieved through contextualizing the curriculum acknowledged and valued, and respond to the complexity of children and families' lives.

Having a knowledgeable caregiver helps to attract children to school because he/she will be creative enough to capture the learner's attention while in class. When a caregiver is knowledgeable, the children will learn to read and write very fast because the caregiver will use all techniques to help children learn (said a female parent from Amudat)

The above excerpts show the quality indicators communities look for in a caregiver they can nominate to work with their children. Those qualities need to be observed in the person over a period of time such that all members come to a consensus that the person is fit to be a teacher. Thus, being a caregiver places one in a position of high esteem where many cannot reach. The ECE caregivers for karamoja should be able to honour the histories, culture, language, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of the communities where they teach. When early childhood caregivers in Karamoja respect the diversity of families and communities in the region, and the aspirations they hold for children, they will be able to foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners.

A quality caregiver should be married. The research participants also want caregivers who are married so that they can bring their family and parenting experiences in the training of children in the ECE sites as explained by one of the female parents from Amudat;

Being a married caregiver is good, children emulate you and they will want to get married when they grow. Besides that, you are respected a lot when you are a married teacher in the community. Even people can listen to you compared to the one who is not married.

It was supported by one of the male elders from Napak when he said;

A married teacher is psychologically stable when it comes to relationships. He or she will not defile children at school because he/ she has a partner at home. Unlike the one who is not married, that one can even be tempted to rape the children which is bad

From those statements above, it was confirmed that married teachers have better morals and good understanding of the social-cultural values of the community. So, they are better placed to develop these in the children they teach.

Promoting continuity of learning and transitions as another good quality indicator for caregivers was mentioned by the respondents. Karamajong children usually bring family and community ways of being to their early childhood settings. So, the respondents want the caregivers to build on these experiences. A male parent from Nakapiripirit district said:

Caregivers should teach from known to unknown it helps children feel great to experience continuity on things that they already have ideas. Caregivers should not bring things that children are not familiar to, rather unfold their thinking and experiences slowly by using real objects for teaching.

An ECE program officer from Napak said that:

Caregivers should build on children's prior and current experiences because it helps them to feel confident and connected to familiar people, places, events and understanding them. It is the reason caregivers have to work hand-in hand with the parents to raise the child's self-esteem that ooooh my parent talks to the caregiver about my studies, hence it makes the child to feel that he/she is an important person.

This literally means that they should be able to support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, by providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared

experiences, and by finding opportunities for children to go into and contribute to their local community.

Being an intentional caregiver was another quality indicator the respondents want to see in a caregiver. Intentional teaching is deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful aimed at developing life skills and values in children. One of the female parents from Kotido said;

I for sure want a caregiver who can study the environment where children live and then use it to teach them important skills. Children can be guided to use tree seeds to decorate their clothes, shoes and any other learning materials at the site

This was in line with one of the of the male elders from Kotido who said,

A quality caregiver should teach relevant skills to our children like; animal psychology of milking animals, administering medicine to the cattle and preserving animal products like milk, ghee, hides and skin and preserving our local food stuffs like; cucumber (akobokob) and their seeds.

This was in agreement with a male elder from Nakapiripirit who said that;

I prefer teachers who actively promote children's learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills. Caregivers can achieve this by providing the children with variety of instructional materials and tell them to make anything they feel. This helps them to create and provide interactions and conversations that are vitally important for learning.

In the same discussion, The ECE focal point officer from Napak said that;

A good caregiver is that one who can plan for opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge-building through using games and child centered methods and help them to draw experiences right from home. For example, if the caregiver is to teach about uses of things in the kitchen, let children be told that tomorrow we are going to cook so bring some food and things we use for cooking different dishes, so the food items will be put together and children will be guided on how to cook and also teach good table manners. This is what makes learning relevant madam

From the above statements, it is clear that the respondents want teachers who recognize that effective learning occurs in the social contexts of the lives of children and their community. This would enable them to move flexibly in and out of different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. This means that the Karamojongs want teachers to create environments that support learning in a way that is responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They want caregivers who are able to cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions.

On top of other quality indicators, the respondents also mentioned that a good caregiver should be able to create a good learning environment for the children. The respondents want their children to learn from welcoming spaces as said:

Hmmmm, let the caregivers make playing materials for the children to use when they are at the sites so that they are always interested in going to school. You know

madam, children like playing and so sites should have sand pits, mud, water and other elements from nature to help children to learn from (Female parent, Kotido)

A male elder from Napak supported the same view by saying:

You know what madam, let caregivers establish gardens in schools, for medicines such that these crops can help the child when he/she gets an injury at school. This can help learners to discover good crops in their school environment and connect to nature.

Another parent from Amudat said:

I want a caregiver to foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education by utilizing the environment around their site. For example, a caregiver should be able to go to the bush and get some medicine for a child who has injured himself/herself while at site

An ECE program officer from Nakapiripirit said that:

In fact, I would be happy to see the caregivers make materials for children to play within the classroom and outside the classroom, am telling you these indoor and outdoor materials will support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community. And this will encourage the children to come to school every day am assuring you madam

This therefore means that a good caregiver for Karamoja should be able to collect and use materials that enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar and also introduce innovation to provoke interest and more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. Effective caregivers for this region should be able to encourage children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions to the learning environment. They should be able to support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, by providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared experiences, and by finding opportunities for children to go into and contribute to their local community.

1.8 Discussion

Observations indicated that ECE caregivers were selected by the community due to their expertise in the way of life of the karamojongs. Being a caregiver in this context symbolized recognition for exceptional abilities that one possessed and the community would want to see such qualities replicated in the children. This however is not usually the case in other areas of Uganda. Kanyike, Namanya and Clair (1999) say that in other areas of Uganda, the communities leave this task of selecting teachers to MOE&S, however the Karamojongs want the community to have the biggest say on who becomes a caregiver in the ECE sites. These findings agree with Johnson (1980) who said that “in most communities with limited education, ECE caregivers not only train children but also teach the whole community through their way of life”. It has been discovered contrary to what many may think, the key stakeholders in Karamoja, know what they want from ECE caregivers.

The findings have demonstrated that the Ministry of Education and Sports (2016) caregiver quality indicators are not much emphasised in Karamoja. In reference to the above statement, it now renders quality indicators of ECE caregivers as relative. This is in line with the post

modernism that view quality indicators in early childhood services as a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Mawusi (2013) shows that the people of Karamoja still base their perceptions of most programs, including ECE on their cultural practices and beliefs.

The key important life skills caregivers need to impart in the children were animal psychology of milking animals, administering medicine and preserving local food stuffs like milk, ghee, cucumber and their seeds (Ngasike, 2014). This is in line with Anderson's (1991) views, who said a good ECE caregiver for Karamoja is one who knows and is very passionate about preserving the cultural heritage and traditions of the children under her care. This is in agreement with De Ketele (2000) earlier findings on people who are very cultural and conservative of their traditions, the people in Karamoja did not want to entrust their children to caregivers who would corrupt their cultural values since they know that teachers are agents of change.

Respondents also wanted caregivers who promote continuity of learning and transitions. Children bring family and community ways of being, belonging and becoming to their early childhood settings. By building on these experiences' caregivers are advised to help all children feel secure and confident. Building on children's previous and current experiences helps them to feel connected to familiar people, places, events and understandings. To achieve this the caregivers, have to be flexible and creative. (Jeffrey & Woods, 2003; Grainger, Barnes & Scoffham, 2004, 2006; Cremin, Burnard & Craft, 2006). It is likely that parents in Karamoja did not understand the real purpose of ECE as preparing children for primary education and holistic development. This is the reason why the area had only 17 nursery schools, five-day care centres and 79 community-based sites (MOE&S Statistical Abstract, 2014).

The respondents want their children to learn from welcoming spaces (Sheridan & huster, 2001; Sheridan *et al.*, 2009). They had already complained on sites lacking good indoor and outdoor learning materials and opportunities to manipulate objects. It could be understood why the respondents in Karamoja wanted caregivers who can provide children with learning environments in which they can reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children. The respondents wanted caregivers who can create play spaces in natural environments. The respondents said that caregivers should be able to plant trees, edible crops, and medicinal crops, make sand pits, mud, water and other elements from nature for children to learn from. They suggested that this kind of learning environments should be able to invite open-ended interactions, freedom to learn, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They also wanted caregivers to make their own teaching materials such as flash cards, posters, toys, booklets and folders for the children. This kind of environment should be able to foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education. This is because the indoor and outdoor environments support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community.

Respondents want intentional caregivers who recognize that effective learning occurs in the social contexts of the lives of children and their community (Ejuu, Apolot & Serpell 2019). This would enable them to move flexibly in and out of different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. This means that the Karamojongs want caregivers to support learning in a way that is responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. So effective caregivers for Karamoja, should be able to promote opportunities for sustained thinking and

collaborative learning. A good ECE caregiver for Karamoja should be able to fulfil his/her professional responsibilities of being cooperative, interface with the parents and prepare relevant schemes of work and lesson plans. Therefore, a good caregiver for Karamoja should be able to enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar.

1.9 Conclusion

In summary, the people of Karamoja have good knowledge of the personal and professional attributes of ECE caregivers who can be effective in their area. Because the karamojongs are cultural, traditional and conservatives, they prefer caregivers who are culturally competent and can provide learning opportunities that invite open-ended interactions, freedom, exploration, discovery and connection with nature for their children. This means that for one to be an effective ECE caregiver in Karamoja, the person should be able to create environments that support learning in a way that is responsive to the culture, lifestyle, interests and abilities of each child.

The caregiver should also be able to invite families to contribute to the learning of the children. They want a caregiver who is a role model and can effectively respect the cultural way of living in Karamoja. They should also be able to effectively plan for teaching, prepare classroom, and arrange materials and apparatus for the children to develop life skills that they will need to have successful lives. In summary, education in Karamoja that is not in consonant with the needs and values of the communities is perceived as harmful. The information provided by respondents show that they want a caregiver of children to teach cultural values and basic life skills in schools that makes their children skilled Karimojongs.

The respondents want the caregivers who are responsive to all children's strengths, abilities, interests, values and build on children's skills and knowledge to ensure their motivation and engagement in learning. They mentioned love, care and interest in children as key personal attribute. This was because as parents and community leaders, they have through experience discovered that a caregiver with love and interest in children can effectively recognize the needs, interests, strengths and weakness of the children and be able to respond appropriately. This is in line with Glenn (2001) who says that a good ECE caregiver should value and build on children's strengths, skills and knowledge.

2.0 Recommendations

In view of the above findings and discussion, the following are the recommendations that various stakeholders should adopt in order to sustain education programs in Karamoja:

Ministry of Education and sports

Given the fact that the people in Karamoja want ECE caregivers who can effectively practice their culture, it is recommended that MOE&S includes this competence as a key requirement for one to work in Karamoja ECE sites.

The communities prefer caregivers who are culturally competent, they are perceived as an asset to the social cultural development of the area. It is therefore recommended that MOE&S encourages ECE caregivers to work in their own communities.

It has been revealed that the people of karamoja have specific needs due to the nature of their environment and they require ECE that can effectively meet these needs. Therefore MOE&S needs to ensure that the ECE curriculum is flexible enough to allow caregivers to value and reflect the practices, values and beliefs of families in the area.

Karamoja may need more non-formal initiatives to supplement the national ECE curriculum it is therefore recommended that MOE&S designs programmes that help children acquire practical skills while receiving basic formal education, to ensure that children leave ECE centres with sufficient skills to make a decent living.

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